

PROMETHEUS

Lois McMaster Bujold: *The Sharing Knife*

The Sharing Knife: The Beguilement

The Sharing Knife: Legacy

The Sharing Knife: Passage

By Lois McMaster Bujold

EOS, 2006/2007/2008

Reviewed by William H. Stoddard

Lois McMaster Bujold established her reputation by writing science fiction—primarily the Vorkosigan series, though LFS members may be more interested in *Falling Free*, which is only tangentially linked to it. An early fantasy novel, *The Spirit Ring*, attracted relatively little notice. More recently, she turned to fantasy, with the three Chalion novels (not a “trilogy” or a series, but independent stories sharing a setting). Her new series *The Sharing Knife* continues that turn to fantasy, with a quite different setting. It also carries another shift in Bujold’s writing further: Her fiction has always had crossover appeal to romance readers, and starting with the later Vorkosigan novels (especially *Komarr* and *A Civil Campaign*), romantic themes and relationships became a major focus of her writing, but *The Sharing Knife* could be described as a full-blown romance that happens to take place in a fantasy setting—a “paranormal romance,” as the publishing industry calls this category.

The fantastic element in this setting is a psychic sensitivity called “groundsense.” This seems to be imaginatively inspired by the Gaia Hypothesis, which views the Earth as a living entity—or, more precisely, on the scientific findings that inspired the Gaia Hypothesis, such as the difference between soil on Earth, which is pervaded with life and organic matter, and regolith on the other terrestrial planets, which has neither (a difference whose implications Robert A. Heinlein examined at length in *Farmer in the Sky*). Some people have groundsense, enabling them to perceive their own and each other’s bodies, other living things, and the soil itself and to do “magical” things with them. Far in the past there was a high civilization with advanced magical skills based on groundsense; the setting of *The Sharing Knife* is a postapocalyptic one, the world left behind after that civilization destroyed itself. Its main supernatural threat, called “malices,” are cancerous entities that grow out of traces of magical pollution (in both the environmentalist sense and the older ritual and tabu sense) and consume “ground”;

what they leave behind is dead ground—in effect, soil returned to regolith, only to be restored slowly, from the edges in.

A threat requires countermeasures, and in this setting those are provided by the Lakewalkers, a relic of the ancient aristocracy. Fantasy readers are likely to be reminded of J. R. R. Tolkien’s Dunedain, not just in general concept but in many details: long lives, unusual tallness, magical talents, preservation of ancient memories, and isolation from the people they guard and protect, who tend to mistrust or even fear them. But Bujold has envisioned her “rangers” in much more ethnographic detail. To start with, where Tolkien always left the Dunedain’s economic base vague—where did they get their horses, their weapons, or even their food? Did they have houses somewhere, or spend all their time roaming the wild?—Bujold shows an economy suited to nomads who have to carry everything they own on horseback. For her Lakewalkers, land is not private property, but common property—in the style of ancient Roman law, where anyone can use or pass over common property, but no one can permanently occupy or appropriate it. This concept is unsuited to farming societies, and the Lakewalkers seem to be very sophisticated hunter/gatherers rather than farmers. The majority of them support the frontline combatants who battle the malices, rather than doing battle themselves. Their kinship system is matrilineal, with descent

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Remember the LFS

By Michael Grossberg

With the end of the year approaching, it's time to think about holiday giving—and remembering organizations near and dear to your heart.

With the price of gold near historic highs, making an extra contribution to the LFS can help to sustain the Prometheus Awards, which include a one-ounce gold coin annually to Best Novel winners and smaller gold coins in other Prometheus categories.

One good way to introduce younger freedom-loving sci-fi fans to libertarian activism is by giving a gift membership at the Basic or Full level to a friend or relative for the holidays. Such gifts can be made last-minute, too, by using PayPal at our website www.lfs.org

As a nonprofit-tax-exempt 501c3 organization, the Libertarian Futurist Society is eligible for tax-deduction donations in two ways:

1) Consider making a 2008 donation to the LFS, above and beyond any annual membership dues (also considered tax-deductible.). Checks must be dated

and postmarked before the end of the year to be tax-deductible for 2008.

2) Add the LFS as a beneficiary to your will, or better yet, as one of the beneficiaries of your retirement funds (such as 401K or IRA accounts.)

People naturally want to leave most of their estate to loved ones, but including even a small percentage or token amount to the LFS can make a big difference—and help to ensure the organization's survival long after you're gone.

The simplest way to do this is to add a sentence or codicil to your will, the next time it's updated, leaving \$1,000, \$5,000, \$10,000 or more to the Libertarian Futurist Society. (Make sure you include the LFS's mailing address and website, as well as the name, address and phone number of an LFS officer in a separate list of beneficiaries' contact information, to make it easier for your executor to locate us.)

One smart wrinkle I learned recently

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Denvention3—2008 Worldcon Report

By Fred Curtis Moulton

Denvention3, the 66th World Science Fiction Convention, held August 6-10 in Denver, Colorado, attracted about 3700 fans. Denver is not as large a metropolitan area as the locales for previous Worldcons. Thus the attendance fell a bit since there was not as large a pool of people to pull from within easy driving range. Denver is known as the Mile High City and the altitude did take some acclimation. It also rained. In fact on Friday it rained very hard in the evening and quite a few unsuspecting fans got soaked. The main facility was the Colorado Convention Center and surrounding hotels were used for other events. The con suite, late night programs, gaming, filk and parties were in the Sheraton several blocks from the Convention Center. The Convention Center complex is large. Worldcon activities were primarily in the rear half of the building so there was about a two block walk inside the building before exiting to head to restaurants and hotels. This long and wide walk inside did have the positive features of allowing friends to spot each other since the walkway was spacious and almost everyone was on it often.

