

PROMETHEUS

Give me liberty

Resurrection of Liberty

By Michael L. Wentz

Novalibre, 2005, \$27.95

ISBN: 978-097679732-6

Reviewed by Anders Monsen

Three teenagers embark on an unintended interplanetary adventure of epic proportions in Michael L. Wentz's debut novel, **Resurrection of Liberty**. In the process, they learn of their untapped talents, hidden family history, and face an interstellar menace only temporarily resolved at the end of this enjoyable science fiction adventure that harkens back the golden age of sf.

Ever since he was a young boy, Dan Foster looked up to his grandfather. After the death of his grandfather followed a few years later by his grandmother's death, the now sixteen-year-old Dan travels with his parents to her funeral in Albany. Growing up, Dan had always sensed that other people held great respect for his grandfather, whose commanding presence was matched only by his secretive nature and distaste for bugs. When Dan was four, his grandfather had returned home with a sharp-looking Cadillac Fleetwood. Covered with grime from years in the garage, Dan still covets this car as much as he did a dozen years ago. As none of the adults seem to want the car, Dan ask for it, and to his great joy and surprise finds no objection.

After getting the car running again, Dan sets out for a weekend trip to the lake a couple of months later with his two best friends from school, Tom and Janet. All three are bright students, with independent streaks of nature and inquisitive minds. The met while on a school field trip to Washington, where each on deviated from the planned agenda just sneak into the Smithsonian to explore their own interests in science. Several hours of detention later and they were inseparable. On the drive up to the lake, as they're fiddling with the antique tape deck in the car, the radio begins to emit instructions in a foreign language. At the same time, and despite all attempts to prevent what's going on, the car morphs into a flying vehicle and takes to the air. Moments later they are high above the ground, then in the blackness of space, heading towards the moon.

In fact, the trio is not headed to the moon, but an area of space behind the dark side of the moon, where a massive ship appears in front of them. Bearing apparent battle scars and hanging lifeless in space, this ship must have been here a long time, undetected. They figure out this must be the main space ship, and their converted car some sort of shuttle on automatic pilot. After docking, Dan and his friends make their way to what they determine is the bridge, hoping to find some way to return to Earth. Instead, other alien vessels appear as if from nowhere and begin firing on their ship. Through luck and sheer gumption the trio manage to escape, but they know

Fiction by Tamara Wilhite, page 10

the clock is ticking: they need to discover more about their ship and quick, as in all likelihood the aliens will return.

What they discover is a world beyond their wildest dreams, and when they start to understand where they are—aboard a spaceship called *Liberty*, from a distant world, and captained here by Dan's grandfather on a risky yet vital mission—we know and they know that there's no turning back. Michael Wentz' novel hurtles the reading along for the ride, as we follow the teenagers across the galaxy to the origin of the starship *Liberty*, and the siege under which they find its creators. When they find out that the insect like race bent on exterminating those people probably also will target Earth, prospects look grim. But the plucky friends refuse to lay down arms, and embark once more back to their home planet to take on the invaders.

Back on Earth, the government knows something is amiss when they detect on radar the alien ships that attacked the *Liberty*, and which casually destroy an escape pod from Earth's orbiting space platform. Wentz skillfully sketches the typical government bunker-like reaction, yet also the brave actions of those responsible for the remaining astronauts on the space station.

Some older readers might wonder at how three 16-year-old kids can manage to pilot an alien space ship across space, take on a powerful non-human war-like race and survive. There were times

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Richard Mgrdechian, Charles Stross, Michael L. Wentz,

and Claire Wolfe & Aaron Zelman;

Reviews of non-fiction from Ray Kurtzweil

Movie review: *The Island*

Eric S. Raymond on Rudyard Kipling's SF Letters; Editorial; Prometheus Award update



The newsletter of the
Libertarian Futurist Society

Editor

Anders Monsen

Contributors

Chris Hibbert

Max Jahr

Eric S. Raymond

David Wayland

Tamara Wilhite

Letters and Submissions:

Anders Monsen

501 Abiso Ave

San Antonio, TX 78209

editor@lfs.org

Subscriptions & Advertisements

Libertarian Futurist Society

650 Castro St. Suite 120-433

Mountain View, CA 94041

moulton@moulton.com

LFS Online:

<http://www.lfs.org>

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De gustibus non disputandum est

Recently, in a discussion forum on the internet, I provoked threats of violence upon my body from one of the other members. My fighting words boiled down to the fact that in a thread I had lauded the movie, *Dragon Inn*, which this other person watched after my recommendation and loathed. He stated that if he encountered me in person he would not be averse to striking a blow at me for wasting his time. Such a statement from an otherwise mild-mannered and urbane individual surprised me. In light of some of the movies he had found watchable (*Seed of Chuckie*), what could inspire someone to such venom?

There's no accounting for taste.

I know from past experience that books, movies, and music that I enjoy might not spark the same feelings in others. Likewise, similar products praised by friends or professional reviews in the press may fail to move me, or make me curse a few hours of wasted time and attention. In the case of *Dragon Inn*, I had approached the movie as a fan of Chinese movies—martial arts movies in particular—Chinese history, and Chinese literary history (elements of this movie alluded to scenes from the vast historical novel, *The Water Margin*), and also an affinity for Maggie Cheung and Donnie Yen, two of the actors in the movie. Thus, I saw several layers not apparent to someone just seeking two hours of entertainment. I failed to state why I enjoyed the movie, but simply said it was a great movie.

As someone who reviews books and movies, the risk always exists that another person will take what I write as a recommendation and seek out a book expecting to enjoy several hours of reading. If they discover instead that the book is not to their taste, will they no longer trust my judgments? In the same manner, if I seem overly harsh concerning some aspects of a work of fiction in print or

screen, fans and defenders of the same work will feel insulted. As individuals, our tastes in books, music, movies, and even food or clothing, act as extensions of our self, our own identity. Two brothers growing up in the same house may have wildly divergent tastes, while two individuals countries apart may discover shared interests and instantly bond.

There's no accounting for taste.

This is not to say no one will agree on anything. There's a market for all sorts of stuff. I've known movies reviews who state that even watching a bad movie is worthwhile, because it gives them a benchmark against which to judge other movies. Brad Linaweaver once wrote a column analyzing the worst of the worst, calling it *Der Krapp*. Now available online at <http://biglizards.net/FlixLizards/Fossils/DerKrapp/DerKrapp00-DerKrappyKontents.html>—mind the conservative war-mongering comments of main Big Lizards contributor, Daffyd ab Hugh, Linaweaver's column delves in shock horror movies of the low budget type.

In terms of *Prometheus* readers, we already agree on one thing: the books between these covers tend to deal with liberty, either for or against. Yet when it comes to individual books, abandon all pretense of shared interests, and debate often will rage regarding the merits of certain books, be those merits on the basis of good writing, or libertarian content.

In this sense, when writing reviews, it's just as important to state the content (what's the book about), as the reasoning for opinions and observations ("I like this book because of X", rather than just "This is an awesome book," or the more famous "Two thumbs up"). In fact, one key *raison d'etre* for the critic is to engage the reader, and this often means taking views contrary to what readers

—Continued on page 15

Agent Jackson:
You.

Smith:
Yes, me. Me, me, me!

Agent Jackson/Smith:
Me too!

—*Matrix Reloaded*

Moving?

Please send any changes in your mailing address to:
David Tuchman
1364 Mapleton Ave
Suffield, CT 06078

Letters

Dear Anders:

It was a pleasure to read Eric S. Raymond's history of science fiction, not least for its interesting reexamination of the concept of genre. However, I must question one of Raymond's historical statements: his comment that "It was Heinlein who invented the technique of description by indirection—the art of describing his future worlds not through lumps of indirection but by presenting it [sic] through the eyes of his characters. . . ."

In fact, that technique had already been used, several decades before, in Rudyard Kipling's two science fiction stories, "With the Night Mail" and "As Easy as A.B.C." Set several decades apart in the same future (another anticipation of Heinlein!), they portray a quite strange future world, the first in the form of a popular magazine article, the second in the personal narrative of a recordkeeping officer of the Aerial Board of Control, on which most governmental functions have devolved as national governments cease operating, who accompanies four Board members on an investigative mission to a future Chicago troubled by memories of the past. Kipling used the technique of description by indirection with impressive skill, especially considering that he may well have invented it. The stories are also worth reading for their explicit avowal of libertarian values, notably in the poem "MacDonough's Song," which accompanies "As Easy as A.B.C."

I have no explicit evidence that either Heinlein or Campbell had read these particular stories. But Heinlein, at least, was a Kipling fan, as evidenced both by references in his writing (for example, Kipling and Rhysling are the favorite poets of Joe and Jim Gregory, the conjoined twins in his early story "Universe") and by borrowings such as Thorby Baslim's mnemonic training in **Citizen of the Galaxy**, closely modeled on scenes in Kipling's novel **Kim**. It's hard to imagine that he would have passed by any Kipling story, especially a first-rate science fiction story, if he encountered it at all, or that, if he read it, he would have failed to learn from its literary methods. And even if he invented the same devices independently, without taking Kipling as a guide, Kipling went before him to this particularly literary frontier.

In any case, I urge Mr. Raymond, and all readers of *Prometheus*, to track down these

stories and read them, not simply for their historical interest, but because they are still powerful visions of the future, which libertarians in particular will find sympathetic.

