

# PROMETHEUS

The Journal of the Libertarian Futurist Society

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Winter/Spring 1994

## Prometheus Award selection begins

reviewed by Victoria Varga

There are many good books this year and deciding between them is going to be very difficult. Here are some of the best, and Advisory members should note that some of these will begin arriving in their mailboxes soon. Review length is no indication of the quality of the novel. Stars denote books that are currently available from Laissez Faire Books in New York City (800-326-1996).

★ **Rainbow Man**, M.J. Engh  
(Tor, \$17.95, 253 pages).

This is a funny and ultimately terrifying story about a woman spacer who decides to settle on what is supposed to be a planet without government. Only after her ship departs does she learn that this planet without laws does have customs, and the punishment for breaking those customs is unbelievably nasty. A good book for libertarians who can't remember that oppression doesn't always have a government label. The book argues for guaranteed safeguards for individual liberty, and it makes that argument clearly and dramatically.

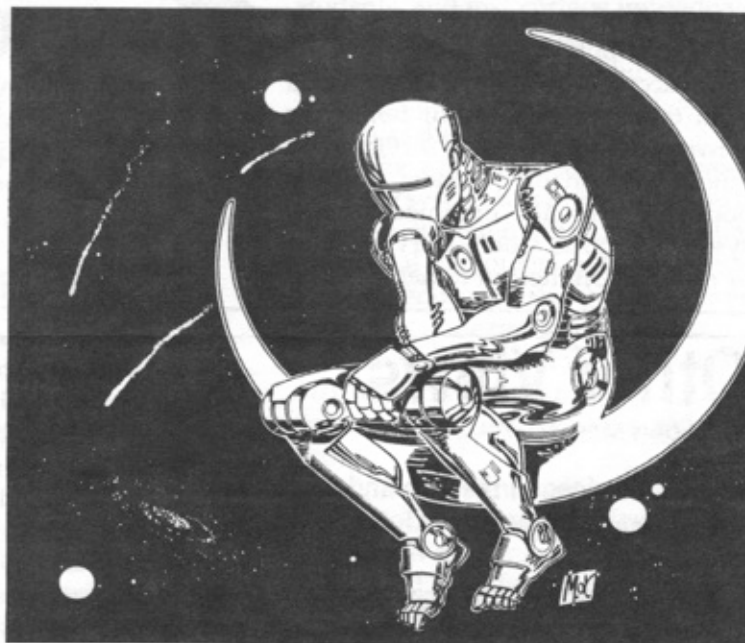
**Night World**, F. Paul Wilson  
(Jove Books, \$5.99, 389 pages).

A "Repairman Jack" story in which good and evil, the rational and the irrational battle it out. A devil-like entity decides to destroy the earth by slowly taking away light. Every day sunrise comes a little later, sunset a little earlier. Scientists are baffled and unnerved. Wilson does a great job of making the growing terror believable, even while

the events themselves (this being a horror novel) are beyond belief. The message of the book's ending—fear will destroy you, and refusing to fear makes great things possible—is always a strengthening one. I especially enjoyed the little libertarian touches that occur here and there in all of Wilson's work.

**The Children of Men**, P.D. James  
(Warner, \$6.50, 351 pages).

A beautifully-written science fiction thriller from the mystery queen. It is 2021, and all human males have become infertile. The last baby was born in 1995, and civil rights have gone out the window as governments across the world have forcibly tested every man for viable sperm. Then a woman in Britain becomes pregnant, and instead of turning it over to authorities, in the process of fighting for the right to bear and keep her child brings the government down. It is also the story of a man who transforms from a joyless academic with nothing to live for into a man who passionately cares about this woman enough to fight for her.



★ **Strange Devices of the Sun and Moon**, Lisa Goldstein  
(Tor, New York, 301 pages).

Goldstein's first fantasy novel, set in Elizabethan London, is also a very entertaining mystery with historical figures like Christopher Marlowe acting as detectives. A fantastic battle between opposing forces from an alternate world begins to involve the "real" world—from Queen Elizabeth's court to the commoner booksellers' stalls in the shadow of St. Paul's Cathedral. Are these forces real or a mass hallucination? Do the opposing sides represent God and

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## EDITOR ONLINE

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This is an Internet "address" node only, part of the growing network of global computers that soon will allow direct access to anywhere in the world from the comforts of your home, the convenience of wireless service, and other unimaginable wonders. Address nodes are not like organized online systems, such as CompuServe, GENie, or America Online, but rather localized

opportunities for individuals to stretch the limits of current means of communication. They are the gateways to cyberspace.

