

PROMETHEUS

Harald

By David D. Friedman
BAEN, 2006, \$24
ISBN: 14156520562

Reviewed by William H. Stoddard

David Friedman is well known among libertarians as the author of **The Machinery of Freedom**, one of the best defenses of anarchocapitalism yet published, and also as the author of several recent textbooks in various areas of law and economics. His fannish background, both as a reader of science fiction and fantasy and as an active recreational anachronist, is perhaps less widely known. But he clearly draws on those interests in **Harald**, his first venture into fiction.

The revised edition of **The Machinery of Freedom** contains a chapter putting forth early Iceland as an example of a functioning anarchist society. (The question's more complex than Friedman's discussion makes it, as can be seen in recent book length scholarly studies of Iceland, but his chapter deserves credit for drawing libertarian attention to this fascinating historical case.) Friedman's enthusiasm for the Icelandic sagas clearly shows up in **Harald**—in the customs of the stateless people of the Western Plains, and also in the narrative style, plainspoken in the manner of Icelandic literature and decorated with traditional Viking sayings at the chapter heads, such as "A small hut of one's own is better; a man is his master at home."

But even though this novel is about politics and warfare, its hero isn't primarily a man of war. Harald is an older man, who has become the leading figure in his own society not through his own use of physical force and combat skills, creditable though they are, but through his cunning and ingenuity in achieving combat goals with the minimum of resources. In Greek terms, he favors the arts of Athena, as the goddess of strategy, over those of Ares, as the god of battle; the Greek hero he most resembles is not the wrathful Achilles but the many-wiled Odysseus, able to use his tongue as a weapon as effectively as his sword. His portrayal adds a great deal to the pleasure of this book.

At the same time, it's regrettably incomplete: we don't see the Penelope of this Odysseus. Harald certainly has a wife, Gerda, back on his native steading; the reader even meets her briefly. But the bulk of the story involves a different woman, the Lady Leonora, head of a different sort of independent military force, the Order, a large body of women archers, currently a prisoner of one of the

2006 Prometheus Award Finalists, Hall of Fame, Special Award Finalists

factions in the political intrigue of the kingdom of Kaerlia. Harald has to deal both with this crisis and with an invasion from a powerful empire to the north. He has more than political reasons for doing so: Leonora is the mother of one of his children, Caralla, also a leader in the Order. But we don't learn much about the old affair and how it ended, or about how Harald came to be married to Gerda, or about what the two women think of each other. There isn't even a scene of homecoming at the end of the novel. Friedman missed a chance to give his characters some added personal depth—and his not doing so makes his decision to introduce the relationship in the first place a questionable one; an old maxim of playwriting says that if you put a gun on the mantel in the first act, you need to have someone fire it in the last act.

As far as the political themes go, readers will want to know if there's any libertarianism in this first novel by a well-known libertarian. Yes, there is, but it's not the focus of the book. It's part of the subtext, emerging from the political situation of a kingdom whose survival depends on alliances both with an independent military force (made up entirely of women) and with stateless colonists on the other side of a mountain range. Friedman explores the kinds of military strength that are most effective without strong central authority. But this also is the basis for a setting where he can tell an exciting adventure story, one that gives his heroes freedom to act

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The newsletter of the
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Full Membership: \$50/yr.
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2006 Prometheus Award Finalists

By Michael Grossberg

The Libertarian Futurist Society has announced finalists and special recommendations for this year's Prometheus Awards, which will be presented during Worldcon August 23-27 in Anaheim, California.

Prometheus finalists for Best Novel recognizes pro-freedom novels published in 2005:

- ◆ **Chainfire**, by Terry Goodkind (TOR)
- ◆ **Learning the World**, by Ken MacLeod (TOR)
- ◆ **47**, by Walter Mosley (Little, Brown, and Company)
- ◆ **The Hidden Family**, by Charles Stross (TOR)
- ◆ **The Black Arrow**, by Vin Suprynowicz (Mountain Media)
- ◆ **RebelFire: Out of the Gray Zone**, by Claire Wolfe & Aaron Zelman (RebelFire Press)

Prometheus finalists for Best Classic Fiction (Hall of Fame), a category that honors novels, novellas, stories, graphic novels, anthologies, films, TV shows/series, plays, poems, music recordings and other works of fiction first published or broadcast more than five years ago

- ◆ **A Clockwork Orange**, a novel (1963) by Anthony Burgess
- ◆ "As Easy as A.B.C.," a short story (1912) by Rudyard Kipling
- ◆ **It Can't Happen Here**, a novel (1936) by Sinclair Lewis
- ◆ **V for Vendetta**, a graphic novel (1990) by Alan Moore
- ◆ The Lord of the Rings, a trilogy of novels (1954) by J.R.R. Tolkien

The Special Awards committee, chaired by Rick Triplett, has approved a recommendation for all LFS members to consider:

- ◆ To **Serenity**, writer-director Joss Whedon's fun-loving and pro-freedom movie that portrays resistance fighters struggling against oppressive collectivism (based on the short-lived TV series **Firefly**).

The Best Novel judging committee, chaired by Michael Grossberg, read 14 novels nominated by LFS members. The other Best Novel nominees: **Reflex**, by Stephen Gould (TOR); **Noble Vision**, by Gen LaGreca (Winged Victory Press); **3000 Years**, by Richard Mgrdechian (iUniverse, Inc.); **Accelerando**, by Charles Stross (Ace/Putnam); **Resurrection of Liberty**, by Michael L. Wentz (Novalibre Publishing); **Infernal**, by F. Paul Wilson (Forge Books); **The Weapon** by Michael Z. Williamson (Baen Books); and **Mists of Everness**, by John C. Wright (TOR).

The Hall of Fame judging committee, chaired by Lynn Maners, selected the finalists after whittling down almost 20 nominees to a preliminary slate of 10 semifinalists. The other semifinalists: **Circus World**, a novel (1981) by Barry Longyear; **Infinity Hold**, a novel (1989) by Barry Longyear; **The Girl Who Owned a City**, a young-adult novel (1977) by O.T. Nelson; **Subspace Explorers**, a novel (1965) by Edward E. Smith; and "Even the Queen," a short story (1992) by Connie Willis.

Fred Moulton will spearhead the Worldcon's Prometheus Awards ceremony, tentatively scheduled for Friday afternoon August 25. Any LFS member planning to attend the Worldcon should contact Moulton (moulton@moulton.com) for updates. To register for the Worldcon, visit www.laconiv.org/

Ballots should be mailed to LFS members by late May with a final voting deadline of July 1. Members who haven't received a ballot by June 1 should contact Grossberg (mikegrossb@aol.com or 614-236-5040.)

All three awards committees are seeking new judges for the 2006-2007 judging cycle, which begins in September. Please volunteer before August 1. Contact the awards committee chairs (via www.lfs.org) or Board President Chris Hibbert (hibbert@mydruthers.com)

BOOK REVIEWS

The Hidden Family

By Charles Stross

Tor, 2005 \$24.99, ISBN: 0765313472

Reviewed by William H. Stoddard

Charles Stross's **The Hidden Family** is the second book in a multi-volume series, *The Merchant Princes*. The dust jacket copy calls it a fantasy; this is a rather misleading description and may keep away some of the readers who would most appreciate the books. The story takes place in a low-tech world reached by sideways time travel; L. Sprague de Camp's classic **Lest Darkness Fall** takes place in a low-tech setting reached by time travel into the past, and is universally regarded as science fiction. The process of travel is a "wild talent," an old science fictional concept, inherited in strictly Mendelian fashion; and in any case the means of travel to a different world is simply a vehicle—what matters is what the author does with the world.

And the story in the other world is the hardest of hard science fiction, in an unusual sense: the science is economics. Stross's protagonist encounters first one, and then a second alternate world where the Enlightenment never took place, and Adam Smith's defense of free market economics is unknown. As a result, both are trying to get rich off of mercantilist policies. And as a proper science fiction heroine, Miriam Beckstein promptly sets about trying to engineer a change in the world, through the introduction of superior rational methods of doing business. There's none of the customary fantasy admiration for the wisdom of the remote past in this story; Stross invites his readers to embrace change.

For libertarian readers, in particular, the specific economic ideas Stross presents will have a pleasant familiarity. This is a novel one of whose parts has the title "Capitalism for Beginners." In fact, in an odd way, the book is a sibling to last year's Prometheus winner, Stephenson's **The System of the World**. Both books look at the desirability of Enlightenment values of scientific rationality, technological advance, market economics, sound currency, and equality under the law against societies that have barely begun to encounter them: in one case, the actual historical past; in the other, alternate presents where modernity was never conceived (in one case) or stillborn (in the other). I'm particularly happy to see a novel where the triumph of Bonnie Prince Charlie is shown, not as a glorious romantic dream, but as the catastrophe it really would have been, given the Stuart support for Tory reaction and hatred of Whig progressivism.

The Hidden Family was also enjoyable to read. It has an ingenious plot that resolves the first volume's loose ends. It has a heroine with a lively mind and a strong will, accompanied by a cast of excellent supporting characters. It plays with many of the classic motifs of romance fiction but doesn't surrender to them. Stross has given us entertainment, but a superior entertainment, one that fans of alternate history ought to give notice to, as well as libertarian readers in general.

The Weapon

By Michael Z. Williamson

Publisher, 2005, \$25, ISBN: 1416508945

Reviewed by Rick Triplett

The Weapon is an exciting and remarkable book. It's exciting because of its many vivid battles scenes of "good guys against bad guys" and because its plot involves issues of justice on an interplanetary scale. It is remarkable, because it will challenge readers to think deeply about the tough issues of libertarianism, including *What is a just war? What makes a victim innocent?* and *How should we deal with terrorists?* It has been a long time since I read a book that engaged me as emotionally as did this decidedly challenging adventure.

The Weapon is set in the same universe and time period as Michael Z. Williamson's earlier book, **Freehold**. It tells the story of Kenneth Chinran, a careerist in the citizen-controlled military of Freehold, which is a libertarian planet that seceded from the highly collectivized Earth government of a century or two into the future. Much of the narrative describes Chinran's training in special operations and the employment of his military skills on several planets. Chinran is the "weapon" of the title, for he is so well trained that his home planet is able to use him as a weapon. Not all readers enjoy "military fiction," but barring an active dislike of the genre, most will soon be amazed at Chinran's extraordinary training and the dazzling exploits to which his career takes him. It would not be wrong to call this story an action story, but it is much more than that, for Williamson gives us a vivid indictment of collectivism and at least three tough ethical problems to wrestle with.

Libertarians love freedom, but they also recognize and love the responsibility that goes with it. Sadly, a great many people seem reluctant to grow up and take over from their parents the job of pursuing and fulfilling their own needs and wants. Williamson is expert and unsparing at dissecting the psychology of these people and in depicting the consequences of indulging the dependencies they crave. Here is a description of a wimpy bureaucrat he runs into: "He was a weasel-faced, soft little troll and had a whiny voice." This sounds macho, but he adds: "Not that there was anything wrong with the voice, just with his inflection and attitude. He had the classic neo-feudalist blame-everyone-else-for-my-problems mindset. I detest it. It's gutless and pathetic." And he writes many pages over the excessive regulation on Earth; his criticisms are detailed and articulate—a joy to read. Here's one example, on the anti-suicide regulation limiting the size of kitchen knives:

I have a hint for the overlords, as no other term applies to them:

People on Earth don't kill themselves because a knife happens to be lying around. They kill themselves because you have turned their planet into a festering shithole with no hope of escape, no hope of individuality, no chance of innovation and creativity, and not even the dignity of surcease in a clean death.

