

PROMETHEUS

A Farewell to Ray Bradbury: 1920 — 2012

By Anders Monsen

I've met Ray Bradbury only once in person. On November 20, 1996 I stood in line for several hours at BookPeople in Austin, Texas for a signing of his latest collection, *Quicker Than the Eye*. We were allowed two signed books, so I picked up a reprint of *Fahrenheit 451* in hardback and he signed that one as well. The signing process took mere minutes. I may have mumbled something inane or just said "thank you," but walked away with a cherished memory. Bradbury was a legend while he lived, and his legacy will stretch far beyond his death in 2012. Born in 1920, he lived nearly a century. Always associated with science fiction through his book, *The Martian Chronicles*, he lived through the birth and ascendancy of science fiction, from the pages of pulp magazines to reality.

I trace my first memories of Bradbury's fiction to "The Sound of Summer Running," and other childhood tales like *Dandelion Wine* and *Something Wicked This Way Comes*. Later I watched episodes from The Ray Bradbury Theater, and read more of his stories and books in the early 1990s as I immersed myself in early sf. *The Martian Chronicles*, *The Illustrated Man*, and numerous short stories remain bright in my memory. This year I've made an effort to read all his books that I has set aside in the "to read later" pile, and to locate those books that I never bought.

Bradbury's insight into humanity's dark nature always surprises me. Layers of our memory tends to obscure this fact, like strata of dirt covering ancient cities under centuries of time and memory, only for someone to unearth them and rediscover their true meaning. Re-reading about the eradication of Martians, or the savage beating of someone as a result of their tattoos probably doesn't sink through as deeply into the mind of a teenager as much as an adult, who sees the fiction reflected in the annals of history: the destruction of the American West, the distrust of strangers.

As readers we tend to adopt our own interpretations of certain books. Whether or not Bradbury intended for *Fahrenheit 451* as a warning against the destruction of books and ideas, I embraced that view, and it remains deeply ingrained in my interpretation of his book. He has on many occasions argued with readers about their interpretation of his classic book. The idea of individual liberty appears in multiple Bradbury tales, such as in "Usher II," "The Pedestrian," several of his *Martian Chronicles* stories, and elsewhere. Bradbury

combined the Renaissance and Enlightenment, both in his fiction and persona.

"A Sound of Thunder" and "The Crowd" are well-known classics. Meanwhile, "The Veldt," "All Summer in a Day" and "The Small Assassin" show that human cruelty is not the sole domain of adults. Yet he also wrote poignant stories about the joys of life and pleasures in the small things, as well as love and kindness. He was both a child and a man, someone who never forgot what it meant to be young. While adults see innocence in youth, Bradbury knew we are never truly innocent, young or old. We bear all the ranges of emotion, from fear to love, kindness to wanton cruelty.

Since the moment of Bradbury's debut in 1938, his imagination, lyrical prose, and grasp of what it means to be human has reached deep into the souls of readers, young and old. There is a little piece of Bradbury in each of his stories. For someone who could sit down and hammer out a story in two hours, then revise this over the course of the week, and write a short story every week for 52 weeks a year, this is no surprise. Various episodes from his life seep into the stories. Without having read a biography of Bradbury one might not realize how closely some of his stories are taken from real life and turned into a Bradbury tale. He mined the rich veins of his past, spun characters out of family, friends, chance passers-by he met on trains or on the street.

There will be no more Ray Bradbury stories, no more acerbic wit, no more brilliant words like the colorful leaves of fall swirling in a bright October sky.

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The newsletter of the Libertarian Futurist Society

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Big Head Press: Graphic novelists

In a short few years (2003-2013) Big Head Press has published a dozen graphic novels. Many of its stories appear as serials first on its web site <<http://www.bigheadpress.com>>, before finding their way into gorgeous print editions. Although artist Scott Bieser has drawn the majority of the books, they are written and illustrated by several authors and artists. Some of the authors include L. Neil Smith, with three original stories (*Roswell, Texas*; *TimePeeper*; and *Phoebus Krum*) and an adaptation of his Prometheus Award-winning novel, *The Probability Broach*.