Very truly yours,
William H. Stoddard

Eric S. Raymond responds:

I am very familiar with the Kipling stories you mention; I've been arguing for years that "With the Night Mail" anticipated the style and preoccupations of Campbellian hard SF. Kipling undeniably does anticipate Heinlein's technique.

And you raise an interesting point—it should have occurred to me that Heinlein might actually have *learned* exposition-by-indirection from Kipling. In fact, the more I think about this, the more likely it seems.

[Editor: a longer note from Raymond detailing how Bill Stoddard influenced his thinking on Heinlein and Kipling can be found online at: <http://es.ibiblio.org/?p=234>, and reprinted on page 9 of this issue of *Prometheus*.]

Hi,

Just got my first *Prometheus* and it lists the 2006 nominees as of August 25th. I went to the site to see if I could buy via links to Amazon so LFS would get some credit. Discovered that we recommend LFB, but they have only one of the nominees on their online site (and it's not listed in the fiction category, I found it via search).

Further, I can't find the list of nominees on the LFS site, either. This seems strange. Are they confidential?

I've also sent a note to the LFB site. If they ask for a list of the nominees in order to stock them, is there any problem with giving it to them?

If LFB isn't going to carry these nominated books, you should consider becoming an Amazon affiliate as well.

Thanks,
Tim Kompara

A quick suggestion--- there are references to the LFS website, such as on page two box, but no actual listing of what it is. I think it should automatically be listed in the page 2 info/staff box. www.lfs.org

Michael Grossberg

Anders Monsen responds:

Tim and Michael make excellent points. In response to Michael's comments, I have added the url for the LFS web page to the banner on page 2. I hope readers will use this resource, since a list of all previous winners of the Prometheus Award and Hall of Fame appears on the web page, as well as a complete index of *Prometheus* articles and reviews dating back to the first issue in 1982.

In response to Tim's comments, I'm currently working with Tod Casament to redesign the LFS web pages, overhauling how the pages look, as well as adding Amazon links to nominated books and previous winners.

Laissez Faire Books does include a fair amount of fiction, and is a great place to shop, but not always as current as Amazon. The nomination list was preliminary, and I am sure the web page soon will contain an official press release.

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REVIEWS

RebelFire 1.0: Out of the Gray Zone

By Claire Wolfe & Aaron Zelman
RebelFire Press, 2005, \$17.95
ISBN: 0964230488, 227 pages
Reviewed by Chris Hibbert

RebelFire: Out of the Gray Zone feels like a juvenile, in the sense of Heinlein's juveniles, but that's mostly because the viewpoint character is a rebellious teenager. Jeremy wants to be a rock star, sculpting visual images for the audience while his favorite band sings about freedom. The major obstacle is that he lives in a repressive surveillance society that monitors people's movements, and controls what they buy, read, view, and ingest. Every facet of his life is monitored and controlled by one repressive bureaucracy or another.

In the style of all such juveniles, the band and all records of their existence disappear from sight, so Jeremy has to escape from his home town and undergo a harrowing journey in order to track them down. Along the way, he adopts a dog, and has the requisite eye-opening adventures in the big city. He joins up with the revolution, finds the band, and stares down some government goons, and starts the band.

I describe the book as formulaic, but Claire Wolfe and Aaron Zelman carry it all off quite well. Jeremy is quite sympathetic, and he does visibly mature through the story. The government is a lot scarier than anything that we've yet seen in America, but all their attitudes and prohibitions are straightforward extrapolations of current governments. As with Sinclair Lewis's *It Can't Happen Here*, the point is that what enables the abuse is unprotesting acceptance by the populace.

RebelFire: Out of the Gray Zone ends

Reminder: *Prometheus* is published quarterly. Issue #1 begins with each new Prometheus Award cycle, after the winners are announced at the annual WorldCon. Subsequent issues appear every three months, with issue #4 closing out the award cycle each summer.

with Jeremy having a personal happy ending, able to live underground, having achieved his dream of joining the band, and (possibly) having gotten the girl. But nothing has really changed for the larger society. This is the one weak point of an otherwise strong candidate for this year's Prometheus award. Oh, and I prefer positive visions to dystopias when I'm voting, but dystopias aren't disqualified by any means.

Footnote: a couple of people suggested not listening to the CD before reading the book, since the clash with their musical tastes spoiled the effect for them. There are two cuts on the CD, representing "heavy metal" and "classic rock" versions of the song "Rebelfire". I didn't mind the classic rock version, and have added it to my iPod. Listening to it first wouldn't have spoiled

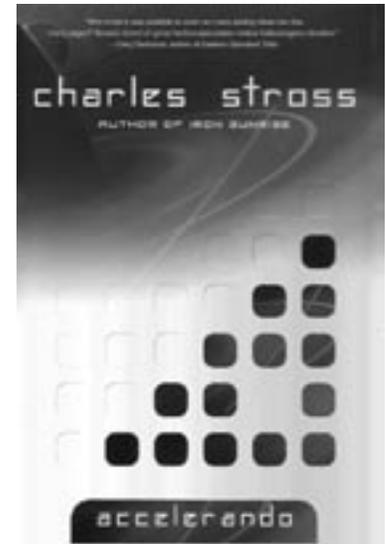
Accelerando

By Charles Stross
Ace Books, 2005, \$24.95
ISBN: 0-441-01284-1, 390 pages
Reviewed by Chris Hibbert

Charlie Stross has been hanging around the extropians email lists and it shows. His latest book, **Accelerando**, (like his earlier book **Singularity Sky**) is replete with Matrioshka brains, characters who live out at least portions of their lives in simulations, people who fork their identities across multiple bodies or software agents and reintegrate the separated memory streams, planet terraforming, and AIs with indiscernible motivations. He weaves it all together into a rousing tale.

The apparent popularity of the novel (the short stories that comprise the sequential vignettes of **Accelerando** were nominated for quite a few awards [*"Nightfall"* in 2004, *"Halo"* in 2003, and *"Lobsters"* in 2002—editor]) makes me think there's a chance that all the inside references and barely expanded concepts might be familiar enough to most SF readers. To me, it read as a novelization of the best years of the extropians list. All the things that people worried about and all the possible scenarios that people worked through in great detail are visible in at least passing views in the final fleshed-out forms they reached on the list. If the concepts he relies on aren't too SL4 for most readers, it should do quite well, because it's a fun read.

The first part ("Lobster", "Troubadour", and "Tourist") follows the adventures of the peripatetic Manfred Macx as he flits around the world economy, inventing wildly and



giving away his patents to deserving charities, or whatever custodian will most piss off his various creditors. In later chapters, the various members of his household and its progeny scatter to the distant corners of the universe along with the rest of expansive humanity. Macx's is not a nuclear family in the conventional sense, so the splintered factions head off in many directions and several combinations, which enables them to be present as humanity and post-humanity inhabit near-earth space, explore farther out, begin turning most of the solar system into computronium, and become less and less recognizable. Necessarily, the story mostly follows characters who have opted to remain more or less human, though, as in Marc Stiegler's **Gentle Seduction**, the gradual changes accumulate rapidly.

The book is nominated for the Prometheus award, but any libertarianism it displays is subtle enough that some on the nominating committee, while admitting that it's a good read, have whether it deserves a place as a finalist. The book has an air of freedom, and I'd like to argue that, though the libertarianism isn't front-and-center, the book presents a society that works without any central government, and that shows its characters and political factions getting along without resorting to governmental force.

In the first three chapters, we see a fair amount of commerce and crime, and most of the enforcement is privatized, or limited to (threatened) court enforcement of contractual terms. The subplot in which Manfred frees the music is about changing the rules

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How I learned to love the future

By Anders Monsen

The Singularity is Near

By Ray Kurzweil

Viking, 2005, \$29.95

ISBN: 0-670-03384-7, 602 pages

The Singularity.

The word conjures up many and meanings and images. The origin of the word reaches back to the 1960s, yet really didn't take off as a popular term until the 1980s. Mathematician and science fiction writer Vernor Vinge wrote about the "technological singularity" in a science journal and novels (see, for example, **Marooned in Realtime** and **A Fire Upon the Deep**). Vinge speculated on at an inevitable trend toward accelerating technological growth leading up to a point where some event (the singularity) rendered the future unknowable to present humans. This hyper-technological leap would occur when the exponential growth of technology became such that humans merged with machines, or genetic change became so advanced yet readily available, that humans could mold themselves into something more than human, or beyond the present definition of humanity.