I chuckled with pleasure over Williamson's blunt criticisms, but I was most exercised—as most readers will be—over three applications of military force that plunge right to the center of important

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controversies many people are averse to consider. The first of these takes place in a town called Mtali on a dismal planet beset with tribal warfare over competing, fundamentalist religions. Chinran and his team are there just to practice their skills in a real fight. This is a smart idea, but did they use force in a justifiable way? Chinran looks at arguments on both sides and ends up faulting himself on several counts for at least part of the killing. As a reader, I was caught up in Chinran's conflicting feelings, forced to debate tough issues that need to be debated.

The second controversial military operation was the way Chinran dealt with terrorists. This is a topic we can relate to; it is a problem that is a long way from being solved. Chinran dealt with it carefully, thoroughly, brutally, and with assiduous attention to target selection. Is this a justified use of force? Can we trust our intelligence gathering? As a policy, could it be abused? Would it have an effect on terrorism? Williamson boldly thrusts us into a conflict that is as important to us as it is difficult.

The last controversy, and the author saves the big one for last, takes us face to face with the core of Just War Theory. Instead of revealing what happens in the story, let me ask you two questions: *Under what circumstances is it right for one nation to engage in war with another?* and *How much force is justified when defending a nation?* These questions were already old when they were raised concerning the atomic bombing of Japan. Williamson will raise them again for you.

Chinran's values are thoroughly pro-freedom. That he holds these values passionately can be seen in many of his comments throughout the book. Referring to his home planet he says, "We defined freedom as the right to be stupid. If you aren't allowed to ruin your life because of the 'greater good of the whole,' you aren't really free, you're a cog." And about the bureaucratic future Earth he is eloquently contemptuous:

'To understand all is to forgive all.' I've heard said. Well, I understood just fine and I would never forgive. The more I looked at Earth, the sicker I got. The history, the roots, the few bits of scenery left unspoiled, buried under ant-like legions of ignorant, stupid, petty little bureaucrats determined to ensure that no one has a better lot than they themselves do made me want to vomit. The poor sheeple living under the yoke, flogged into basic modules to serve this machine filled me with despair.

There is much that is heroic in Kenneth Chinran, but there are flaws, too. Williamson has given us a character who has noble values and who is willing to risk his life and to take on large responsibilities. But we also agonize with this soldier over his difficult decisions and we sympathize with him as he learns from his mistakes. He hates fraud, pretense, laziness, politicians, terrorists, and people who stand around doing nothing while injustice grows like kudzu all around them. In short he is not an armchair libertarian.

I like to think that if I had lived in Thomas Paine's time, I would not have been a "sunshine patriot." And I hope that I will never have to literally fight for my rights. But I am by no means confident that the contemporary erosion of freedom can be halted without a physical struggle. So I am grateful to Michael Z. Williamson for reminding us that our struggle may become grim and for inspiring us to tough it out should that become necessary.

Learning the World

By Ken MacLeod

Tor Books, 2005, \$24.95, ISBN 0765313316

Reviewed by William H. Stoddard

Learning the World is Ken MacLeod's trying something new. His two series and his standalone **Newton's Wake**, despite their variety of themes and settings, established a characteristic pattern for a "Ken MacLeod novel": written in a dense prose style, filled with subtle jokes, and thematically concerned on one hand with the implications of libertarian and Marxist ideas, and on the other with life in the neighborhood of a Vingean singularity and with transhumanist speculations. He offered his readers the same kind of intoxication that early cyberpunk provided, but with a more sophisticated view of politics and economics. In contrast, **Learning the World** is much more like a classic science fiction novel. It may make MacLeod accessible to a wider readership. It's our good fortune that in doing this, he hasn't stopped giving us brilliant ideas and interesting worlds.

In fact, one model for MacLeod's narratives seems to be the classic Heinlein juveniles. His primary viewpoint character is a girl in her early teens living on an interstellar colony ship that's about to enter a new solar system. This provides him with an elegant way of avoiding idiot lecture: as Atomic Discourse Gale grows up, she learns more about her world, and the reader learns with her.

What makes this story more interesting is that her world is not stable. As the starship reaches its destination, its crew and passengers discover unmistakable evidence of an intelligent race on one of the new system's planets. This faces them with conflicts of many sorts: over how to deal with an unprecedented encounter; over the ethical shortcomings of the alien civilization, and what can legitimately be done about them; and over the disruption of their own plans for colonization. Suddenly there are conflicts of interest between the crew, the older generation passengers, and their children, who grew up in the expectation of having an entire solar system to lay claim to. This part of the story is as dramatic as anything MacLeod has ever written—and leads up to a clear acknowledgment of Heinlein's influence, in the two lines by "Noisy" Rhysling at the end of Chapter 17, which, impressively, are even more emotionally charged here than in Heinlein's original story.

The aliens themselves are extremely well portrayed, in a style that recalls Vernor Vinge's portrayal of the Tines in **A Fire upon the Deep** or the Spiders in **A Deepness in the Sky**. MacLeod gives the reader not only alien bodies and minds, but alien cultures and an alien science, with both parallels to and differences from human science. The reader sees one of these imagined cultures readying itself for war, with both armed forces and an intelligence service ready to use new technology as a weapon against rival cultures—and then discovering that it is not alone in the world, as if the Air Force UFO investigations had found real aliens in our solar system. And the alien cultures have features that disturb or even horrify the human colonists.

One of these features is a long-established practice of slavery, involving, not other members of the aliens' own species, but a more primitive species. This is one of the themes that libertarians will find sympathetic in this book: the humans regard slavery with entire abhorrence, and are divided only on how to put a stop to it.

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MacLeod also shows a long-established body of law for the private appropriation and exploitation of bodies in space, complete with futures markets in asteroids, comets, terrestrial planets, and other sorts of bodies. This is a logical outgrowth of the idea of colonizing and industrializing space, but in the context of present-day Earth law and politics it's a radical, and radically libertarian idea. Finally, the political institutions of the ships are founded on libertarian ideas, starting with each ship having an explicit Contract to which its crew and passengers must agree when they sign on; these people's social contract is an actual contract. Ideas that libertarians cherish are woven into the substance of this future human culture—which doesn't prevent its people from turning against freedom to coercion in a crisis, such as the one that drives this novel's plot.

MacLeod has always been a thought-provoking writer. But in **Learning the World** he also achieves an elegant simplicity of design and style, expressing his transhumanist ideas and social speculations in the form of classic science fiction. This book deserves a wider readership than MacLeod has found up to now.

47

By Walter Mosley

Publisher, 2005, \$16.99, ISBN 0316110353

Reviewed by Rick Triplett

"Neither nigger nor master be."

This advice, from the mythic co-protagonist Tall John, of Walter Mosley's short novel, isn't merely good advice. It defines everything he does, everything he stands for; it is a principle—not just a platitude, but a fundamental, practical, life-changing principle. When Forty-seven, the other protagonist, first hears it he has no notion what it means. He likes the sound of it, but it takes time and many life-lessons before it fully soaks into him.

As a libertarian I like this principle, too. It is a folksy way of stating our basic view of ethics: equal rights. It is equivalent to Jefferson's statement, "Rightful liberty is unobstructed action according to our will within limits drawn around us by the equal rights of others. I do not add 'within the limits of the law' because law is often but the tyrant's will, and always so when it violates the rights of the individual."

Inspired by the American slave tale of High John the Conqueror, Mosley has written a sci-fi adventure that educates and edifies. Under the confident, steady, and optimistic tutelage of a traveler from the stars, a young slave in 1832—given the number *cum* name Forty-seven—is introduced to the work regimen of his plantation, meets good and bad slaves and good and bad whites, suffers, loves, learns, discovers hope, beauty, and goodness—but most of all discovers and falls in love with freedom:

The truth was dawning on both of us. We were free. Free to do what we wanted to do. Freedom—what every slave dreamed about from morning to night and from night to morning, every day of their lives....

In the distance dogs were howling and the smell of smoke was in the air but we didn't care about all of that. We were free under the pale blue morning skies. Even if they caught us and hung us from the tree we hid behind we still had the greatest treasure in the world.

Mosley is an accomplished writer, but he is not a libertarian (see <<http://www.thenation.com/doc/20060227/mosley>> for a sample

of his liberal politics), yet the case could be made that his novel is. I make this claim based on four points.

(1) His equal rights statement, the first line of this review, is the predominant ethic of the novel. At every turn of events, Tall John and (eventually) Forty-seven make choices based not on hatred, vengeance, reparations, or expedience, but on the hopeful and good-hearted construction of something good.

(2) He keeps his liberal views in check. There is no politics in this novel! This must have been difficult for Mosley, but apparently he wanted to create a story that was timeless and inspiring, rather than just a commentary on our times; and several reviewers on the jacket have indeed describe 47 this way. He does bring up Plato—"You carry within you the potential of what farty old Plato called the philosopher-king,"—but calling him "farty" suggests that Tall John was complimenting Forty-seven's thoughtfulness, not recommending an aristocracy.

(3) Tall John does not rely on mysticism. Although he makes overtures to Idealism or Epiphenomenalism with his depiction of mind existing independently of the body, this view is not critical to the agenda of freedom. Moreover, he seems to be saluting the laws of physics when he says "I have no master, Forty-seven. No master but the power that keeps my feet on the ground."

(4) Individualism and the power of one's mind are honored:

"I know who I am," I said.

"Not if you call yourself nigger," he said.

"You notice things and you don't only notice but you ask why. Those are only two of the reasons why you are destined to become a great hero."

"You, Forty-seven. You are the promise. Your blood is capable of great power, your heart is free from hatred, and your mind dares to consider new ways."

Mosley believes we can be inspired by our dreams, and this is, of course, one of the reasons we in LFS give awards; we understand the power of drama to inspire. And although his novel can and will be read and enjoyed by adults of any age, he apparently adjusted his writing style for a "young adult" audience. He clearly has more respect for the flexibility of children than of adults:

Children resist slavery better than grown men and women because children believe in dreams. I dreamed of lazy days in the barn and stolen spoonfuls of honey from the table ... And being a child, I thought that my dreams just might one day come true.

I appreciated her gratitude but there was something else that was even more important to me. I really had saved her life. I had used my mind and my courage to brave Death and Master Tobias to do what I thought was right. These actions made me a man, and a real man, I knew, couldn't be a slave."

From that moment on I never thought of myself as a slave again.

But none of that mattered because there I was, alone in the woods with the most wonderful person I had ever known. When he looked at me he liked my black skin and dusty hair, he thought that I was a hero and who was I to say no?

Mosley's 47 is a powerfully moving tale. The reader comes out of it with a renewed appreciation for freedom. Readers won't automatically conclude that taxation, regulation, etc. are forms of slavery. But a refreshed admiration for the concept of equal rights, of not wanting to rule or to be ruled, is both welcome and likely.

Tom Paine Maru, Uncut and Uncensored

Tom Paine Maru

By L. Neil Smith

First Uncensored edition, 2005 (Del Rey Books, 1985)

Cover by Scott Bieser, 283 pages, \$5

Reviewed by Rick Triplett

L. Neil Smith has written quite a few books of libertarian science fiction, and **Tom Paine Maru (TPM)** is one of my favorites. First published in 1984 by Del Rey, it was an LFS finalist for the 1985 Best Novel award. The membership that year chose “None of the Above,” partly, I believe, because the publisher edited out significant portions of Smith’s text. Last year, he took advantage of the increasing popularity of “electronic books” and released a revised version as a web download. This time, wording was entirely under Smith’s control. Retrieving the original text from decades-old 5.25 inch floppies was an adventure tale in its own right and is briefly recapped by William Stone, III in an appendix.