Other authors include Sandy Sandfort (whose ongoing *Escape from Terra* series has reached three volumes), Steven Grant, Mike Baron, Rex F. May, and Susan W. Wells. Stories have ranged from an indictment of the drug war to alternate history, plus science fiction set in the far future, and an adaptation of Homer's *Odyssey*.

One of the current projects is written and illustrated by Scott Bieser. *Quantum Vibe* <<http://quantumvibe.com/>> is a far flung tale set in a future world with both libertarian and statist characters, all of whom have very personal motives, needs, and fears. During the week, one new page is added to the site, and usually my day begins by reading the latest page in the story.

If you like graphic novels, I highly recommend the Big Head Press catalog: art, adventure, libertarian content, and much much more.

—Anders Monsen

Prometheus Submission Guidelines

Without content no publication can survive. In order to continue publishing future issues, *Prometheus* seeks reviews, interview, essays, articles, and columns of interest to libertarian science fiction fans. Any individual may submit material — membership in the LFS is not required.

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.

Letters of comment also are welcome, whether about the reviews, or any questions about LFS, the nominating and voting process. In this digital age the printed press continues to matter, but we need your help to sustain this newsletter.

Contact the editor for more details via email at: editor@lfs.org

Darkship Renegades

By Sarah A. Hoyt

Baen, 2012

Reviewed by Max Jahr

Darkship Renegades is Sarah Hoyt's sequel to her Prometheus Award-winning novel, *Darkship Thieves*. In the first novel, she introduced a fairly libertarian society in the space habitat Eden, an asteroid hollowed out and populated by people who fled Earth, and who created a free society without central government. This society still had rules, or a system of ethics that governed interactions and managed justice and defense, and provided power and water. Eden strictly enforced rules when it came to outside contact, because everyone there feared what would happen if Earth discovered their existence. In *Darkship Thieves*, two Edenites were forced to visit Earth for medical attention, and *Darkship Renegades* opens as they try to return to Eden.

These two, Athena Sinistra and Kit Bartolomeu, have a complicated history, yet are fiercely loyal to each other. Athena, originally from Earth, married Kit; yet, as an outsider it raises suspicions when they arrive, months overdue, and they readily admit that they come from Earth. Behind the paranoia arises an opportunity for control, showing that even a society that treasures individual freedom is not immune to a take-over by individuals who push security and fear as a means to assert dominance. This includes pushing a particularly harsh method of interrogation to seek the truth and extent of Kit and Athena's visit to Earth, a method that triggers a deep-buried secret about Kit's identity to emerge.

In order to provide his innocence they must make one more trip to Earth, during which the buried personality inside Kit begins to assert more and more control. Athena and her crew must worry whether this new personality is a danger to them. On a more personal level Athena is faced with a relationship to a person who no longer is the man she married, who may never return.

Once on Earth, they are embroiled in a civil war, between the Good Men introduced in *Darkship Thieves*, and subjects and clones. Hints at this war began with *Darkship Thieves*, and comes to the forefront in the sequel. The two conflicts parallel each other: the explicit war on Earth and the behind-the-scenes *coup d'état* on Eden, and Athena and Kit's group are in the midst of both.

While I found *Darkship Thieves* a fast-paced blend of romance and adventure, I thought that the sequel sagged somewhat. The conflict within Kit seems forced, and along with the issues on Eden and Earth, clutter and distract, and really appear to fade away with little final impact. Perhaps a more personal element was needed in a book that introduces two major societal conflicts. When the two main characters already have resolved their romance and married, how do you introduce conflict and tension without merely showing bickering grown-ups? Still, Hoyt's worlds and future history continue to fascinate as they evolve, and it will be interesting to read future installments, and see whether Eden and Earth re-unite.