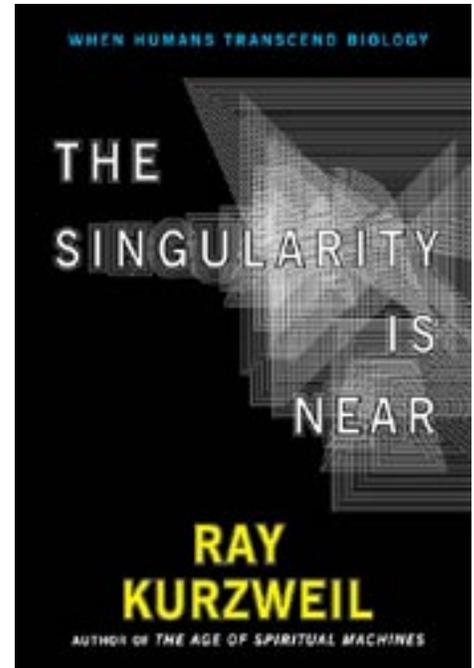
In the field of science fiction, the idea of the singularity has both provided rich fodder for writers, while at the same been ignored completely by many practitioners of the art of writing about the future. According to some scientists the singularity looms just around the corner, and when reached will render all our speculations about life beyond 2050 moot. Most sf writers take a slower path, and set novels centuries in the future not much different from our present day. A memorable early example of the former view is Bruce Sterling, whose **Schismatrix** and **Crystal Express** told the story of mechs vs. shapers, two radically different and opposing forces of human singularity. More recently, the foremost example of a writer working within the premises of the singularity is Charles Stross, whose first novel even bore the title, **Singularity Sky**. Still, his starkest example of the implications of the singularity lies in his 2005 novel, **Accelerando** (reviewed on page 4). At times **Accelerando** reads like a fictionalized road-map of Ray Kurzweil's new non-fiction work, **The Singularity is Near**.

Kurzweil, an inventor and science writer, has embraced wholeheartedly the idea of the singularity as a positive and inevitable event. The concept itself almost mirrors the Christian idea of transcendence (indeed, the book is subtitled, "When Humans Transcend Biology"). Elsewhere, Stross jokingly has referred to the singularity as "The Rapture of the Nerds," almost lampooning the day when tech-savvy individuals who have embraced the implications and effects of technological transcendence (ie., the true believers) leap across the event horizon and become something other than human.

Introducing his vision of rapidly accelerating change, Kurzweil first walks the reader through six epochs of evolution, concluding that the singularity will take place in the fifth epoch, some time later this century. More specifically, this transformation will occur in the year 2045, and mere forty years from now. At this point, the "nonbiological intelligence created in that year will be one billion times more powerful than all human intelligences today." With a vast array of charts and diagrams, Kurzweil sketches the progress of evolution through to today's computational nexus of activity.

It seems only natural that since most of the technological advances of the twentieth century have taken place in the areas of computers—from room-sized, isolated tape-driven machines to mobile, interconnected super fast and ubiquitous daily objects—that Kurzweil takes the idea of computational power as his corner stone metaphor. Computers, once purely the domain of large universities, corporations, and government entities, now form the pervasive component of everyday life.

From the world of computers, **The Singularity is Near** discusses the computational power and design of the human brain, drawing parallels between how humans think, and how computers think. Inevitably, Kurzweil seems to argue, human brains and computers eventually will approach each other enough in design and action to one day merge. This is the foundation for brain mapping and uploading, much discussed among futurists and extropians, and also deeply entrenched as a science fiction trope. Indeed, many an sf writer could mine the pages of this book for story ideas and road-



maps of technological progress.

Kurzweil looks at the three areas that will shape the future of mankind: genetics, robotics, and nanotechnology, or GNR. At this point the ice perhaps is thinnest, as much of what he writes is speculations and extrapolation of current trends, ideas, and discoveries. Each of these fields are relatively young, yet progress is rapid. The implications a few years down the road also are staggering.

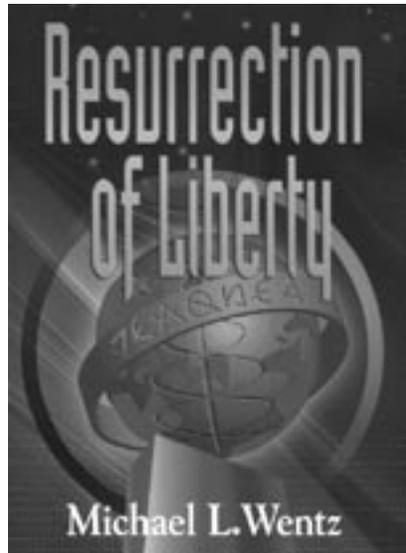
Kurzweil's books in an exciting yet scary vision. Although he does spend some time answering his critics, and also mentions some of the dangers of GNR, I fear his book is far too rosy in its vision of the future. While no techno-pessimist, I recognize the inherent failings of ubiquitous technology. In the early 1990s we thought the world being interconnected was fantastic. Yet along with the Web, email, and instant news we have spam, crippling viruses, ID theft, government control of information aided and abetted by companies (see China). How will we defend ourselves against GPS driven courier bombs, re-programmable nanocytes in our bodies, or amoral AI? Change is inevitable, and while Kurzweil presents a bold vision of the future which may or may not happen, parts of it will come true. Will we be freer as a result? Who knows. The story of history has been the story of liberty, as Benedetto Croce wrote. Awareness is the key, and the first step might be to arm yourself with this book, as the ideas within will open your eyes and make you

—Continued from page 1

that also crossed my mind. And yet, kids are resilient, inquisitive, and in tough situations tend not to give up that easily. As James P. Hogan writes in one of his essays in his 2005 collection, **Catastrophes, Chaos, and Convolution** (BAEN):

“[T]he world needs teenagers. Those gangly frames, splayed limbs, and toothy grins that we used to think of as assemblages of left-overs from the Creation with no practical use turn out to be indispensable to our survival. What is mindless irritation for us, becomes for the kids a boundless source of the delights of meeting challenge, demonstrating competence and virtuosity, and savoring the heady taste of achievement.”

Much like the early stories of Robert A. Heinlein, such as **Red Planet**, **Rocket Ship Galileo**, **Space Cadet**, **Farmer in the Sky**, and L. Neil Smith’s **Brightsuit MacBear** and **Taflak Lysandra**, as well as several other classic works of science fiction, **Resurrection of Liberty** gives us a thrilling story about kids who never give up in the face of danger and uncertainty. The writing style is straight-forward and smooth-flowing. Here’s a book you can cheer for, with likeable characters, quickly plotted, and deserving of wide attention. This is the kind of novel that



opens doors to science fiction among readers young and old.

As Dan, Tom, and Janet encounter the human like-beings from the other planet who built the *Liberty*, they are treated with respect far beyond their years. Part of this respect is driven by the fact that his grandfather piloted the ship to Earth, and many of the people they meets served with or knew Dan’s grandfather. Yet compared to the reactions of people in charge on Earth who deal with adults in that subplot, the non-earth humans (for lack of a better term, display a greater

ease with intelligence. Instead of the line-of-command driven society of the government and space program on Earth, Dan and his friends find assistance far easier on an alien world than had they arrived unheralded on our home planet. It helped that they arrived in the long-lost ship *Liberty*, and that in their first encounter with the people who made that ship they destroy the invading bug-like alien ships. But over-all, this society seems more free and open than current Earth society.

While the novel fails to answer two main questions (why did Dan’s grandfather and his crew never reveal themselves if they knew the aliens one day would look to invade Earth, and how will people from both worlds defend themselves against the insurmountable power of the bug-like aliens), the story satisfies on so many other levels.

The field of sf needs novels like this, which breathes passion for its subject. Perhaps as a result of being a first novel, some of the characters seem at times stereotypical. The young friends do break down too much into hysterical yelling, but that’s part of being a teenager, too. The ending itself leaves openings for future novels in the same universe, and it will be interesting to see if Wentz follows **Resurrection of Liberty** with a sequel. I found this book to be one more enjoyable novel I’ve read in a long time, and kept thinking about pulling out those old Heinlein books again to relive the emotions

Context

By John Meaney

Pyr, 2005, \$25

ISBN: 1-59102-335-1, 531 pages

Reviewed by Anders Monsen

John Meaney’s second installment in his Nulapeiron trilogy marked a very frustrating experience for this reader. At times it felt like the author had taken pages of a large and complete manuscript, ripped them into small fragments, and scattered them about for the reader to assemble and interpret. Originally published only in the UK in 1999, Prometheus/Pyr has re-released Context in the US, along with the first volume and soon the third. Thus, Context finds itself in the unenviable position of being the middle filler of a trilogy, where the protagonist and setting probably already saw most of its freshness and existence developed in the first volume (**Paradox**), and expects a summation in the final volume (aptly titled **Resolution**). Someone like myself, unfamiliar with the first

installment, may initially struggle through the first few pages striving to find a pattern.

Tom Corcorigan, the novel’s protagonist, finds himself in the opening pages seeking immediate and radical medical attention after a rescue mission that went both right and wrong. Corcorigan saved the target, yet himself suffered life-threatening internal wounds. Unless the treatment is successful, his body will tear itself apart from within. Nulapeiron, the planet that forms the backdrop to the story, is an underground planet. Few people ever see the surface, and travel takes place through tunnels and waterway, along or between the many levels that form the geographic environment. To reach his treatment center, Corcorigan travels far from his own territory, where once he lived as a lord, having climbed the social ladder from servant origins. He also bears one defining and significant physical feature: accused of theft as a youth, he lost his left arm as punishment.

While undergoing treatment, Corcorigan

suffers the loss of his trusted aide, Elva Strelsthorm, who he secretly loves. During a session with one of the psychic Seers upon whom the ruling classes depend to guide society, Elva commits suicide. Tom is shocked and unnerved by her action. When he learns that there may be a duplicate or twin version of Elva somewhere on the planet, he promises himself to seek out this other Elva. The rest of the novel details his journey towards this goal, a long path filled with missteps and sidetracks.