TPM takes place in Smith’s North American Confederacy universe a couple of centuries after the setting of **The Probability Broach**. The protagonist, Whitey O’Thraight, is a corporal in the military of the gloomily statist government of the planet Vespucci. On that government’s first excursion to the stars, he and his lieutenant barely survive a landing on a still gloomier planet called Sca, where they are rescued by Lucille Olson-Bear and her teammates from the Confederacy. What follows is a succession of colorful and harrowing adventures in which Whitey wrestles with the conflict between his allegiance and affection for his homeland and his growing admiration for liberty and individualism. On the way, Smith gives us his customarily clear and convincing depictions of how well freedom works in society.

What I like most about Smith’s fiction is the clear and imaginative ways he presents freedom in action—how the world might work under what he calls the “Nonaggression Principle.” In a world where we cannot depend—even among well-educated people—on reason being the method of choice for reaching ethical and political conclusions, the use of fiction is a tremendous help. Through it, people can see vividly how much peace, abundance, and happiness they could experience in a free society.

Nearly every page of **TPM** offers us a dose of freedom; what follows are a few choice samplings.

When Whitey demands an explanation from the Confederates

who save him, Lucille tell him that “There ain’t no such thing as a free lunch.” This sort of lesson comes up often in the story, always as a part of Whitey’s continuing education.

Later, after Whitey makes an economically naive statement about greed interfering with the need for people to be taken care of by the government, Lucille snorts with contempt and tells him, “A free market feeds more people, Corporal, more equitably, than any other system known to history. It’s the only system capable of feeding non-productive idiots like you. But you all eventually come to expect it, as a right, and that’ll probably be its undoing. That it accomplishes all of this as a by-product of greed is irrelevant—unless you care more about motivations than results!”

Whitey also gets lessons in reality from other confederates, such as Johd-Beydard Geydes, who has spent many years living amongst “primitives,” to figure out how best to introduce them to the advantages of freedom: “Just remember to avoid the likeliest paths the comin’ revolution’ll want t’ follow. Each of the major political systems has its own methods of policy-making’. Authoritarianism, such as ye have here, operates on whim, divine inspiration, the stomach-grumblin’ of the monarch. Majoritarian systems appeal to the ‘wisdom’ of the masses—too bad there ain’t any—usually a lot of votin’ gets done t’everybody’s ruination. Individualists, my friend, do ‘none of the above’.”

Frequently, the novel presents cases of victims’ finally getting the upper hand and exacting justice on their persecutors. Readers get a satisfying catharsis from such scenes. Early in the book, we learn that an evil character by the name of Voltaire Malaise had kidnapped hundreds of women and implanted them with mind-control devices to ensure their submissiveness; he plans to set up a monarchy and use the women for breeding. Later in the book, word is received that they have been discovered and that Confederates are on their way to intervene. Lucille comments, “I wouldn’t mind being there, myself. Think of it: tens of thousands of freshly-kidnapped women, free to do whatever they want with their kidnappers!”

Smith constantly praises the virtues of thinking rationally, of seeking to achieve excellence and productivity. He glories in the mind and its potential, not just in men, but in women, aliens, and sapient “animals” such as many of the characters in his books. His characters endorse replacing “mankind” with “mindkind.”

What I have said so far applies to the original **TPM**. But what of the revision? I read the e-book alongside my yellowed Del Rey paperback. There are many differences, some quite worthy of note. The most obvious difference is a large number of small changes, typical of the minor revisions an author might make while preparing a text for publication.

Other changes are more substantial. I’m going to cite one, which makes it clear how and why the original publisher made changes that harmed Smith’s work. The scene involves part of the growing conflict between Lucille and Whitey. Lucille has repeatedly insulted Whitey for his mindless/collectivist beliefs. This time, he snaps back at her, and one of the other Confederates, Koko, calms them down. In the old paperback version, the whole scene takes only a dozen or so lines of text and comes to an abrupt, unsatisfying halt. In the e-

—Continued next page

book, this scene is over twice as long. We learn that Smith has richly developed the sexual tension between Lucille and Whitey and even given us philosophic insight that is integral to the plot. Although the interchange is only a moment in time, the e-book tells us about how the relationship between Lucille and Whitey is developing and uses some sexual imagery to help us to understand this. The tension is greater, we learn more about Lucille's emotional difficulties and more about why Whitey reacts as he does, and we are treated to a bit of wisdom from the character Howell, which needed to be said for a full understanding of the two central characters. I've reproduced only about half of the new material here.

"Nobody will hurt you," Howell agreed with Koko, "Even if they wanted to. But what ever gave you the idea that rationality is a prerequisite to liberty? There's a sapient right to be free, period, whatever condition we find ourselves in. We do not need to earn it. Nobody has a right to withhold it from us until we do. Nor does a society operate on reason – which is an individual attribute – any more than it operates on kindness. As I recently explained to your Lieutenant with regard to criminality, in the Confederacy, stupidity and ignorance have just been priced out of the market, made too expensive ... "

"Whitey," Koko interrupted – these people seemed to do a lot of that – "In all of sapient history, there are only three ways that people have ever discovered to organize themselves. One individual can tell everybody what to do – that's called monarchism. Or everybody can tell everybody else what to do – that's called majoritarianism. Or—"

"Or nobody," Lucille almost shouted, although I could tell she was horrified at her bodily response to the idea of fighting with me, and trying frantically to calm down. "Nobody tells anybody what to do! Always the best way, Corporal."

There are many scenes in the e-book that have sexual content not found in the paperback. All of these are tasteful, reasonable, and help develop the plot. All are quite mild by contemporary standards, but were probably deleted by the publisher in 1984 as perhaps too suggestive. That publisher may even have thought the book too extreme overall to be a serious offering for adults, since important expressions of philosophy were also omitted. I think the publisher underestimated what an adult audience is capable of appreciating and what young adults ought to be exposed to. The e-book is suitable for both audiences.

With this new release, L. Neil Smith has given us a new chance to enjoy a work that deserves a wider audience. It is available at www.lneilsmith.org.

Chainfire

By Terry Goodkind

Publisher, 2005, \$7.99 , ISBN 0765344319

Reviewed by Rick Triplett

Chainfire is one of my favorites of all the books I've read this year. I didn't like it at first, but it grew on me—a lot! This book is the ninth installment in what has come to be known as The Sword of Truth series. I had not read the previous books, but author Terry Goodkind is careful to give plenty of back-story, so that each book can stand alone. His setting resembles our Middle Ages, but with the addition of magic.

Because this universe contains magic, the series is more fantasy than science fiction. This can be a problem for some readers, but Goodkind is a strong advocate of reason, using magic only as a plot device: it is not capricious, it is learnable, as one might learn different rules of physics in an alternate world. Zedd, a respected teacher in this universe, speaks for the main characters when he says, "In reality, contradictions cannot exist. To believe in them you must abandon the most important thing you possess: your rational mind. The wager for such a bargain is your life. In such an exchange, you always lose what you have at stake."

Chainfire is the story of Richard Rahl, who is a hero in every sense, an individualist, and a passionate champion of liberty. Historically, he is *Lord Rahl*, current holder of a hereditary title as leader of his country and its people. He is also the first in a long line of Rahls who does *not* want power. His people for the most part have trouble with the idea of not having a powerful leader, and Rahl spends much of his time trying to get them to think in more liberated ways. There are two plot threads in **Chainfire**: one is the threat of war from the evil, tyrannical regime to the north, led by Jagang; the other is the romance between Rahl and his missing wife (or does he only imagine her?). Rahl's greatest challenge is to hang on to his independent judgment while battling magic, a large army, disagreements with his closest friends, and the mystery of the wife whom he claims has disappeared.

If you remember your objectivism, you cannot miss its influence upon Terry Goodkind, who paints a convincing and moving portrait of a man driven by a fundamental love of life, independence, rational egoism, and responsibility. Note how Rahl describes his people's revolt against the tyrant, Jagang and his Order:

The revolt had been opposed by a good number of people who supported the Imperial Order, who wanted things to continue the way they were. There were many who believed that people were wicked and deserved no more out of their lives than misery. Such people believed that happiness and accomplishment were sinful, that individuals, on their own, could not make their own lives better without causing harm to others. Such people scorned the very idea of individual liberty.

For the most part, those people had been defeated—either killed in the fighting or driven away. Those who had fought for and won their liberty had fierce reasons to value it. Richard hoped that they would have the will to hang on to what they had won.

He knew, too, that it was the simple, sincere happiness of people pursuing their own interests and living their lives for the sake of themselves that would draw the hate and wrath of

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— *Chainfire* Review, continued from page 7

some. The followers of the Order believed that mankind was inherently evil. Such people would stop at nothing to suffocate the blasphemy of happiness.

Some reviewers have complained about the length of Goodkind's novels and about his multi-paragraph "speeches." His novels are indeed long, which means that if you don't like his writing style, you will have even more to dislike. He does write detailed descriptions of each location in the story, and he lingers on characters' thought processes and on the meaning behind events. I enjoyed these passages, and they certainly helped me to understand the characters and the actions they took. His prose flows smoothly and is free of awkwardly complicated sentences, but if you are looking for lighter or more conventional philosophy, this book may not please you.

After his country revolted and inaugurated freedom, Rahl makes this remark about Altu'Rang, where he lived:

Now, at stands on almost every corner, bread was plentiful and starvation looked to have receded into nothing more than a horrific memory. It was amazing to see how freedom had made everything so plentiful. It was amazing to see so many people in Altu'Rang smiling.

Of course, there are many in this world who would prefer to "share" responsibility, rather than take it on fully. Rahl considers such people misguided at best, and probably dangerous. To a witch he meets, he says, "You see, despite what friends and loved ones want for me, or hope I will achieve, it's my life and I decide what I will try to make of it. People can plan or hope all they want for those they care about, but in the end it is each individual who must take responsibility for their own life and make the choice for themselves." This much responsibility can be scary, so it's nice to have a story that encourages us to be our best.

Chainfire is a libertarian novel, both in its explicit expression of ethics and politics, and in its depiction of the philosophy and the personal traits on which a free society probably has to be based. I think that most people who read this book will at least partially reconstruct their ideas about goodness, and for the better. These people will be like the young person, who could not help using Richard's hereditary title:

She swallowed, "Yes, Lord Rahl."

He put a hand on her shoulder and smiled. "Richard. I am a Lord Rahl who wants people to be safe to live as they wish."

Silver Screen

By Justina Robson

Pyr Books, 2005, \$15 ISBN: 1591023386

Reviewed by Anders Monsen

In its first year of existence, Pyr Books, an imprint of Prometheus Books (gotta love that!) has taken the sf field by storm. Through a mixture of reprints and original publications, Pyr seems to have assumed the mission of bringing to the attention of US readers some of the hottest British sf writers of the current generation. Justina Robson, a critically acclaimed writer with several novels already in print in the UK, certainly stands in the forefront of this new British invasion of hard sf that includes Ken MacLeod, Iain Banks, Charles Stross, Ian MacDonald, and many others. Originally published in 1999, Robson's first novel, **Silver Screen**, now is available in the US in a reasonably priced trade paperback edition.

Several threads weave through this novel, not the least of which is the question of the rights of Artificial Intelligences. This problem is skillfully debated, both among the proponents of AI rights and those who see AIs as threats or property, as well as the AI in question. How does one secure rights to something that exists primarily in circuits and between connections? If the owners of the hardware decide to shut it down, does an AI have any recourse, any way to leave and thus survive? Or, is an AI bound by its physical limitations, and the rights therefore constrained and not on par with human rights? Robson gives weight to many sides of the argument, but in the end AI survival does seem to hinge on being able to physically exist and move beyond any servers on which the consciousness resides.