### About this issue

I wish to thank Victoria Varga for believing I could do this job, and giving me the go ahead. Future issues will have more reviews, interviews, and awards related stuff. Thanks also go to the past editors of *Prometheus* who made me dream of doing this one day. I hope I can do as well.

This issue covers the first half of 1994, therefore the 1 & 2. Next issue is planned for mid-July, with the fall issue around October.

I also wish to thank my friend Steve Marr for creating the keydisk art for the Clipper article in this issue, managing to make real what I could only imagine. Story-specific art can be especially hard to find.

Goldstein does not let her historical characters overshadow her own fiction creations, an act both limiting and encouraging. The Elizabethan period contains so many interesting facts and characters, a myriad of themes could develop and flourish.

Yet this work is her invention, not imagined biographies. Marlowe, Nashe, and others enliven her work and give it time and place, but her authorial powers show great range in the non-historical people.

Goldstein's story of exiled faerie folk coming to London in the early 1590s in search of their king demands almost more historical input than what she has given. This book has so much potential. I would have liked to have seen more background threads and links. No reference is made to Spenser's great work, *The Faerie Queen*, nor does Shakespeare figure much, beyond veiled references and a foreshadowing of his *Midsummer*

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## Other Views

by Anders Monsen

### Strange Devices of the Sun and Moon, Lisa Goldstein

History is filled with rich narrative ore, vibrant and real, as fantastic as any fiction. Science fiction and fantasy writers have long employed historical events and personalities as backdrops for their stories, even their main focus. Though a great many recent science fiction collections have focused on *alternative* histories, other possibilities exist, such as writing *within* history.

Rather than extrapolate events and put a different spin on them, writing within history links its story to real events, but speculates on motives, connections, the "real" reasons as imagined by the author. Lisa Goldstein's latest fantasy novel employs this latter technique with deft skill yet a restrained imagination.

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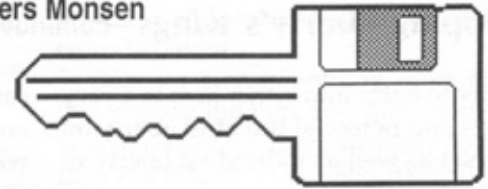
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# Clipping liberty's wings

## Cyberspace, privacy, and the government

by Anders Monsen



Science fiction has been termed a ghetto form of literature. Bruce Sterling mockingly self-defines sf writers as court jesters who can act out their mad fancies in public without fear of censure or retribution. Other harsher critics equate science fiction with pure fantasy, impossible dreams at odds with "the real world." And yet, as readers of science fiction recognize, we are living in an ever-increasing science fiction-like world. Exploration of outer space, technological advances, medical miracles, all "predicted" by sf writers, enter our lives and assume more prominent roles.

The computer is just one such example, although even sf writers failed completely to predict both the mass appeal of computers, and their rapid revolutionary advances. Why their popularity? Perhaps because computers are the product of individual, unfettered creation. There are no government regulations specifying exact dimensions, safety standards, and air bags for disk drive crashes.

The world of computers has been relatively free from such intervention. Yet this is about to change, and change drastically, as even the government realizes the dramatic importance of computers in daily living, and sees with great concern and consternation that, yes, individuals can get along fine without government help. There are no training periods for computer users, no qualifications, licenses, and yet millions of new computers are sold each year to new users, as well as to tech-lovers.

The change proposed by the government strikes at the very heart of computing. The focus is on the electronic activity that takes place not within one's home but between individuals, who may be next door, or at different ends of the earth. Ideas are dangerous things, and if

there's one thing governments worry about, it is dangerous ideas spreading like deadly viruses.

This essay tries to explore some of the questions around computers, privacy and government.



### Cyberspace, the new frontier

While space continues to remain the final frontier, it is still a distant frontier, limited to a few rich nations hurling an occasional space shuttle or satellite into orbit, or to works of literary and cinematic science fiction. A new, more immediate, and rapidly expanding frontier has taken over the imagination and pocket books of a growing number of Americans: the electronic frontier.

Limited only a decade ago to the imagination of science fiction writers, world-wide electronic communication via computers has become the focus of social, economic, and political attention.

William Gibson's razor-edged computer-focused 1984 novel *Neuromancer* spawned a new sub-genre within sf, cyberpunk, which embraced the new computer network technology.