Context becomes both a voyage of discover and self-discovery. We learn through some of Tom’s history that a few years past he had led a revolution to change the social structure of Nulapeiron to reduce the existing system of slavery and bondage. He failed in this revolution, which still leaves him bitter. As a “made” lord, not through inheritance, he straddles two social spheres, and seems more comfortable among the lower classes. Tom

—Continued on page 8

Clones on the run

The Island

Directed by Michael Bay
Starring Ewan McGregor, Scarlett Johansson; Warner Brothers, 2005
Reviewed by David Wayland

I rented this movie with low expectations. When released on the big screen I pencilled it in as a movie worth watching, but hesitated upon reading the unkind reviews. Film-goers like myself who failed to see the movie the first time should give it a second chance. *The Island*, for all the burdens imposed upon it by the director, satisfied me on most levels.

Michael Bay, lampooned so deservedly in the puppet-comedy, *Team America* for his lush action sequences set to rock music, seems for the most part quite restrained in this movie. There's one jaw-dropping car-chase scene that extends to hanging from a building while shots are fired, and of course the requisite mano-a-mano showdown at

the end, but otherwise *The Island* focuses more on its two main stars and the premise that drives them.

Ewan McGregor shines as Lincoln Six Echo, a bright and inquisitive young man, living in what seems to be the last refuge of mankind after a global contamination. Sealed inside a tower-like building, life appears quite regulated. Lincoln is friends with Jordan Two Delta (Scarlett Johansson sleepwalking through most of the movie), yet prevented by rules of "proximity" enforced by guards in black from close contact. Newcomers are recovered from the contaminated zone on a regular basis, and the carrot of a lottery ticket to "the island," a paradise on the outside world, keeps hope alive among the citizens.

When Lincoln discovers a butterfly in a supposedly quarantined part of the building, he follows this out through a ventilation shaft and through what appears to be the floor of a hospital. Here he discovers quickly that everything he has been told is a lie, that he and the other "survivors" are being killed for

body-parts, pregnant citizens are killed after their babies are harvested, and the guards are ruthless when it comes to keeping this secret. Grabbing Jordan during his escape, Lincoln makes it to the outside world, where he discovers they are clones of real people, used as an insurance policy, and considered nothing more than products. Determined to find their sponsors and expose this program to the world, Lincoln and Jordan become hunted fugitives. Little do they know than even their sponsors care not for them as human beings.

The Island works both as a popcorn movie, with excellent set, great eye-candy, and strong action sequences. At the same time, it's a thoughtful movie, showing that humans can justify and rationalize exploitation of other humans. The guards and workers at the clone complex are just as guilty in individual rights violations as the Nazi guards working in concentration camps. As a movie that entertains as well as questions authority, *The Island* certainly is worth more attention than it received. A fun ride.

Prometheus Awards, an update

The Prometheus Awards honor works of science fiction and fantasy, broadly defined, that uphold libertarian values or dramatize pro-freedom or anti-authoritarian themes.

Eligibility for Best Novel is limited to novels published between Jan. 1 and Dec. 31,—or, if previously overlooked, published in November or December of the previous year.

Eligibility for Hall of Fame is limited to works first published or broadcast in English at least five years ago. Such works may include anthologies, novels, novellas, short stories, plays, poems, comic books, graphic novels, movies, TV episodes, TV series, etc. (Previous Prometheus Award winners for Best Novel are not eligible.)

Special Awards, which are not automatically presented annually but only when deserved, have gone to libertarian anthologies (including *Free Space*, the first explicitly libertarian sf anthology), graphic novels (the recent adaptation of L. Neil Smith's *The Probability Broach*) and individuals (Poul Anderson) for lifetime achievement.

Who to Contact for Nominations:

Best Novel—Chair Michael Grossberg (mikegrossb@aol.com, 614-236-5040)

Hall of Fame—Chair Lynn Maners (lmaners@dakotacom.net)

Special Awards—Chair Rick Triplett (ricktrip@reason.net)

Here are the works nominated this year—as of mid-December—in the three Prometheus categories:

Best Novel nominees

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 and Aaron Zelman (RebelFire Press at www.rebelfirerock.com)

The Weapon (Freehold War) by Michael Z. Williamson (Baen Books)

Mists of Everness, by John C. Wright (TOR Books)

Special award nominees:

Serenity—film based on the TV series

Tom Paine Maru—revision and website-based republication of L. Neil Smith's 1984 novel

Hall of Fame nominees:

"As Easy as A.B.C."—short story by Rudyard Kipling (1912)

Blake's 7—British TV series, by main writer Terry Nation (1978-1981)

A Clockwork Orange—novel by Anthony Burgess (1963)

Circus World—novel by Barry Longyear (1980)

The Girl Who Owned a City—novel by O.T. Nelson (1977)

"The End of the Line"—short story by James H. Schmitz (1951)

"Even the Queen"—short story by Connie Willis (1992)

Infinity Hold—novel by Barry Longyear (1989)

It Can't Happen Here—novel by Sinclair Lewis (1936)

The Lord of the Rings—a trilogy of novels by J.R.R. Tolkien (1954)

A Mirror for Observers—novel by Edgar Pangborn (1954)

Subspace Explorers—novel by Edward E. Smith (1965)

A Time of Changes—novel by Robert Silverberg

Time Will Run Back—novel by Henry Hazlitt (revised 1966)

2112—music album/set of songs, by Rush (1976)

V for Vendetta—graphic novel by Alan Moore and David Lloyd (1981-1990)

—Continued from page 6

goes undercover countless times, and re-invents himself as an artist, warrior-monk, and finally, war-tactician and deep-cover spy.

During his five year journey, Tom also encounters hints of a dark force invading his planet. Its opponents call this force many things, but one terms that sticks is “the Blight.” This blight moves through areas of the planet, slowly subsuming the populace and converting them into concentration camps that slowly devour every living being. The focus of the novel now shifts from Tom’s inner journey to uncovering the source of the Blight and how combat this seemingly unstoppable force.

As I mentioned in my opening words on this novel, it seems at times confusing and hard to navigate the pages of John Meaney’s **Context**. Aside from Tom’s inner journey and the events around the Blight, the novel features a subplot of a character from 1300 years in the past. “Ro’s Story,” as this subplot is called, is a narrative well-known by Tom Corcorigan, and one he refers to and uses in his efforts against the Blight. While we enter Tom’s story midway, making his identity somewhat confusing to grasp, we witness the origins of Ro’s story, and it’s far easy to follow.

Towards the end of the novel I did grow accustomed to Meaney’s style enough to enjoy the book. However, based on the events alluded to earlier in Corcorigan’s life, I am more tempted now to pix up **Paradox**, the first volume of this trilogy, which deals with

his growth to manhood and struggles against the social order. It’s a shame that so much time has passed before this novel reached the US, but such publishing vagaries are far from uncommon in the science fiction field.

Meaney certainly is a novelist worth watching, and he’s just one of many of the current British invasion of sf writers only now being noticed in the US. This Pyr Books edition bears a superb cover painting by renowned sf artist Jim Burns.

Tides

By Scott MacKay

Pyr, 2005, \$25

ISBN: 1-59102-334-3, 356 pages

Reviewed by Anders Monsen

Scott MacKay’s novel, **Tides**, appears at first driven by impulses of the fantasy genre. The society in which mariner Hab Miquay dwells contains minimal technology, one supreme king, a stratified society of mainly easy and plenty, and few people concerned with science of the prospects of discovery. Much like brief history texts showing only a singular person here or there affecting the world or making discoveries, MacKay’s book contains two or three individuals in an entire society (which to them means the world) willing to look beyond quotidian events. Such a microcosm view hampers what otherwise is an entertaining and engrossing novel, where some individuals risk everything to see what’s beyond the horizon.

In the early years of adulthood we find Hab in command of a whaling vessel, hunting animals somewhat different from those on Earth. The locale is a vast, watery world with two moons, generating massive tides that lock the inhabitants of Paras within an island, able to sail only short distances before

turned back or killed by mountainous waves. While is an accomplished sailor and whaler, inside he feels empty. When he encounters a scientist, Esten, and the scientist’s sister, Jara, on a rocky shore working experiments that prove the existence of a faraway land, Hab finds himself compelled to go there.

The need to satisfy some inner longing drives Hab to sacrifice all he loves, breaking the very rigid rules of conduct that govern his society. He steals from his family, defies his king, and risks the lives of all those who sail with him. After one failed attempt, Hab set sail again using a new design, submersible boats. He hopes that these vessels can ride under the gigantic swells where all others foundered on the surface. Setting sail with three of these boats, Hab and his crew head north into the arctic regions for the new land.

With only three boats, and a crew of under twenty per boat, Hab’s venture seems doomed from the start. Whether MacKay here alludes to Christopher Columbus and his three boats that sailed to the New World is unknown. Hab’s three boats meets a harsher fate, however, when one boat is lost in the ice during a mutiny, and a second vanishes in a storm. The latter is discovered adrift, empty and battered, by Hab’s sole remaining ship, with no evidence of what happened. Soon after this, however, Esten’s work is vindicated when they come across a rocky and unknown shore.