Cold City

By F. Paul Wilson

Tor, 2012

Reviewed by David Wayland

F. Paul Wilson wrote the first Repairman Jack story in 1984. *The Tomb* told a realistic, semi-horror tale about an average guy with a not-so-average life in New York City, who encountered horrific creatures brought over from India in a revenge plot. The central figure in *The Tomb*, known as Repairman Jack, lived outside the law, so to speak. He brought his own moral code, very much in tune with John Locke's thoughts on society: those who initiate violence are fair game. Jack's trade involves fixing difficult problems for people: he is not a murderer for hire, but knows violence can be part of the job.

After *The Tomb*, Wilson left his intriguing character alone on a roof-top, fate unknown, until he wrote *Nightworld*, in 1992, where Jack re-appeared as a supporting cast member, seemingly in a new universe, one more malevolent, almost Lovecraft-meets-Calvin, with monsters and predestination. Then another gap, this time only six years, as Jack re-surfaced in *Legacies*, set after *The Tomb* but before *Nightworld*. And that set the ball rolling, as 13 more Repairman Jack novels followed, one per year, until 2011's *The Dark at the End*, which led directly to *Nightworld*, and the Repairman Jack saga ended.

But not quite. Three young adult novels followed, with Jack aged 14 and entering high school, highlighting the genesis of Jack's future career, yet also infused with characters and elements that appeared in many of the later Jack books. Yet even after *The Dark at the End*, fans clamored for more, and F. Paul Wilson responded with a new trilogy: one set in the years after the death of his mother and before the events of *The Tomb*, detailing how Jack became "Repairman Jack." The first novel in this trilogy is *Cold City*.

The problem Wilson faces is how to write a compelling mid-story about a character with whom so much is known. Jack arrived in *The Tomb* fully formed, a capable, resourceful man of action. In *Cold City* Jack is none of those things, getting by initially on sheer luck and force.

The book opens with Jack arriving in New York with few skills. Leaning on his yard-work experience to find a job in landscaping, we find Jack a lonely, disaffected and quick to anger noob in the city. His one friend is Abe, whose uncle he worked for in his hometown. When Jack's rage costs him his job, he is forced to look for something else, and falls into the world of cigarette smuggling. It's lucrative work, but one on the edge of polite society, where other more darker characters exist. Jack discovers, in this world, protection is only as good as your own, and that means getting to know how to use weapons, and when to use them.

Cold City moves at a brisk pace. The characters are compelling, and we learn a great deal about Abe and Julio, both whom feature in the later RJ novels. We see Jack struggling to loosen the ties to his past, to break free of everything. The traumatic reaction to his mother's death shapes him as a person, but he clearly has a moral foundation, and doesn't embrace nihilism

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Themes of Liberty in *The Twilight Zone*

An Interview with Aeon Skoble by Jeanne Hoffman

Jeanne Hoffman: Welcome to this Kosmos online podcast. I'm Jeanne Hoffman. Today I am pleased to be joined by Aeon Skoble to talk about themes of liberty in the popular TV show *The Twilight Zone*. Dr. Skoble is professor of philosophy at Bridgewater State University. Welcome Dr. Skoble and thanks for being on our podcast.

Dr. Skoble: Happy to be here.

Jeanne Hoffman: First, what is your expertise in *The Twilight Zone*?

Dr. Skoble: It started mainly as some obsessive fan worship of the show. I just watched it a lot growing up, I'm not that old, but it was on re-runs all the time when I was in junior high and high school. I ended up getting pretty familiar with the entire five year run of the series. Much later, when I became an academic, I was asked to start writing about some of the pop culture topics that I was interested in.

Jeanne Hoffman: Have you ever written anything on *The Twilight Zone*?

