

PROMETHEUS

Rainbows End

By Vernor Vinge

Tor, 2006, \$24

Reviewed by William H. Stoddard

Rainbows End is a change of pace from Vernor Vinge's recent novels, especially from the interstellar adventures of **A Fire upon the Deep** and **A Deepness in the Sky**. In some ways it's a return to the concerns of his classic "True Names"; in others it's an entirely new departure for his writing.

The setting of this novel is Earth in the near future. No radical new technologies have emerged; instead there has been continued progress along lines that can be extrapolated from current technology and scientific thought. Life extension, genetic engineering, cognitive science, artificial intelligence, and the amplification of human intelligence through networking are all part of everyday life. Much of the character interaction in story takes place through the exchange of secret messages over electronic channels, so that two or three layers of conversation can be going on in parallel. The effect is rather like that of recent anime series such as *Ghost in the Shell*, where voiceovers and on-screen text displays carry on multiple narrative tracks. Vinge's parallel narratives were easy to keep track of, thanks to some simple but ingenious typographic conventions—and careful choices of viewpoint.

Part of this novel is about large-scale social effects of this new technology. The political landscape of Vinge's future Earth is also a close extrapolation from the current world, in much more detail than that of "True Names." Three superpowers dominate the world: China, the United States, and the Indo-European Alliance (a clever pun!), which includes Japan as well as Europe and India. Despite rivalries, all three mainly want to keep the world stable and prevent the sudden emergence of new technological threats—either old-fashioned weapons of mass destruction in the wrong hands, or dangerous new possibilities such as YGBM, "you gotta believe me," a psychological technology that allows irresistible persuasion. One of this novel's themes is the methods used to defend against such threats.

These include military force, and Vinge shows us a small-scale military action in the course of the novel. But much more important is intelligence, in both senses of the word: human and military. Several major characters work for intelligence agencies of various nations. Vinge envisions a radically

different approach to intelligence, summed up by one of his characters in an early chapter: "A government crash program? That's twentieth-century foolishness. Market demands are always more effective. You just have to fool the market into cooperating." Decentralized networks of analysts provide operatives and mission planners with real-time solutions to complex problems. But managing such resources demands highly skilled people, and strains even their capabilities.

At the same time, networking and covert communication aren't the exclusive property of secret agencies. In many parts of the world, everyone has them, even high school students. Much of the story takes place at a high school in San Diego county, attended not only by adolescents but by a number of elderly people, beneficiaries of new medical technology, in need of rehabilitation and instruction in the new essential skills. Much of this novel is about two students at that school: Miriam Gu, a very bright girl of 14, and her grandfather, Robert Gu, recently successfully treated for Alzheimer's syndrome.

This focus on family life is itself something of a departure for Vinge; a lot of his previous heroes have been loners, either by choice or because circumstances isolated them from social

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PROMETHEUS

The newsletter of the
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Liquid Vision

Æon Flux

Directed By Karyn Kusama
Paramount Pictures, 2005
(DVD 4/25/2006)

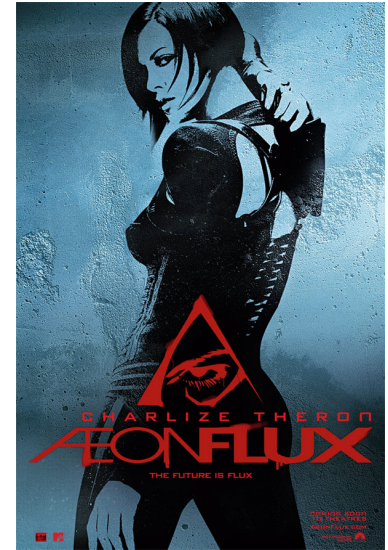
Starring: Charlize Theron, Marton
Csokas, Sophie Okonedo
Reviewed by David Wayland

In the mid-1990s, MTV carried a
series of ground-breaking animated TV
shows under their “liquid television”
banner. Alas, MTV’s liquid television
dribbled out rather quickly. One of the
more interesting shows, *Æon Flux*, fol-
lowed the adventures of a scantily-clad
female assassin in a far-future city called
Bregna.

Skip forward a few years and we find
Æon Flux adapted for the silver screen in
2005, starring Academy Award winning
beauty Charlize Theron. The feature
film version assumes many of the same
characters, background, and the general
idea from the TV show, and adds its own
gorgeous vision, along with slightly more
than a hint of unique confusion.

In the movie, humanity 400 years in
the future survives a devastating plague
by retreating into a walled and pristine
city. *Æon*’s character describes this sce-
nario in a weary voiceover, and hints
that something is rotten in the city of
Bregna. People disappear for unknown
reasons, and inhabitants suffer from
strange memory flashes of events they
never experienced. In response to the
autocratic rule of Trevor Goodchild, who
organized the city of Bregna 400 years
ago, a resistance group emerges, calling
itself Monicans, of which *Æon* is their
foremost agent (guessing that this is a play
on mnemonics would be incorrect; the
source is the original animated series, in
which Monica was an anarchist sister-city
of Bregna, but this is neither explained
nor alluded to in the movie).

The Monicans send *Æon* and Sithan-
dra, an agent who has modified her feet
into another set of hands—one of the
strangest visuals of the movie—to as-
sassinate Trevor Goodchild. Something,



of course, goes wrong in their mission,
creating doubt and internal conflict
within *Æon*, and setting her at odds with
the Monicans.

It’s from this point in the movie that
events veer from a visually stunning movie
with an interesting plot, to a visually
stunning movie with a baffling plot. For
make no mistake, the effects in this movie
as well as the scenery, design, and people
all result in colorful eye candy.

In terms of libertarian elements, we
find the resistance, highly trained and
organized, allowing its agents significant
bio-modification and virtual-reality com-
munication seemingly absent from the
ruling forces. The Monicans’ goals are
unclear; they want to disrupt the gov-
ernment, and take out Goodchild, but
nothing else matters. Any initial desire to
cheer on the Monicans from a libertarian
perspective quickly fades.

For want of a story, the director in-
stead focuses on the surface beauty, and
I came away feeling cheated. The same
stress on visual effects were a major part
of the animated series, but I expected
more coherence from a feature length
film. Watch this movie if you want to
see stunning cinematic craft and design,
but the story itself did not carry the same
weight. The movie’s release prompted
MTV to package and release the original
series on DVD for the first time, and that
alone might prove more interesting than
this version.

BOOK REVIEWS

Engaging the Enemy

By Elizabeth Moon

Del Rey/Ballantine, 2006

Reviewed by William H. Stoddard

Engaging the Enemy continues Elizabeth Moon's new Kylara Vatta series. Previous volumes have explored the conflict between mercantile and military ethical values, through the adventures of the protagonist, Ky Vatta, a young woman pursuing a second-choice career as a merchant captain after her expulsion from her home planet's naval academy. Over the course of the series, the scope of the conflict has steadily widened, from the purely personal issues of the first volume to the small merchant and privateer fleets of the third.

Despite its title, though, this book doesn't involve much actual engaging of the enemy. One of its major plotlines involves the gradual discovery that the scale of the threat is greater than was evident in earlier novels, and that several different problems that characters in those novels faced may have had a common source. Being at least somewhat prudent, the heroine tries to deal with these by regrouping and finding allies, with the goal of creating a unified fleet of privateers that can step in and suppress interstellar piracy. This leads to an actual space battle with a small pirate fleet in the final chapters—but one that appears more as a test of the privateers' readiness for their self-assigned mission than as a strategically decisive action.

The attempt to create a privateer fleet gives rise to the other main plotline: the legal issues faced by the heroine. Privateers in this universe have a bad reputation: many jurisdictions consider them little different from pirates. Vatta faces threats ranging from being forbidden to discuss privateering to forcible seizure of her newly acquired combat-ready starship. Dealing with the legal issues hampers her efforts to restore the fortunes of her own family after a destructive attack on their corporate headquarters. Resolving them also leads to revelations about her family history. Moon takes advantage of the trial scenes to portray societies with exotic customs and laws.

Readers looking for a straight action/adventure story may

find this book something of a disappointment; it's much more about the legalities of warfare and ownership than about warfare itself. Readers of *Prometheus* may well find Moon's treatment of these issues fascinating. The subordination of violence to law is the primary theme of this series, and Moon provides a variety of situations that test various ways of doing this. She also offers readers the pleasure of watching competent people do their jobs under pressure—a classic science fictional theme, and one with literary antecedents from Kipling's stories back to Homer's **Odyssey**. This series has continued to hold my interest; I'm hoping that the fourth book will show Vatta *actually* "engaging the enemy" in a big way.

In High Places

By Harry Turtledove

Tor, 2006

Reviewed by William H. Stoddard

In High Places is the third volume in Harry Turtledove's series of young adult novels, Crosstime Traffic. These books have a shared background, a late 21st-century Earth that's supported by trade with alternate timelines, in the style of H. Beam Piper's classic Paratime stories. But each book is self-contained, with different central characters and a plot that's completed in one volume, so that they can be read independently without difficulty.

Turtledove is a historian by training, and these books reflect this: all of them have been set in worlds with less advanced technology and archaic customs. A running theme is the confrontation of young people from a modern society with the harsher realities of the past—and the economic constraints that created them. **In High Places** will be of special interest to libertarian readers, because its focus is on slavery. Turtledove offers a straightforward economic interpretation of slavery: technologically advanced societies have machines to serve as slaves, but societies without that advantage have no choice but to have human beings occupy that role. On the other hand, he also suggests that slavery is a source of personal gratification for some people, even in an advanced society that has no need for it.

Turtledove has also made a name for himself in the fictional subgenre of alternate history, creating a variety of historically divergent worlds. Many of his series have focused on the big sellers in this field, the Civil War and World War II. These books seem to be giving him a chance to invent histories with less often used divergences. **In High Places**, for example,

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Interview with Vin Suprynowicz and Scott Bieser

By Sunni Maravillosa

SUNNI: It's good to see **The Black Arrow** getting well-deserved acclaim from several people. I imagine you're getting a lot of private feedback too. Are you pleased with its reception so far?