The LFS Awards ceremony was held on Wednesday afternoon instead of Friday. The reason for the shift was that since we had a tie for best novel it was necessary to coordinate the schedules of two authors as well as find an open room in the meeting rooms allotted to the con. Harry Turtledove and Jo Walton were present to accept their awards. Fran Van Cleave was in attendance to assist and read the statement announcing the Hall of Fame winner. I announced the Prometheus Best Novel award winners. Harry Turtledove spoke first, followed by Jo Walton. Both Harry and Jo said how pleased they were to get the award. Following their remarks we had a general Question and Answer session with several good questions from the audience. Other LFS members were present and assisted with photos and other details. Announcing the authors of the winning books a couple of weeks prior to the convention appears to have worked well.

Wednesday evening several LFS members met for dinner and conversation at Marlowe's restaurant. It was a good chance for getting caught up since it had been at least a year or more since some of us had previously met.

As for the con itself, it had its ups and downs. The registration on Wednesday morning had poor signage and was not well organized. They had the pre-registration open the previous day until 9:00PM but failed to realize that many people were on flights that arrived late. And even if the flights arrived early in the evening the Denver airport is so far out that it takes a long time to get into downtown Denver. If they had been smart they would have opened registration Wednesday morning at 8:30AM for all of the East Coast people who felt like it was 10:30AM and thus reduced the Wednesday morning rush. But they opened at 10:00AM with very poor signage, a slow

process and a crowd of people. Fortunately SF fandom is resourceful and various fans in the lines started monitoring the lines and improving some handwritten signs which helped.

The various panels I attended were interesting and for the most part well moderated. There were a lot of impromptu meetings in hallways and around the various fan and bid tables. The Fanzine Lounge provided a centrally located place to rest, relax and peruse fanzines new and old. The Art show, dealers room, history of prior Denver Worldcons, and Fanac were all grouped together in an upper floor of the Convention Center. The Art Show had many fine pieces. The Dealer's room had a mix of book, comic, jewelry and clothing vendors. L. Neil Smith and Scott Bieser ran the Big Head Press booth in the Dealers Room selling copies of *The Probability Broach* and *Roswell, Texas*, as well as other graphic novels.

The Australia Worldcon bid beat back the strong challenge of bids from Xerps in 2010 (which had fun parties on multiple evenings) and Peggy Ray's House in 2010. The next Worldcon takes place in Montreal from August 6 through 10, 2009, followed by the 68th Worldcon in Melbourne, Australia, aka Aussicon 4.

I heard very few negative remarks about the con overall, mainly about specific events such as the registration problems mentioned earlier and not about the con as a whole. I just assume that every con will have at least one problem whether it is with registration or the newsletter or some other item. So I identify the problem and then move on and have fun. I saw a lot of smiling faces. I had a great time. For those of you who want to review the con newsletters they are in PDF: <http://www.denvention.org/publications/index.php>



L. Neil Smith, Fran Van Cleave, Scott Bieser, and Fred Curtis Moulton at the Big Head Press table (left to right).

—*The Sharing Knife* review, continued from page 1

traced from mother to daughter and from uncle to nephew, perhaps reflecting their nonownership of land—though they do have the institution of marriage, apparently conceived as a partnership rather than as male proprietorship of women’s fertility. They also seem to be sexually sophisticated in a style that would have appalled Aragorn, accepting same-sex relationships and *ménages à trois* casually. Groundsense apparently enhances their sexual skills as well, which is an asset for characters in a romance novel.

But this wouldn’t be much of a romance without obstacles to the lovers’ happiness. Many of these come from the estrangement between the Lakewalkers and the people they defend, called simply Farmers. Farmer culture is focused on owning and working land, which is inherited patrilineally, from father to son, making legitimacy and monogamy vitally important. Farmers and Lakewalkers are capable of falling in love, sexual intercourse, and bearing each other’s children, but the clash between their marital customs ensures that most such relationships end tragically. Bujold’s plot tension comes largely from the efforts to bridge this gap. It’s tempting to describe Farmers as “conservative”—in a lot of ways they look like an analog of nineteenth century American farm communities—but in fact the Lakewalkers are every bit as conservative, and her Lakewalker hero and Farmer heroine are welcome as a couple in neither culture. Instead they have to create their own form for a lasting relationship through their own personal choices.

In a sense, the Lakewalker conservatism is that of aristocrats; they have the emphasis on bloodlines and the sense of tradition and duty. But they’re a peculiar sort of aristocrats: noble men and women who don’t rule, or command armies of Farmer conscripts, or collect rents or taxes. They do consider the Farmer communities to be their own creation, part of their effort to reclaim ground blighted by malices, but rather than owning or controlling these communities, they leave them to grow by themselves, gaining benefits from them partly through voluntary trade, and partly from gifts made by Farmers they’ve saved from supernatural attacks. This seems like an idealized image of noble lineages, if an interesting one for libertarians, but at the same time it fits the hunter/gatherer lifestyle Bujold portrays. And, of course, a hero from a noble lineage falling in love with a commoner heroine is one of the classic plotlines of romance, going back at least to *Jane Eyre*.

Readers who dislike the conventions of romance novels probably should pass these novels by. But if that’s not a barrier

for you, you’ll find some interesting speculative elements and themes in this story—along with supernatural horror, eroticism, and even humor. It seems clear that Bujold has wanted to write in this style for a long time, from the tendencies of the later Vorkosigan books and the Chalion books; in this story she’s felt free to do so.

The first two volumes of *The Sharing Knife* were mainly a love story in a fantasy setting. The third volume, *Passage*, continues that story, but with a change of emphasis: away from love and toward work and politics. This appears to be an entirely conscious decision on Bujold’s part; in a talk she gave earlier this year, which I attended, she said that writing this series had convinced her that themes of political agency were central to fantasy and science fiction, and that in its third and fourth volumes she was turning from the personal focus of romance to the political focus of fantasy. Though in this volume, at least, it’s politics in the small: the building of community by people uprooted from their own (which, come to think of it, could be a metaphor for science fiction fandom in general).

Something became clear to me as I read this third volume, which I hadn’t seen so clearly in the first two. Tolkien described his “sub-creation” as an attempt to give England its own mythology. In somewhat the same way, this series could be described as creating an American mythology. In this story, in particular, Bujold gives us a fantasy analog of one of the greatest American novels, Mark Twain’s *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*: A mixed group of people traveling down a long river on a flat-bottomed boat, having adventures and getting to know each other. In a note at the end, Bujold mentions some of her historical and biographical sources, and they’re accounts of life on the Mississippi and of the American frontier—which is, in fact, the central American myth: a story not of people but of landscape.