Dr. Skoble: Yes. Lester Hunt and Noel Carol recently put together a book called *Philosophy in the Twilight Zone*. They asked me to contribute a chapter to it, which I did. I wrote an essay on the episode "Nick of Time," which contemporary audiences might note for having a very early appearance by William Shatner.

Jeanne Hoffman: So you wrote about rationality and choice in "Nick of Time" right? Could you go into that a little bit?

Dr. Skoble: Yes, that is an interesting episode. Most *Twilight Zone* episodes are notable for having a famous twist ending or a supernatural element to it. One of the things that always struck me as fascinating about the episode "Nick of Time" was it doesn't have either a supernatural element, or a strange twist at the end. It draws its suspense entirely from the internal psychological workings of the main character, which as I said, is played by William Shatner. He is a very superstitious man and while he is with his wife at a diner he gets in the grip of a little napkin fortune teller thing. You put a penny into it and it tells you your future.

It's a classic example of the vague prediction. It's like a magic 8-ball in that it spits out vague answers that you can interpret in any way you wish. It's an interesting exercise in confirmation bias; he sees what he wants to see in the answers. He becomes literally irrationally imprisoned by this fortune teller machine. Interestingly, he comes to reclaim his autonomy by recognizing how silly his superstitious beliefs are, and how he is in fact using confirmation bias and other fallacious forms of reasoning.

What's really rewarding about the episode is that he is liberated from his irrationality purely by choosing to do so. His wife is helping him; she is not superstitious, and helps him see that he is being irrational and that he literally loses his autonomy through this irrationality. When he realizes

that his very freedom depends on rejecting superstition and irrationality, then he sees what he's been doing wrong. He goes and reclaims his life.

Jeanne Hoffman: You gave me a list of other episodes that have themes of liberty in them. A couple of them caught my eye that I'd like to ask you to elaborate on. Could you talk about the episode called "The Shelter"?

Dr. Skoble: Sure, at the beginning of the episode we see a neighborhood with people having dinner together, and socializing together. One of them has a bomb shelter in his basement. It's the cold war, and people are concerned about this. Some of his friends think he is being a little too paranoid to have put so much energy into his bomb shelter.

Then the radio alert system comes on and tells them that there is an imminent attack. He and his family bundle off into the shelter where they've got their canned provisions, bottled water, filtered air, and what have you. Then what happens is that his neighbors realize that they don't have a bomb shelter, and that they need to use his. Just as he is about to get into the shelter the neighbors come over, and they want to get into the shelter as well. Of course, the problem is that the shelter is only built for one family. If too many people are placed into the shelter then they will die as the shelter runs out of food, water, and air.

The neighbors start fighting among themselves about who should be allowed into the shelter with him. His position is that "I don't want any of you guys in the shelter, because we'll all die." The neighbors are not only fighting each other, but also eventually getting battering rams to knock the door down. Of course this is completely foolish because if you knock the door down then nobody will be protected by the shelter. They are panicking, and it's a classic case of mob psychology. It's almost like, a Hobbesian state of nature that they are all at each others throats.

The moment there is the threat of a nuclear war they are literally punching each other, knocking down the door, and forcing themselves upon him. The twist is that as they knock down the door, the radio comes back on and says "False alarm. There wasn't a nuclear attack coming at all, we were mistaken." The neighbors say: "Oh, we're so sorry. We hope you can forgive us." He's not sure he will be able to, because he's seen this savage inside of each of them.

Jeanne Hoffman: There is another episode called "On Thursday We Leave For Home" that I thought had a really good moral to it. I wonder if you could go into that, too.

Dr. Skoble: Yeah, that's an interesting science fiction story. Just in case some of the listeners aren't familiar with this: this is an anthology series. There are no repeating characters or settings, every episode is its own free-standing story. So, some

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—*The Twilight Zone*, continued from previous page

take place in the past, some take place present day, and some take place in the future. “The Shelter” that you just asked me about takes place in what was at the time ‘present day’ in the 1960’s. “On Thursday We Leave For Home” takes place in the future somewhere.