VIN: All the notices have been positive. You can't complain about that. I'm especially glad to see some attention being paid to the characters and the relationships, going beyond your basic plot outlines. It's also nice to get some kind words from female readers and folks who I know aren't gun nuts or tax protesters. That means the book is appealing to that wider readership we were hoping for. Of course, we still don't know if the traditional boycott on any pro-gun or anti-tax or anti-drug-war book that's not from a major publisher, by *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times*, by *Publishers Weekly* and *Kirkus Reviews* and *Harper's* and *The New Yorker*—by all the mainstream media—is going to continue. All you can hope is that pressure from the internet and the alternative media will finally force those people to cave in and acknowledge we exist.

We send out more than 500 review copies of each of my books, and we can generally count on some generous review space in *Backwoods Home* and *Guns & Ammo*. You can maybe add *Soldier of Fortune* and *Laissez Faire Books* [Laissez Faire Books elected not to stock **The Black Arrow**, which caused quite a stir among the online libertarian community—Editor] and Mike Hoy's people up at Loompanics [Loompanics recently announced their decision to cease operations—Editor]. But that's about it; up till now the mainstream media in New York and Washington have just thrown our books in the trash and hoped we would go away. I'm not whining, it's just the point from which we know we start out. Once you've been at this for six years you start to see the pattern; it has nothing to do with whether the author is willing to go out on the road and promote the book; it has nothing to do with whether we make the book available through Baker & Taylor and list it in *Books in Print* and get ourselves a Library of Congress number and a bar code on the back, because we do all that. And I don't think it's just my ego when I say it can't be the quality of the writing, when people I've never met are already comparing **The Black Arrow** with **Atlas Shrugged** and **Gone With The Wind**. Which I think is a little over the top, just for the record. But yeah, there's some real enthusiasm out there.

What's different this time is the kind of work you and Tom Knapp and Doug French and Fran Tully have been doing on the internet. We're getting orders from Germany and Australia. We've sold hundreds of the leather-bound edition of **The**

Black Arrow at \$50 apiece, and the demand for the paperback is building, and it's not even released yet. So things look good. And we've got a few cards left up our sleeve, yet.

SUNNI: Most readers are probably familiar with your previous nonfiction books, **Send in the Waco Killers** and **The Ballad of Carl Drega**. Both are excellent compilations of—and expansions upon—your newspaper columns. Why did you shift to fiction for your third book?

VIN: Looking for a wider audience. Fiction is more digestible; people don't think of it as work. But also because the conventions and space limitations of journalism just get too restrictive when the goal is to get the reader emotionally involved. And it was just time to grow. Either you grow and

change, or you stagnate and fall into a formula and lose your ability to bring anything fresh and surprising. My nonfiction books sell 5,000 or 10,000 copies apiece and they make a little money; the investors make their percentage. But to have any real impact you have to sell hundreds of thousands of copies. This book is the equivalent of going at the walled city with ladders and battering rams. We're tired of being ignored. Did I just quote Glenn Close as the creepy woman who boils

the rabbit in that Michael Douglas movie?

SUNNI: [laughs] Speaking of **The Ballad of Carl Drega**, Scott Bieser is also here. You do seem to be quite busy of late. You co-authored **A Drug War Carol** with Susan Wells, just recently published in print your graphic novel version of L. Neil Smith's classic libertarian novel **The Probability Broach**, and did the cover for Vin's novel **The Black Arrow**. Sleep much? [laughs]

SCOTT: Not enough. But this is the sort of work I feel like I was born to do, so I'm really happy to be doing it.

SUNNI: How did you and Vin first connect? I recall that you did the cover for **The Ballad of Carl Drega**—beautiful work, too. That may be my favorite of all your artwork I've seen.

SCOTT: Thanks! The original concept was Vin's which had the soldier handing out flintlocks. I suggested substituting M-16s for the flintlocks, and Vin loved the idea. I first discovered Vin through his older online collection of articles. But I didn't really establish contact with him until we both

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attended Ernie Hancock's first Freedom Summit, in 2001. By that time I had several cartoons published in *The Libertarian Enterprise* and I was getting to be known within that faction of the libertarian movement. Just a bit prior to that I had some initial internet contact with him, as Neil wanted me to paint the cover for **Lever Action**, which Vin and Rick Tompkins were publishing. At the Freedom Summit we got better acquainted, and soon afterward Vin contacted me about doing a cover for **The Ballad of Carl Drega**. And so we are now infamous in New Hampshire.

SUNNI: Yes, so I've heard. You and Neil seem to do a lot of work together, too. I noticed on your web site that some of the stories for your posters start out, "L. Neil called me..." How did that relationship come about?

SCOTT: In 1997 I was going through one of my burnout periods, dejected and disgusted. But one evening I was idly surfing the web, and just on impulse typed "libertarian" into Yahoo's search engine. The first listing was a compilation of Vin Suprynowicz's columns, titled "The Libertarian," and several hits from Neil's web site. Reading Vin's columns got my blood roiling, and then reading Neil's columns was like a blast of fresh water. I was re-energized and revitalized. You might say that together, Vin and Neil saved my libertarian soul.

The fact that Neil is also a science-fiction writer, and tends to put more of himself into his writing, and sometimes participates in online mailing lists, drew me closer to him first. I wrote him a few times and got a desultory "thanks for the interest" reply. I used my 3D graphics program to do an update of his "Bill of Rights Enforcement Logo" and got another desultory response. Finally, in 2000 I drew a cartoon showing how Harry Browne was screwing his Libertarian Party donors, and that got Neil's attention.

Neil loves cartoonists, and was thrilled to discover a libertarian cartoonist with my skill level—I know that sounds immodest but I don't know how else to put it. Neil was already friends with Rex "Baloo" May, and I like his work, but it's very Thurberesque.

Neil and I got to chatting first by e-mail, then by phone, and we learned we have a great deal in common. We were both strongly influenced by Rand, and have the same generally Rothbardian opinions on the questions which divide libertarians. We both like guns, science-fiction, and the general drinking-carnivore lifestyle. We have some disagreements, but they seem pretty minor so far, more a matter of differences in interpreting events than in basic doctrines.

Later, when I started drawing **The Probability Broach**, Neil remarked at one point that it seemed like I had a direct

USB connection to his brain, that scenes came out looking almost exactly as he imagined them, only reversed left-right for some reason. Maybe what we really have is a twisted-pair Ethernet connection. [laughs]

SUNNI: Sounds like it. Did you and Neil work closely on your graphic novel interpretation of **The Probability Broach**? Or did you simply get the okay from him for the idea, and run with it by yourself?

SCOTT: Neil and I worked closely on the graphic novel. We spent a couple of weeks working up the "look" of the main characters, and Neil wrote a complete comic-book script for the graphic novel, based on his original book. In the beginning, as I was drawing the book I would see something I wanted to change to make it look better or read better, and I'd e-mail him and wait for a response before continuing. By the time we were halfway through the book, Neil said, "Scott, I trust you

and know that you understand this story as well as anyone. Go ahead and make whatever changes you deem appropriate." I always sent him notices when I made changes, but we never had any real disagreements on how to do this book.

SUNNI: I'm not usually a big fan of graphic novels or comics in general, but I really enjoyed your vision of **The Probability Broach**. Why did you decide to do it, and what do you hope to accomplish with it—other than making some money, of course?

SCOTT: It was our mutual friend, the late, great Lux Lucre (AKA Kerry Pearson), who suggested doing a comic-book mini-series. Neil wasn't too keen on trying to break his story into six or eight episodes, and I'm not keen on the 32-page comic-book format anymore—I think it's a doomed format. So Neil and I worked up some sample pages for a graphic novel—they're the future—and I shopped the book around for publishers. Finding none, I convinced my brother to start a new company, BigHead Press, to publish the work. What we hope to accomplish, besides making money, is to expand the audience for Neil's work. No one besides Robert Heinlein has been better at presenting libertarian ideas in an entertaining way.

SUNNI: Many writers who dabble in both areas say that writing fiction well is much more difficult than nonfiction. That seems to dovetail with my perception as a reader: few nonfiction writers transition successfully to fiction. Vin, you're a notable exception to that pattern, and I'm wondering if you have any ideas on why you not only succeeded, but have done so well in creating a story, characters, and an environment that many readers find so engaging.

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—*Suprynowicz/Bieser Interview*, continued from page 5

VIN: Journalism is good training for other kinds of writing, but only up to a point. It teaches you craft. You learn to organize your thoughts on the fly and write short and get to the point. Picking out the one cogent detail instead of describing someone right down to the color of their socks, which usually reveals nothing. You're not there to take an inventory, you're looking for that one detail that tells the story. She hasn't fixed her own sweater but the dog's sweater is neatly mended, whatever. You work fast and you write a lot so you get better. I'd still tell any young writer to go write professionally for a newspaper or magazine for awhile. It bakes out that temptation to write purple prose. You need to see a good editor lop all that stuff off and throw it on the floor. You're learning a craft, and one of your tools is a great big pair of scissors. But then there comes a day when you've done it too long. Fiction demands that we get inside the character and hear her thoughts and suffer with her and exult with her, but journalism trains you to stay on the surface, only to write what you can see and prove.

So if you're meant to write fiction, you go home at midnight frustrated and you pour all that love and hate and frustration into pages and pages of stuff that you have no idea how you're ever going to use. It's either that or eventually they beat it out of you; you stop putting in those off-the-wall details and those rambling ungrammatical verbatim quotes that actually sound like the way real people talk, and you're dead. You're embalmed as a writer; you just don't know it yet. I see it all the time. It's a little scary, 'cause newspaper writing is a steady paycheck. But in the end, your daily paper wants nice, safe, inoffensive stuff to wedge in between the brassiere ads on page 4 and that special on motor oil down at Checker Auto Parts in the Sports section. Newspaper readers write in to complain if you run a photo of a stripper to illustrate a story on a topless clubs, even if she's partially hidden and you can't see a thing. It's the idea of showing the stripper that offends them. "This is a family newspaper!" Well, where do they think goddamned families come from, underneath the cabbage leaves?