Bujold’s world has its own frontier: lands left desolate and uninhabitable by a great magical blight, and now, centuries later, starting to recover. With their recovery, settlers start to move in, only to be threatened by residues of the ancient blight: beings called “malices” that can exist only as parasites, draining the life out of people, their communities, and the land itself. A remnant of ancient sorcerers, the Lakewalkers, patrol the wilderness, living apart from the farmers, and trying to guard them from malices; inconveniently, the farmers are resistant to being kept from clearing new land, or evicted from land they’ve cleared, much as early Americans resisted British attempts to keep them from colonizing the interior. And in this novel, we see another aspect of frontier life: the threat not of supernatural evil but of human outlawry. In a sense, this volume is a Western, focused on the hero who comes to the defense of a community at the mercy of bandits.

The Lakewalkers trace their descent to magically gifted aristocrats of a fallen empire, and they still have aristocratic attitudes: pride of descent, resistance to interbreeding with farmers, mistrust of commerce, avoidance of certain types of labor. Above all, they live to give their lives fighting against malices. But they’re aristocrats without political power, and that’s where *Passage* takes on a curiously libertarian slant.

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Prometheus Submission Guidelines

Prometheus seeks reviews, essays, articles, and columns of interest to libertarian science fiction fans. As the newsletter of the Libertarian Futurist Society, *Prometheus* focuses on Prometheus Award-nominated works, but also publishes reviews and articles beyond the Prometheus Award candidates.

Contact the editor at editor@lfs.org

—*The Sharing Knife* review, continued from previous page

Midway through, the novel's hero comments, "There are no lords here. The gods are absent." And the heroine, now his wife, answers, "You know, it sounds real attractive at first, but I'm not sure I'd want lords and gods fixing the world. Because I think they'd fix it for them. Not necessarily for me." This society without a ruling class is perhaps the aspect of these books that has the strongest American flavor, and the greatest departure from the fantasied kings, knights, and courtly institutions of more traditional fantasy. The greatest dread of this novel's hero is turning into a lord, able to wield power over lesser men; and repeatedly, Bujold confronts him with examples of the things he fears he might turn into.

Reading this series may be disorienting for some science fiction fans; the strongly personal focus of the first two volumes may come across as a lack of substance—at least, of the sort of substance science fiction readers expect. In the third volume, we're back on more familiar science-fictional ground, with the central characters taking actions that aim to transform the world, however slowly. And that, too, is something libertarians certainly can sympathize with.

Macrolife

By George Zebrowski

Pyr Books, 2007

Reviewed by Wally Conger

Macrolife, by George Zebrowski, is utterly mind-boggling science fiction. Its scope is certainly epic, spanning one hundred billion years, so I suppose it qualifies as space opera. Maybe Space Opera Plus. And I think it offers exciting ideas for radical libertarians, freedom-seeking secessionists, and anarcho-transhumanists to mull over.

First published thirty years ago, the book is a heady mix. It's a novel, yes, but it's also a future history, a polemic, and a call to action. More than anything else, it's a far-reaching meditation on the ultimate survival of humankind. You don't dash through this book and then toss it aside. After I finished reading *Macrolife*, I didn't slip it back on a shelf. It sits bedside, where I plan to take a sip from time to time.

The novel's premise is compelling. Its author contends that our species must reach out to the stars in order to endure. Zebrowski writes in an afterword to this latest edition (2006):

"[E]ven in the near term, across the next millennium, our failure to become a space-faring world may well be suicidal when we consider what we can do for our world from the high ground of the solar system: energy and resources, planetary management, and most important the ability to prevent the world-ending catastrophe of an asteroid strike. This last threat will happen; it is not a question of if but when. Today we are utterly helpless before such a danger and would know of it only when it was already happening."

But Zebrowski argues that merely vacating Earth and populating other planets—or "dirtworlds"—is only a short-

term solution. Limited resources, he says, assure the consistent failure of planet-based civilizations. Likewise, the proposed "space cylinder" habitats of Gerard O'Neill, which assume construction from scratch, lack long-term vision. With a nod to futurist Dandridge M. Cole, Zebrowski suggests that hollowed-out asteroids serve us as nomadic "societal containers," or macrolife—mobile—organism comprised of human and human-derived intelligences. It's an organism because it reproduces, with its human and other elements, moves and reacts on the scale of the Galaxy." These "mobile utopias" will be larger inside "than the surface of a planet. And larger still within its minds." In the Big Picture, macrolife is an open-ended, expanding union of organic, cybernetic, and machine intelligences, spreading itself through the galaxies.

Macrolife suggests futures beyond this planet, beyond Old World cultures, beyond governments, beyond authoritarian institutions. It's utopian but acknowledges the dangers of utopianism. It's worth reading, worth study, and worth serious discussion.

The Sunrise Lands & The Scourge of God

By S. M. Stirling

Ros, 2007/2008

Reviewed by William H. Stoddard

S. M. Stirling's new series, planned to comprise four novels altogether, has a complicated history. Originally Stirling published the three-volume Nantucket Island series, a "castaways in time" story like L. Sprague de Camp's classic *Lest Darkness Fall*, but with not one man, but several thousand people, falling into the distant past. (And nearly two thousand years earlier, in the late Bronze Age!) Then he came back to the twentieth century from which Nantucket had been snatched away, and showed what happened there, in a kind of mirror image series: explosives, combustion engines, and electrical devices all stopped working, and the survivors of the resulting global catastrophe had to rebuild civilization with pre-gunpowder technology. His latest series is a follow-up to those books, set two decades after the Change.

The original trilogy was a story of entrepreneurship, not so much in the economic as in the cultural sense, with smart, strong-willed and lucky people emerging as leaders and founding new communities. This new series is about inheritance, as the children who grew up after the Change begin to take on adult responsibilities, and some of them become leaders. These turn out to be two phases of a process Stirling calls ethnogenesis, the formation of cultures and communities out of social chaos. Where the first series examined a handful of such communities in the Willamette Valley of Oregon, the second has a wider range, as its heroes—the traditional Nine—undertake a quest across what was once the United States.