What happens is that there is some colony on another planet that has been marooned for thirty years. They have managed to survive because their leader has had a very hard strict rule over them all. He has been simultaneously inspiring them and encouraging them with stories of how wonderful Earth is, but at the same time ruling with an iron hand to maintain order. This has worked in the sense that after 30 years the colony is still alive and well, but he has gotten so use to his power that when the rescue ship finally comes he doesn’t want to go. The ship comes and the colonists pile onto the ship, but he doesn’t. He sort of runs into his cave, and starts going over a litany of rules to an audience of nobody. At the last minute he realizes he has made a terrible mistake by staying behind, but it’s too late and the ship has left.

His power had become an addictive drug, and he couldn’t kick the habit until it was too late.

Jeanne Hoffman: This is the final one I wanted to ask you about directly. Could go into the episode called “The Little People”?

Dr. Skoble: That one is an almost funny example of Acton’s quote about power corrupting. These two space travelers arrive on a planet where the people are the size of ants. One of them decides that “Oh, wow this is great. I can be like a god here.” He steps on them and terrorizes them, and makes them worship him like a god. When it comes time to leave he refuses, and threatens his traveling companion. He tells him “You leave, I’m staying here, and there is only room for one god on this planet.” His friend blasts off, and he’s left there to terrorize these little people.

The twist ending is that another spaceship lands with people that are from his point of view, giants, and they step on him.

Jeanne Hoffman: Is there a similarity with “On Thursday We Leave For Home” in that the character is willing to stay for the sake of power rather than leave to go back to his community?

Dr. Skoble: That’s right. Both of them show, in different ways, the corrupting influence of power. Especially unchecked power.

Jeanne Hoffman: Which episode did I not ask you about that you wish I did?

Dr. Skoble: Well again, this is an anthology series that ran for five years. Most of them didn’t deal with themes that are of interest to classical liberalism. There are a handful of others. The most famous is probably “Eye of the Beholder,” which is an episode about conformity in a tyrannical society.

The episode concerns a young woman in the hospital for plastic surgery, because we are told that she is hideously ugly and disfigured. She just wants to be normal and look like everybody else. It is a very cleverly filmed episode, because we never actually see anybody’s faces until about three quar-

ters of the way in. The bandages come off, and she is by our standards very beautiful. We see that all of the doctors have what we would consider hideously deformed pig-like faces. That is a way of pointing out that beauty is in the eye of the beholder.

Throughout the episode we find that one of the reasons why she is afraid of looking like all of the others is that she actually lives in a society that is ruled by a dictator that enforces conformity of not only appearance but opinion. All of the ones that look freakish by their standards, like you and I look, are all sent off to this colony where they live separately. Their individuality makes them freakish, and that is why they are all corralled off on this separate island colony.

The leader appears on televisions throughout the episode talking about how important it is that everybody look the same and how conformity is so important. What is interesting to the viewer is that she doesn’t look freakish from our point of view at all.

Jeanne Hoffman: So is *Twilight Zone* the greatest show of all time?

Dr. Skoble: Well, I wouldn’t go so far as to say that. Maybe it’s in the top ten. The anthology series has gone out of style as a way of doing television. With an anthology series you get some episodes that are just fantastic and others that are not that great. With five years of stories every week, you are going to get some hits and some misses. I do think that the *Twilight Zone* at its best is television at its best. Using the medium to not only be very entertaining, but to be thought-provoking to challenge people’s settled notions.

Jeanne Hoffman: Well, thank you very much for joining me Dr. Skoble.

Dr. Skoble: You’re very welcome.

This podcast is available to listen online at <<http://www.kosmosonline.org/2011/11/01/podcast-aeon-skoble-on-themes-of-liberty-the-twilight-zone/>>. It is reprinted here with permission of Kosmos.