You can tell them 12 guys got blown up in Baghdad every day of the week, but don't show them a single photo of a real dead body or they'll cancel their subscription. It just got to be time for me to write the gory photos and show the stripper's tits, that's all. I like tits, and I think we have to look at death to understand life, and I've passed all my exams and got gold stars on all my papers; I've got nothing left to prove and I don't give a damn if people look at me funny, any more, because I'm right. I'm quite often shockingly right. The sleeper is awake. When journalism gets afraid to cover reality, we go back to

writing reality and we call it fiction.

SUNNI: Would you consider online writing as professional writing? I don't mean a personal blog—but maybe a politically-oriented one, or an online 'zine like *The Libertarian Enterprise* or Lew Rockwell.com?

VIN: It's hard to answer because that's so broad. I just don't know how they all work. But the basic criterion is you have to do it for money. Not forever—there's a risk of getting comfortable and sticking at it for 20 years till your stuff has about as much individuality as a Keebler cookie. But for a couple years, at least, you have to depend on it to pay the rent, you have to work for an editor who can give you a raise or get you fired, or transferred to taking classified ads over the phone. It's a hidden benefit of capitalism that hardly anybody

ever talks about. Because as long as everybody is a volunteer they can say "Oh, that's very nice dear, thank you so much (bless her heart)"; no one ever calls you on your rambling attempts to channel the Brontë sisters. So the learning curve never really gets started. But if you need that paycheck to pay the rent you grit your teeth and mutter what an insensitive bastard he is and you learn to do it his way; you get hammered out in the

forge, you get purified in that fire. You learn to write crisp and short without a wasted word.

So, later, when you've been through that bloodbath, you've earned your stripes, then you can start to fool around with the formulas, break them down the way Coltrane and Parker broke down the tunes and played them from the inside out. But you've internalized that editor, his voice is always there for you in your ear, going, "Oh great, Heathcliff on the moor! How many pages of this crap do you think they're going to put up with? You do know what they invented wastebaskets for, don't you?"

SUNNI: Speaking of stupidity, Vin, I'd guess that your opinion of most of your journalist colleagues—and I use that term loosely, because unlike you, most of them seem to have forgotten what true journalism is—isn't too favorable. Is that accurate, and if so, what keeps you in a field that seems to largely be unappreciative of your work?

VIN: The paycheck. It's a dream job, in a way. You know those internet spam ads that say "Get paid for your opinions"? Well, I've already got that job. If you're some freelancer out there on the internet, people have to wonder if tomorrow you'll be writing about gray aliens inside the hollow earth, and they'll be embarrassed that they were touting you to their Uncle Ned last week as a real solid source. It's like a musician going back to play the Newport Jazz Festival. Do they still do the Newport Jazz Festival? Miles used to go back and do

—Continued next page

Newport to prove it wasn't all studio magic, that the rumors were wrong, that he wasn't too sick or strung out to stand up and jam. I will have to move on, eventually. But it takes some years to build your chops and land a seat on a major metro daily, and it does add a little cachet. At least, I used to think it did. And don't even talk to me about the "alternative press." Being socialist was an alternative when the powers that be were William Howard Taft or Warren Gamaliel Harding. Since 1936, to be "alternative" in American journalism you've had to be Austrian in economics and Libertarian/Constitutionalist in politics. Repeal every law passed since 1912: There's an "alternative."

SUNNI: Ooooh, Miles Davis. You just reminded me of something from **The Black Arrow** that I loved, but didn't mention in anything I've written on it: your bringing old music into the story. In part because of that, I've been going back to the music I heard on my parents' radio station when I was a kid and other older music I'm just now discovering, and I'm finding all kinds of songs that are still relevant, and meaningful. Like the Association's Requiem for the Masses, Frank Zappa's Trouble Every Day, the Rascals' People Got to be Free, and several from Cream, and Crosby, Stills, & Nash (and sometimes Young). Did you work the music in just because you love it, or to make a point?

VIN: What's the first sentence in **The Black Arrow**? Most people think it's "Madison walked alone." But it's not. It's "This is the story of a dream. Whether it was a good dream, you must judge for yourself." It was part of the dream. The dream had a soundtrack. A lot of writers have to hunt around and find the right kind of music to listen to while they write, Les Daniels first told me about that, years ago in Providence. It blasts everything else out and helps clear a pathway—music can be a useful drug that way, a useful way to alter the consciousness. Anybody who's planning to live with a writer probably needs to ask about that. And the music that you need can change according to the book you're working on, or maybe what you write changes in part because of the music you're listening to, the emotional content, the phrasings—I don't know if anyone has ever answered that particular chicken-or-egg question.

The rhythm of your sentences is actually affected by the music, so you have to be careful. Choose carefully, Grasshopper. Originally I thought this book would be Tommy James and the

If I could have stuck a disc in the jacket flap with a little number on it and said, "As you read this scene, play track 12," I would have done that. But the expense of the permissions alone would have been nuts. The written page is too limiting, really, if your dreams have soundtracks.

"I Think We're Alone Now" is the only Tommy James song that I kept. It's there when Jack and Joan find themselves sitting in that darkened drainage tunnel, you have to listen for it, it's just a fragment. Who knew this book would be *The Raspberries*? But when you find the right sound, it's bliss, I'll tell you. Storytelling is an aural art form, they used to do it around the campfire, it's the sound of the words. You have to hear the words as you write; the keyboard is a musical instrument. I just know the new book I'm working on is Miles and Bill Evans and Dylan and John Sebastian—"Younger Girl" and "Did You Ever Have to Make Up Your Mind," which are basically the same song. It's a considerably different mix from **The Black Arrow**. I'm still working on it, getting it right. It

may require some Gershwin or some Hoagy Carmichael. You never know, it's all trial and error. I tried Billie Holiday; not quite right. Thought it would be, but no. That doesn't mean she's not great; of course she's great. But you're trying to re-open a wormhole to a particular altered state of consciousness. You can use pharmaceuticals or sacraments, of course, but we all know the downsides there, how draining that can be, and the risk of diminishing returns.

What may work is using a sacrament to find that dream state, and then finding less taxing ways to return there at will.

It helps that my brother is a musician; I called him up and explained the kind of stuff I was looking for, I was looking for real heroin music, and Clark immediately says, "Oh, you want Miiiiiiles. 'Steamin' With the Miles Davis Quintet.'" And he was right, of course. But doing **Black Arrow**, it was the first time I found the music was so intrusive—I mean that in a good way, so omnipresent—I could only write a scene right when I finally figured out what song to write it to, it was part of what told me I'd finally stumbled on the right tone—the music would give coherence in tone over these vast expanses, hundreds of pages—that I figured, what the hell, let's give this a try. Let's tell the reader what the background music is to this scene, since it forms a kind of subtext. If I could have stuck a disc in the jacket flap with a little number on it and said, "As you read this scene, play track 12," I would have done that. But the expense of the permissions alone would have been nuts. The written page is too limiting, really, if your dreams have soundtracks.

If I'd written **The Black Arrow** as a screenplay with the soundtrack music specified it'd still be sitting on some shelf, somewhere, gathering dust. So all I could do was plant that stuff there, in case some reader wants to go to the trouble to go to Amazon.com and buy these old discs and stick them in

**WANTED:
A FEW GOOD REVIEWS**

Email editor@lfs.org

Shondells, Ronnie Spector and Edison Lighthouse, the 1910 Fruitgum Company. But that wasn't quite right.

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—*Suprynowicz/Bieser Interview*, continued from page 7

the player on “shuffle” and really have the full experience of reading **The Black Arrow**. The Raspberries’ Greatest Hits, the Chiffons’ Greatest Hits, just read the attributions at the back of the book. It would be like discovering the original soundtrack to a movie that you always thought was a silent movie, wouldn’t it?

You wouldn’t believe how long I looked for the right music to write the final battle scene to. You’d think it would be Liszt’s Preludes or the 1812 [Overture] or Wagner’s Valkyre, I tried all of those. All wrong, completely wrong. Pompous, overblown, no nuance. Then one night I’m lying in bed, I’ve essentially given up, I’m never going to get this, maybe that scene just isn’t supposed to be there at all, and what comes on in the other room but “Sweet Talkin’ Guy,” and I go, “No way. Come on. You’re kidding me. The cavalry comes to the rescue playing Sweet Talkin’ Guy?” It was hilarious and ridiculous and impossible and it was perfect so of course I leap out of bed and blast the Chiffons through this old tubes-that-glow-in-the-dark sound system that Jimmy on East Charleston keeps repairing for me as a labor of love because the digital stuff just doesn’t sound the same, these big old 60-pound floor speakers I’ve been lugging around for years, and it was perfect, I wrote the whole scene in an hour. And this way, if they ever do make the movie of **The Black Arrow**, they’ll know what’s supposed to be there, on the soundtrack. I already did the work for them. Change it at your peril; the readers will know, ‘cause it’s all in there.

SUNNI: Scott, it was a nice bonus to learn that you’d done the cover art for the trade paper edition of **The Black Arrow**.

VIN: Scott is on the right wavelength, politically, and he’s got the chops as an artist and illustrator. He read an early manuscript version of **The Black Arrow** and came up with a cover idea. In this case, I suggested something else, which turned out not to work at all. We got as far as a rough sketch and it became obvious my idea would have been much too busy and hokey. So after I wasted a little of his time we went back to this one, to Scott’s original conception, which strikes just the right tone, I think. We had one reader actually complain that it looked too much like a throwback to the pulp covers of the ‘40s and ‘50s. Well, duh.

SUNNI: I don’t want to give away too much of the book, but I’m really interested in where the character of Daniel Brackley came from. He’s such a contrast to the other major male characters...and of course, I loved despising him. Is he

based on a man or men you know?