But something strange is happening as the story progresses.

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2008 Prometheus Awards Presentation

[On August 6th, deep in the bowels of the Convention Center in downtown Denver, Colorado the Libertarian Futurist Society presented the 2008 Prometheus Awards for Best Novel and Classic Fiction. This year was the first time two novels tied for the Best Novel award. Also, although several women writers have been nominated for the Prometheus Award, this year saw the first woman writer win the award.]

Fred Curtis Moulton

First, I'd like to welcome everybody. This is the annual meeting for the Libertarian Futurist Society awarding of the Prometheus Awards, and we're really happy to have everybody here. The awards are given for libertarian fiction and have been awarded for a couple of decades now, and is one of the longest running fan awards in sf. We have a Prometheus Best Novel Award and we also have the Hall of Fame Award. We're going to start off today with the Hall of Fame Award. The nominees for the Hall of Fame Award were "As Easy as A.B.C.," a short story by Rudyard Kipling, *That Hideous Strength*, a novel by C. S. Lewis, The Lord of Rings trilogy by J. R. R. Tolkien, and *The Once And Future King* and *The Book of Merlyn*, novels by T. H. White, and the winner was *A Clockwork Orange*, by Anthony Burgess. Fran Van Cleave will now say a few words about that award.

Fran Van Cleave

A Clockwork Orange raises many issues about guilt, responsibility and punishment in general. The particular theme of the book, of interest to libertarians, is the theme of both government and opposition parties using the main character, Alex, as a pawn in a political game. This is even more sharply focused by the violent and criminal nature of Alex himself. The novel raises many issues and is worth our consideration and reflection. Anthony Burgess is no longer living. We are contacting the Anthony Burgess Foundation for the purpose of placing the award plaque with the other Burgess items that are maintained there. Thank you.

Fred Curtis Moulton

The LFS Best Novel Award has some wonderful news because we had a tie this year. It's always good to be able to honor two really wonderful works, and so we have that special honor today. I'll read the list of nominees. They were *Ragamuffin*, by Tobias Buckell; *The Execution Channel*, by Ken MacLeod; *The Fleet of Worlds*, by Larry Niven and Edward M. Lerner. We really honor them for being finalists and it's a very hard

decision to come down to the two that won, which was *Gladiator* by Harry Turtledove and *Ha'penny* by Jo Walton. We're going to have each of them say a few words. We'll start with Harry Turtledove.

Harry Turtledove

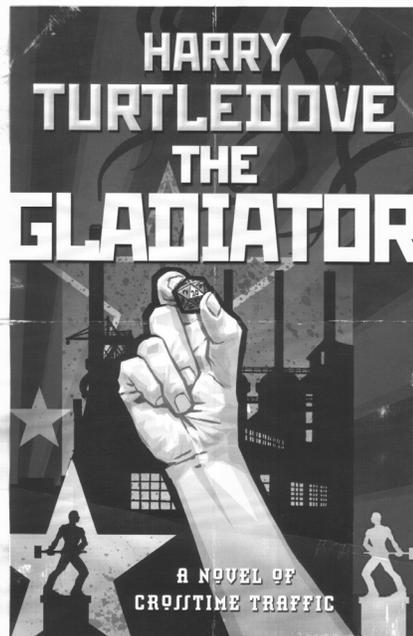
Thank you very much. It's a great privilege to accept the award.

It's kind of appropriate, I think, for me to get the Prometheus Award on August 6th, because, if you remember 63 years ago, that's the day fire really came down from the heavens. And, one of the things that will help keep us free, and I hope it will never come down again in the next 63 years. I hope we'll be lucky enough to see that.

I really want to mention, since we're talking about writing and freedom, I want to mention the passing of Alexandr Solzhenitsyn [August 3rd, 2008—editor], who in his work and in his life, did more to trample the tyranny of the Soviet Union than damn near anybody else I can think of. So, we ought to give him, not a moment of silence, because silence is the thing that he fought all his life, but a round of applause. [Applause] Thanks.

The other thing that I want to say is, just what a tremendous honor it is to be mentioned in the same breath with Jo Walton's fine novel, *Ha'penny*, because I think it is just a splendid piece of work. Between us, Jo and I, take licks at the two major ideological diseases of the 20th century—me communism and her fascism. Both of those are smaller problems than they were a couple of generations ago and I'm damn glad of it. The only thing that worries me is that the 21st century—as centuries have a way of doing—will spawn its own ideological diseases.

I hope that some time early in the 22nd century there will be people getting awards for novels talking about how they got around the ideological diseases of the 21st century.



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—*Prometheus Awards*, continued from previous page

[Next, the co-winner of the Prometheus Award, Jo Walton, was presented with her award, and read her remarks. Both winners received a plaque with a one ounce gold coin. Although the market fluctuates, a one ounce gold coin at the time was worth roughly \$1,000.]

Jo Walton

Thank you very much.

You mentioned that this was one of the oldest fan awards, and I'd like to mention that this is the first time a woman has won it. So that's one for feminism.

I'd like to thank all the people who nominated *Ha'Penny* for the Prometheus award and voted for it.

I'm not sure it's a Libertarian novel. I'm not sure what a Libertarian novel is. But it's certainly a novel about liberty and about civil liberties. Thank you for finding that important. I've got into a lot of arguments with Libertarians online about things like, oh, the US's lack of a health service, and handicapped parking spaces, but clearly on some very important issues our hearts are in the same place.

I'd like to thank Patrick Nielsen Hayden and Tom Doherty and everyone at Tor for supporting and promoting *Ha'Penny* and doing their best for it. I'd like to thank Ursula Le Guin and Harry Turtledove and Robert Charles Wilson and everyone else who read it or *Farthing* and liked them and provided great quotes to go on the cover and encourage people to buy them.