Here they discover another species, a lizard-like animal that hops and swims. Starving, Hab’s crew slaughters several of these, when suddenly the tides turn, and a larger, more intelligent lizard-being arrives and kills some of the crew, and blows up their last ship using some sort of grenade. Trapped upon a hostile and alien shore, they find themselves fighting for survival. The three main characters are captured and hauled off to the main lizard city, where they are treated almost like pets. One of the aliens, however, has darker designs upon Hab’s homeland, something he fails to discover until too late. He now must race to stop the inevitable invasion and destruction of his homeland. When the invasion takes place, both Hab and the lizard-people will realize long-forgotten truths about their origins.

At this point the novel takes on some known SF aspects, but never lingers there. Instead, the ending is somewhat ambiguous, but the resulting effect of Hab’s adventure

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Future Washington

WSFA Press, the publishing branch of the Washington Science Fiction Association, Inc., has published **Future Washington**, a collection of 16 original stories by writers such as Cory Doctorow, Joe Haldeman, Thomas Harlan, Jane Lindskold, Sean McMullen, Kim Stanley Robinson, Allen M. Steel, and many others. Of interest to readers of Prometheus is “The Lone and Level Sands,” by L. Neil Smith.

Future Washington is published as a hardcover (\$24.95) and trade paperback (\$16.95) in October, 2005, and edited by Ernest Lilley, the publisher of SFRevu (www.sfrevu.com), an online science fiction review magazine.

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

Rudyard Kipling Invented SF

By Eric S. Raymond

[Editor: These comments originally appeared on Eric Raymond's blog on December 2, 2005, in detailed response to Bill Stoddard's letter printed on page 15 of this issue. With Raymond's gracious permission I hereby reprint his entire remarks.]

Ever had a moment when somebody else drops an insight on you, and you feel totally stupid because you had all the facts and all the motivation to generate it yourself, it was about something you're expert at, but you just...didn't...see...it? And you should have, and you're damn annoyed with yourself for missing it?

This happened to me recently. I gave permission for the newsletter of the Libertarian Futurist Society to print my essay "A Political History of SF." In it, I wrote:

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.

This is pretty much the standard account by historians of the field. One William H. Stoddard wrote the newsletter editor as follows. He agrees that Heinlein introduced indirect exposition into SF, but observes:

In fact, that technique had already been used, several decades before, in Rudyard Kipling's two science fiction stories, "With the Night Mail" and "As Easy as A.B.C."

Mr. Stoddard goes on to note that Heinlein wrote a number of Kipling tributes into his own work, most notably in the early scenes of *Citizen of the Galaxy* (1957), and to speculate plausibly on Kipling's influence on Heinlein.

This is the point at which I slapped my forehead and swore. For, indeed, I know "With the Night Mail" well, have reread it many times, and have described it to friends as an important work of early proto-SF. I had noticed before that the story prefigures modern Campbellian and hard SF very exactly in its concerns, its narrative tone, and its management of information about the imagined future. And that it could have

been written by Heinlein if he had been more than a child of five in that year; I knew this. But....grrr....I missed the implications.

You see, I had a perspective problem; my eyes were too modern. I am so used to reading the idiom of hard SF in our time that until William Stoddard pointed it out, I was unable to see quite how unique and pathbreaking "With the Night Mail" had been in its time. Once Stoddard woke me up



to this point, I immediately realized that the story was not, as I had previously thought, merely a sort of historical curio thrown off on the way to modern genre SF, but almost certainly one of the key steps without which modern genre SF as we know it would never have existed!

In researching the matter, I discovered an excellent essay by long-time fan Fred Lerner, "A Master of our Art: Rudyard Kipling," considered as a science fiction writer which develops this case in detail. Again, little in it was factually new to me; the biggest surprise is the report that John W. Campbell regarded Kipling as "the first modern science fiction writer." But Lerner draws together well-known facts into a new shape, arguing effectively that both Campbell (the theorist of modern SF) and Heinlein (its first great practitioner) both saw themselves as explorers

in a direction first set by Rudyard Kipling.

Having considered the matter, I think the sharpest insight in Lerner's essay is his proposition that Kipling invented the technique of exposition by indirection while writing his India stories; and that it is in *Kim* (1901)—that great, warm, wonderful, sprawling, picaresque novel of the Raj and the Great Game—that the technique found expression in a form barely distinguishable from the SFnal use Heinlein and those who followed him would put it to forty years later. As Lerner himself puts it:

Kipling had learned this trick in India. His original Anglo-Indian readership knew the customs and institutions and landscapes of British India at first hand. But when he began writing for a wider British and American audience, he had to provide his new readers with enough information for them to understand what was going on. In his earliest stories and verse he made liberal use of footnotes, but he evolved more subtle methods as his talent matured. A combination of outright exposition, sparingly used, and contextual clues, generously sprinkled through the narrative, offered the needed background. In *Kim* and other stories of India he uses King James English to indicate that characters are speaking in Hindustani; this is never explained, but it gets the message across subliminally.

The point to keep bearing in mind (one that I think Lerner doesn't emphasize enough) is that this had never been done before. There is no such subtlety in the contemporary proto-SF of H.G. Wells (mostly between 1894 and 1907) and Jules Verne (between 1863 and 1905). These authors rely on expository lumps almost as heavily as did pre-Campbellian genre SF in the 1910s and 1920s—and for precisely that reason, they seem far more dated than *Kim* or "With the Night Mail" do to an SF fan reading today.

My title exaggerates a little; Kipling did not single-handedly invent modern SF. But I think we may safely credit him with inventing the style of exposition that was to become modern SF's most important device for managing and conveying information about

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The Pain of Interminable Living

By Tamara Wilhite

Fiction

“From boredom even the gods must struggle to escape.”
– Nietzsche

“Leila, are you ready to go?”

“One moment.” I turned off my computer and watched the holographic display flicker before disappearing. “Ready.”

We were only stopped twice for routine identification checks. Each time, I inwardly held my breath and prayed; each time, I outwardly maintained a blasé air of the annoyed professional. After the last checkpoint guard had given us the cards back and a final glance, Sandra pulled me aside. “Leila, I can tell something’s bothering you. Want to talk about it?”

“No.” The coworker who was the closest thing I had to a best friend looked crestfallen. She was silent the rest of the way home.

“Do you want to talk about it inside, where it’s more private?”

“No.”

Sandra stood there for a long minute. She knew there were things I didn’t talk about: my past, my family, and my personal interests. It occurred to her that I rarely shared my emotions either. For all I did to help and all the activities we shared, she had never scratched the surface of who I was. And realized that she never would.

She did not even wave as I entered my code and walked into my apartment building. I did not bother to turn on my lights, allowing a perfect memory to guide my steps. My toe hit something. It was the photo album I’d kept all this time ... And I’d kept it on the shelf ... someone had put it on the floor directly in the path I would have taken. I knew who.

A floor board squeaked. A footstep. “Surely you’ve figured it out by now.”

That voice was so familiar Did I still hate him? Did I still love him? “Jenadar.”

“Why not ‘Jen’? That’s what you used to call me. It’s on my ID card now. And who are you now? Lynn Martinez? Lisa Clark?”

“Leila Simmons now.”

“How long has it been?”

“You’re memory is as good as mine.”

“Eleven years, three months, sixteen days.” A pause. “Are you with someone now?”

“Not right now.”

“Did you tell that last fellow - Jared?”

“The riots 10 years ago killed him ...”

“I know about them. I barely survived one.” He put an arm around my waist and pulled me close. “Relax. We’re still married. And there’s no one else in your life.”

“We aren’t married anymore.”

“We never divorced.”

“Marriage ends at death.”

“That old argument. Cara ...”

“Don’t call me that! She died because of you! I’m not her! Not anymore. Don’t you dare -” He silenced the tirade with a kiss. His body language said he’d been alone since our last encounter. When he chose that path, that hunger and need made the reunions over the decades more intense than anything anyone else could give. He knew that the body could remember what the mind sought to forget.

I kissed him hard, trying to forget the lifetimes of memories he brought with him.

Exhaustion from the reunion brought deep sleep. With it came dreams of the Canadian Rockies. A cabin in the middle of nowhere, beautiful scenery breath-taking to an American girl. He was mysterious, quiet, distant, and handsome. A pure blooded Native American of a nondescript tribe, yet totally accustomed to civilized life as he was to the wilderness. As an ecologist, the land was a common passion for us. He slowly won me over to loving him. Despite the political correctness crowd telling him he should find someone of his own people, we were married for four wonderful years -

Someone broke in. They found me first. Jen found us fighting and tried to get the gun away from the burglar. I fell, left with a gaping hole where part of my abdomen should have been. I thought Jen wasn’t injured; he was at my side too quickly after the murderer got away. The rest was a blur of the snowmobile ride to a hospital before blacking out.

There was nothing they could do, not here; it would be a several hour flight to a hospital with the necessary facilities. Jen was a whiz at first aid, his care had kept me alive to that point when others would have died. Despite that, I still might not make it to the major hospital. Jen hated hospitals as much as he hated governments and bureaucracies and records. He would have lived alone in the wilderness oblivious to the outside world if not for the loneliness.