VIN: My friend Bill Branon, who was the first manuscript reader to come pretty close to getting this book, which is why his blurb is on the first page, says Brackley is the protagonist of the book. “There’s your protagonist.” Not the hero, mind you; he’s the villain. But Bill meant that Brackley is the central character. He’s the best developed character. Andrew Fletcher is much sketchier, because the readers demanded that. All this crap we hear from the Beat Generation critics about people wanting a conflicted, neurotic hero is so much crap. They want Tom Selleck or Sam Elliott in a big hat and a bandana, strong and silent, saying “Yep” and shooting that sleazy Mark Harmon. People react to the hero, they bounce off the hero, who pretty much stands there looking good. But with a villain,

all those rules are suspended. Daniel Brackley is what all these feminist schoolmarms are going to get if they insist on turning our little boys into sensitive little girls who brood about their deepest feelings. What does every woman complain about? Her man won’t tell her his deepest feelings. Why won’t they tell us their deepest feelings? Why why why? Well, are you sure you really want to hear them? Here’s Daniel Brackley, explaining his deepest feelings about women and the way they treat men in the endless rituals of dating and mating, and women immediately shriek that they want this guy killed. It’s hilarious;

you can set your watch by it. End of chapter four. Turns out they don’t want to hear it, at all. Brackley has disadvantages, he has handicaps; he’s short and pudgy and bald.

SUNNI: Hey! A lot of women like bald men! Bald can be very sexy!

VIN: So he uses the same techniques to bed a woman as the Claude Rains character used in the movie **Casablanca**. Well, everyone thought Claude Rains’ Captain Renault in **Casablanca** was just a lovable rogue. “I’m shocked, shocked to learn there is gambling going on in this establishment!” It’s fine when he throws away the Vichy water at the end and walks off arm-in-arm with Humphrey Bogart, because they could never hear his thoughts, it was all handled so elegantly, with such indirection and subtlety and savoir faire. Well, I’m sorry, Captain Renault was going to give that young couple the letter of transit if the pretty young wife spent the night with him. And you know what he was going to do to her? He was going to fuck her.

Aaah! Aaah! I can hear the shrieks all the way from Bayonne. You let people in on what a guy like this is thinking—especially female readers—and they’re immediately out for blood. Every man in the world over the age of 14, when he sees a hand-

—Continued next page

some woman, he doesn't think, "Gosh, I wonder if she has a Ph.D." No, he thinks: "Nice tits." But women don't want to be told that. Daniel Brackley holds up the dark magic mirror and says, "You wanted to know what's really going on in a man's mind? Are you sure?"

I'm not saying he's normal. Daniel Brackley is pathological, obviously. But I've had male readers tell me, "I had an experience just like he talks about where he got rejected by Carmilla. There but for the grace of God go I."

I've had guys tell me, "This guy may be evil, but a lot of what he says about women and marriage is right on target." He's expressing things that every man has felt. The difference is that this very casualness, this thick skin, this refusal to brood and dwell on emotional hurt that women complain about in men, actually saves us from becoming like this guy.

My mom was visiting Las Vegas when she read the book and she got so shrill she actually yelled at me, "I don't know why you have to give this guy so much space in your book!" This is a guy whose character and personality are defined by the way he's been treated by women—it's almost the key to the book, looking at the way the characters' personalities are defined by how they've been treated by the opposite sex. And I get the distinct impression women don't want that staring them in the face. Daniel Brackley moves us past a whole layer of pretense; he makes it okay for everyone to start speaking their mind. Daniel Brackley is the way every man feels when he thinks he's getting the right signals and he puts a move on a woman and he gets shot down, rejected, thrown out, treated like shit. Only instead of grabbing a beer with his buddies and laughing and saying "Better luck next time," this guy hoards his rejections and disappointments and perceived betrayals, he collects them and broods on them and plans his revenge. John Lennon sang, "I'm gonna break their hearts all 'round the world," and Danny Brackley is a really big Beatles fan.

SUNNI: Wow. Okay... and I guess I should thank you for all my sistren that Danny didn't get a little help from his friends. Last time I saw you, Vin, you seemed fairly down—maybe you were just preoccupied with writing **The Black Arrow**; and I think that I, along with many people, took your "farewell tour" as a sign that the bastards had at least partially succeeded in grinding you down. Is that right? I read **The Black Arrow** as a realistic, hopeful book—as you know I give it a lot of credit for rejuvenating me in the wake of the Hiibel case, and all the other, regular bad news that we freedom-minded individuals have to deal with. Was writing the book a way for you to create a better future than what we seem to be headed for now?

VIN: I used to tell my stories at Libertarian conventions and they knew my talk was a good draw so they'd usually schedule

me just before the big auction or the pass-the-hat fundraiser or whatever. And bless their hearts, Libertarian Party activists know how evil government is and they just want to explain it all to their neighbors so everyone can vote for freedom. You can't hate that. I was there myself, 12 years ago. We all have to give it a try.

But it's all doomed. Mencken said the American electoral process is an advance auction of stolen goods and you can't win by promising to return all the stolen goods to their rightful owners, because no one will bid on that. So I just started to feel like I was part of the Cable Shopping Network, peddling eight-dollar costume jewelry for four easy payments of \$39 apiece. I don't wish them any ill will, I just think it's been

tried and it failed and I can't in good conscience put on a big smile and tell people to throw fifty bucks in the hat to help paint some more yard signs and we're bound to win next time. If they want to have me come talk about what I'm writing now and sign my books and answer questions like I'm answering here, that's great. But I can't be Pinky Lee in the plaid suit doing the old song and dance any more, encouraging people to think we're going to win at the ballot box by telling people their taxes

will go down after we close the government schools. They're horrified; they think we're the walking dead.

I can't create a better future. I'm just a writer. But I can choose to be an honest writer. I can go look for the dream place that the holy men and the visionaries have been seeking out for thousands of years, and if I survive the journey again then I can report back my visions, and let people make whatever they can of them. The temptation is to soften them down and sugar-coat them, but you have to deliver them as rough and whole as you can, and not worry about people who complain you're "incoherent." We've lost our visions, or allowed them all to be tamed and put in cages like canaries where we can't draw any strength or power from them, any more. Religion used to be orgiastic and now you snooze while some old man chants for a few minutes before brunch at Denny's. Read *The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind*. Remember the first sentence of **The Black Arrow**... "This is the story of a dream." The meanings are not hidden. They're only hidden if you're too sophisticated to read the words. Come to the words as if you were a child, filled with wonder. "This is the story of a dream."

SUNNI: One of the things I liked best about **The Black Arrow** was that it illustrated very well how a decentralized resistance could operate. I mean, even though the Black Arrow is clearly a leader, he's not the only one; and he's certainly not a micro-manager. Was this an intentional element you

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What would someone else's SETI see?

By *Tamara Wilhite*

We imagine aliens coming to Earth with their views of Earth shaped by "I Love Lucy" reruns and 1930s radio broadcasts. Yet we fail to realize the irrationality of aliens seeing our TV signals light years away if we can't hear FM stations 200 miles away. This then raises the question: What can they learn about Earth? And if they cannot receive our TV and radio signals, what can they receive?

Assumptions we would have to make for Reverse SETI are that a group like Amateur Radio Operators on Earth would be using a 100 Meter antenna dish on their world. We'll assume the objective (Earth) is 10 light years away.

Would aliens be able to determine if Earth is populated by intelligent beings? They could tell that we have technology. You have to have electricity and signal generation technology to send a signal into space. Intelligence, however, is a whole other question. There are humans who don't see other humans as intelligent. But they could see that we do have technology, which is a start. What else could they learn about us from our signals?

What exactly would they be able to determine about Earth? Let's look first at what they could not determine. What is not detectable over interstellar distances?

Forget TV stations. If you can't watch TV stations across the country, aliens will NOT see it. Forget Radio Stations: If you cannot get FM or AM once you are over the horizon, ET can't, unless he's in orbit. If he's made it to Earth orbit, then they don't need our signals to learn what they want about us; they could send probes or collect samples.

Let's now look at the primary question: What is detectable over interstellar distances? The answer: Military radar output and satellite uplinks.

What do our signals look like from outer space? Imagine a transmitter as one of the dots on the surface of the Earth. If it is radiating out into the air—and space—it will project out in a disc in a straight line in tangent to the Earth's surface. This means that with fewer transmission sites on the Southern Hemisphere, anyone "below" us while looking "up" at Earth with a radio telescope will see less than anyone a straight line view of the Northern hemisphere.

The RADAR's can be identified by frequency and PRF (Pulse Rate frequency). Many radar systems exceed 180 degree sweep, so they can be detected on both edges of the planet. This would mean these signals are viewable twice every 24 hours, at sunrise and at sunset, coming and going.

A 24-hour rotation period is easy to determine via variations in signal strength as the Earth turns. By observing the polarization changes every 12 hours (Doppler shift) the position of the transmitter on the sphere (Earth) can be estimated. The northern hemisphere sure is busy! Observers along the line of the Southern Cross would detect little because there are few

RADAR of multi megawatt levels south of the equator.

Measuring the Doppler shift between the rising and setting signals as the Earth rotates, along with their position on the sphere, would allow them to measure the Earth's rotational speed. Knowing the day length of 24 hours and Earth's rotational speed gives them the diameter of the planet. Extended observation produces the 365-day year. Extend Doppler measurements produces the orbital velocity of the planet. (Red shift/blue shift of radar frequency).

Direct observation of the Sun will give the mass of the Earth. Stellar mass along with the orbital velocity of the planet, or the Orbital Period, inserted into Kepler's laws of planetary motion will give us the distance between the planet (Earth) and the Sun. Distance from the Sun and strength of the Sun's solar output gives a rough idea as to temperature range. They will know we are not as hot as Mercury or as cold as Pluto. They will now know our length of day, length of year, that we have seasons, our gravity, and type of orbit.

They will ask: Is there air out there? Can they find that out? YES! Atmospheres distort radio signals. This is how weather radar works, be measuring the distortion of the radar signals to determine the density of the air above the surface. This is how we know when a cloud is a thunderstorm versus a fluffy cumulus cloud. Observers could not see our hurricanes, but there is enough atmosphere to tell them we have an atmosphere—and details about it.