Anjuli O'Connell, the novel's human protagonist, is far from your usual hero. She's overweight, self-conscious almost to a fault, and possesses an eidetic memory: she has total recall of any page she reads, any conversation she hears, and can recount these verbatim, with no memory degradation over time. On the other hand, she seems to lack the ability to fully understand concepts, or fears that her memory merely compensates for not comprehending the meaning behind things. What does it matter to know why something works, if you just need to recall the exact ways in which it does work? Considered a prodigy for her memory, she grows up at a school for the remarkably gifted, where she meets others like her, and later works with many of the same individuals.

Among Anjuli's friends are the talented Croft siblings, Roy and Jane. Social misfits amid their superlative intelligences, the Crofts diverge in later years. Roy delves into the study of machines and AI, hoping to find a way to meld his mind into the network, while Jane eschews technology in a hippie-like commune. Both Roy and Anjuli end up working aboard a space station on an AI project, the current iteration of which is called 901, a tightly controlled project owned by a private company dead set on protecting its investment. Anjuli, faced with despair over her lack of understanding the underlying concepts behind all the facts she absorbed, turned to AI psychology as a career. As the novel opens, Anjuli is called into Roy's room to find him dead. The apparent suicide becomes a mystery she feels compelled to solve, even though this will put her at odds with the company, and place her life and those she loves in great danger.

As Anjuli begins her investigation, led each step via enigmatic clues provided by Roy, Jane, and even 901, she enlists the help of

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First Novels for Freedom: *Rebelfire* and *The Black Arrow*

By Rick Triplett

These two works, one short and one long, are novels by amateur fiction writers. **The Black Arrow**, by Vin Suprynowicz, is directed at an adult readership, while the shorter **Rebelfire: Out of the Gray Zone**, by Claire Wolfe and Aaron Zelman, reaches toward youth. In calling them amateur writers of fiction, I don't mean to disparage them or their writing. I mean only that the bulk of the authors' time and productivity over the years has been in areas other than fiction writing. All are longtime activists, and all have produced a commendable body of nonfiction. But except for a couple of Zelman's collaborations with L. Neil Smith, none has published any to my knowledge. The theme of both of these books is resistance fighting in a credibly drawn near-future USA. Many coat-and-tie libertarians, nurtured primarily on *cato.org* and the national Libertarian Party, may not be acquainted with these authors; but those who have been around longer and are angered to the bone over injustice know all three as ardent champions of freedom.



ways he could never have imagined. And he never lets go of his dream. This novel is the story of his adventures and of his maturation towards individualism and self-sufficiency.

The Black Arrow is also set in a highly regulated USA, and the main character is the secret leader of a growing organization of resistance fighters. The intrusion of the state into people's lives is painted in detail; readers repeatedly see how power breeds even more power, and suffer vicariously as good people's lives and aspirations

are crushed by police and thwarted by bureaucrats. Colorfully diverse individuals in the resistance work together and fashion their plans against evil. **The Black Arrow** is a vivid, sometimes electrifying tale of resistance fighting, with lots of heroic characters and a trenchant exposé of the evils of collectivism.

Despite being fairly new to the writing of fiction, the authors of these two books have produced surprisingly readable prose. I felt that **Rebelfire** had the better style, perhaps because the two authors served as checks on each other's excesses.

If I were to fault the writing it would be that it lacked excess: at no point did I find my blood boiling. Nevertheless the tale of **Rebelfire** kept me mildly interested.

The Black Arrow, in contrast, did make my blood boil, and frequently. Suprynowicz is an intelligent man, and he has taken pains to produce a plot that is both complicated and engaging. I chortled with glee as villains were slaughtered, and I was on the edge of my seat when the good people were harmed or threatened. A surfeit of regulation is shown to be not just inefficient but unintentionally harmful and counterproductive. That being said, it was a book that could have used further revisions. The author needed to trim perhaps a quarter of the text, including the longer speeches and the unnecessarily graphic imagery. I hope **The Black Arrow** will sell well; but falls a little short of its potential as a libertarian classic.

These two books were written to inspire a love of liberty in the reader. Both tackle a broad range of issues important to libertarians. Both dramatize those issues so the reader will take such issues personally and care about them. I have repeatedly loaned these two books to acquaintances and none have been disappointed.



Interview with David Friedman

By Michael Grossberg

Most libertarians know David Friedman as an economist, political theorist and non-fiction author. Best known as a leading libertarian thinker for his first book, **The Machinery of Freedom: Guide to a Radical Capitalism**, Friedman also has written **Hidden Order: The Economics of Everyday Life** and his latest book, **Law's Order: What Economics Has to Do with Law and Why It Matters**. He's currently writing **Future Imperfect**, a book about technological change in the near future and its consequences. He is a professor at Santa Clara University, teaching in both the law and business schools.

Now libertarians can begin to appreciate Friedman as a fiction writer, with the Baen Books hardback publication in April 2006 of **Harald**, his first novel.

Baen Books is describing the work as "an intricate and thrilling debut fantasy novel from libertarian prof (and son of economist Milton Friedman) and Society for Creative Anachronism grandee, David D. Friedman." Baen Books' website (www.baen.com) offers a blurb about the story:

It's the perfect storm for conquest: a dysfunctional kingdom reels under a weak monarch. A powerful order of warrior maidens turns to infighting after suddenly losing its charismatic leader. Worst of all, a disciplined and blooded imperial army stands ready to invade and dominate. If ever a moment called for grit, competence, and an utter lack of wishful thinking it is now. Enter Harald of the Vales. Family man and teller of tales. Warrior's warrior. It's time the Empire got one thing straight: the land of Kaerlia will never be its for the taking. ...

Here is a short quote from the novel, representative of Friedman's fictional style:

Woodsmoke. Ahead, in forest shadows, a red spark.
"Welcome to my fire, Lady."

Unlikely enemy. And if he was, she thought with a sudden shiver, she was dead already, sitting a horse in plain sight, bow unstrung and cased. She slid from the mare's back, led towards voice and fire. The cat was alone, sitting with his back to a tree. The strung bow in its saddle sheath rested against the tree to his left; his hands were empty.

Michael Grossberg recently interviewed Friedman about how and why he wrote his novel and his opinions on other subjects.

§

GROSSBERG: Please describe any libertarian themes in your work.

FRIEDMAN: "Theme" is a little strong—it is a story, not a political argument. But there are at least two elements which I think would be of interest to libertarians.

The first is the idea that, as Auden put it, "there is no such thing as the state." All politics ultimately come down to relations among individuals.

The early part of the book is dominated by the conflict between Harald, my protagonist, and James, a new, young and inexperienced king of the kingdom to which Harald and his people have been allied. James has lots of formal authority; Harald has none. James takes it for granted that his formal authority is real—that people under him in the feudal structure will in fact do what he tells them.

As should be clear to any reasonably observant reader, James is wrong. He can give orders, but the people who get them will, for various reasons good and bad, obey them or not according to their own duties, desires, loyalties. Harald has no formal authority but a lot of friends and respect earned over the previous thirty years, during which he has been, on and off, the commander of the allied army. Harald has no formal authority—but more real power.

The same point runs through the book. Towards the end, Harald is maneuvering to end the long running war with the Empire that has been trying to conquer kingdom and vales. He does it by setting up lines of communication, and a very temporary alliance, with one of the two sons of the Emperor who are competing for the succession.

The second idea that ought to be of interest to libertarians is that more decentralized societies are, if not necessarily better, at least different in interesting ways. Harald's problem in the long running war with the Empire is that he doesn't have an army and the Emperor does. The Emperor has the resources to pay an army; Harald has to rely on volunteers—and how to get them and pay the expenses of a military campaign are problems that require some ingenuity to solve.

But there is a balancing advantage. Harald is better than even the best Imperial general, not because he is more competent but because he is more ingenious, unconventional, innovative. Although I never say so explicitly, there is a reason for this—an Imperial officer with Harald's approach to problem solving would be very unlikely to get promoted, and might well end up executed for insubordination. The only niche in the Imperial political system where someone like Harald might be able to survive and prosper is at the very top, in the competition among members of the imperial family for the throne.

GROSSBERG: Is this your first attempt to write a novel? And what have you learned about fiction-writing, as opposed to the challenges of writing full-length nonfiction books?

FRIEDMAN: It is a first attempt, and what I learned was that I could do it. My main concern was over whether I could manage dialog, which isn't usually an issue in non-fiction. At some point it occurred to me that although the dialog had to be internally consistent and work rhetorically, it did not have to be realistic—sound like the conversation of actual people I knew—since it was in a world of my own invention.

Also, I have been doing medieval storytelling in the SCA for a very long time.

GROSSBERG: How did you develop your ideas for this novel?

—Continued next page

—*Harald Review, continued from page 1*

as individuals, and many readers will simply pass over the subtext and not notice it.

The style of this book is readable, but perhaps a little *too* plainspoken; it's hard to tell the voices of the different characters apart—courtly monarchists, imperial invaders, and free-spirited mercenaries all have the same clipped way of talking. The narrative is occasionally a little spare on details: the reader needs to figure out what's happening from indirect evidence, much as in a mystery novel. It's not impossible to do so, but I hope that Friedman will develop a broader stylistic range if he goes on writing fiction.

In a sense, the fact that this book came out from Baen is an odd accident. **Harald** is not science fiction: it doesn't take place in an alternate timeline in the usual sense—there is no place in Earth's past history where we can say, "If this had happened otherwise, these political entities would have emerged." But it's also not fantasy in the usual genre sense: it has no magic, no gods, no monsters, and none of the other appurtenances we have grown used to over the past half century. It's an adventure story set on an "other Earth"—an Earth-like world with its own history and geography, but inhabited by the same human beings and other species as our Earth: an "Earth that might have been." By some definitions, this is fantasy, or even "high fantasy," if this is defined as fantasy set in invented worlds (though a definition that makes Fritz Leiber's Lankhmar "high fantasy" and C. S. Lewis's **That Hideous Strength** "low fantasy" strikes me as odd). But it's not what most people now expect from fantasy. It's

really a straightforward adventure story in an imaginary place.

As an adventure story, **Harald** is consistently readable and lively. As a character portrait, it's a bit better than readable. **Harald** was constantly enjoyable to read about; among the secondary characters, Anne, the wife of the young king of Kaerlia, was a delight. I hope that Friedman's future work in fiction will achieve this quality of characterization consistently, as well as retaining the skillful handling of events that this book already displays. As a novel, **Harald** is competent and entertaining; as a first novel, it's also promising.



FRIEDMAN: It started out, oddly enough, as an insomnia cure. Daydreaming when you are trying to fall asleep doesn't work very well, because you are the hero of your daydreams, and so too involved in them. It occurred to me that if I instead plotted out a novel, I would have enough distance from my characters to drift off to sleep while doing so—and it worked. I ended up with pieces of several related plots, and one reasonably complete one.

Our house rules at the time required me, when putting one of our two children to bed, to make up and tell three stories. I mentioned my novel to my daughter and she suggested I tell her that instead. One problem with telling long connected stories to my daughter is that she remembers them better than I do, and can point out inconsistencies between the story I told her three months ago and the one I am telling now. So this time I kept an outline, written up each night after I put her to bed. When I got near the end, I decided to try actually writing it out. I wrote the final scene, liked it, went back to the beginning, and wrote the whole thing in a month or two. The process was so absorbing that I played almost no computer games during that time—writing the novel was more fun.