I'd like to thank my family, my son Sasha Walton, my husband, Emmet O'Brien, who read it as it was going along, and my aunt, Mary Lace, who remembers the real 1949 and gave me some great advice about my version. I'd like to thank my grandparents, Jack and Nancy Lace, who have been dead for years but who brought me up, and who lived through the Second World War and talked often about the divide it made in their lives.

I'd like to thank Winston Churchill, for fighting on in 1940 when anyone in their right minds would have made a compromise peace. I'd like to thank the Americans for Lend-Lease, for getting into the war, finally, and most of all for the Marshall Plan.

Ha'Penny is set in an alternate 1949 where Britain did make a compromise peace with Hitler, where the concentration camps still exist, where everything is nice on the surface but under the surface nothing is nice at all.

I've always been a very cheerful and optimistic person. That's

why I wrote *Farthing* and its sequels. I started writing these books in May of 2004, after the stolen election of 2000, and while your country and mine were engaged in an aggressive war against Iraq, when everyone in the US and the UK seemed to be giving up liberty for a little temporary safety hand over fist. I wrote them in the understanding of how good people do bad things and live with themselves—how we do bad things and live with ourselves. I wrote it in the belief that our choices do matter.

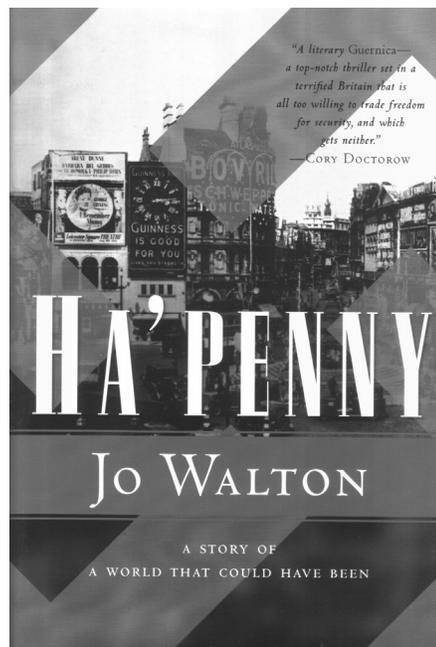
SF has always been a very political genre. You only have to look at books like *The Moon is a Harsh Mistress*, *The Dispossessed*, *The Star Fraction*—all Prometheus winners or Hall of Fame

winners. One of the things I've always loved about SF has been how it can be a crucible for writing about uncomfortable things. *Ha'Penny* is also a very political book, and a very uncomfortable book, too. It isn't meant as an allegory. I wrote it as a story, and if it didn't work as that, it wouldn't work as anything.

If the world were a terrible place, if we really were going down into darkness, this uncomfortable book wouldn't have won this award. You'd have picked something you're comfortable with. And its predecessor, *Farthing*, wouldn't have been nominated for other awards.

It isn't enough, it's a straw in the wind, any individual thing is a straw in the wind, but this is a straw in a wind that's blowing in the right direction.

Thank you.



[Looking ahead to 2009, the presentation for that year's Prometheus Awards is scheduled to take place at the WorldCon in Montreal.

LFS members are encouraged to nominate novels published in 2008 for next year's Best Novel, as well as any works of fiction published at least five years ago for the Classic Fiction category.

A complete list of winners and nominees is published at the LFS web site: www.lfs.org/awards.htm]

—*Stirling* review, Continued from page 5

The first book was nearly pure science fiction, examining the engineering consequences of an unexplained natural phenomenon; one could imagine John W. Campbell buying it for *Astounding Science Fiction*, though without the sexual content. But more and more, the later books are becoming fantasy, and even high fantasy. It's almost as if J. R. R. Tolkien's history of Middle-Earth had been reversed, with the rare magic and lesser heroes of the Third Age giving way to the wonders and titans of the First Age. Partly this is because the survivors themselves look to historical models: the medievalism of the Society for Creative Anachronism (hybridized with twentieth century gangster culture), the Celtic traditions of a pagan community, a dash of Viking heroism, two different analogs of the Roman Republic, a Buddhist monastic community, several native American groups, and even a group modeled on Tolkien's Rangers, created by a teenage fan. As their children grow up, in a world where advanced technology is a fading memory, and older traditions are being revived, they *believe* in legends, often strongly enough to baffle their elders. But it's more than that: Stirling shows us what look like prophetic visions, demonic possession, divine intervention, and heroic feats like scenes from ancient epics or sagas.

Central to all of this is Rudi Mackenzie, bastard son of the principal heroes of the first series about the Change, and heir to the chieftainship of his neopagan clan. Stirling showed his birth attended by omens, and his childhood by prodigious feats. Now a young adult, he performs feats worthy of a demigod—for example, leaning sideways on a running horse to lift a full-grown man in armor. In *The Scourge of God* one of his companions, himself a trained soldier, judges that Rudi is fighting as fast as anyone he's ever seen, striking blows as hard as he's ever seen, and striking with amazing accuracy—without having to trade one quality off to get another. And his companions are all capable of legendary feats in their specific domains. On the other hand, these two volumes also show that even legendary heroes can be overwhelmed. In the course of *The Scourge of God*, both Rudi and one of his twin half-sisters, a member of the Dunedain Rangers, are grievously hurt. And Stirling makes it clear that Rudi is being pursued by agents of a twisted anti-technological religion, who have apparently inexplicable powers, unless the explanation is, as it appears to be, some form of demonic possession.

Meanwhile, back at home in Oregon, the once warring powers are forced to make an alliance against the armies of that same cult, and old adversaries find themselves working together. And in this part of the story, too, there are dreadful injuries, and some deaths. Stirling's one of the best writers in the science fiction/fantasy community at describing military action, at conveying the complex factors that determine its success or failure, and at making it emotionally real. Each of his cultures has its own distinctive martial arts and its own preferred weapons. And another major theme of these books is the ethics of war. Stirling is no libertarian, and certainly no anarchist; his characters are rulers, in a society where rulers use force, or directly command those who do. But his heroic characters use force to defend innocent people, shielding

them with their own bodies against criminals and tyrants. In his legends, the king's ultimate role is not to rule the people, but to die for them.