Atmospheres bend radio signals. Air is thick near the surface, thinner as you go higher. Thus like light deflected going through a prism; the radio waves are bent downward slightly. If there were no air on a planet, the Radar signals would be detected every 12 hours. Due to atmospheric bending, the signals would be detected at 11 hours 55 minutes, and then at 12 hours 5 minutes. With some variation with the wavelengths used.

Atmospheric bending data, especially taken over several frequencies, gives observers the density of the atmosphere. Much of what they would learn would be negative data. While 80% Nitrogen with 20% Oxygen could not be determined, the detection of signals on absorption frequencies of other gases could rule them out. They could see hydrogen frequencies, so they would know our atmosphere was not a majority hydrogen (water vapor does not count). They would see methane frequencies, and hence learn that we are not like Titan.

Question for humans: What do satellite uplinks do? What can they tell observers?

Geosynchronous satellites (those that remain in stationary orbit above the Earth) used to relay satellite television signals. They are stationed in the Clark's belt, which is three Earth radii out. To send a signal out that far, satellite dishes send signals

—Continued next page

out to those satellites at $\frac{1}{2}$ a Gigawatt. Think 500,000,000 Watts of radiated power. Per satellite dish sending out its signal. Now multiply that by several hundred TV stations sending up satellite signals. (Only a few hundred of the old network analog systems ran those levels. Cost a lot of money, big electric bills, so they run only what they have to.)

Satellite uplinks are very high power, some in the 0.5 Gigawatt Class. However, only about 20% of the sky is illuminated with such signals. The signals are short; sweep or observation time about 60 seconds per 24 hours. This is not long enough to provide much information except to see what frequencies we are using for our own communications. And, perhaps, to see a brief commercial for “I Love Lucy” reruns.

What Do We Know They Could Know

- That Earth’s populations know how to generate lots of RF power and complex modulations.
- Size of the planet, length of day, length of year, estimate of gravity, and it’s distance from their Sun.
- Estimation of seasonal tilt.
- Approximate temperature range.
- It has an atmosphere, the density, and what’s not in it.
- Intelligence...still to be determined.

If aliens decided to make contact, how would they do it? The advantage of someone looking at the frequency ranges of radar is that we put out Gigawatts of signal. We have been sending out these signals in increasing strength since the 1950s. They can see us if they’re within 50 light years. We could see the same for them if we were looking for it. SETI/Argos currently scans all stars it searches for ALL frequencies. If they are radiating radio frequencies on radar frequencies, we’d see it. This means that we don’t have to wait for aliens to see us and send a signal back. They could already be visible, if they are radiating signals in a range and strength that we can receive.

Do I believe that intelligent life exists anywhere else in the universe? Can we prove it exists on Earth? Imagine if early humans did go extinct as they almost did 80,000 years ago. Dolphins would still be prospering. But they wouldn’t be obvious even if aliens sent a probe to Earth and mapped the planet as we have other worlds in our solar system. How about ultra-smart squid? Or a pre-technology hunter-gatherer species. How could you tell chimps from squirrels via a probe?

There is almost certainly single celled organisms on untold numbers of planets in the solar system. There may be smart squid around some planet 50 light years away. They may be 2 billion light years away and will last another billion years—but they’ll never hear us, because our signals only travel at the speed of light.

If we’re going to meet intelligent life in any form, it is most likely of our own making. But if aliens are out there, and if they can listen for us, now *you* know what they’ll be able to learn about us.

2007 Prometheus Award Nominees

Two novels have been nominated for the 2007 Prometheus Award: **Rainbows End**, by Vernor Vinge (TOR Books, May 2006) and **The Ghost Brigades**, by John Scalzi (A TOR Book, 2006).

Other novels mentioned as on the radar include **Glasshouse**, by Charles Stross (Ace Books, June, 2006), **Red Lightning**, by John Varley (Ace Books), **Spin Control**, by Chris Moriarty (Bantam Books), **Engaging the Enemy**, by Elizabeth Moon (Ballantine Books/Del Rey, 2006), **Harald**, by David D. Friedman (Baen Books), **The Clan Corporate** (Book Three of the Merchant Princes) by Charles Stross (TOR Books, May 2006), and **Variable Star**, by Robert Heinlein and Spider Robinson (TOR Books, September 2006).

Novels eligible for the 2007 Prometheus Award must have appeared in print for the first time between November, 2005, and December, 2006.

To nominate a novel for the 2007 Prometheus Award, send an email to committee chair, Michael Grossberg, at mikegrossb@aol.com.

J. Neil Schulman’s Off-Hollywood Adventure

Principal photography on author J. Neil Schulman’s feature film project, **Lady Magdalene**, completed on June 11th, and the production company has “wrapped most of [the] cast including [the] star, Nichelle Nichols.” The movie was shot around Pahrump and Las Vegas, Nevada. On September 25, 2006, **Lady Magdalene** will premier at the High Desert Shorts International Film Festival at the Pahrump Nugget Hotel and Gambling Hall in Pahrump, Nevada. This project is Schulman’s first produced feature length screenplay. Schulman’s credits include writer, co-producer, and director. He acted in one of the roles, and worked with Nichelle Nichols, who performed an original song that Schulman wrote.

The movie features a Department of Homeland Security investigator working at a brothel to uncover an al-Qaeda plot. Schulman received notice that he could not use the agency’s name “or any of the Department’s official visual identities” in the film, despite the fact that the film presents a positive image of the DHS. The feds stated that the “project does not fit within the DHS mission and that it is not something we can participate in.”

—*Turtledove review, continued from page 3*

takes place in a world somewhat like that of Kim Stanley Robinson's **The Years of Rice and Salt**, where the Black Plague was much deadlier than in real history—but Turtledove's divergence is less extreme: rather than killing over 99% of Europeans, leaving the continent empty and Christianity all but forgotten, the plague in this world killed only 80%, leaving Europe vulnerable to a Muslim resurgence in Spain, Italy, and the Balkans, while the surviving Christian areas went down a different historical path.

As young adult novels, these books are shorter than Turtledove's books for adult readers. Personally, I find this a pleasure; they feel more focused, with smaller casts of characters and a faster narrative pace. I don't find Turtledove's young adult novels as good as Robert Heinlein's classic juveniles—but the comparison's not hopelessly one-sided, either; if Heinlein is the sun in this particular sky, Turtledove is at least a bright moon. Probably his single worst trait as a young adult novelist is a recurrent impulse to condescend to his protagonists, pointing out things that they don't know or haven't realized. But he does this in his adult novels, too. If I wanted to try to infect a young adult reader with an enthusiasm for science fiction, I might pick these over Heinlein as a starting point, if only to avoid the chance that a fifty-year cultural gap might make Heinlein less accessible. And a bright middle school student who read Turtledove could learn enough about historical and

cultural gaps to make Heinlein's classic work more accessible to them.

In particular, Heinlein was writing boys' books; that was how young adult science fiction was classified when he started. He only wrote one science fictional girls' book, **Podkayne of Mars**, and it's not one of his best books for this age group. Several of Heinlein's juveniles have strongly portrayed female characters (for example, Ellie Coburn, Caroline Mshiyeni, and Pee wee Russell), but they tend to be peripheral to the action. Turtledove's books have boys and girls equally well portrayed, and equally central to the action. Annette Klein, the protagonist of this story, has the competence and the will to take effective action on her own, without being turned into a cinematic supergirl. And her friendship with Jacques, a boy her own age native to the alternate history her family is assigned to, is believably portrayed.

This novel is a good introduction to the Crosstime Traffic series. Readers of *Prometheus* may take a little extra pleasure in its antislavery theme and its quiet support for religious tolerance; but fortunately, neither is heavy-handed. The classic formula, "instruct by pleasing," is still good advice for young adult fiction, and Turtledove shows that he understands that pleasing the reader has to drive the story, whatever educational or moral content may be riding in the passenger seat. I've liked all three books in this series, but I find this one the best, and it makes me look forward to more.

—*Vernor Vinge review, continued from page 1*

relationships. The characterization of Robert Gu is a bigger departure. Over the course of the novel, Vinge shows him as a brilliant but thoroughly unpleasant man, one who succeeded in poisoning every importance relationship in his life—and is now setting out to do the same with his granddaughter. The struggle between his hostility and her desire to take care of him makes up a large part of the story, and one that Vinge handles skillfully.

The plot of this book links the two stories together, simply but ingeniously, and resolves both of them in a long-sustained climax—even longer, in fact, than that in **A Deepness in the Sky**. Vinge has gotten steadily better at maintaining high narrative tension.

This novel is less overtly spectacular than most of Vinge's previous fiction; much of its drama is in its implications. And its choice of an unsympathetic viewpoint character may make it difficult for some readers to get into. But it has a lot of major virtues: an ingenious and dramatic plot, complex human relationships, and a first-rate job of indirect exposition.

Libertarian readers may be ambivalent about the world Vinge reveals. It's not radically transformed in the way we would like to see. In some ways the governments of this future setting are more powerful and more intrusive than ever.

But at the same time, they accept both market relationships and decentralized cognitive networks, working with them as tools rather than trying to replace them—this is a thoroughly postsocialist world.

The relationship between the market and military force is a major problem for libertarian theory, possibly even its single biggest challenge. Military action has its own institutional logic, its own law, and even its own ethics. Can someone who accepts these—a soldier, or a spy—be a defender of freedom? Many science fiction novels have explored this conflict. Vinge has given us an important new fictional treatment of it, one that libertarian readers should pay attention to—and hope that he's right in saying yes, because if he's wrong, the prospects of freedom are poor.

—*Space Tourists, continued from page 20*

of tourist ships built by Rutan. Hundreds paid into a waiting list for the expensive trip, but nothing yet on the radar as to when flights begin. For the average human, space flight in the year 2006 looks almost as distant as it did in 1950. Unlike the low-budget adventurers in Victor Koman's novel, **Kings of the High Frontier**, reality shows that while it takes a billionaire to compete with government in space, time continues to prove a major factor in getting off the ground.