GROSSBERG: Knowing of your longstanding interest in actual Iceland society in the middle ages, and how it offered in some ways a model for an anarchist society, how did that interest and knowledge affect this novel?

FRIEDMAN: My protagonist's society is loosely modeled on saga period Iceland. We don't see a lot of it, but we see a lot of him, and the sort of person he is results in part from that society.

My other medieval interests fed into the book as well. My protagonist and his people are horse archers, and some of the details were lifted from a translation of a Mameluke treatise on the subject. My protagonist is a storyteller, and story fragments we see are

borrowed, with suitable modifications, from a range of historical literatures—an Icelandic saga, a medieval Syrian memoir, and an Indian story translated from Sanskrit to Persian to Arabic to become a classic of Arabic literature.

GROSSBERG: What type of fiction do you like to read? Can you mention a few favorite novels that had some themes of interest to libertarians and individualists, and what you find most intriguing about them?

FRIEDMAN: Mostly science fiction and fantasy, because I enjoy it. **The Moon is a Harsh Mistress** is the one that influenced me the most—because it gave a plausible, internally consistent description of a society with private property and without government, where the legal framework was itself generated in a decentralized way rather than imposed.

GROSSBERG: How long did it take you to complete your first novel, and how did you balance that with other writing and activities? Now that it's done, any plans for more?

FRIEDMAN: Actually writing the first draft took a month or two. Composing it took much longer—I'm not sure how much—but since it was done mostly while trying to fall asleep or while putting my daughter to bed, it didn't compete with other activities. The revision took place over a longer span of time, perhaps a year or so, but didn't involve spending a lot of time on it.

I have ideas for two sequels, one prequel, and one unrelated novel—a fantasy with magic. Whether they will get written I don't know. I'm currently working on the sequel—but mostly by trying to think through the plot while trying to fall asleep. If that doesn't work I shift to one of the others.

(For more information, visit www.davidfriedman.com and www.baen.com)

Post-9/11 Hollywood: The films they dare not make today

By Thomas M. Sipos

Terrorists are cool and cuddly, *jihad* is noble and liberating, and Bush's New World Order war hysteria is, well, hysterical! Those are some of the shocking but unavoidable post-9/11 messages of many Hollywood films shot pre-9/11—films that would likely not get produced today (at least, not uncensored).

The Oil Must Flow

Okay, here's the trailer for the feel-good movie of the summer: They were proud desert warriors, poor but God-fearing—occupied and exploited by heathen armies and foreign cartels for the fuel beneath their sand. Too weak to attack their enemies' high-tech military head on, they resisted through surprise raids and bombings. The imperialist oppressors called them savages—even terrorists—but they knew themselves to be freedom-fighters. And that one day God would send a messiah to unite their tribes and lead them in *jihad*.

No, not Osama bin Laden. Not any current Arab leader. And not even Lawrence of Arabia.

I'm talking about Muad'Dib, the messiah in Frank Herbert's epic sci-fi novel, **Dune** (1965). It is Maud'Dib who leads the Fremmen tribes in *jihad* against a spice-hungry Empire. Spice is the fuel of the Empire. Without spice, interstellar travel—and trade—is impossible. Without spice, the galactic economy will collapse.

"The spice must flow!" is the cry repeated throughout this tale. Along with, "The one who controls the spice, controls the universe!" And in all the galaxy, there is only one spice source—the desert wasteland planet named Dune.

Maud'Dib defeats the Empire by taking the spice source hostage, and threatening to blow it up, which would plunge all civilization into a new dark age. Talk about terrorism! (Anyone recall Hussein's threat to blow up the Kuwaiti oil fields?)

Oh yes, Dune has all the parallels. The hero even uses the J-word—*jihad*. Of course, critics have long recognized that Dune was inspired by Islam, and that Herbert modeled Maud'Dib on Mohammed. But I've yet to hear someone note the parallels post-9/11.

Hollywood has twice adapted Herbert's novel. First as a 1984 feature film, directed by David Lynch and starring Kyle MacLachlan as Maud'Dib. Then in 2000 as a Sci-Fi Channel mini-series, directed by John Harrison and starring Alec Newman as Maud'Dib.

Most fans of the novel prefer the mini-series to the Lynch film, maybe because the mini-series is twice as long as the film, and so includes more of the novel's details. But Lynch's **Dune** has a grander soundtrack, which better captures the novel's epic sweep. Lynch's film feels bigger than the mini-series, despite being only half as long.

What's remarkable is how similar both adaptations are, both remaining faithful to the novel.

Can a faithful adaptation have been produced post-9/11? Sure, **Dune** is a classic sci-fi novel, its cult status with 1960s counterculture achieved partially because spice was also a psychedelic, something you can't say about oil.

But even if some future Hollywood Maud'Dib stays mum about *jihad*, **Dune** still carries a dangerously subversive message. The tale actually implies that an indigenous people have a right to their land,

and to the natural resources beneath it—even if a technologically more advanced civilization decides that they want it. Yikes!

Hot Bods in Fourth Reich Chic

Bedtime story, from Papa Bush to his young 'uns: Once upon a time, a long time from now, there was a United Earth. A New World Order of peace, prosperity and freedom. Everyone was clean and pretty and healthy. Good genes, all around. Black people too. And the streets were clean, and the environment, and the trains ran on time. Then one day, bad monsters attacked Earth, because the monsters were evil and ugly, and looked like giant bugs (because they were giant bugs), and they hated anybody lucky enough to have so much peace, prosperity and freedom, and who were so good-looking.

But luckily for the happy people of Earth, their world government had the bestest military in the universe, with lots of gnarly weapons and way cool uniforms. So everyone enlisted like crazy to fight the ultimate war between good and evil. The politicians and top brass called it the Bug War—but for the young recruits, it was the kick-ass adventure of a lifetime!

The bugs never had a chance. The end.

No, not a bedtime story, but Paul Verhoeven's **Starship Troopers**, a dead-on satire of post-9/11 war hysteria—astonishing because it was released in 1997!

The film's satire was originally aimed at its source material: Robert Heinlein's 1959 novel, **Starship Troopers** (condemned by some critics upon publication as "fascistic"). But like humor-impaired Trekkies, many Heinlein fans remained clueless and unamused. They complained that the film had replaced Heinlein's socio-political military philosophy with mindless bug battles. Few realized the joke was on them. Verhoeven didn't so much ignore Heinlein's philosophizing as lampoon it.

Heinlein's novel paints a future Earth in which everyone enjoys equal rights and liberties—except to vote and hold office, which are reserved only to those who complete military service. Enlistment is voluntary and non-discriminatory; any sex, any age. Blue-haired grannies can sign up. But no special treatment. Many softies die in the sadistically brutal boot camps. (However, you can quit anytime, without reprisal). Another rule: everyone fights. Cooks, supply clerks, nurses, medics, privates, generals. No paper pushers or desk warmers in Heinlein's military.

Verhoeven's **Starship Troopers** parodies Heinlein's romanticized military culture by trivializing and sanitizing war. Soldiers are sexy and clean even after battle, ready to party hardy. Ready to die. Dina Meyer's death-bed speech satirizes an old war film cliché: while reaffirming her love for her main squeeze, she nobly adds that she has "no regrets" about her sacrifice.

For "red shirt" soldiers, death is less sentimental. Quick—and quickly forgotten. After shooting a captured soldier (to prevent a painful bug death) Michael Ironside curtly informs his platoon: "I expect you to do the same for me." Which they do.

Starship Troopers was no big hit in 1997, but it has its fans, many

—Continued next page

of whom—judging by review postings on Amazon.com—confuse the film for a serious sci-fi epic with a “war is hell” message. (Not surprisingly, post-9/11 postings are more likely to “get it”.)

Those who doubt the film’s satirical intent should consider one hero’s uniform, which can best be described as neo-Third Reich. Clearly, Verhoeven’s film was not informed by Heinlein’s libertarian fans, but by those critics who interpreted the novel as fascistic.

Also noteworthy, the film’s stars are all strikingly attractive with well-chiseled Aryan features.

However, their SS physiques are not part of the plot, but merely a hint at the film’s underlying satire. Plotwise, Federal Service (as it’s called) is open to all, and the Aryan protagonists warmly welcome their sidekicks of color. In one brief scene, a dumpy black female is appointed as the new Sky Marshall, promising to “take the war to the bugs.”

However, because many moviegoers confuse fascism with racism, and because most of them were unfamiliar with the novel, the film’s satire was lost on many. For most moviegoers, the film was just vapid soldiers shooting giant bugs. Further obscuring the satire, the soldiers were just too damn sexy, the bugs too mean and ugly. We humans are inclined to sympathize with attractive people, which is why satirists often paint their targets in hideous garb (communists as pigs in George Orwell’s **Animal Farm**, and as grotesque vampires in my own **Vampire Nation**).

Starship Troopers takes the opposite tact, painting globalist fascism as imagined by globalist fascists. Everyone is healthy and happy and sexy. The satire is in the exaggeration of fascist ideals (as in Norman Spinrad’s **The Iron Dream**). With unwavering fortitude and unshakable confidence in Earth’s inevitable total victory, Denise Richards flashes her Pepsident smile throughout the film. In hairy battles, her mouth may turn sexily pouty, but her brilliant teeth soon return, vast and blinding, equally at home on a TV commercial and an SS recruiting poster.

Want to laugh out loud? The funniest scenes are the recruiting ads and “news” propaganda bulletins. One “news” item features warmly grinning soldiers distributing bullets to the delighted squeal of eager schoolkids. (How clueless do you have to be to post reviews at Amazon praising the film’s “war is hell” message?)

But the clueless are out there. Unfamiliar with the book, smitten with the sexy stars and repelled by the bugs, many didn’t “get” the jokes. In practical terms, until 9/11 **Starship Troopers** was a satire without a target. The war hysteria following 9/11 provided that target, the players and events stepping tailor-made into the film’s sites with amazing prescience, granting the film a powerful resonance that was lacking when it was first released.

As with **Dune**, all the parallels are present. The enemy—the Bug—are pure evil. The military, the news reports, the war, the government, are all beyond question. If they make a mistake, they can be trusted to correct it. United Earth we stand.

The Bug War begins with a Bug attack on a city. In the film’s eeriest scene, a burning building’s framework resembles the Twin Towers. Also remarkable are the many random jokes that find a target post-9/11. In adapting a 1950s book to a 1990s sensibility, Verhoeven tossed in some contemporary satirical barbs unconnected to the book, or even to much of anything in 1997—but which eerily resonate with our post-9/11 war culture.

There is the film’s black female Sky Marshall, a kooky but satirically pointless joke in 1997. Yet it’s a role tailor made for Condoleezza Rice. There are the TV war correspondents, absent in the book,

but today stationed in Iraq. They pester the soldiers in battle, don’t appreciate the threat, and are killed by the bugs. There are the TV pundits who would understand the bugs, woolly and ineffectual as seen through the film’s fascist prism (the New World Order likes to see itself as tolerant).

Starship Troopers is a penetrating satire of post-9/11 war hysteria as might be imagined by an idealistic New World Order fascist. It’s hard to believe it was made pre-9/11; impossible to think it could be made post-9/11. Starring Casper Van Dien, Denise Richards, Dina Meyer, Jake Busey, and Michael Ironside.

High Testosterone 9/11

Try pitching this to a studio today: The movie ends with the hero blowing up a skyscraper. No, better than that. A whole skyline full of skyscrapers! (Yes, in an American city.) See, the hero’s this terrorist, but he finds true love at the end. The film’s got romance. And in the final scene, the terrorist hero and his lady love, they stand in romantic silhouette before a panoramic view of an entire city skyline majestically aglow from the explosions, then come crumbling down. Boffo!