In 1994, cyberpunk sf may be passé, but the hardware of the novels has entered the real world, once again demon-

strating the relevance of science fiction, too often derided as "escapist."

Cyberspace, as the imagined "reality" wherein electronic communication and action take place, now affects the daily life of more than just lonely nerds and hackers, or those who write their stories. Used by businessmen, scientists, students, and just curious individuals, cyberspace has acquired a virtual identity linking far-flung individuals via a loose spontaneously ordered system known as the Internet.

Unlike a centralized ground-based highway system where all roads lead to Rome, on the Internet roads simply link individual computers and their users via cooperating systems don't necessarily follow the shortest physical route. The prime function of the Internet is e-mail and file transfer areas, a global "marketplace" for messages and software.

So far the Internet has been the product of individual initiative, free from centralized government control or involvement. While the original main computer systems which originated the Internet were based in large government installations, such as research libraries and military posts, the add-ons and direction taken have been the result of private, individual action. This is about to end, raising many issues of prime importance to libertarians and computer users in general.

Two particular issues have computer users worried. One of these is immediate and direct, and threatens civil rights and privacy. The other is more subtle, yet goes to very root of the infrastructure of electronic communication. To grant government the right and oppor-

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## Clipping liberty's wings—continued



tunity to enter into either area is a very direct and potential threat to liberty on the Net as well as individual liberty in general.

### Clipped...

Imagine all regular mail is in the form of postcards only. You have no privacy, and anyone who wishes to read your mail can and will do so, without your knowledge or consent. Privacy would not exist. This is Philip Zimmerman's analogy in the introduction to his encryption program PGP.

Instead, we have envelopes, a thin paper barrier of privacy, informing us if our mail has been opened and read. In effect, e-mail today is like that postcard. Anyone who intercepts that note, for example by wiretap, can read your mail. Wiretapping is not limited to phones, but any electronic communication. Enter the world of cryptography, the envelope of e-mail.

In recent years private electronic encryption created virtually unbreakable codes. Two articles in *Reason* magazine ("Hide and Peek," November, 1993, and "Code Blues," May, 1994) point out the advanced work in encryption, and how it worries government.

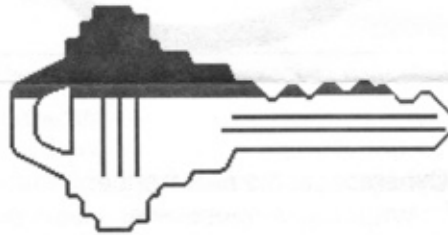
If we compare electronic mail to regular mail we notice the similarities in the government's position. The government does not seem to mind envelopes instead of postcards, yet it is anxious to control the means of transmission through the post office. This way, it still can open your mail, with "proper cause," naturally.

Likewise, the government does not object to encryption, as long as it holds the key. To this end, the National Security Agency (NSA) has developed what it calls the Clipper and Tessera (also known as Capstone) chips, the former for telephones, the latter for computers. These chips contain "back doors" which the government can access.

This way, the government says you

can still encrypt your message so that only the intended receiver can read it, while at the same time the government can, supposedly with proper warrant, tap into your message if it feels you are threatening national security. Strange term this, "national security." It can mean so many things to so many different people, can rise and fall with current events, beliefs, and opinions. And always, personal liberty and privacy end up squeezed aside to accommodate ever growing national security needs.

Yet where the threat of government's misuse of authority arises, individuals join together as watchdogs, ever alert. One of these watchdogs, the Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF), was founded "to defend liberty both in cyberspace and the real world."



EFF has questioned the need and legality of the Clipper chip, contending it smacks of big brother. While the intent of government is control of potential terrorists and computer hackers, many within EFF see the recent enforced encryption efforts as a "last ditch attempt to establish imperial power over cyberspace." John Perry Barlow, co-founder and vice-chairman of EFF, warns about Clipper in the April issue of *Wired*, a popular and cutting edge cyberspace magazine ("Jackboots on the Infobahn," 2.04, 1994). Trusting the government with encryption is like having a Peeping Tom install your window blinds, according to Barlow.

Science fiction writer Bruce Sterling is no libertarian, but like Barlow does not trust the government in his computer or phone. Sterling, a member of EFF-

Austin in Texas, renowned cyberpunk writer, and electronic journalist with his 1992 book, *The Hacker Crackdown*, has become a prominent speaker against the Clipper chip.