Humanity's Edge

By Tamara Wilhite

Blue Phi'er Publishing, 2005, \$14.95

Reviewed by Anders Monsen

Tamara Wilhite's first short story collection brings together thirteen tales of transformation and identity. These stories vary in length from brief sketches of only a couple of pages, to longer novelettes. Each piece packs a powerful emotional punch, and cover both near-future extrapolation and far-flung future speculations.

Of the longer stories, "New Beginnings," "Cathedral," and "Breathing Room" stood out as the strongest of the tales. The opening scene of "New Beginnings" deceptively lures the reader into thinking the characters comprise a space-faring family after a major accident. One part of that statement is true, and as the young characters grow and mature, they learn the terrible truth that their "father" hid from them through their lives. In "Cathedral," genetically engineered geniuses with built-in shortened life-spans seek a means to save their own kind. In the end, their dreams aren't quite realized, but instead one renegade genius sows a seed of creative destruction in the rest of the populace. While these two tales contain unexpected twists at the end, "Breathing Room" is a straightforward post-apocalyptic story, although the pace stumbles when the writer inserts info-dumps to set some scenes. Parts of this story reminded me of Nancy Kress's recent novel, **Nothing Human**, at least in tone and direction.

A few of the stories rely somewhat on gimmicks to drive the plot, such as "Double Trouble," a cloning story with a legal bent. "Banking on Hope" and "Kyoto Plus Ten," both quite short, also has sort of a ripped from the headline feel. The former covers the dark deception of a group in need of gene therapy blackmailing the one person who can save them. The latter opens with burger on a grill in an alley, an illegal act in the near future. The brevity of these tales only hint at their potential. However, I was uncertain about the views and groups the characters represented in "Banking on Hope"—the story seemed slightly rushed and foreshortened. Two other tales, "Denny" and "Gone in a Flash" also extrapolate on what-if scenarios. Whereas the latter feels at times preachy, the former is a mere scene, and tells the reader little.

"Church of the Called," which deals with fear and telepathy, comes off as one of the weakest stories. A reporter investigating a secret cult becomes its prisoner, and he faces a terrible choice. Perhaps this group really is acting in self-defense in how it deals with the reporter, but I wondered about other options. Four alien tales deal with questions of what it means to be human. In "Moment of Humanity," a future war between humans and cyborgs seems to go the latter's way, when a brief moment of kindness sparks a like gesture in return. Perhaps there's hope for something beyond constant war.

In "The Hunter and the Hunted" a samaritan brings a hurt man into her house, only to discover certain thing about him

that she fears, perhaps because it mirrors something within her. When she finds herself captive, things look grim, and there's a nasty surprise at the end. "The Ghosts of Tedjai" deals with first contact on a planet, where humanoids similar to mankind are dealt with harshly by the human settlers. It's a story fraught with emotion, and one of the strongest tales in the collection. "Survival of the Fittest" echoes the same issue as "Ghosts," with humans struggling to interact with near-humans.

This slim volume contains several thoughtful, well-crafted stories that debate the nature and scope of humanity. What does it mean to be human, and how do we deal with radical changes in our environment, both physical and cultural? How do we relate to other beings, both human and alien yet near-human? Wilhite asks important questions, and her characters deal with critical issues that make the reader think and question conventional wisdom. There are moments when the style stumbles, particularly when it comes to certain points of view transitions. Occasional info-dumps detract from the narrative. One can sense the writer at times still searching for her voice.

Wilhite's fiction has appeared in *Liberty Magazine* and *Prometheus*, as well as many other publications. **Humanity's Edge** brings together a nice baker's dozen of journeys well worth a trip.

Future Washington

Edited By Ernest Lilley

WSFA Press, 2005, \$16.95

Reviewed by Anders Monsen

It's perhaps no surprise that when the writers in **Future Washington** talk about Washington and politics, they tend to ridicule and belittle those most hallowed institutions. That tends to be the popular feeling outside the punditry (after all, who can forget how audiences cheered when aliens blew up the White House in Independence Day?) In **Future Washington**, a recent anthology published by the Washington Science Fiction Association (WSFA), sixteen original tales take a look at the how the nation's capitol fares over time. Some stories deal with the immediate future, others gaze far beyond the present time.

When a set of stories deals with the center of American politics, there's bound to be some debate and controversial ideas in more than a few tales. The gamut covers three strong tales of dissent in Joe Haldeman's "Civil Disobedience" and Edward M. Lerner's "The Day of the RFIDs," and Jack McDewitt's "Ignition." Lerner's story sketches an almost icily near-future scenario where records of grocery purchases feed into a database ripe for government data miners eager

—Continued on page 14

—Reviews, continued from page 13

to make terroristic assumptions. I had a hard time sleeping after reading this story.

We find climatological statements like Kim Stanley Robinson's "Primate in Forest" and Thomas Harlan's "Hothouse." The former comprises the first chapter of Robinson's novel, **Fifty Degrees Below**, a sequel to his **Forty Signs of Rain**. The main character in "Primate in the Forest" embraces his decision to begin living in his van, and explores the wilderness of Rock Creek Park, where escaped animals from the National Zoo now live. Harlan's story is set many years in the future, as inhabitants have abandoned the now waterlogged DC area, as two rent-a-cops arrive at the scene of a break-in. I found this story weak and full of self-importance, but perhaps too short to convey the many items thrown out by the author.

There are a couple of near-future thrillers in B. A. Chepaitis's "A Well-Dressed Fear" and Travis Taylor's "Agenda." Chepaitis veers away from science and into the realm of telepathy, and wonders if a Hitler-type candidate came along who also would do great things, how would you weigh the benefits against the terrible costs?

Along with serious pieces like L. Neil Smith's "The Lone and Level Sands" and Cory Doctorow's "Human Readable," I found it curious that humorous works dominated the book. Smith's story contains several characters from his completed but unpublished novel, **Ceres**, as they walk through that oft-imagined libertarian dream—Washington, DC's memorials and government buildings now stand simply as museums in a vast park. The plot is almost secondary to Smith's trenchant comments on several of the more famous (and not so famous) presidents. Doctorow's novella is the longest story in **Future Washington**, and perhaps the boldest sf story. Considering the advance of smart networks which move decisions about everyday life out of the hands of humans because perfect decisions are too complex, Doctorow gives us a grim future.

I'm not sure I buy the need to move networks this way for efficiency, as it ignores the structure of the free market's invisible hand and posits a strong enough computer will almost work the same way. But "Human Readable" certainly rates as the best written story.

Of the sixteen original stories, humor or satire found expression in seven tales. On the light-hearted side we find Steven Sawicki's "Mr. Zmith Goes to Washington," Brenda Clough's "Indiana Wants Me," Nancy Jane Moore's "Hallowe'en Party," and Sean McMullen's "Empire of the Willing." It's easy to make fun of politics, and some stories succeed better than others. More sarcastic visions abound in James Alan Gardner's "Shopping at the Mall" and Allen M. Steele's "Hail to the Chief." Jane Lindskold's "Tigers in the Capitol" is far more subtle, and might even be considered even-keeled rather than humorous, although the protagonist's commentary seemed at times tongue-in-cheek.

I was surprised to learn that only 1200 copies were printed (200 of these were hardcovers). Sure, this is no mass-market best-seller, but I expected a greater audience potential, given the names listed on the cover. Given the nature of this anthology, the focus on politics is inevitable. Well worth the price, this anthology shows that ideas remain an integral part of science fiction, not just in the realm of science. If more stories like these continue to appear, the Prometheus Award committee may need to consider expanding the award range to shorter works.

Death is Easy

By Russell Madden

Guardian Press, 2005, \$14.95

Reviewed by Anders Monsen

Russell Madden's detective novel, **Death is Easy**, hints coyly at a stateless society in a near future version of the United States, but spends precious few words describing the operation of law enforcement in a free society. That's a shame, as there are missed opportunities that come tantalizingly close to shedding light on the criminal side of a free society. The radical differences one might expect to find compared to a society where one group monopolizes the legal use of force, instead seem marginal. Once you uncover that Madden's society (apparently the same geographical entity as the United States, which still maintains borders with Mexico and Canada) exists with fewer laws but many of the same institutions, the temptation to search for the greater implications of such a vision almost obscures the rest of the novel's plot.

Dyrk Rinehart (with a "Y"), a private investigator who occasionally free-lances for the local police, takes on a simple

—Continued next page

2006 Prometheus Awards

The 2006 Prometheus Awards, honoring the best novel published in 2005, as well as the Hall of Fame Award, will be presented at LACon IV, the 64th 2006 World Science Fiction Convention, held in Anaheim, California August 23-27.

A perusal of the program list finds some notable libertarian writer guests, including Victor Koman, James P. Hogan, Brad Linaweaver, Eric S. Raymond, Melinda Snodgrass, and Vernor Vinge.

Visit the official web site for more details on the World-Con: <http://www.laconiv.org/>

missing person case. Along with his young and gorgeous assistant, Rinehart seeks out the last location of a probable suicide by a cancer patient. Instead, they uncover a layer of plots and subplots, from basic insurance fraud to major drug running and double-crossing between rival gangs. As they pull each of the loose threads, they even uncover links to the death of Rinehart's wife and kids in a car accident one year ago.

Madden writes an interesting detective story, although the escalation of plots and huge cast of rarely seen background characters made it difficult to keep their motivations and fates straight. Far too much time is spent on describing the events leading up to the death of Rinehart's family, time that might have better been spent in the present, fleshing out all the characters making up the subplots.

As a person, and detective, Rinehart lacks sympathy. Given the tragic death of his two young kids and wife, the reader feels almost obligated to root for Rinehart. His self-deprecatory sense of humor may attempt to blunt his cantankerous world view, but instead grated, rather than coming across as banter. Perhaps this came through so strongly because so many of

the other characters never loosened up either; virtually every other person with whom Rinehart interacts seems to hate the world, and each person thus failed to act as foils for his wacky sense of humor.