These are adventure stories, but some solid thought has gone into them. I compared the first series to Poul Anderson's *Orion Shall Rise*, with its tapestry of cultures evolving after a nuclear war. In this second series, Stirling adds more well-thought-out cultures to the tapestry, showing the combination of historical necessity and lucky accident that shapes them—for example, the Lakota who took in a Mongolian exchange student after the Change and learned some useful things about traditional Mongol technologies. There are a few scenes where I think his judgment could have been improved, but I find these books intelligent entertainment, with good characters, an interesting theme, and a compelling mystery. I look forward to the rest of the series.

The Justice Cooperative

By Joe Martino

Elderberry Press, 2004

Reviewed by Anders Monsen

What could possibly drive a good person to commit murder? Does killing an evil person justify such an act, or remove guilt? Joe Martino's novel, *The Justice Cooperative*, grapples with these questions through the lives of a young couple caught in a desperate situation.

Tom and Judith Borden lived through a traumatic experience that shattered their lives. Harry Grubbs—an unrepentant criminal—broke into their house, raped Judith in front of her husband, and went to prison vowing revenge. The Bordens seemingly picked up the pieces of the lives and tried to move on, but nothing really stays the same after such an experience. Their marriage suffered, their outlook on life darkened, and future thoughts of a family faded in the aftermath of the brutal attack. When a judge orders a large-scale release of prisoners due to over-crowding, the Bordens are horrified to discover that Grubbs is among those due for early release. Having thought themselves safe, they now experience a new terror. Will Grubbs come after them, and what are their options?

Tom Borden begins to think of self-defense. Spurred by his fear that he was unable to protect his wife earlier, he visits a gun store. Initially he feels out of his depth, uncertain about what gun to buy, and even if a gun really will help him. After all, a weapon in the hands of an untrained user could quickly be turned on the owner by a hardened criminal. Tom also worries about how his wife will think about the idea of guns. The store clerk however tries to ease Tom's fears, suggesting various options to educate Tom, and recommending that his wife also get a gun, and that they seek training.

Together, the Bordens slowly grow used to their new weapons. At gun ranges and training classes they meet new

—Continued next page

—*The Justice Cooperative*, continued from previous page

people and discuss gun laws and gun ethics, along with issues of individual liberty and self defense. Leaving a lesson at a range they discover a paper on their car, about a group calling itself “The Justice Cooperative.” This group promises to solve all their issues related to Grubbs. Initially the Bordens reject the idea; the law will take care of them.

The specter of Harry Grubbs lurks in the corners, an eternal but unknown threat, until one day they see Grubbs in their neighborhood. When they contact the police the response is non-existent, and the Bordens begin to feel like the criminals. Has the legal system abandoned them? After all, this system sent criminals like Grubbs back on the street, and the detective in charge seems more interested in keeping a low profile until his retirement than helping them. Could this “Justice Cooperative” help after all? When they discover the terrible price they must pay to be free from Grubbs, they balk, but then slowly change their minds.

The concept behind this Cooperative is eerie, morally ambiguous. They promise to remove Grubbs, but only if the Bordens first kill someone equally evil, quite a dilemma indeed. The novel skates into dangerous moral territory with such a group. The Bordens engage an elaborate spy game to maintain secrecy, yet take the mission of this group almost at face value. By agreeing to the terms of the Justice Cooperative they essentially agree to commit murder on behalf of a shadow organization, one that in turn could send someone to kill them. Obviously others have been persuaded to kill on behalf of this organization before, and probably will continue should the Bordens finish their mission. Once they commit this murder they are never safe. The justice system certainly would not hesitate to go after them.

Martino’s story is driven by its characters, and the Bordens

feel very real. At times characters fall into the mode of preaching, but the events and reactions are human, poignant, and gripping, unlike some other pro-gun novels I’ve read. The main characters, as well as most of the people they encounter are blue-collar everyday Joes and Janes. Some stereotypes dragged the plot in places, especially in terms of the portrayal of members of law enforcement and the legal profession. Not every cop sees their aim as disarming innocents and being over-protective of convicted criminals, but in Martino’s novel this was more often the case than not.

The book adds another dimension. The Bordens languished in their post-Grubbs incident. Their marriage barely existed, they daily routine fragile. The return of Grubbs acts as a catalyst. They take control of their lives, discover direction and shared interests, and start to love each other again. Could they maintain this path and avoid becoming monsters by agreeing to the terms of the Justice Cooperative, or do they need this ultimate act to exorcize their inner demons as much as the very physical demon?

The Justice Cooperative satisfied on almost every level. It is an emotional novel for our age and time, a reminder that life is precious, that moral decisions are made on many levels, from the ultimate one of life and death, to basic acts of friendship and kindness. The eponymous organization provides a strong moral dilemma to the novel, adding the critical twist beyond a simple revenge and self-defense story.

Although not overtly science fiction in any way, in my opinion the idea of the Justice Cooperative strangely almost qualifies the novel as a work of science fiction. It is one of those powerful What If stories we all expect from SF, and delivers every punch with effort and verve, and ends up being a disturbing yet cathartic tale. The novel essentially asks the reader: could you take on the same mission as the Bordens? Are there other ways?

—*Remember the LFS*, continued from page 2

from my accountant is a way to remember the LFS and other groups I care about while avoiding more taxes when I die. So here’s something else you can do: List the LFS and other tax-exempt nonprofit organizations you care about among the beneficiaries of your tax-protected retirement funds, instead of directly within your will and estate. The big advantage: While the income tax is postponed for 401K and traditional-IRA accounts and therefore must be paid when money from those accounts is distributed, that can be avoided to the extent such distributions bypass your will and estate and go directly to 501c3 tax-exempt groups like the LFS.

In some cases, company 401K accounts require that beneficiaries be listed by percentages rather than dollar amounts. A good way to handle that might be to leave most of the account to your estate, and divide the rest among nonprofit organizations. Even a few percent of a growing retirement account can mean a significant contribution, and you can always adjust the percentages periodically as your retirement accounts fluctuate (hopefully grow) in size.