Okay, he’s more anti-hero than hero, but he’s the character we’re rooting for, the one who stands up to the Man.

No, you won’t get that film made today, at least not with that ending. But in 1999, that was the ending of David Fincher’s **Fight Club** (starring Edward Norton, Brad Pitt, Helena Bonham Carter, Meat Loaf; based on the novel by Chuck Palahniuk).

Fight Club satirizes corporate dehumanization and its emasculation of men. An office worker, browbeaten by his equally domesticated yuppie bosses, regains his manhood by destroying his material things and founding a “fight club”—a place where society’s male losers (the clerks, the wage slaves, the unemployed) gather to beat up one another. The point is not to win, but to fight, to give and feel pain, and thus reconnect with one’s authentic, primal masculinity. In the process, you lose fear of pain, you stop caring what polite society thinks. Your bruised and ugly face becomes your badge of manhood, an in-your-face challenge to your prissy yuppie bosses at work.

If you do not fear, they cannot control you. If you do not want societal status or material goods, they cannot buy you.

Although remaining underground, fight clubs spread to other cities, and members seek to confront society more directly, through guerrilla theater, vandalism, and terrorism.

Even pre-9/11, critics were divided over **Fight Club**. Some praised it as a progressive/anarchistic assault on materialism, consumerism, and corporate dehumanization. Others condemned it as a fascistic/nihilistic assault on those same targets.

Anti-**Fight Club** voices noted that fascists too oppose “bourgeois family values” and that the film glorified a brutal “cult of masculinity.” Club members live communally in frat house/pig sty conditions (liberated from feminized civilization). Although their ranks are multi-racial, they sport shaved heads and combat boots. Not so much clean Marines as unruly storm troops. They are not merely anti-corporate, but anti-everything. They vandalize corporate art, spread anti-environmentalist agitprop, and challenge both police and Mafia. Feeling oppressed from all corners, they seek complete liberation from all values and all powers.

Fight Club is a thought-provoking film, satirizing both yuppie America and the nature of rebellion. As in **Starship Troopers**, the

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—*Post-9/11 Films, continued from page 13*

fascism in *Fight Club* is non-racist. But unlike Verhoeven, *Fight Club* acknowledges both the nihilistic and patriarchal strains in fascism.

Although *Fight Club* is brilliantly original satire, its targets are not. The insight that fascism is inherently more sexist than racist was recognized in Katherine Burdekin's novel, *Swastika Night*. Corporate emasculation and dehumanization has been satirized from a conservative perspective in my novel, *Manhattan Sharks*. And David Salle's film *Search and Destroy* satirized corporate man's desire to reconnect with his primal masculinity (as did *Manhattan Sharks*).

In *Search and Destroy*, Griffin Dunne and Christopher Walken portray two businessmen who, after becoming enamored with a Nietzschean TV guru (Dennis Hopper), abandon their material "things" and office, and go out hoping to find adventure and do bold "deeds." (Hopper's character, author of "Daniel Strong," also seems inspired by Robertly Bly, author of *Iron John*).

But while people are shot and killed in both *Manhattan Sharks* and *Search and Destroy*, neither pack the uncompromising anti-corporate punch of *Fight Club*—a hero taking down an entire city skyline!

Nor will Hollywood be producing any more such uncompromising scenes, at least not anytime soon.

Terrorists Are Cuddly

Our final pitch: A small time crook threatens to blow up a New York landmark unless his demands for money are met. They're not, and he does. We see Lady Liberty's head disintegrate in an explosion. In our final shot: our terrorist sits overlooking New York harbor, nonchalantly munching his lunch while observing the headless Statue of Liberty. Oh yeah, it's a comedy. For our terrorist, picture someone cute & cuddly. Say, Danny DeVito.

No, you don't have to picture it. You can go see it, at least if you can get access to the NYU film school archives.

The film is *Hot Dogs for Gauguin*, a 1972 student short, shot on black & white 16 mm film. Directed by then-student Martin Brest

(who went on to direct *Beverly Hills Cop*, *Scent of a Woman*, and *Meet Joe Black*), and starring then-unknown Danny DeVito as the terrorist. Also featuring his future wife, Rhea Perlman, in a minor role.

The shot of Lady Liberty's head exploding was a remarkable special effect, reports a former NYU film student, especially by the standards of thirty years ago—and especially for a student film. Steve Feld helped Brest with the special effects, which Feld discusses on his website. Naturally, *Hot Dogs for Gauguin* helped launch the careers of Brest and DeVito.

According to the former student, NYU was screening *Hot Dogs for Gauguin* in classes as of the 1980s, and may still be doing so. A call to NYU was not returned, but NYU was still screening the film to the public as late as October 5, 1999.

The student also reports that, after screening *Hot Dogs for Gauguin* in class, the professor stated that, dramatically speaking, exploding Lady Liberty's head was a wise choice. "You can't set up a big expectation, and then not give the audience a payoff."

Even so, the class was surprised—and delighted!—with the ending. Everyone seemed to have expected DeVito's friend, played by William Duff-Griffin, to succeed in his attempt to stop DeVito's terrorism, in the nick of time.

Although there are exceptions, film schools normally retain ownership of their students' projects. Having screened NYU student films produced just a few years ago, and observed the copyright notices in their credits, the Hollywood Investigator has confirmed that this is the case at NYU. If prints of *Hot Dogs for Gauguin* still exist anywhere, it will likely be in the NYU film school archives.

Although DeVito portrayed a small time crook turning to terrorism for profit, his is a likable character. Just a little guy trying to make the big score.

Film schools are idealized as places where tomorrow's artists can follow their vision, unrestricted by commercial concerns. Still, don't expect to see many student films about likable crooks blowing up New York landmarks, at least not anytime soon.

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Brad Linaweaver's *Mondo Cult*

Mondo Cult, No. 1

Published by Brad Linaweaver, Edited by Jessie Lilley

2006, \$5.95, 48 pages

Reviewed by Anders Monsen

Prometheus Award-winning author Brad Linaweaver (*Moon of Ice*), a long-time contributor to magazines on cult movies, actor at times in cult movies, and friend of Hollywood cult-movie director Fred Olen Ray, has launched a new magazine. *Mondo Cult* tackles more than just cult movies. With reviews of books and features on the music scene, the magazine should reach a wide audience. The first issue contains short paragraph reviews mixed with lengthy essays on movies *Whale Rider*, *Star Wars: Revenge of the Sith*, and classic old-time features from the early days of Hollywood's monster flicks.

Editor Jessie Lilley has put together a crisp, highly readable magazine. Unlike some similar publications from a few years ago

(*Cult Movies*, for example) the black and white photographs are clear and viewable.

Writers include Linaweaver, Arthur Byron Cover, Victor Koman, and Buddy Barnett. The essay on *Whale Rider*, along with Victor Koman's brief review, were to me the most enjoyable pieces. For anyone interested in movies slightly off the beaten path, both new and old, there are some worthy entries. The section on music may appeal to fans of classic rock and modern heavy sounds, but as my tastes differ from those featured in the magazine, I tended to skip that section.

The web site <<http://www.mondocult.com/Content.shtml>> could use a little more work, as each link opens a new window, and the magazine itself hardly is mentioned. Retail sites to purchase the magazine are available, and you now can order the magazine online as well. With Linaweaver's many years of research and writing in movies, and his contacts in Hollywood, *Mondo Cult* certainly has the promise of an interesting publication.

—*Silver Screen Review*, continued from page 8

her lover, Augustine, who is in the midst of wiring his body for a cybernetic suit with a brain of its own. Augustine's willingness to undergo radical surgery to discover how this suit works is chilling, yet at the same time no different from the acts of countless scientists who experimented upon themselves while trying to reach some radical new discovery. In many instances these scientists are fully aware of the risks, and when it comes to trying something new on a human subject, they feel compelled to make themselves that subject so as not to put other individuals at risk.

Meanwhile, questions swirl around whether 901 is a self-aware AI with individual rights. Anjuli carries an implant which links her to 901, and she is privy to many insights about AI, making her a major player in a trial case about 901's rights. One might be tempted, on the basis of 901's sense of humor and ability to parse out nuggets of information sparingly rather than all at once, to think it's a human machine, but 901 might be the best AI to have on your side since Robert A. Heinlein's Mike in **The Moon is a Harsh Mistress**.

Throughout the course of her investigation, Anjuli and Augustine decide to make use of Augustine's suit in an attempt to break into a religious stronghold to retrieve Roy's diary, which supposedly contains vital clues about Roy's death. The results of the sortie into the religious stronghold—a church run by Roy and Jane Croft's fanatic father—prove in the end almost too costly for those involved. What looked like a simple in-and-out action turned out to be a more evenly matched battle, as Roy a long time ago built some serious defenses into the church. Couple that deadly hardware with his father's willingness to do anything to protect what he now views as a holy relic, and nothing is certain. This sub-plot seemed almost to me like an unnecessary detour, although perhaps is the most readable part of the novel through the intense action and high-tech gizmos employed by Anjuli's team and the defenders. The variance between this scene and the rest of the novel made me wonder if Robson patched together two stories, rather than created one cohesive work.

As a whole **Silver Screen** proved an enjoyable read, brought down only a few times by the protagonist's almost too human self-doubt, along with the irritating leakage of clues by characters who knew a lot more than they wanted to let on, even when it seemed in their best interest to provide more information. The novel is an interesting blend of mystery, hard sf, and debate on the nature of consciousness and the basis for individual rights. Justina Robson raises many interesting issues, and does so in a prose style that's clear and relaxed. Her characters, though at times complex and eccentric, are well-drawn and believable. She's certainly an author to watch, and I'll be looking for more US publications of her work with interest and anticipation.

Classifieds

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.

Starship: Mutiny

By Mike Resnick

Pyr Books, 2005, \$25.00, ISBN 1591023378

Reviewed by Anders Monsen

Wilson Cole is a misfit, a malcontent, a rebel, and a commander aboard a military spaceship in the middle of a war. In **Starship: Mutiny**, Mike Resnick embarks for the first time into the world of military sf. This sub-genre inside science fiction demands by its very nature a great deal of action, and Resnick delivers perhaps too much action. The pace of incidents and sticky situations marches across the pages with nary a moment for the reader to catch a breath, or really feel comfortable with Cole's character.

Cole reports for duty on the *Teddy Roosevelt*, an old and apparently useless military ship stationed far out on the rim. Its crew consists of other malcontents, drug addicts, and people who no longer give a damn about life outside their own shell. Aboard the *Teddy R*, Cole finds himself in a familiar position. He's a man who cares about winning the war, and dislikes the strictures and regulations imposed on him by the military hierarchy. Whoever said military intelligence was an oxymoron probably is Cole's intellectual mentor, for Cole's actions are dictated by his personal code. On two prior occasions his actions went against strict orders. While this resulted in career-stunting demotions, it also brought great public glory for Cole, and many regulars and civilians see him as a hero.

Wilson Cole quickly finds both friends and enemies aboard the *Teddy R*. On his very first day, while acting as duty officer in charge of the bridge, he spots an enemy vessel on a nearby planet. Without consulting his superiors, he sets off at once and engages the enemy. Once again he embarrasses his superiors and the high command through his actions, but gains further acclaim through media channels and the people that he encounters on the ground. It's tough not to like Cole, but at the same time you get the feeling that he would be a difficult person to work alongside.