Death is Easy rarely tries to convince any character (save maybe the criminal kind) that a free society was worth the fight. There's no cause supplied for the radical change from a previous statist society to one with private security and private police, leaving the libertarian reader (and non-libertarian, for that matter) in the dark regarding what could have proved a major component of the novel. For example, by what authority can the private police force make arrests or imprison individuals? A privatized fire department is one thing, and there's a nice touch where Rinehart risks a false alarm and must pay restitution. Whether this is an anarchist or minarchist society (the state exists to provide security), we never learn. Instead, the novel remains a decent detective tale with a tough-luck protagonist. If Madden develops future Rinehart novels, filling in the political background and imparting a lighter sense of life among the characters would create a stronger book.

Orphans of Chaos

By John C. Wright

Tor, 2005, \$24.95

Reviewed by William H. Stoddard

John C. Wright came to the attention of *Prometheus* readers with his Everness novels, which took a distinctive approach to fantasy: mythic high fantasy drawing on many different sources and set in the present-day world. **Orphans of Chaos**, the first of a new series, applies the same approach to a specific fantasy motif: the school for students with mysterious powers, along the lines of Roke in Le Guin's Earthsea novels or Hogwarts in Rowling's Harry Potter series—or, looking further afield, Professor Xavier's School for Gifted Youngsters in *X-Men*, which trains apprentice superheroes. Most such schools strive to help their students master their unusual abilities. Wright's has a different goal: to restrain its unusual students. In some ways, **Orphans of Chaos** is comparable to the classic television series *The Prisoner* (recipient of an LFS Hall of Fame award for its treatment of the theme of resistance to authority).

Wright's mythic premise in this book gives it a somewhat narrower focus than in the Everness books. Its starting place is Greek mythology, and in particular the generational succession of the Greek gods. Many of its characters actually *are* Greek gods, typically under pseudonyms that invite the reader to guess who he's referring to. The combination of the ancient Olympians with a modern British setting is sometimes a bit odd—but gives the story a very British flavor.

There has been Internet discussion of Wright's Christian beliefs and their likely effect on his further books. There cer-

tainly are references to Christianity in this book—but of a very odd sort. The one character who claims to be Christian, and who offers instruction in Christian beliefs to the protagonist at a moment of spiritual crisis, identifies herself as a Donatist, an adherent of a set of beliefs that was classified as a heresy before the fall of Rome. (In brief, the Donatists taught that the validity of a priest's office and of the sacraments he performed depended on his own moral character; they rejected any pragmatic view of the church as an organization and saw it purely as a community of the holy.) There is also an elaborate story of creation that fits very closely to the myths of Gnosticism, a different and even more radically unorthodox Christian heresy, though one that, much more than Donatism, has continued to attract sympathizers. In some ways, Gnosticism's rejection of divine authority will appeal to libertarians; in others, it's more akin to Marxism's promise of a post-scarcity world of total freedom than to any standard libertarian view of freedom. In this book, though, the Gnostic themes appear to exist more for to define the situation of the characters than to convey a view of the real world. Readers looking for a religious message, whether in hope or in dread, will be puzzled to find one.

Wright's characterization is highly stylized, and his language is often deliberately archaic or mannered, as was also the case in the Everness books. Not all readers will find his writing accessible. Readers specifically looking for political and social themes probably won't want to try: any applicability of these books to such themes is at quite a distance and little relevant to their main themes. They're better read for other reasons: for the interest of puzzling out Wright's references and his odd slant on classical myth, or for the sake of the characters themselves, whose story is much more sharply focused on than in his previous work.

RFID tags, spy chips, and the myth of “the mark”

By *Tamara Wilhite*

Are RFID chips like “Digital Angel” and “Verichip” going to mutate into the mark as many saw in *The Omen*? Before we visualize our fears of what could be, let’s take a look at what RFID chips actually are.

RFID stands for Radio Frequency Identification. This term is used for any system that allows you to identify an object based on a radio frequency system. This can be anything from the toll tag for your car or an inventory tag on a tube of toothpaste.

There are two kinds of RFID systems, active and passive. If they are powered by the light beam, then they are passive. If the LCD is modulated by a chip with a battery, then they are active.

When you have to power it up, range is more limited, but cost is much less.

Uses include electronic tolltags for cars, theft resistance tags in items in stores—or Verichips in people. It is this use in people that raises the “Mark of the Beast” fears of Revelations in the Bible. The greatest privacy concern RFID chips are raising is in tracking individuals.

RFID chips can be coded to contain personal information. It’s essentially a bar code turned into a digital data string.

The “verichip” makers want us all to have chips that have a personal identification code—a barcode embedded in the implanted RFID chip. The greatest likely future use that is being pushed is to have the RFID chips hold a medical ID

number tied to your records in a central database. And a centrally accessible database of our medical records is a violation of our security concerns. Name, address, *social security number*, along with potentially embarrassing medical. 300 million peoples’ information, including information valuable to ID theft, blackmail, and pranksters.

I had personal concerns when a typographical error in someone’s database listed my blood type as type O. I’m A. However, I’d had a moderate medical reaction after a surgery. If the case had been reverse, and the database said I was O and I had received type A blood, the mistake could have been fatal. What happens when 100,000 medical staff can enter information into the database? And any hackers who’d think it’s funny to make a million people think they have AIDS or an angry ex-spouse who hires a hacker to delete a fatal drug allergy from the database.

If RFID chips ever did become a replacement for credit cards and debit cards and the government tried to outlaw cash so they could track our purchases, we’ll simply see the black market of goods and underground labor start dealing in pesos or Canadian cash. Hence, “mark of the beast to make us unable to do business” is not what we should be worried about.

Put everyone’s medical records in a single database so that RFID chips can be used as a medical record barcode, and our private public records become that much more vulnerable. *That* is the reason RFID chips should cause us worry.

A handful of words

You learn much about the limits of time when there are two beings in your house under the age of four. In early April our second child was born, Aidan. He joins his older sister Ariel in a household of books and toys, with his own unique demands on our time merging with existing demands from a person with almost limitless energy. It’s strange that a few years ago parenthood seemed like an alien world, and now my life expands and shrinks at the same time. I no longer read as many books as I used to a few years ago, and trips to bookstores long since have been replaced by clicks at amazon.com.

As an older parent, I wonder about my role, and what life will be like twenty years from now as my children contemplate college. Who could have predicted the War on Terror, or the breakup of the Soviet Union, twenty years prior to those actual events? Nonetheless, as I watch my daughter’s joy from listening to books, or making up stories and names, I realize that her world is too small to include some of the events on the global stage, and yet only limited in scope by her imagination.

The effects of parenthood on this newsletter may mean a few shortened issues. I tend to plan ahead by a couple of issues, looking both for themes and content. Luckily the interview in this issue is one that I had planned to print last issue but ran out of space. I’m also thankful for the many reviews written by former editor Bill Stoddard. If you have any reviews, or thoughts for other types of contributions to *Prometheus*, please don’t hesitate to contact me, at editor@lfs.org. In addition to book reviews, as you can see from this issue the range of content includes (but is not limited to) movie reviews, interviews, news notes, and essays.

Looking ahead to the fall issue I expect announcements, news, and reports from the Prometheus Awards presentation. This year the Awards will take place at the WorldCon in Los Angeles in August. I wish I could say I hope to see you there, but for reasons alluded to in the first paragraph, my travel options tend to limit such plans.

This issue sees yet another minor change in presentation—increasing the font size slightly from the previous issue.

— *Anders Monsen*

Periodical Praise

By Jim Sullivan

When it comes to my lifetime's favorite hangout, the public library, all I hear about it these days is that librarians ought to put a V-chip, or some similar screening contraption, in the library's computers to block kids from seeing things they shouldn't, like naked men and women.

Well, I object (not to the nude folks, mind you, but to the screening devices)! I'm here to say that no one in my hometown public library, which I visited as a kid, stopped me with a V-chip or with anything else electronic, mechanical, or physical from perusing whatever I wanted to in the collection. That included its vast archive, going back to the early 1920s, or *National Geographic Magazine*, with its easily recognizable glossy, yellow-bordered cover. All were shelved openly, if remotely, in the back of the library (but within its walls).

Certainly, the librarian, the facility's only staffer, who was in her 80s but with all her mental faculties as sharp as ever, save for slight impairments in sight and hearing, must have known full well what I was looking at so quietly, for hours, back there in the dimly lit, narrow aisle also filled with dusty law books.

I was getting an eyeful, I'll grant you. But at the same time, I was getting an education in more ways than one. Primarily, Africa's, Asia's, Australia's, and the South Sea Islands' past was being revealed to me. I didn't learn till years later that there was a reputable word for what I was learning—anthropology.

In any case, I concentrated on the magazine's text. Well—okay—I scanned the captions mostly. But I poured over those pages, mainly filled with big, black and white photos, till I nearly went blind. That affected my later life in some ways: today, for instance, I have to wear glasses. But I learned a lot about people from other lands. And that's made me a tolerant person. I do, though, have a tendency nowadays to get a wee bit cranky with bigots and censors.

What I am, too, is self-educated. And it's not only in the field mentioned above but also in anatomy, gross and otherwise; geography; cultures of the world; and related subjects. The credit for all that goes to *National Geographic Magazine*, which I still enjoy looking at. Today, by the way, I have the good lighting I need to see the pages without straining my eyes. And I do it (look at the magazine, that is) in a dust-free environment.

Admittedly, reading *National Geographic Magazine* as a youngster may have inadvertently accelerated the onset of my puberty. But no harm came to me as a result. On the other hand, I did marry rather young—at age 22. Yet that didn't work out too badly, considering that my missus and I have been wed now for over 40 years.

But the point I want to make is, a V-chip might block out some things that parents don't want their little Tommys and Marys to see. But in the process, topics that loving moms and

dads, upon serious reflection, would want their children exposed to, if you'll pardon the term, will also be covered up.