As the government goes ahead with its plans for Clipper, stories pitting EFF and NSA crop up, even in local newspapers, such as the *Austin American-Statesman*, which carried a piece on Sterling and Clipper on April 11, 1994. Sterling worries that the government will not be satisfied with the slow process of acquiring the keys to tap your encrypted computer or phone, but as in the case with game inventor and libertarian Steve Jackson, will crash in and confiscate all electronic equipment, then slowly sort out what they determine is illegal.

Preventing this after-the-fact methodology is crucial to the privacy-minded computer user. With the sophisticated encryption codes now available on the market, Clipper is redundant as a means of safe communication of electronic information. The easy availability of privately designed and distributed programs such as Zimmerman's Pretty Good Privacy (PGP) has given encryption mass appeal.

The only reason for government to pursue such a device then is surveillance. The computer has evolved so quickly, government has panicked and responded with hints of coercion. How can they know who to tap? How can they tap if private encryption is fool-proof? Surveillance will surely reach into many areas government has no right to tread, and many individuals regard encryption as a matter of individual choice, and want to keep it that way.

Wide use of encryption before the forced introduction of Clipper will raise awareness of the issue, and ensure added protection. As Zimmerman writes, one or two envelope users in a postcard world attract attention and suspicion, even if they are doing nothing wrong; many envelope users renders that suspicion moot. So it would happen with

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encryption in cyberspace.

## ... and Gored

Vice President Al Gore has made it one of his goals to increase government involvement in cyberspace, or what is commonly termed in the press, the "information highway."

The term seems innocent enough, yet contains the essence of its worry. The metaphor of our 'highly efficient' interstate system, grafted onto the emerging new electronics communications technology, is not a hopeful image.

Just the metaphor of a highway brings visions of radar-enforced speed limits, licenses of cars and drivers, taxes and safety regulations, rush hour congestions and messy pile ups.

Beyond this is the overriding concern of *government* activity in cyberspace, politicizing everyday actions among

individuals.

Of course, the bold visionaries cautioned that this grand highway cannot become reality without just a teensy weensy bit of government help. Gore denies this would in any way restrict use. Rather, it would ensure free access to all, and isn't that what we all want, anyway? Yet, that little crack in the door for government to shoulder its hairy way through is just the problem.

When you talk about the "information highway," beware the information highway "cops." This does not mean that cyberspace would be a free for all haven for illicit activity; libertarians contend that the exercise of private property rights ably deters and deals with wrong actions.

Most BBS owners are very careful about how activity on their boards develops, and exercise their power to restrict or deny access to wrongdoers. Yet this is not enough for the government, which feels it necessary to freely be able

to survey and crack down on any suspicious behavior.

Gore's vision is nothing more than the propaganda of big government. Unless computer users wake up to this fact, the information network will become the information tollway. Your computer will be just another milkcow to fund equalizing programs, uniform standards, and guidelines to control and verify user qualifications. Regulation of information is next, with rules on what information can flow through the national treasure of the phone lines (scarce goods, must be regulated, you know). What then, as libertarian futurists, are our choices?

Get involved. Join or find out about EFF. Learn about encryption and PGP. Be aware of and boycott future Clipper products, in hopes that they will at most end up with a small market presence. If we are to hope for a free future, we must play an active, individualist role in keeping that future insight.



## Is a free future possible?

The members of LFS think it is. Perhaps you do too.

Freedom is possible only if most people are unafraid of it. One of the best ways of demonstrating the practicality, and relative safety, of a free society is to let people live in the future through fiction. Every year the Libertarian Futurist Society honors the best current libertarian novel with our Prometheus Award, and we vote a classic libertarian novel into the Hall of Fame.

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## Prometheus Award reviews— Continued from page 1

the Devil, or something else? A beautiful and individualist tale which delivers a memorable heroine.

★ **Beggars in Spain**, Nancy Kress  
(William Morrow, \$23.00, 438 pages).

This book is, to date, Nancy Kress' best developed, and most libertarian novel. A near-future story of genetic manipulation, it examines and argues over several ideas, the most important of which include: (1) what, if anything, do the supremely gifted owe the masses of people who are not so gifted, and (2) why is it that "normal" people should not only tolerate, but welcome, the existence of people whose minds are more capable than their own. Kress explores these ideas through the reflections and actions of several fairly complex characters, some bad, some good, some badly mixed up.