Rather quickly after this incident, Resnick sends Cole into two more major incidents, one of which results in the death of the *Teddy R*'s captain. Podok, the officer immediately above Cole is promoted and takes command. The new captain is an absolute stickler for orders and rules, and despises Cole for his free-swinging methods and attitude. Podok's also an alien, something which surfaces later as a vehicle to discuss racism as motivation for Cole's action. For when Podok destroys a planet populated by millions of innocent humans just to follow orders, and aims weapons with the same intent upon another planet, Cole lives up to the title of the novel, and assumes command of the *Teddy R*.

The mutiny, however, is not a permanent one, and Cole turns himself in when he believes the situation is under control. However, he discovers that military rules align themselves more easily to Podok's worldview than his own, and finds himself facing the ultimate punishment. At this point he finds help from unexpected places, and once again, mutiny becomes the keyword.

Starship: Mutiny is the first in a five-book series. Readers not averse to questioning authority will find themselves quickly on the side of Wilson Cole, but with little pre-history of Cole's life related in this novel—though constantly alluded to by the people who know Cole—it feels at times like this is the second part in a series, not the lead-off book. Watching Cole's development through the rest of the series will be interesting, though hopefully Resnick will temper the pace of actions lightly to allow for greater character development.

Intellectual Isolationism

By Richard Mgrdechian

I know I could probably be shot for saying this in a libertarian forum, but the truth is, I've never read anything by Ayn Rand. Not **The Fountainhead**. Not **Atlas Shrugged**. Nothing. That being said, I'm certainly aware of her work and the sort of messages they convey in terms of individualism, collectivism, objectivism, second-handers and so forth, but there is no way I could ever claim to be an expert on any of these things—at least not when it comes to what the precise definitions of them actually are.

Yet, despite this limitation, I recently published a novel that—at least according to several people I've spoken to—seemed to incorporate quite a few of these same concepts. Of course, it made no explicit mention of any of these terms and was not in any way meant to be a competing or derivative work; it was simply based on my own longstanding beliefs about how the world works, where I see our society heading, the concepts of right and wrong, the kinds of people I respect and those whom I despise. In fact, only after completing the novel and getting some feedback from friends, did I even think about learning a little about Rand's work to try to find the parallels between what she did so well and what it was that I was really trying to say.

So how is it I could end up writing a book that was similar to hers in many ways (quality, popularity, relevance and longevity notwithstanding) without knowing anything about her work until my novel was done and over with? How is it that I could come up with a concept—good competition, a central theme of the book—that incorporated much about her ideas of individualism and objectivism before I ever knew these words even existed? And how is it that I could come up with another concept—bad competition, another central theme—that was so similar to her ideas of collectivism and second-handers without ever having heard these terms before? It turns out that the answer to these questions can be summarized in two words—Intellectual Isolationism.

The fact of the matter is I was never very good at learning from books. I was never very good at learning from lectures. I was never very good at learning by being told about something. And I certainly was never very good at learning by simply repeating what it was that other people had to say.

No, for some reason I always had to do things the hard way—to reinvent everything I ever wanted to understand myself. And by thinking a little bit more about why this is, one thing has become very clear to me: for better or worse, libertarians always seem to have a need to do things on their own.

So given this not-too-surprising revelation, I thought it might be worth sharing my particular approach to problem-solving in the hope that some people might find it intriguing enough to adapt

and build off of in order to possibly develop new and better ideas in whatever fields they may have an interest in.

To me, one of the biggest problems in terms of learning anything through the usual channels—whether it be physics through a physics book, writing through a writing class, politics through a political science program or whatever else it may be—is that you end up going through the exact same thought processes that other people have been going through for tens, hundreds or even thousands of years.

Go to the same schools, take the same classes, be exposed to the same materials, work with the same axioms and assumptions, approach the same problems in the same ways as everyone else does and there is little doubt that you'll end up thinking just like everyone else—at least when it comes to your particular field of study.

Now don't get me wrong. I'm not saying this is necessarily a bad thing—after all, there is certainly a need for this consistent body of cumulative knowledge and expertise. However, being part of this intellectual establishment can also be very limiting, especially when it comes to how much creativity can be applied to any given problem, including those that haven't been solved properly. After all, once you're convinced that you already know something, what's the use in trying to figure it out again?

On the other hand, an outsider has the ability to come in without the same bias and look at a situation completely from scratch—and it is this simple dynamic which explains why so many new ideas tend to come from outside the mainstream. Sure, the overwhelming majority of incremental developments in any field will always come from people with some sort of specialized training, but the

real leaps—the major changes in thinking—often come from those people outside the field.

Sometimes a new set of eyes is all it takes. I certainly found that to be helpful in the writing of my book—especially never having done something like that before. But the same thing is also true in business. A company hires outside consultants not because they necessarily know more about the business than the management does, but because they come in with a different perspective and may see problems or opportunities that the people who are so focused on the monotony of running the day-to-day operations simply may not.

Fundamentally, it is this approach of looking at a problem completely from scratch which is the essence of what I mean by Intellectual Isolationism. More specifically, it is the process of learning as much

—Continued next page

as possible about the basics—the most basic of basics—of what it is you want to understand and then stepping away from whatever else is out there in order to logically and incrementally derive everything you'll ever think about that subject all on your own.

In other words, don't "learn" the same things everyone else does. Sure, read about them, but never take what you read or hear in terms of knowledge, wisdom or understanding at face value. Always find a way to derive it, or at least derive as much as you can about it, all on your own. Step back and begin to rethink everything based on first principles—on the most fundamental elements possible. By not knowing what you should know—or at least by not taking it for granted—you just may end up creating something better than what was already out there. But even if you don't develop any new ideas—and in the vast majority of cases, you won't—you'll still have the most thorough understanding of something that you possibly can.

Want a good example? Take a look at the case of Albert Einstein. Einstein—who was working as a clerk in the Swiss patent office because he couldn't get a position as a researcher—was enamored with the concept of physical fields ever since his father gave him a compass when he was five years old. As he grew older, this infatuation with action at a distance led him to look at physics and ask a fundamental question: What would a beam of light look like if he was running alongside of it?

Interestingly, it was a question that had never been asked before simply because other physicists had all subscribed to the laws of motion that had been in place since the days of Newton. They all assumed them to be true and absolute, but Einstein didn't. And thanks to his incredible understanding of first principles—of the basics—he systematically took them apart piece-by-piece and the rest is history (including his famous quote that "imagination is more important than knowledge.")

Okay, so much for Einstein. Now let's look at an example that's a little less extreme and talk about some of the ways that I've employed the tools of Intellectual Isolationism. One of these would certainly be with respect to the issues we touched on earlier—i.e., the parallels between the concepts mentioned in my book and the objectivism of Ayn Rand—and this would be a perfect example of independently converging on an existing answer (or an existing ideology) based on the use of first principles.

But even beyond that, in **3000 Years** I tried to look at a lot of things, including science, from a new perspective and along the way ultimately came up with the idea for a time-travel technology which I called *time suppression*. But unlike the case of other time travel stories, it wasn't just some black box, it wasn't a wormhole—it wasn't something that just happened. In fact, it was just the opposite. It was something that was derived and explained from the ground up based on looking at Special Relativity from an entirely different perspective—that of changing the electrical characteristics of space in order to slow the speed of light and therefore the passage of time.

Is it a fictitious technology? Of course. Is it interesting? Most of the people I've spoken to think so. Is it Earth shattering? Not really—but it is a new way of looking at things that may ultimately inspire someone a lot smarter than me to question what may have been taken for granted for just a little bit too long. And doing so would necessarily lead to one of two outcomes—a new insight into how the world works, or another confirmation that the physical theories currently in vogue are likely to be correct.

In the same way, through the use of Intellectual Isolationism, I've not only reinforced my understanding of so much of what I had initially learned in more conventional ways, but I've also developed quite a few of my own ideas including new theories on human behavior, a new framework for analyzing political policy and debate, some interesting thoughts on the nature of gravity and so forth. No doubt some of the more complex ideas are probably wrong, but I also have no doubt that some of them—or at least some elements of them—are likely to be right. And if they ultimately do prove to be correct, great; if not, I'm just one of the countless thousands of people—some of whom are well known; the majority of which are completely obscure—who tried to expand our thinking in some new direction that just wasn't quite right. But it would still be worth a try.

However, despite all of its benefits, we should also keep in mind that the method of Intellectual Isolationism isn't necessarily for everyone—a medical doctor for instance. In that situation, the overriding rule is to "do no harm" and there is no way any sort of iterative process could ever possibly fit within that kind of constraint. In the same way, one of the potential problems with Intellectual Isolationism is the ever-present possibility that it may inadvertently lead to other forms of isolationism, in particular, a disconnect from the people and resources needed to take whatever ideas you may come up with from a concept into a reality.

In the end though, the advice I would give to anyone interested in doing things their own way would be to explore the path of Intellectual Isolationism—at least in some areas. Decide what interests you, and then figure it out for yourself. Create your own framework for understanding it completely from scratch. Start with the strongest possible understanding of the most basic elements—of first principals—and then use them to derive everything else. But make absolutely sure that you do understand as much as you can about the fundamentals—or risk understanding nothing at all.

At the same time, keep an open mind. After all, sometimes you'll be right and sometimes you'll be wrong. And when you are wrong, accept it and go back and see *why* you were wrong. Was it something about your understanding of the basics that wasn't quite right? Was it a mistake in logic somewhere along the line? Whatever the reason, go back and find another way to derive the right answer from the ground up. After all, as with anything, practice can only improve the chances of your getting it right the next time around.

But as you do this, be sure to maintain as many of your external relationships as possible. Be sure to keep in contact with other people in the field. Be sure to keep that network alive, because if you ever want the rest of the world to know about something you've managed to figure out, you'll need those conduits to get it there. Isolationism can be a great tool; just don't let it permeate too many elements of your life.

Richard Mgrdechian holds a BS in Electrical Engineering from the California Institute of Technology, along with an MBA from Columbia University. His background includes positions as a NASA engineer, investment banker, and high-tech CEO. He is the author of the Prometheus Award nominated speculative-fiction novel, 3000 Years.

Repairman Job

Harbingers

By F. Paul Wilson

Gauntlet Press, 2006, \$60

Reviewed by Russell Madden

While F. Paul Wilson's Repairman Jack certainly has enough *jobs* to occupy his time, there is another kind of "job" that is beginning to seem more apropos for this character. For anyone who has been following the recent RJ segments of the Adversary Cycle, "Job" with a capital "J," long-O, better describes this poor man's existence.

Over the course of this series, Jack has had one-damn-thing-after-another befall him and those closest to him. As a teenager, he lost his mother. In the last few books, he has lost his sister; his father (murdered in an airport massacre); and his brother (who vanished in RJ's place to satisfy the demands of a weird artifact).

Now an orphan, Jack has had to deal with threats to his fiancé, Gia, and her daughter, Vicky. As **Harbingers** begins, Gia is nearing delivery of Jack's own offspring, a pending event that has induced him to do what he vowed never to do: enter "normal" society with government-issued identification, tax obligations, and all the rest of the entangling tentacles of an ever-encroaching State.

Even this foray into "respectability," however, comes cloaked in typical RJ subterfuge. Through the intervention of his friend, Abe, Jack is headed for Europe to return reborn as one "Mirko Abdic." This "fix-it" is necessary to forge the legal bonds with Gia, Vicky, and his coming baby that will "grant" him rights to care for any or all of them should the unthinkable happen to one of them.

With the Adversary and its malignant agent-on-Earth Rasalom maneuvering against the Ally for dominance over our small world, Jack's concern is anything but misplaced. **Harbingers** brings that point sharply home when Jack's reluctant agreement to help a patron of his favorite bar, Julio's, track down a missing fourteen-year-old niece leads RJ deeply into the meshes of the cosmic web that is deciding our world's fate.