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<<http://www.kosmosonline.org/2012/07/11/science-fiction-and-liberty/>>

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Kosmos online can be found at

<<http://www.kosmosonline.org/>>

—*Cold City review, continued from page 3*

and despair. While in a sense a criminal, he retains certain scruples that the later Jack has set aside, and this gets him in trouble several times.

One major downside to the novel is that many characters from the later novels appear in a book set long before *The Tomb*, including the ice-cream suit clad actuator, Ernst Drexler, and his young enforcer, Kris Szeto. Both appeared for the first time in 2009's *Ground Zero*, yet Wilson must regret not having introduced Drexler sooner, as he shows up in the young Jack books and now again figures as a main antagonist in the twenty-something Jack books. Having wished for a Secret History-free "City" trilogy, I anticipate the next two books will simply push that angle harder, to the detriment of Jack's history and growth into Repairman Jack. That said, Wilson's skill at pacing and character development make any of his books nearly impossible to set down. With the sequel due out in late 2013 and the final book in 2014, we have a complete Repairman Jack saga from beginning to end.

Lost Everything

By Brian Francis Slattery

Tor, 2012

Reviewed by Anders Monsen

Words, scenes, characters, and settings ebb and flow through Brian Francis Slattery's third novel, a post-apocalyptic nightmare that manages to make Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*, or *The Book of Eli* movie, look like a trip through Disneyland. Taking place almost entirely along a small stretch of the north branch of the Susquehanna River in Pennsylvania, a stream of consciousness flows through the text like the river on which it takes place.

More a tale of life and war, death and hope, rather than one dealing with liberty, the novel could just as easily have taken place along the Euphrates in the current Syrian war or the Mekong in the late 1960s, or the Mississippi in the 1860s. The book relates casual tales of violence, random bullets and brutality along with friendship and family, love and loyalty.

Although not as coherent a tale as Slattery's other two novels, it's clearly darker as everyone seems to be waiting for the Big One to hit, even after clearly other massive events have sent American society into a long death spiral. Although his previous novel, *Liberation*, also dealt with a post-apocalyptic future, *Lost Everything*, as the title reflects, goes far beyond anything in *Liberation's* future.

Here the two main protagonists set out to see a son, left behind for safety, as a resistance group battles soldiers in a never-ending war. Agents are sent against these two, with orders to kill, aware of their destination. As the boat on which they've hitched a ride lazes up river, stories and characters whip in and out like flotsam drifting along the current. Slattery's prose is elegant at times, but often dizzying. There is little room to pause, to get to know the characters, and I came away disappointed, given how much I enjoyed his previous two books.

Quick Fixes

Tales of Repairman Jack

By F. Paul Wilson

2011

Reviewed by Rick Triplett

Fans of F. Paul Wilson drew a lot of inspiration from his early works, such as *Healer*, *Wheels Within Wheels*, and *An Enemy of the State*. These had very prominent pro-liberty themes. Since then, Wilson has continued to produce novels and stories with satisfying, well-paced prose and with plots always sympathetic to individualism and justice. He is also an accomplished and popular author in the horror genre, though even there he always depicts heroic struggles against horrific forces.

One of his most popular series is undoubtedly the Repairman Jack tales. He announced the last one a few years ago, but ardent fans pressed him so hard that he promised a couple more additional novels and has started a YA series of Jack in high school.

While the Jack tales do not clearly push a libertarian theme, Jack himself lives a vividly libertarian life. I expect many thousands of readers have become advocates of rational individualism simply from reading about a man who lives "off the grid," virtually invisible to the IRS and other authorities, while still maintaining a social life and high standards of justice and personal responsibility.

As the Jack novels continued, they increasingly included plot elements from Wilson's horror writing, the "Otherness series." While these story elements are immensely entertaining, they did not always focus on issues of liberty or stick to the hard science that some readers prefer. Nevertheless, Jack's impressive courage and determination in the face of evil made for an engaging read!