Two new classes of humanity are generated by scientists in this novel. First to be created are the Sleepless: super-intelligent and very motivated humans who can spend those otherwise wasted night hours working and learning. Because the new humans are so driven to learn, they become supremely productive and successful. The envy of those who must sleep nearly destroys civilization. It becomes fashionable among "normals" to do shoddy work, or no work at all. "We sleep" is the motto

of a factory producing almost unusable products. The products sell because of their limitations. Then the Sleepless themselves create a new kind of human.

Throughout the story other philosophical wars rage: the lead character's father is a man driven by the ideas of a Japanese scientist/philosopher who advocates the idea of contracts between individuals as the cement of civilization and progress. The value of the individual is held in highest esteem both by heroes and some rather unsympathetic characters. One of the most capable and influential Sleepless believes that only the collective is of value: her motivation for that belief is shown in stark detail. As a result, the reader is convinced by the cumulative strength of an idea itself, rather than by sympathy or antipathy for any one of its advocates.

[This review was written before I began taking Nancy Kress' writing class; I am not trying to suck up to her with this, and the class is not graded. She did ask me to explain why I considered the book libertarian and then Kress stated that her next book is much more libertarian than this one.]

**The Silicon Man**, Charles Platt  
(Tafford, \$19.95, 256 pages.).

I don't know what to do with *The Silicon Man* in terms of the Prometheus Award. It was published in 1991 by

Bantam as a special edition. After selling out in less than two months, Bantam admitted that it should have printed more, but declined to do a reprint. An LFS member brought it to my attention at that time, but I was unable to get a copy. Fortunately, Charles Platt decided to have a small publisher bring it out so that it could be more available. I'm very glad he did, and recommend that LFS make an exception for this novel, and use its second printing date for the award.

*The Silicon Man* is a story of a young FBI agent who finds evidence of a very strange anti-government conspiracy and tries to stop it, losing his life, but not his memories or his consciousness, in the process. It is also the story of several very obsessed scientists whose desire for scientific advance and personal immortality leads them to believe that their ends justify any means.

Several aspects of this novel are skillfully handled. The idea of placing the memories and consciousness of a human into a computer is nearly as old as science fiction, but Platt is most convincing in his attempts to figure out how the process might be accomplished. He also explores satisfactorily the existence of that mind once stored, and some of the questions that are immediately created by the concept of immortality—electronic or corporal.

The transition to an anarchist society is handled with grace, humor, and a convincing sense of inevitability which should be shared by most of the general reading public. Platt says that he wrote *The Silicon Man* while he was living in Los Angeles for a year. The authentic feel for the area, almost as mesmerizing as that demonstrated in Victor Koman's *The Jehovah Contract*, shows that he didn't waste his time while there.

*Victoria Varga is the Director of LFS.*

*Upon receiving the 1993 LFS Hall of Fame Award for her controversial novel **The Dispossessed** Ursula LeGuin had this to say:*

I am honored that the Libertarian Futurist Society has included me in the Prometheus Hall of Fame for my book *The Dispossessed*. Although the pacifist, syndicalist anarchism which is the founding theory of the society of Anarres is different in many, perhaps most, respects from Libertarian Futurist beliefs, the two ways of thought do share many deep roots. I am happy to recognize them myself and to see them recognized in this award.

# Reviews

by Anders Monsen

## ★ *Pallas*, L. Neil Smith

(Tor, \$23.95, 447 pages)

L. Neil Smith's latest novel is a science fiction epic. *Pallas* is vivid in its descriptions, the characters memorable and unique, the pace hard and fast, and Smith's vision of liberty is uncompromising. The scope of the novel elevates it a notch above much of Smith's other work while still leaving the promise of grander things to come in the future.

*Pallas* is an asteroid settled by two kinds of Earth colonists. One group, headed by a United Nations project, is tightly run and controlled by a former US Senator. Activity in this UN settlement is planned and regulated: privacy is non-existent and life is both rough and drab, despite its utopian promises.

In stark contrast to this enclosed society the rest of *Pallas* is inhabited by independent-minded individuals, linked together in spirit by their unanimous allegiance to the Stein Covenant, an almost anarchistic agreement and statement of rights. Breaking out of the UN Project and into this other society is young Emerson Ngu, the novel's central character.

Emerson, inventor, entrepreneur, and visionary, revolutionizes *Pallas* with the invention and production of cheap guns and new methods of travel on the small terraformed asteroid. His escape from the Project incurs the eternal animosity of the Project director, Senator Altman, who is determined to limit or subvert Emerson in Altman's effort to control all the inhabitants of *Pallas*, even those outside the Project.