Jen asked to be alone with me. I watched him check the vital signs and the IV. He pulled a small ceramic vial out of his coat pocket and poured it into the IV. He pressed a finger to my lips, “Don’t try to talk, it’ll help.” He kissed my forehead. “Trust me.” He put the monitoring equipment on himself as the drugs flowed into my bloodstream. The monitors hardly noticed the transition.

—Continued next page

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It felt as though I was lighter than air, half-dreams flowing through my mind. He asked, “Do you feel the effects yet? As though you’re floating? Just nod.” I nodded yes. He smiled, then said, as he poured a different solution down the IV, “Don’t worry. You’ll wake up soon.” He knew herbs. Was this a final gift? A peaceful end on his terms? A loving act to let me die while he was here?

To my surprise, I did wake up. Jen disconnected the monitors from himself and let them dangle. Within thirty minutes, Jen was having me discharged over the staff’s protests. Nor would he permit an exam. He tried to keep them from seeing my condition. We went home, ostensibly so I could die. He never told me if they’d filed a death certificate in my name or if he’d done it himself.

Several days passed before I noticed the full effects. Underneath the bandage, my skin was perfectly smooth. No scar, not even a wound. I showed Jen, surprised and confused. He was neither. He murmured something in his native tribal language, black eyes seeming darker somehow. I asked to go into town to check messages. He refused me that right. “Stay here. Recover.”

“I feel fine.”

“You’re not ready yet.”

Days passed. I found the second set of blood stains on the wooden floor. His blood. He’d been shot too. Doubts arose, ones which could not be silenced this time. The medicine cabinet that had always been empty before I came. His never having been sick. His inability to remember his birthday. His lack of family, close friends, a nameable tribe, or a past.

One day, he said he was going to explain everything. Then he pulled out a gun. *Oh, God, he’s going to kill me!* He fired it into his chest. I screamed and ran to him, heedless of the blood or gore. He looked at me, eyes showing no fear and a lot of pain before closing. His heart and breathing stopped. Then started again. He sat up slowly, then pulled his shirt open, revealing a healing wound. He began talking.

His tribe had died out so long ago, though he had no idea of how long. He had been in trance using the drug he had used on me when the enemy attacked. He took a second potion to build up his strength before seeking to defend his people. The enemy was successful in killing him. He awoke later, no idea of what had actually happened. As years passed, the remnants of his tribe saw that he no longer aged and drove him out.

He began to wander. He had seen the Anasazi at their height. He’d seen the Inca cities and the Maya before their fall. Had seen the Cahokia mounds as they were built. Had lived with Alaskan Inuit, seen the first Russians land there. Had seen the small pox epidemics as they ravaged Eastern tribes. Had once gone to Tierra del Fuego and had seen the Arctic Circle, eager to see a land he had not seen before. Had hunted buffalo with Plains tribes and had been enslaved by Spanish missionaries when they came to California. After travel with Europe began, he went there for a few decades before coming back. That was when he’d learned the European languages and cultures. When technology arose that could track and trace him, he came home to the wilderness to hide from the prying eyes.

Over the centuries, he’d had friends and loves he’d tried to save. And learned from terrible trials and errors that of the two dozen

ingredients, a few had long been extinct, and several of the plants used nearly were. By the time he had discovered what would work and dried caches in ancestral storage locations of the extinct ingredients, he had decided to never get close to anyone again. He could save someone or perhaps two, but he had already died inside. He’d never get close enough to bother trying.

I had broken through his barriers. I’d been an experiment. Could he still attach to others? Could he live with someone of the modern age? When I had been injured, he decided to save me. We’d managed four years; why not forever?

He sat in silence for a moment, then asked me to forgive him.

“For what?”

“You’ll have to learn to live with this. You won’t age anymore. You’ll have to move every few years, learn how to change identities at the first sign of danger. You are no longer able to have children - I know that from personal experience. You won’t be able to see your family again. Cara, I’ll teach you what I can...I did it to save you, but what I’ve taken away...I lost my family when I gained immortality. I didn’t even realize what I’d taken from you until after I’d done it.”

We stayed together for another year before going our separate ways. He’d had to change identities because of suspicious government official. I did not want to travel to Asia; the thought of going so far from my family—though I’d never see them after a year or two more - was unbearable. Two years later, I forged the identity of Lisa Martinez and moved to South America for a decade. The turmoil on that continent made it the only place where I could safely build a new identity. It was the first such change and far from the last—

I could hear him breathing lightly in my ear, sleeping. Had it really been a century and a half? Yes. We always ran into one another or sought each other out every decade or two. If it hadn’t been for electromagnetic pulse weapons and the occasional nuclear war, there would have been no hiding places for us now. Even with experience, it was still a hard shell game to maintain. But the wilderness did not provide the shelter and anonymity it once did. Only the cities and constant migration did. But he’d taught me the game; he could find me if he chose.

Sometimes we would talk an hour before parting. Sometimes we would stay together for a time. I still paired off sometimes. Married twice; widowed once by war and once by terrorism. He’d given up on anything long term except with me. If there were one night stands on his part, he never said. Perhaps this un-routine routine would keep us going for another few centuries.

I looked out the window, watching the sunrise over the cityscape, wondering. Who was I going to be next year? How long we would stay together this time? After losing two men I’d loved, did I really want to try again? Was I going cold inside? What I had yet not done or seen in the world? Fads and fashions were all repeats upon themselves, and the novelty of seeking out novelty was wearing thin. The man beside me had long since died inside, living on habit and automatic.

The fear that I was becoming the same was still sharp, but it was bitterly familiar. And the hatred welling back up was worn beyond interest. The salty tears refused to come as the grief for what I’d lost consumed me. There had been too many tears already.

*Tamara Wilhite is a professional technical writer and free lance fiction writer. Her first book, **Humanity’s Edge**, collection of 13 new short stories, is available on Amazon.com December, 2005.*

—Reviews, continued from page 8

is massive societal change for both cultures. Early in the novel there are some pro-liberty stands by Jara, and Hab certainly defies his king, but the book reads more on an adventure level. The depictions of the tides and voyage around the world were gripping, though the ecosystems at times seemed hardly varied enough to support some of the inhabitants. Despite a few stumbles with the language, and frustrations with Hab's character, I enjoyed **Tides** and found it difficult to put down.

3000 Years

By Richard Mgrdechian
iUniverse, 2005, \$16.95
0-595-36072-6

Reviewed by Anders Monsen

3000 Years is a sharp thriller, one that at times sent my heart racing with excitement and anticipation. Richard Mgrdechian's first novel blends scientific speculation with elements of the near-future thriller genre. Ostensibly the novel deals with a sort of time-travel, but the underlying focus really deals with human society and how individuals acting in certain, often narrow ways leading to far-reaching implications and unintended consequences.

Professor John Bennett is driven to find ways to cheat death. Motivated by the death of his dog during Bennett's childhood years, and later his much-admired grandfather, he pours all his energy into physics. He also is a man with many heroes, studding his walls around his punching bag with images of boxing greats like Ali, Dempsey, and Marciano, and his office walls with Einstein, Newton, and other scientists. Bennett's mood upon discovering a startling new application makes him almost ebullient. By slowing down the speed of light, Bennett is able to place living

tissue in a stasis field, preserving youth over great lengths of time. He stands at the cusp of being able to change the world, granting him instant acclaim and recognition. He's blessed with a wonderful girlfriend, Dawn Whitmore, a cultural anthropologist, admiring students, and a wide open future at PacTech.

Tom Walsh, the arrogant bureaucratic president of PacTech, despises Bennett for his success. In the aftermath of a bar brawl when Bennett protects one of his star students, Paul Branning, Walsh gets his chance to publicly humiliate Bennett. Yet instead of going down meekly Bennett resigns; he has other plans. He decides to make personal use of his discovery, placing himself into stasis. While the outside world continues along its unabated pace, Bennett will sleep for decades at a time, appearing briefly to witness the progress of history, skipping like a pebble across the river of time. When he finds out that Dawn suffers from incurable ovarian cancer with scant years left, he hatches a plan to place them both in stasis and leap forward until they find a future with a cure. Along for the ride is Sam Tobin, one of Bennett's old college friends. They fake their deaths and enter stasis in an abandoned missile silo that they bought on the cheap from the government, setting the timer for fifty years in the future.

They arrive into a fragmented America, with California split in several parts, none of which seem enticing or welcoming. They still manage to somewhat adapt themselves into society, with a few mishaps along the way. Bennett secures a visiting professorship at a local college, while Tobin hooks up with Linda Moreno, an attractive attorney after he spends some time in jail for the unpardonable sin of the times, Abhorrent Vocalizations. Speak ill of anything, or have someone find offense in your words, and you end up jail. Farewell free speech. Political correctness run amuck.



The second act of the novel thus deals with how the trio handles the fifty year leap into the future. Friends and family left behind now are dead, or aged naturally into post-retirement years. Almost alone they face a two-pronged threat: how can they integrate themselves—even temporarily—into a culture of fear and social repression, and also deal with an escalating threat of nanotech hackers bent on tearing apart integral communications technologies?

In the former threat the trio seek others of like minds, from Sam's attorney friend, to a student and another professor that Bennett meet at his new university. Against the latter they team up with a former hacker, Harold Fu, who immigrated to America from China on the advice of his brother (Here I felt slight quibble, as the story about the brother who had become a national karate champion back home rang slightly off. Karate is a Japanese martial art, and I don't know for sure, but it seems that China probably would not host national karate contests. Rather, it would seem that any martial arts competition in China would instead feature wu shu or kung fu, which are native types of martial arts.)