Because estate planning can be complex, it’s wise to consult

with your accountant and attorney. If you have any questions (including the LFS’ tax-ID number, which is required for identification purposes like Social Security numbers by many company 401K accounts), though, please contact Michael Grossberg at mikegrossb@aol.com

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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, \$10. Strauss, 10 Hill #22-LP, Newark NJ 07102.

Little Brother

By Cory Doctorow

Tor, 2008

Reviewed by Max Jahr

“They who can give up essential liberty to obtain a little temporary safety, deserve neither liberty nor safety.”

—Benjamin Franklin, 1775

The above quote has been paraphrased and quoted in a variety of forms for over 230 years. It defines our current age, especially post 9/11 when the conservatives who had been slumming with the “radicals” splintered the libertarian movement, sacrificing the idea of liberty to the god of war. To those who remain embittered and enraged by the casual dismissal of liberty evinced by various minions of the state and its fellow travelers, Cory Doctorow’s young adult novel, *Little Brother*, raises high a rallying cry for liberty. *Little Brother* ripples and shakes with justified anger. The book crawls under the reader’s skin on the same level as reading true life tales of innocent lives murdered and betrayed by callous and indifferent wielders of state power.

Actual stories in newspaper articles tend to be shunted aside as unreal, removed, faked. Strangely enough, reading about them in a work of fiction creates the opposite effect, making them more real. I imagine many people have felt the agony and pain of Winston Smith during his brief awakening and ultimate terror in Room 101, the most feared room in the Ministry of Love. Humans feel strong empathy for fictional characters in pain; this is the essence of catharsis, the notion of a cleansing release through powerful drama.

It’s no coincidence that I bring up the protagonist of George Orwell’s novel, *1984*, perhaps the most famous fictional warning of absolute statism ever written. Marcus Yallow, the high school age protagonist in *Little Brother*, uses Winston Smith’s name as his handle, although in the hacker style: w1n5t0n. Even the title alludes to *1984*, inverting its very famous concept of Big Brother.

From the opening line Doctorow creates a frisson of rebellion. “I’m a senior at Cesar Chavez high school in San Francisco’s sunny Mission district, and that makes me one of the most surveilled people in the world.” The public education system, unwilling or unable to educate, often goes for that which it can manage: control. In Doctorow’s fictional school, like so many real schools in America, metal detectors and closed circuit cameras spy on virtually every nano-second of students’ lives while in school. In some cases the intrusiveness extends beyond school. From spyware on their computers, to software that identifies a person by their face or way they walk, there are no boundaries to the scope of this desire for control. For kids are unpredictable, and therefore dangerous.

Marcus is a typical 17-year-old kid, disdainful of clueless authority figures, he is technical savvy, smart, and obsessed

with various subcultures where imagination and the real world mingle in ways incomprehensible to outsiders. When he cuts classes with some friends one day to participate in an Alternate Reality Game, where people locate things in real life that are related to an online game, he discovers there are worse things out there than assistant principals bent on knowing every step you make. Such as the Department of Homeland Security.

As Marcus and his three friends range through the streets of San Francisco scavenging for the latest clue in their game, a bomb goes off downtown. In the ensuing confusion, Marcus’s best friend, Daryl, is stabbed. When they try to flag down someone to take Daryl to the hospital, soldiers from DHS swoop down, shut down the city, and arrest Marcus and his friends. The kids are subjected to real and psychological torture to admit their role in the bombing. After surrendering passwords and meekly submitting to the harsh interrogators, they are all released. All except Daryl. And when they try to

find out what happened, they are told things can get worse for them unless they drop it.

But Marcus refuses to drop it, and after initial moments of despair, he decides to go up against the entire Homeland Security in San Francisco. He refuses to subject himself to their absolute and arbitrary control. He also is driven not just by outrage and revenge, but also to locate Daryl

and get him back.

To this end, Marcus will employ every aspect of his hacker knowledge. He essentially creates an underground network, secure from government control (at least before it can be infiltrated). He conceives of small cells that carry out subversive hacks of the government network. Ironically, their intent to wreck havoc with government RFID tracking devices, human behavior software, and other methods of crowd and thought control backfires. This “terrorist” activity serves merely as an excuse by the government for more money, more control.

Using gaming consoles and modified versions of the Linux OS, Marcus quickly builds a virtual and real following, all equally outraged at how a government agency can assume control of an entire city under the pretense that a lethal bombing requires every citizen to give up freedom of movement and thought.

Little Brother contains thematic elements of science fiction from a near dystopian future, to an emphasis on high tech. The computer lingo and hacker attitude mirrors the cyberpunk novels of the late 1980s/early 1990s, but with a far better understanding of the internet. Rather than the virtual reality of the web as imagined a generation ago, Doctorow sees the internet as a method of communication, not a 3-D play world or stylized representation of our fantasies. Interspersed amid the events of the novel are actual applications of software and low-tech means to subvert spyware employed by any government. Marcus is not a bad person. He doesn’t try to extract

“National unity? The whole point of America is that we’re the country where dissent is welcome. We’re a country of dissidents and fighters and university dropouts and free speech people.”

—Continued on page 12

Liberation: Being the Adventures of the Slick Six After the Collapse of the United States of America

By Brian Francis Slattery
Tor, 2008

Reviewed by Anders Monsen

Words and plots spin with a dizzying pace from the mind of Brian Francis Slattery. Like the bright lights and sounds at carnivals that draw in rapt crowds, the literary dazzle on the pages creates the same effect. Slattery's debut book, 2007's *Spaceman Blues*, gave New York City prominent play, making the location as much a character in the plot as the human characters. The evocative title of his second book, *Liberation*, ranges over the world, and especially America, painting a vast Whitmanesque canvas that shows the fragile nature of society amid mankind's strong will to survive.

The long subtitle of *Liberation* gives away the plot of the book, but only in the barest of outlines. The novel opens on a modern day slave ship. From the origin as a prison ship used to deal with overcrowding in American jails, the crew converted its human charges into cargo upon hearing the news of America's collapse. Facing a brutal future, the prisoners strike back against their former guards and current masters. With the ship in their hands, they wander the seas until, amid the news of the total collapse of their homeland, they point the ship towards New York City.