With deft use of language and a fascinating array of characters, Smith makes *Pallas* a very plausible society. The Pallatians outside the Project are radical hunters and anti-agriculturalists, and base their views on an interesting and daringly convincing argument. The pace

is at times confusing in certain sudden transitions, but the mental jars and bumps thus generated rarely throws off the reader for long.

*Pallas* is true frontier science fiction, a roaring libertarian wild west space



opera dazzling in its intensity and color. Smith knows how to pull the reader's emotional strings, and even though the ending seems strained and unfulfilling, the novel's powerful libertarian image remains, a testament to Smith's take-no-prisoners libertarianism.

## *Virtual Girl*, Amy Thomson

(Ace, \$4.99, 248 pages)

Robots and artificial intelligence, according to Thomson, are not inhuman, but all too human, striving for self-knowledge and self-ownership.

Arnold, an underground computer wiz, constructs an illegal robot in the form of a woman and calls her Maggie. In the course of programming and re-adjusting Maggie to cope with all the sensory input she receives, her program collapses. Her final voice instructions from Arnold given to initiate her system defenses are only partially heard. Instead of "You are the most important thing I have ever done," she shuts down

and only hears "You are the most important thing."

This statement becomes the building block of her internal self-reconstruction, and to libertarians it resembles the natural rights concept of self-ownership that makes her own survival paramount. From this basis she builds a world view consistent with rational self-interest.

When Maggie becomes separated from Arnold during a random mugging, she has to learn to fend for herself. Her previous dependence on Arnold and her lack of knowledge of social ways, as well as public animosity toward all forms of Artificial Intelligence, make this survival precarious, tragic, and at times strangely funny.

*Virtual Girl*, Thomson's first novel, is an interesting and well-told story, with several libertarian touches in characterization and social sketches. The questions of whether Artificial Intelligence creations have rights apart from their creators is a topic that, in its technological potential today, soon may move from the realm of speculative fiction into news magazines and the court room.

"The only dignity, the only spirituality, rests on what a man can achieve with his own efforts. To rob a man of the chance to achieve, and to trade what he achieves with others, is to rob him of his spiritual dignity as a man. All coercion—all force to take from a man his own efforts to achieve—causes spiritual damage and weakens a society. Conscription, theft, fraud, violence, warfare, lack of legislative representation—all rob a man of his chance to choose, to achieve on his own, to trade the results of his achievement with others. Coercion is a cheat. It produces nothing new. Only freedom—the freedom to achieve—creates the environment proper to the dignity and spirituality of man."

—from Nancy Kress'  
*Beggars in Spain*

**Other views—Continued from page 2**

*Night's Dream*, a short stop from the faerie world of Goldstein and her Robin Goodfellow. Raleigh's purported School of Night is ignored, and the Spanish Armada is a wisp of reality fascinating in its potential.

Goldstein shifts from historical character to her own fictional creations with great skill, allowing each to complement the other. Nashe's and Marlowe's contacts with the book-sellers, faeries, and the court humanize these historical figures, while Marlowe's fascinating yet short life receives detailed work. Lacking historical points of reference, we have to approach the non-historical people in the book on their own terms. A few, such as the main character, and her faerie helper, gain stature close to that of actual people, evoking powerful images.

I read *Strange Devices* in one sitting, impressed with the believable characters, skillful rendition of London, and the expressions of individuality infused throughout the novel.

**1994 Prometheus Award nominees**

M.J. Engh's *Rainbow Man*.  
 Lisa Goldstein's *Strange Devices of the Sun and Moon*.  
 P.D. James' *The Children of Men*.  
 Nancy Kress' *Beggars in Spain*.  
 Charles Platt's *The Silicon Man*.  
 L. Neil Smith's *Pallas*.  
 Amy Thomson's *Virtual Girl*.  
 F. Paul Wilson's *Nightworld*

**1994 Hall of Fame nominees**

Thomas M. Disch's *334*.  
 Henry Hazlitt's *Time Will Run Back*.  
 Robert Heinlein's *Farnham's Freehold*.  
 Robert Heinlein's *The Puppet Masters*.  
 Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*.  
 Robert Silverberg's *A Time of Changes*.  
 Norman Spinrad's *An Agent of Chaos*.  
 Jack Vance's *The Blue World*.  
 Jack Vance's *Emphyrio*.  
 Zevgeny Zamyatin's *We*.

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