Wilson did not limit Jack to his novels. As the years passed, he would occasionally weave Jack into short stories he produced. In 2011 he released *Quick Fixes*, a collection of short stories featuring Repairman Jack. These are cleverly plotted, told in Wilson's trademark fluid, page-turner style, and—good luck for libertarians—have almost no Otherness but a lot of Jack's taking action to right wrongs independently of government.

There are ten stories in this collection, three of which have been incorporated into novels and hence may seem familiar to some readers. All of them show Jack doing what he does best: fixing problems, usually for a fee. Each story is preceded with a brief introduction by the author, and these are as interesting as the stories themselves. In one very harrowing story, Jack's worst fear comes to pass: he gets involved with the police; but the predicament is resolved in a way that reminds us of what a great story teller F. Paul Wilson is. The book is available in paperback.

Avogadro Corp and AI Apocalypse

By William Hertling

2011 and 2012

Reviewed by David Wayland

This pair of novels is set in the same universe; the second one is set a few years after the events in the first book. They are fairly fast-paced and focus on the rise of Artificial Intelligence and how one or many AIs would interact with humans. Each book addresses a different “genesis” story of AI type entities, yet both are accidental. The humans in the novel do not set out to create an AI, unlike possibly many scientists in today’s world who may have thought about how this could happen.

In the first novel, Avogadro is a start-up company that focuses on selling email software. Current email programs have the ability to suggest and correct spelling, organize email, and behave in semi-intelligent ways. A couple of software developers set out to make a far more intelligent program, called ELOPe, one that almost re-writes your email based on algorithms analyzed from vast troves of email messages. David Ryan has invested everything in his baby, and leads this team. His main developer, Mike Williams, is his more sensible counter-point, looking for solutions but not as emotionally attached to the program.

This program would look at the type of message being crafted and modify words or phrases based on the subject matter and target audience. Their project exists in R&D in Avogadro, one of many such projects. However, in their efforts to analyze every kind of email possible, they are consuming vast amounts of server resources, and this sets them at odds with procurement and management. After being told their project has only two weeks to prove itself scalable and justify current resources, the main force behind the new program writes some rogue code. This is the spark that appears to create an AI, once it consumes and analyzes email under the new code.

Before David and Mike realize what's going on, ELOPe has quietly started to protect itself. Email messages are intercepted and re-written. New applications are requisitioned that will bridge other applications to ELOPe via email. And, more dangerously, requests are made to arm off-shore an datacenter with remote controlled weapons systems. David, unaware of how far ELOPe has evolved, decided to remove his rogue code, and discovers that this no longer is possible. Certain events escalate, and he and others who become aware of an AI in the system now must take drastic measures to combat the rising influence of this silent power. But will it be enough? And should they even try? After all, after ELOPe extended beyond Avogadro’s servers and into the rest of the world, peace and stability suddenly seemed on the rise.

Meanwhile, *AI Apocalypse*, like the title implies, is a far more overt and dangerous origin story. Set a few years later, with Avogadro computers and networks still dominant, the narrative shifts to three young high-schoolers. They are gamers and programmers, gifted yet trying not to attract attention to their skills. The main protagonist, Leon Tsarev, son of Russian immigrants, is contacted by an uncle in Russia, who makes his

living writing custom virus applications for the Russian mafia. Their botnet dominance is on the wane, thanks to ELOPe. Leon’s uncle thinks that Leon can help write a killer app to save his uncle, who is under serious pressure. Using his knowledge of evolutionary biology Leon writes an evolving virus that he calls Phage, and sends this over to Russia.

The Phage virus appears to work, but before Leon is aware of what is happening it replicates itself as it spreads, evolving and forking as something requires it to change. Within days the world’s entire computer environment appears infected, taking many systems offline and spawning disasters on a massive scale. The three kids flee their neighborhood, trying to find a safe location where they can battle what they now believe to be a rogue AI, but is in reality many rogue AIs.