Jack's run-ins with the mysterious Yeniceri and their black-eyed Oculus; his discovery of the true nature and purpose of the men who killed his father; his race to protect Gia and Vicky and his unborn child from an old danger; and his travels from the heat of Florida to the frigid waters of a Nantucket blizzard transform **Harbingers** into a hold-onto-your-hat adventure that keeps the reader turning in horrified fascination to learn what more could possibly happen to this man for whom there are "no more coincidences."

Harbingers clarifies as never before the operations of both the Adversary/Rasalom and the Ally. Jack knows that the Adversary thrives on chaos. Any reader who has read **Nightworld** will also recognize that before all is resolved, the Adversary will transform our planet more to its liking in its attempt to destroy what is precious to people. As Rasalom says, "The human mind is comforted by patterns, but I shall offer none."

But the shredding of reality contemplated by the Adversary makes the most random killings perpetrated by the Nazis seem as tightly logical as a mathematical proof. *Give hope then destroy it. Repeat as necessary.* That is a strategy designed to inflict maximum pain and disorientation. As the Nazis and Soviets realized, people can withstand the most incredible abuses...*if they understand the rules and know what to expect.* When anything goes, however, when the Law of Identity is revoked, the impossible stands on par with the routine,

and the human mind is left impotent.

That fact is both a strength and a weakness in the Repairman Jack novels. On the positive side, the horror is heightened due to the very alienness and unpredictability engendered by the Adversary. Neither Jack nor the reader can rely upon experience to process what happens or to make plans to deal with what *might* happen to Jack and those closest to him.

On the negative side, however, is what could be called the "Superman Syndrome." The presence of beings who are next-to-omnipotent, who can violate virtually any law of physics at will, create an atmosphere of frustration and, ultimately, a "why-bother?" attitude. Remember the story of Job in the Bible: God grants Satan near *carte blanche* in torturing Job. Satan can destroy all those whom Job loves; can obliterate his worldly possessions; can visit the worst physical afflictions on the hapless man who wants only to live his life. The only thing Satan cannot do is kill Job himself.

Compare this to what has and will happen to Repairman Jack: all he has lost, all he has suffered physically and emotionally, all he has endured to satisfy the whim of a supernatural being with incomprehensible goals of its own. Like Job, Jack will survive the torments he encounters in these books; **Nightworld** assures us of that. Like Job, Jack's excruciating agony is, in human terms, meaningless and pointless, just as the wrangling of the Adversary and the Ally over a "trivial" piece in their "game" has no intrinsic value.

Being who he is, of course, Jack does not sit idly in his ashes wailing against his fate and begging for surcease or wondering what he did to "deserve" such punishment. He actively does what he can to rectify what goes wrong, though his options are limited given the artificial restrictions imposed upon him by external forces far too powerful for him to defeat.

In this sense, Jack's position parallels that of those fighting to restore freedom in our own society. The modern-day, incipient police state treats its citizens as faceless pawns destined to dance to the tune of its own irrational, self-contradictory dictates. A popular Washingtonian button from a number of years ago captures the attitude of both the Adversary and his "opposite," the Ally, and the politicians and bureaucrats who erroneously believe they can translate into fact whatever they can dream up in their fancies: "Reality Is Negotiable."

But reality, of course, is not negotiable. No one and nothing can escape or subvert or evade the Law of Identity or its corollary, the Law of Causality. While Superman or the Adversary/Ally can act in absurd ways and "get away with it," that is not an option for real people...not even politicians. People can *try* to ignore reality, but reality has the final laugh. We can "suspend our disbelief" up to a point...but only to a point.

The juxtaposition between Jack, a man who is grounded in the gritty here-and-now, and the vaguely "all-powerful" Adversary does create a dramatic tension, but a tension that can only carry us so far. I'm reminded of Heinlein's Michael Smith in **Stranger in a Strange Land** who can "will" his hair to stop growing. Nice trick, but...so what? Such "magical" behavior has no relevance to real human beings.

Harbingers does leave us a sort of "out." One character says, "Nothing is carved in stone. The human variable—willingly or unwillingly...—has the capacity to affect outcomes in the most unpredictable ways." Jack is the wild card in the Adver-

—Continued on page 20

And Now For for a Word

The Spring 2006 issue of *Prometheus* sports a slightly re-designed look, spurred by an article that in the end does not appear in this issue. A few months ago as I looked ahead to this issue, I had no content. I requested and received permission to reprint a lengthy interview of interest to readers, and thought that eight pages of text does not read very well across three columns. So, I switched the layout instead to the current format of two columns.

Then new articles and reviews started to pour in for the Spring issue. I added four pages. Not enough room for everything. Faced with the choice of shifting many reviews to the Summer issue, and losing relevance in terms of Prometheus Award nominated books, or shifting the interview to the Summer issue, I opted for the former, while keeping the two column layout. I still hope and intend to publish the interview, and I expect the Summer issue to have lots more reviews. In particular I'm looking forward to Vernor Vinge's new novel, **Rainbows End**, as well as Charles Stross post-singularity mystery/sf novel, **Glasshouse**.

Much like Repairman Jack, I believe in "value given for value received." This stands behind the entire process of assembling each issue of *Prometheus*. I'm extremely happy that this issue runs 20 pages, and contains strong reviews, excellent essays, and an interview with David Friedman. Russ Madden provides a tantalizing preview of the new Repairman Jack novel. You can buy Madden's latest novel, **Death is Easy**, at <<http://www.lulu.com/content/173588>>, and read his other articles, short stories, novel excerpts, and other items of interest to Objectivists, libertarians, and sf fans at his website, <<http://www.russellmadden.com>>

If you have read any books, seen any movies or TV shows, and feel strongly about these in terms of liberty and the arts, *Prometheus* welcomes your reviews.

— Anders Monsen

LFS on Yahoo Groups

The LFS uses an email list (LFS-discuss@yahoogroups.com) on the Yahoo groups web site for discussions by members of the LFS on the nominees for the Prometheus Best Novel, Hall of Fame, and Special awards before we vote on them each Fourth of July. We hope that more members discussing will lead to more members voting. Please participate in the discussion and vote.

The list is restricted to LFS members, so in order to join, you submit a request. You can do that by visiting <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/lfs-discuss/> or sending a message to LFS-discuss-subscribe@yahoogroups.com or LFS-discuss-owner@yahoogroups.com.

Be sure to include your name so that we'll be able to tell that you are a member.

— Chris Hibbert

Novel Portraying the Evils of Socialized Medicine Wins Literary Award

Libertarian Fiction Scores Big in National Contest; Novel Portraying the Evils of Socialized Medicine Wins Literary Award

Chicago—Feb. 26, 2006

The *Writer's Digest* 13th international book awards has just honored first-time fiction writer and Chicago-based author Gen LaGreca with one of the most sought after awards in the publishing world for her dramatic novel **Noble Vision**. This book competition celebrates small press publishers and is sponsored by *Writer's Digest* magazine, considered the bible for up-and-coming writers. **Noble Vision** won honorable mention in the category of mainstream fiction. The announcement comes in the current March 2006 issue of the nation's leading magazine for writers.

This first novel of Genevieve (Gen) LaGreca, a former pharmaceutical chemist and healthcare writer, was one of the top six picks in a field swamped with hundreds of submissions. In a letter to LaGreca, *Writer's Digest* editor Kristin Godsey observed, "Competition was particularly fierce this year, so your accomplishment is truly impressive."

Noble Vision is the love story of a beautiful Broadway dancer whose life is shattered by a tragic accident and a young neurosurgeon determined to save her. The ballerina's only hope is a revolutionary new procedure the surgeon has developed to repair damaged nerves. The treatment, however, does not have the required approval of their state's health system, a bureaucracy bogged down with cost overruns and political corruption. The story presents a gripping account of a brilliant doctor and desperate patient caught in a bureaucracy that fosters conformity and obedience over innovation and independence.

According to *Writer's Digest*, "The author seems to know a great deal about the medical profession and the issues surrounding it. The novel is dealing with some of the most serious issues of our day, and this lends the story an immediacy and vibrancy. The author's prose is polished and professional. The book reads like the work of an experienced author."

The novel's all-too-accurate portrayal of the dangers of socialized medicine earned endorsements from medical leaders, including Edward Annis, past president of the American Medical Association, and Jane Orient, executive director of the Association of American Physicians and Surgeons. The novel also garnered praise from magazine magnate Steve Forbes, Nobel laureate Milton Friedman, and syndicated columnist Walter Williams.

Noble Vision was published in 2005 by Winged Victory Press, a Chicago-based independent press formed by LaGreca and her associates. "We hope the exposure from the *Writer's Digest* award will encourage more people to read this book," says LaGreca, "and to fight for their right to make their own medical decisions."



—**Harbingers** review, continued from page 18

sary/Ally contest, though for someone who was unaware of Jack's actions in **Nightworld**, the above quote would be the equivalent of whistling in the dark, a symbol of bravado or wishful thinking. There has been precious little evidence in the past few "months" of Jack's life to support the efficacy of his freewill decisions. The "no coincidences" mantra transforms him into a puppet dancing at the whim of unseen others or, at best, a rat in a maze who can "choose" some pathways but can do nothing to affect the final goal towards which he is being herded.

An actual, predestined "fate" would render human thought and actions pointless and illusory. Luckily, humans are neither billiard balls pushed hither and yon by external forces nor mystical creatures capable of doing anything and everything. We have an identity, a specific nature. In order to succeed in life, we must both recognize and understand that identity and act in consonance with it. Those who treat people as faceless pawns, who believe that others are the means to ends not their own, spit in reality's face. These individuals see others "as natural resources, as raw materials." They assuage their guilt by claiming, "There's no evil there, just pragmatism."

But only disaster and pain can result from such self-delusion. As Jack points out, such a man-made hell is "[S]o goddamn unnecessary. Just like everything else that had gone down." The statists and mystics and the collectivists may tout their "social engineering" as laudable and themselves as decent folks, but there is "No evil unless you [are] on the receiving end." As Ayn Rand so presciently and cogently pointed out, "Where there's sacrifice, there's someone col-

lecting sacrificial offerings... The man who speaks to you of sacrifice, speaks of slaves and masters. And intends to be the master."

Jack tells us that the Ally "can't show compassion because it has none. It can't be held to human moral standards because it makes its own rules and answers only to itself." This is an almost perfect description of how many people view "society" or the "State" or "government." The "almost" is there because in Jack's universe the Ally exists as an actual entity. But in reality, "society" or the "State" do *not* exist *per se*. They are abstractions. They have no meaning apart from or above the *individual* people who *do* exist. "Society" is nothing more than a shorthand way of describing the relationships among individuals. To say "society" exists as an independent thing with its own needs or desires or rules would be like saying "left" and "right" exist outside the individual people who make such concepts meaningful in the first place. "Society" and the "State" *can*—and must—be "held to human moral standards" precisely because only individual (morally accountable) humans comprise them.

Whether it is the phantasmal Ally or Adversary or State claiming so, there *is* no "greater good of humanity," a value that exists separately from concrete human beings. "Good" does not and cannot exist divorced from specific individuals. There is only that which is good for Jack or Gia or Vicky. Or you. Or me.

Though in **Harbingers** Repairman Jack has become a kind of modern-day Job beaten down by an apparently invincible foe, he does not go quietly into that (not so) good night. Even knowing that he, as Heir, will eventually prevail in this war against the Otherness, we readers still cringe at how much more he must endure before bursting through to the other side. Let's face it: Repairman Jack deserves a break.



The Newsletter of the Libertarian Futurist Society
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