With Harold along for the ride, the novel takes on a thriller aspect, as they race to locate the nano-hackers, only to discover a ghost from Bennett's past. Can they defeat this threat, and is there a chance of saving Dawn from her cancer? Indeed, the effects of the stasis appear only to have accelerated her illness, and instead of a possible cure, time grows ever shorter, with another status trip seemingly impossible, even fatal. The twist thrown in here certainly highlights how deep-reaching a simple event can become,

—Continued next page

Libertarian writer Russel Madden has published **Death is Easy**, a detective story set in a world where liberty is taken for granted. Yet, "Even in a fully free society danger abounds." From the website:

Dyrk Rinehart lost his wife and two young children in a senseless car accident. So when Rachel Banister asks him to locate a dying brother who has disappeared, Dyrk understands her urgency. In the course of his investigation, however, Dyrk—along with his partner Carla Stevers—learns that even in a fully free society danger abounds. Before Dyrk and Carla discover what happened to Paul Banister, they find themselves threatened by drug smugglers, racists, and a secret from Dyrk's past that will rattle the foundations of his world.

The novel is published through Lulu, which touts itself as "the web's premier independent publishing marketplace for digital do-it-yourselfers." **Death is Easy** is available as print paperback and download, with a 51 page PDF preview, from <http://www.lulu.com/content/173588>.

—continued from previous page

even decades after the cause.

Some of the secondary characters encountered in the novel receive short treatments. I expected more about the young boy, Tommy Vesely, who Bennett befriends as a fellow science fan. The swift transformation of Tinny Morrison, from flirtatious student to predatory troublemaker, took me by surprise, but played out well in showing the interplay between John and Dawn. It also makes for one of the more interesting scenes in the book, in the virtual global “mood-bar.” Linda Moreno, the attorney who latches onto Sam, also is dropped later in the book, but not before she walks us through some of the stranger new legal aspects of this society.

Despite these few misgivings Richard Mgrdechian succeeds in writing a convincing thriller rooted in present day technological, social, and legal trends. Blending moments of fast-paced narrative with occasional and brief info-dumps, Mgrdechian crafts an enjoyable work that I believe many libertarians and futurists will enjoy. In fact, I felt many of the chapters were too brief, and the novel leaves open the possibilities for sequels. However, writing about how present day people deal with events fifty years in the future probably is quite different from one hundred or one thousand, but not altogether impossible.

<http://www.3000years.org/>

Selene’s Guiding Light

By Greg Bauder

PublishAmerica, 2005, \$14.95

ISBN: 1413741509, 93 pages

Reviewed by Anders Monsen

Selene’s Guiding Light is Canadian writer Greg Bauder’s sequel to **The Temptress Ariel** (both available from Amazon.com). The novel is slim, clocking in at less than 100 pages.

The story begins in a hospital room, as a patient travels in his dream to a distant planet, guided by the moon-goddess, Selene. Adapt at shape shifting, she turns into various beings, beasts, and implements during the narrator’s first-person voyage. We only learn the narrator’s name mid-way through the novel, Don Waters.

The theme of gold runs through his experiences in the new land. Bauder’s language is lush and descriptive, but rather tells too much rather than let the reader experience the setting and actions. The narrator flies through populated areas, where people proclaim him a god, and also into an empty city. Here he discovers the remnants of a nuclear war, the Hairy People, whom he adopts.

The chapters are like brief snippets or narration overwhelmed by imagery. At the times the imagery is vivid yet erratic: “Selene and I caught the midnight Plato-directed flick

of Milton’s **Paradise Lost** which was shot on location in Pandemonium and Eden on another plane in a parallel universe.” Bauder tosses out names at apparent random, with characters in a play a blend of real and mythical people like Eve, Sting, Woody Allen mixing with an audience that contains Ralph Nader, Shakespeare, and Carl Jung. When the narrator wakes up from his dream he’s back in the hospital room, his life now mundanely reduced to a regimen of medication until the next dream.

Greek gods and characters from Greek history and mythology predominate in metaphors (“like the Sirens to Odysseus,” “like Poseidon at sea,” “you rise like Pegasus,” etc.), but Biblical names also make appearances, as do other mythological beings.

The events switch between the dream world and the narrator’s existence as a patient in a mental hospital. The narrator reveals how he moved away from the constrictive one-god belief of his world, finding instead joy in the Earth and nature, which he saw as the embodiment of Selene. In itself this mirrors other divine inspirations and revelations. Other Biblical echoes come forth, such as women being subordinate to men, and the meek inheriting the earth. While feted by the people of a village who deem him a god, the narrator though attempts to subvert this by

—Continued on page 14

Announcing Roswell, Texas

Imagine a world in which Texas never joined the United States, NAZI Germany conquered England but was held in check by a nuclear-armed Irish Republican Army, the Catholic Church has moved its headquarters to Brownsville, Texas, and Mexico is ruled by a neo-Aztec emperor in partnership with French colonial bureaucrats-in-exile.

In this Texas-that-might-have-been, residents are required to have permits not to carry firearms. The Federated States of Texas includes most of what we know as New Mexico and Colorado, as well as Louisiana, Arkansas, Oklahoma, Kansas, parts of Wyoming, Nebraska, and Missouri. Not to mention Alaska, Cuba, Venezuela, most of Central America, and the Philippines. Its currency is based on petroleum, and its limited government is financed entirely by a monopoly on garbage collection.

And in 1947, Texican President Charles

A. Lindbergh was faced with a most amazing, and potentially world-changing, situation — reports of a flying saucer crash in far west Texas, near the town of Roswell.

Big Head Press announces plans to publish the first all-new novel-length story in nearly five years by award-winning sci-fi author L. Neil Smith, to be titled **Roswell, Texas**. Co-written by *Wall Street Journal* and *National Review* cartoonist “Baloo” (in his other identity as Rex F. May), and illustrated by Scott Bieser, the story concerns what happens when a special team of Texas Rangers races an array of spies, troops, and operatives of neighboring nations to the UFO crash site, and discover a truth even stranger than any of them could have imagined.

“As a graphic novel, **Roswell, Texas** will mark another first for Big Head Press: it will be the first BHP project serialized on the World Wide Web, with a printed version possibly

to follow as market conditions permit,” said publisher Frank W. Bieser.

“Current plans call for the first chapter to be uploaded to a new, completely revamped BigHeadPress.com site around February 1, 2006,” said Scott Bieser, who in addition to being the story’s illustrator is also Director for Big Head Press. Access to the site will be free, at least for a limited time, and will be supported financially by banner advertising and merchandising, he explained.

Roswell, Texas will be illustrated in full color, and when completed “in late 2007 or so” will consist of 576 computer-monitor-formatted “pages,” he added.

Big Head Press, founded in 2002, is a publisher of graphic novels, including **A Drug War Carol** and Prometheus Award-winner, **The Probability Broach: The Graphic Novel**.

Submission Guidelines

In order to remain a viable and interesting newsletter promoting libertarian science fiction and the Prometheus Award, *Prometheus* seeks reviews, essays, articles, and columns of interest to libertarian sf 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, including mainstream libertarian fiction, historical fiction, graphic novels and comic, movies and TV shows, and gaming products such as video games or role-playing games.

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 via email at 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*, please mention this when sending your material.

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.

—*Kipling and SF*, continued from page 9

imaginary futures and otherwheres. In doing so, he exerted an influence on the style, tone, and even content of SF that remains pervasive.

Once we understand this, there are some apparently accidental features of the genre that make a great deal more sense. One is the degree to which SF and SF-influenced fantasy, essentially alone among modern genres, carry forward a tradition of high-quality moral-didactic children's fiction that can be read with pleasure by adults. Robert Heinlein's juveniles and even J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter sequence are not just coincidentally like the Kipling of **Kim**, **Stalky & Co.** and **The Jungle Book**—they are organically derived from his work through the technique of indirect exposition.

Another is the persistence of military SF. The similarity between Kipling's prose and verse about the North-West Frontier and genre SF's frequent celebrations of the military ethos in exotic surroundings is hardly accidental either. These stories too, are all about indirect exposition—immersing the reader in a strange and challenging environment, not by telling but by showing. As I have discussed elsewhere, military SF

tends to have as important subtext an examination of the soldier's proper relationship to his society—much as do Kipling's barrack-room ballads.

Lurking behind both these features is SF's abiding concern with morality, right living, and humans' place in the cosmos. Now of course all literature touches these concerns; but part of the SF tradition is a tendency to do so in ways that emphasize politics and psychology rather less, and the inexorable-ness of natural law rather more.

The archetypal example of this emphasis is Tom Godwin's classic **The Cold Equations** (1954), in which an innocent and likeable girl stows away on a spaceship and must die—must, in fact, be killed—because she overstrains the capacity of the vessel, which is delivering supplies vitally needed to prevent mass death.

What is this, really, but Rudyard Kipling's **Gods of the Copybook Headings** (1916) in the idiom of the Space Age? Perhaps Kipling's most lasting legacy in the content of SF is his insistence (one expressed hardly ever, if at all, in literary genres other than SF) that human feeling and social construction cannot override natural law; that a tough-minded grasp of the way the universe actually works is both possible and necessary.