These spontaneously evolved AIs develop a system of trade and barter amongst themselves, and then, as Mike Williams and ELOPe from the *Avogadro Corp* novel get involved, they begin trading with humans as well. A few years have passed since the events in *Avogadro Corp*, and Mike now works closely with ELOPe, which appears to have the personality of a young adult or teenager, though a super-smart one. The personality of ELOPe appears quite similar to that of Mike in Robert A. Heinlein’s *The Moon is a Harsh Mistress*. As ELOPe opens communication with the virus AIs, it also discovers who created the new AIs, and reaches out to the three kids, transporting them to Portland so they all can deal with the aggressive nature of the AIs.

While the single AI in *Avogadro Corp*, seemed fairly benign, despite how it armed itself and seemed willing to kill in what it perceived self-defence, the AIs in *AI Apocalypse* are quite the opposite. They are aggressive, seek to destroy or dominate their own kind, and are quick to see humans as a threat and take action against them. This is the future of *The Matrix*, though not quite to the point of making humans into batteries. Despite this aggression, the AIs, since they essentially involved along different paths, some of the AIs are able to see the benefits of trade and cooperation with humans. Yet it only takes one to start a war, and the most aggressive of AIs declare unilateral war against ELOPe and the humans, and in the span of a few minutes a full-scale world-wide battle takes place between these two systems. Can Leon and his team stop it in time?

Both of William Hertling’s novels take the rise of artificial intelligences as inevitable, a natural result of distributed nodes or computing power. Throw together enough computers in a network, and something will click and an intelligence that parallels human intelligence will result, and fairly quickly. This what if scenario he mines for two interesting novels, as he considers pros and cons of such a type of intelligence. Humans tend to see themselves at the top of the pyramid, but what happens if something appears that possibly supersedes humans? How will humans react? How will that other “being” react? Science fiction has produced a plethora of AI novels, stories, and movies. Until (or if) something like that ever appears, authors will continue to speculate how these things might appear, what they might do, and how humans will react. Hertling’s novels are an interesting approach. There is little overt libertarian content, but much food for thought nonetheless.

Dystopian novels on the horizon

A previous issue of *Prometheus* covered the rise of young adult dystopian fiction, with the wide popularity of the Hunger Games trilogy. Some other dystopian fiction with planned reviews in *Prometheus* include the following:

Intrusion, by Ken McLeod. Currently only available as a UK edition (hardback and paperback), a story of medicine and state control.

The Registry, by Shannon Stoker (Morrow, June 2013). Subtitled: Freedom is the Ultimate Crime. In a future America where girls are raised to be bought and sold, and boys raised to be soldiers.

Reached, by Ally Condie (Dutton, November 2012). A juvenile futuristic adventure with a heroine, the final book in a trilogy that includes *Matched* and *Crossed* about a girl escaping a controlled society.

The Office of Mercy, by Ariel Djanikian (Viking, February 2013). A Huxley-Orwell inspired story about a high-tech underground settlement where one person starts to question what goes on outside their habitat.

Article 5, by Kristen Simmons (Tor, 2012). New York, Los Angeles, and Washington, D.C., are gone. Something called the Moral Statutes has replaced the Bill of Rights. Soldiers have replaced the police, and every crime leads to arrest, trial, and often disappearances.

Breaking Point, by Kristen Simmons (Tor, February 2013). Sequel to *Article 5*. The protagonists of the previous novel continue their struggle against the government and the Federal Bureau of Reformation.

Son, by Lois Lowry (2013). Set in the same universe as *The Giver* and other books.

Allegiant, by Veronica Roth (2013). Final book in Divergent trilogy (*Divergent*, *Insurgent*).

Many of these have common themes, raise interesting questions about life in difficult circumstances. The number of dystopian books published have risen from one or two a decade to five or more per year. From zombies, to robot networks, the apocalypse is everywhere in fiction and film. Such an environment is ripe for ideas on liberty.



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