One of the prisoners aboard the returning ship is Marco Oliveira, an enigmatic killer with lightning reflexes, and the former muscle for the free-wheeling crime group known as the Slick Six. The disparate collection of individuals came together briefly for a series of inventive thefts. One common victim of their action was a master criminal known as the Aardvark, who grew tired of being fleeced by the Slick Six. The Aardvark waged a legal campaign that eventually sent Marco to prison and sundered the Six. When Marco returns from his years in exile amid the ruins of America he finds the Aardvark now rules New York City. Like an orphaned boy who needs his surrogate family, Marco sets out to reunite the Slick Six.

We are witnessing a growth-industry in post-apocalyptic fiction and film. Cormac McCarthy's eerie novel, *The Road*, soon will appear on the big screen, and a long list of movies in the same vein are set to follow. Slattery's post-apocalyptic America is less desolate than McCarthy's, but only marginally. Slavery has once more surfaced, with people selling themselves out of desperation. The New Sioux, a Native America army, has resurfaced in the Mid-West, ranging up and down the country in a migratory pattern and an attitude of near arrogance towards the residents in their path. A flesh-eating circus of madmen ranges through the same area, literally absorbing people into its midst like a killer blob with limbs and will.

As I read this book in the waning days of September and into early October I wondered what crystal ball Slattery had used. At this time the subprime mess went nova—caused not by laissez-faire but by the machinations of an inflationary government and the drunk industry it spawned—and sucked down the American economy into its expanding event horizon.

Marco's first act in reuniting the Slick Six means breaking out the leader of the group from the Aardvark's prison. Zeke Hezekiah brought the Six together slowly, picking people for the unique skills: Johanna for her legal acumen, Hideo and Carolyn for their financial skills, and Dayneesha to handle the computers. And Marco, a warrior faster than a whisper, who glides past bullets with ease, handled the battles and the weaponed opposition. Extracting Zeke from prison seems child's play for Marco, and soon they are southward bound to search for the others.

The Aardvark does not forgive transgressions easily, and sends an assassin after them, a man who can see into the past, who can become invisible, and now hunts Marco with Terminator-like persistence. Like superheroes who transcend mere mortals, characters like Marco and this assassin enhance the vast and fantastic world described in *Liberation*. Slattery enjoys language, revels in it, but not at the expense of characters, plot, and action. The novel is a near-perfect blend of all these components. It seethes with life and color, like an open air market at mid-season.

Everything comes back to Marco. In the aftermath of America's economic, political, and moral collapse, it is Marco and not Zeke who assumes a leadership role. Still, when Johanna asks him why he wants to re-unite the Slick Six, he has no answer. As his lawyer and briefly his lover, she bears a strong guilt for letting him take the fall for the other five, for watching him sail away in chains. When Johanna refuses to follow Zeke and Marco, the two hit the road once more to look for Dayneesha. She is holed up in Fort Worth, Texas, a battleground like the rest of the nation, and she gives them bad news. Hideo and Carolyn are slaves, part of the Aardvark's vast empire of human labor.

After the collapse, Hideo and Carolyn survived briefly on their own, before starvation and desperation forced them to sell themselves to one of the many camps along the California coastline. Now they exist at the mercy of a sadistic camp owner in Watsonville. Marco's purpose remains fixed. When Dayneesha's commitment wavers, Zeke and Marco head West on their own, although hours later Dayneesha must revisit her decision when the Aardvark's assassin takes down the last remaining member of her family in his quest to find Marco.

When Marco frees Hideo and Carolyn, his goal remains elusive. All of the Six except Johanna stand there on the beach.

"The law's got nothing to do with right or wrong," Big Mother said. "They're two separate things. Take away the law, it doesn't mean everyone burns everything down, does it?"

—Continued on page 12

—*Little Brother* review, Continued from page 10

steal, or bring down networks. He wants to live a normal life, find his friend, and not have to justify every action and instant of his life to thugs who see independence simply as intent to commit evil acts.

Doctorow writes with a lucid and easy style. Though considered a “young adult” novel, this book is challenging, inventive, intelligent, and angry. The rage is justified and intense, and that intensity reached through the covers and into my soul. I literally picked up the book and could not set it down until the last page. The characters are gripping and real, although some conversations seem lifted from bad movies, and the ending seemed like a let-down of sorts.

Little Brother eloquently makes the case against the excessive government control that seems so *de rigueur* these days. We are fighting a war, we hear. We must grow up and set aside our childish notions of liberty, all for the safety and future of the free world. The few who oppose such ideas are ridiculed; they can expect nothing but swift retribution and violence against them and their loved ones. Against such fierce conservative thought, the idea of individual liberty seems fragile and weak, clearly on the defensive. Doctorow’s novel challenges the notion that you must submit to the security needs of society. Such excessive control fails to achieve anything *but* control. *Little Brother* is entertaining and thought-provoking, a daring work of fiction vital in any age, and especially this one.

—*Liberation* review, Continued from page 11

The Slick Six may never be whole again, although Marco believes one redeeming act can change that and reunite his new family: together they will shatter the slave trade, destroy the Aardvark once and for all. This will be the final, triumphant moment of the Slick Six.

Throughout his life Marco has known only one constant: violence. Since his roots as a child soldier in Latin America when he shot a friend through a direct order, to his days learning the trade at the hands of a master assassin, Marco trained his mind and body in the art of death. This art also keeps him alive, through his nearly super-human skills. I believe that *Liberation* merits strong consideration for the Prometheus Awards. The title covers not just the aim of freeing modern slaves, but freeing oneself. For just as Marco is driven to free slaves, he also must free himself from his past. Only then will his restless soul relax, find a home, happiness, a future.

Brian Francis Slattery writes with a unique voice. From the first few lines the story takes hold and refuses to let go. He weaves in story lines and connections through past, present, and future like a vast tapestry. The fluid, fast-paced narrative overcomes any hints of jarring edits by making every element interesting and amusing; the writing style is simply superb. Once again Tor manages to discover a unique talent, one that skates on the edge of the definitions of SF, but executes that action deftly and confidently.



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