—*Reviews*, continued from page 13

saying they control their own fate, and not to depend on gods to grant them anything.

Interspersed among the pure related narrative sections are poem and passages construed like streams of consciousness.

The narrator's journey is one of discovery, much like **The Pilgrim's Progress**, where he is tempted, led astray, yet always with his spiritual guide by his side. Throughout his travails he's tormented by the real world, as doctors and nurses continually pull him back from his lucid dreams into medicated reality. Diagnosed with schizophrenia, none of the medication seems to have any effect, as he always falls back into Selene's world.

At one point aliens appear of the type known as "greys," who seek to help the narrator. They teach him how to operate a spaceship and shape shift, becoming indistinguishable from the gods of the past.

We learn Don has been in this hospital since the death of his girlfriend, Ariel, murdered by drug dealers. Don now believes Ariel is a goddess, who communicates with him in his dreams as Selene. The Hairy Persons that Don is supposed to save might be a

metaphor for the homeless, the downtrodden. Their enemy, the North Mountain People, who have everything, are the fortunate ones in society. Don sympathizes with the Hairy People, possibly from his days living off the streets in Vancouver with Ariel.

Don meets Ariel's cousin, Dawn, who looks just like Ariel, and falls in love. The novel as it began ends in the dreamworld, Don seemingly happy. Has he ventured over into the lands of madness for good?

Selene's Guiding Light is a lyrical novella, rife with effusive adjectives, but not really appropriate as a candidate for the Prometheus Award. It's a personal novel, a work of discovery and faith, but I fail to see any libertarian elements in the story. It did remind me somewhat of John C. Wright's Everness books in terms of the religio-mythological content and ideas, but Wright's books contained strong themes of repression and rebellion amid the gods and monsters. I see none of this in **Selene's Guiding Light**. In the end I felt I spent too much time looking for the real Don, as well as the key to the story itself. Perhaps I would have reacted differently had the ideas been fleshed out and clearer in scope.

Apocawhatnow?

P. Bagge's weird take on the end of the world as we know it

By Max Jahr

Apocalypse Nerd #1 and #2

By P. Bagge

Dark Horse Comics, 2005,
\$2.99 each, 32 pages

P. Bagge is perhaps best known for his *Reason* magazine cartoon work. His quirky humor, libertarian politics, frenetic art-work, and profusely stressed-out characters appear in vignette like sketches almost like animated narrative fiction.



Along comes *Apocalypse Nerd*, a six-part comic book series from Dark Horse comics, which gave us the three-part *Serenity* comic book. Issue #1 debuted in February 2005, and #2 arrived in stores around October 2005. The color covers mark the black and white interiors, yet the books are populated with the same Starbucks-in-veins type characters as in *Reason*.

Imagine the end of the world, for example via a nuclear holocaust. Bagge's heroes, two disparate buddies heading back to work in the big city after a week in at a cabin in the woods, encounter a world gone mad heading in the opposite direction. Chaos erupts at a gas station, shots are fired, and anarchy rules the day. They're informed that the Koreans nuked the US, and people are fleeing the cities en masse. What's a middle-aged computer geek with zero survival skills and a crazed Republican shoot-first-ask-questions-later supposed to do? Head back to the cabin and hunker down, that's what.

The first issue of *Apocalypse Nerd* details the initial shock and first attempts at survival in the woods. Faced with starvation, the two city folks must figure out how to get food, and worry about what might happen if someone else (the owner, for example) should stumble across their hideaway. One of the men has a rifle, and some experience with it, so he heads out to bag a deer. The kill is not clean, and the uber-nerd is forced to use drastic and gory measures to finish the poor animal.

Picking up six weeks later, issue #2 finds our two heroes suffering from an unmixed

diet. Too much deer meat appears to have a disastrous affect on the intestines, sending the nerds into thunderous gassy outbursts and spasmodic fits of the runs. In graphic detail, one of the men is interrupted by the arrival of the cabin's owner, who is quickly dispatched by the gun-toting partner. The owner's wife and two kids, who witnessed the whole thing, run screaming into the forest.

Wracked by a brief moment of conscience, the wimpy computer jock decides to leave the cabin and head back to town. He makes it almost back to a gas station when his buddy appears, and they decide two people are better than going it alone. At the gas station they manage to bungle events again, with the result another dead body.

Apocalypse Nerd is not for the squeamish, and not always funny, but has its moments. So grab your bug-out-bag, your Claire Wolfe books, and head for the hills with Bagge on one weird ride. Each issue functions as brief window into a world gone mad, with people unprepared to deal with the situation, screwing up everything along the way. One of character sums it up as follows: "I know it's not funny. What *is* anymore. It's either *laugh* or *cry*, ya know."

As a bonus, each issue features a savagely irreverent look at the Founding Fathers. Comic books attack your sensibilities far differently than novels or movies. There's little or no libertarian content to speak of at the moment, and it will be interesting to see how Bagge handles the remaining four installments. What's left of civilization for these two crazy nerds to find?

—*Accelerando*, Continued from page 4

for ownership of property, which some may see as akin to theft, but it seems to me that it's a sensible exploration of alternative choices. If technology makes the old schemes unenforceable, ceding increasing amounts of force to the state (or to property owners) in order to maintain rights that have always been inventions of the state in any case (patent, copyright, trademark) is probably the wrong approach from a libertarian point of view.

Chapter 4 ("Halo") starts out with Manfred's daughter, Amber, escaping the clutches of her mother by emigrating to the asteroid belt. She ends up the head of a voluntary justice association that people subscribe to because it's better situated to their problems. The characters refer back to this period throughout the rest of the story, and it's clear that it serves as a reminder that voluntary arrangements work better.

The story ends with a transhuman superintelligence (the cat, Aineko) needing something from Manfred, and having to negotiate with him to get it. It's clear from the power arrangements that Aineko is used to manipulating events so people want to help her, but in this case, she needs a willing assistant, so she offers Manfred something he's wanted all along: to be left alone to live his own life. It seems plenty libertarian to me.

—*De gustibus*, Continued from page 2

might like. This often leads to elitist critics quick to disparage the works of popular authors and praise obscure and quirky works. Where this goes wrong is when critics act this way purely for the sake of being contrarian, rather than examining the merits of the work in question. Then it leads to bitter comments by slighted authors, and befuddled mistrust from the general public.

As a fan of fiction in general, there are many writers whose work I admire that have nothing to do with liberty. For example, Clark Ashton Smith and Michael Shea are two of my favorite writers, but I see no purpose in reviewing their work in *Prometheus*. By mentioning their names, I do recommend their books to fans of literary and imaginative fantasy fiction, but that taste is not for everyone. But, if you took my advice and hated my recommendation, just don't bring a baseball bat should we meet in person.

—*Anders Monsen*

New developments in private space flight

New Mexico Governor Bill Richardson and Sir Richard Branson, Chairman of the Virgin Companies, announced December 14, 2005 that Virgin Galactic, the world's first commercial space tourism business, will locate its world headquarters and Mission Control in New Mexico. The agreement between the State of New Mexico and Virgin Galactic calls for New Mexico to build a \$225 million spaceport in the southern part of the state, on 27-square miles of state land.

"This is a historic day for our great state, and particularly Southern New Mexico," said Governor Bill Richardson. "With Virgin at the controls, enthusiasts from around the world will fly to space, routinely and safely, just a few years from now. And they will be flying from the world's first purpose-built spaceport here in New Mexico. I am excited that New Mexico will be on the ground floor of this new industry, and I know this will mean new companies, more high-wage jobs and opportunities that will move our state's economy forward."

Virgin Galactic plans to create a five-star

destination experience in New Mexico to accommodate customers, their families, and space enthusiasts.

Branson and Richardson confirmed that Virgin Galactic plans to inaugurate space flights out of New Mexico in 2009 or 2010, once construction of the spaceport is complete, and plans to send 50,000 customers to space in the first ten years of operation.

Customers will spend training time in simulators and light aircraft vehicles in order to prepare for the g-forces they will encounter in space. They will also learn how to operate a "personal communications console" that will allow them to record their experience in space. The flight itself will consist of SpaceShipTwo being propelled into suborbital space by a rocket motor after it is dropped by a launch aircraft.

Funding for construction of the spaceport is expected to come from a combination of state capital outlay, federal appropriations, and a local-option gross receipts tax that will be proposed to voters of southern New Mexico counties that stand to benefit from the

spaceport and the resulting job growth.

A design for SpaceShipTwo is now in its final planning stages and construction of the commercial prototype is expected to commence in 2006 and be flying by 2008. It is expected that five SpaceShipTwo's and two White Knight Two carrier aircrafts will be built, in order to allow 50,000 customers to experience personal space flight over a ten year period up to 2019.

Currently, there are 40,000 registrations from individuals from 120 countries.

New Mexico's spaceport has been in the planning stages for 15 years. The spaceport, located in Sierra County, about 45 miles northeast of Las Cruces, and 25 miles southeast of Truth or Consequence is approximately 27 square miles of open, generally level, range land with an average elevation of 4700 feet.

From New Mexico Economic Development Department press release.



The Newsletter of the Libertarian Futurist Society
501 Abiso Ave
San Antonio, TX 78209