Naturally, I'm not defending hard-core stuff. That's something else again where children are concerned. But the only sure way to keep kids from viewing or reading such anywhere is for a vigilant mother, father, older sibling (not!), or other responsible adult to be there to prevent it from happening.

One of those individuals should always accompany kids to the public library where ideas, in print, in pictures, and on the internet, possibly ideas contrary to those taught in the family home, are rampant. This shouldn't come as a surprise to anyone, for the public library is the area's home for different ideas.

Yes, I can safely, and proudly, proclaim that the *National Geographic Magazine* made a man out of me, and an informed one at that. So, censors, stop badgering librarians! They're doing their jobs splendidly!

Jim Sullivan has been a full-time writer for the past twenty years and has been published in Pacific Coast Journal, Grit, Skeptical Inquirer, Frontiersman, Satire, and others. This essay originally appeared in Washington Free Press and is reprinted by permission.

Jim Baen, October 22, 1943 - June 28, 2006

Editor and publisher Jim Baen died on June 28, following a massive stroke. He once referred to himself in an interview as "somewhat conservative and somewhat libertarian in my political leanings." Notable libertarian works published by Baen include Vernor Vinge's classic short story "The Ungoverned," E. Paul Wilson's **The Tery** and **Dydeetown World**, L. Neil Smith's **Forge of the Elders** (which included **Contact and Commune**, **Converse and Conflict**, and the cancelled **Concert and Cosmos** as a single novel), plus short story collections and novels by James P. Hogan. Baen Books was recognized last year by the LFS when a Special Prometheus Award was presented to co-editors Mark Tier and Martin H. Greenberg for two linked anthologies, **Give Me Liberty**, and **Visions of Liberty**.

Baen forged a unique brand in the sf publishing world. The distinctive covers and focus on military sf hid the fact that he published quality sf and helped discover many new writers. He pioneered electronic publishing, virtually giving away copies of books online, and stood forth as a vocal supporter of unencrypted books. Through a Webscriptions program Baen also sold online books, which proved quite successful.

—*Suprynowicz/Bieser Interview*, continued from page 9

planned, or did it just happen as you wrote?

VIN: In 1777, the British captured Philadelphia. They expected the Revolution to end. The European tradition was, when you captured an enemy's capital, they quit. As late as 1940, look at how fast Holland and Denmark and France laid down their arms. Orders from the capital. That was the tradition. Like a game of chess. But there were two really scary exceptions that meant things were going to change. In 1777, the Redcoats captured Philadelphia, and the colonists said, "So what? Our capital is now some tree stump out by Harrisburg. By the way, your Johnny Burgoyne guy in the nice gold braided uniform? He just got beat by a jumped-up New Haven storekeeper up at Saratoga." The whole British paradigm was wrong. We didn't need the cities. And then the same thing happened to Napoleon in 1812. He captured Moscow; the Russians were supposed to surrender. Instead Czar Alexander just said, "So what? I never liked Moscow that much, anyway. How do you like our winter? Getting a little hungry yet? Try eating the chandeliers." Just that quickly, the time of Europe was over; the age of Russia and America had begun, because we weren't playing some stylized feudal chess game any more; we changed the rules.

The Black Arrow doesn't want to capture territory and make himself the new maximum ruler; he's just fed up and he's ready to start killing them; what he wants isn't reform, it's anarchy. We're taught to think anarchy is a real scary word, but if you went back to the year 1910 you'd find a nice, peaceful world that most of today's Americans would be unable to distinguish from anarchy. No zoning codes, no drivers licenses, no income tax, we didn't even have any airport searches all the way up through the 1960s. There was very little government involvement in the average American's life, and it was a mostly peaceful, happy land. To immediately shout "But there was racial prejudice!" is to ape those propaganda films

the Russians used to show, that characterized America as nothing but ghettos and race riots. I'm not saying I want to go back to separate drinking fountains. You'll note plenty of the good guys in **The Black Arrow** are black and Jewish and Asian. But the idea of federalism is that every state should be different; Rhode Island had complete religious tolerance, a lot of Jews moved to Rhode Island so it thrived and the other states said, "Gee, maybe we should allow synagogues to be built here, too; it doesn't seem to hurt anything." I should be able to go live in a state that has the same level of government that it had in 1910, if I want to. That's the Free State Project ideal, though of course the federals will never allow that, now. What's the last sentence in **The Black Arrow**? It's a quote from John F. Kennedy; go look it up.

But, back to my point...The other side can understand someone who just wants to live in the palace. You can cut a deal with a guy like that. What frightens them is the guy who doesn't want to live in the palace. If you can't win playing by their rules, you change the rules. Technically, a decentralized group of cells works better; it's harder to decapitate. But this is actually something I wanted to write about. Setting up a new political organization that's big enough to replace the old political organization just means you get a Stalinist bureaucracy instead of a Czarist bureaucracy; you get Castro instead of Batista. The kind of talent you need to run that kind of outfit is going to behave just like the old outfit, because the form dictates the function. What takes courage is deciding you're going to be free, and that anyone who wants to search your pockets has to be killed, here and now; no half measures. We're issuing a warning, see. Back off, or this is what's coming. And when it comes, the meter maids will not be safe; Ramon at the airport will not be safe. They won't listen, of course. They never do.

SUNNI: How far do you gentlemen think we are from that kind of action?

SCOTT: I think we're awful damn close. If you look at **The Ballad of Carl Drega** with this thought in mind, you might get the idea that it's already starting, in isolated cases. Personally I'm a lover, not a fighter, and I don't look forward to the kind of world and actions depicted in **The Black Arrow**. But I fear that's where we're going, nearly in free-fall now.

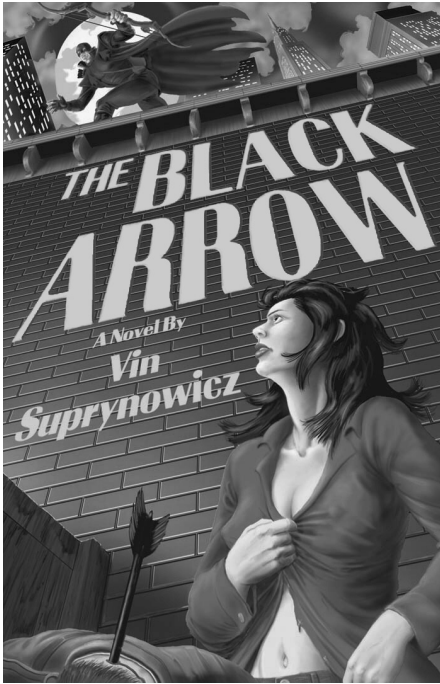
SUNNI: What medium do you like to work in best? Do you have a closet full of paintings, waiting to be discovered?

SCOTT: I've gone completely digital in my art. The only canvas paintings I've done were done years ago in art school. There are about a half-dozen of them. I did a lot of spot-illustration work for Steck-Vaughn Company, the textbook company I went to work for after leaving art school. I have some comic book work done in the early and mid-1980s, including a comic-book called **Gambit**, from which Marvel Comics stole the name and concept for its mutant character of the same name.

Classifieds

The (Libertarian) Connection, open-forum since 1968. Subscribers may insert four pages/issue free, unedited. **Factsheet Five** said, "Lively interchange of point, counterpoint and comments". Eight/year, \$20. Strauss, 10 Hill #22-LP, Newark NJ 07102.

—Continued next page



SUNNI: Who among today's libertarian writers would you most like to work with?

SCOTT: You mean, fiction writers? I'm pretty much already doing it, working with Neil and Vin. Neil and I hope to do future collaborations. The next one will probably be a story set in yet another alternative universe, titled **Roswell, Texas**. This will be a prose novel for which I will do chapter illustrations. We've also talked about adapt-

ing **Their Majesties' Bucketeers**, doing a series of juveniles based on **Brightsuit MacBear** and **Taflak Lysandra** and continuing the rest of that septology. Also, we want to do the story about how Lucy invented a working FTL drive and how Clarissa finally gets cured of Koman's mitochondriasis. I'd also love to work with Victor Koman, and I just finished working up sample pages for a graphic novel proposal with J. Neil Schulman—who came to me with the idea.

SUNNI: Oooh! Can you tell me more about that?

SCOTT: Schulman recently wrote his first new prose novel in several years—**Escape From Heaven**. I don't want to spoil the plot but essentially it's a romantic comedy involving Jesus, Satan, Adam, Eve, God, and the story's hero, a popular radio talk-show host named Duj Pepperman. Schulman does some interesting twists on Christian mythology. The book also contains a fair bit of libertarian commentary, in the form of Pepperman's on-air commentary, but the book isn't really about libertarianism, it's about one's relationship with God—a subject that has occupied Schulman's thinking rather a lot lately.

SUNNI: Yes, I'm familiar with the book—I reviewed it, but don't think the review got published anywhere where it was widely seen. So, what pro-freedom artists do you like best? What artists inspire you?

SCOTT: Pro-freedom artists are pretty damn scarce, which I suppose is a good thing for me because it cuts back the competition. Some of the artists who inspire me the most, based on their technique, completely leave me cold politically, or else I don't know their politics. Those are comic-book artists like Steve Rude, John Byrne, Frank Miller, and the late Will Eisner, illustrators Frank Frazetta, Mike Whelan and the late

Kelly Freas. I was also inspired by the underground cartoonists Gilbert Shelton and the late Dave Sheridan, *Mad Magazine* artists Jack Davis and Mort Drucker. The only other pro-freedom cartoonists I know of are Peter Bagge, Kevin Tuma and Russmo—and of course, Rex May, who I mentioned earlier. I respect them as comrades in the struggle for liberty, but I can't say their work has any influence on mine. Although I'm a tad jealous of Bagge for getting those multi-page spreads in *Reason*.

SUNNI: The "About the Author" page in **The Black Arrow** states that you're at work on another novel. Care to share a bit more about that?

VIN: I tried for years to write novels from outlines. The way they tell you to. Tried and failed. Complete disaster. Everybody's different, but I have to let a novel grow organically out of the stuff I'm researching, the life I'm living. And most of all, out of my dreams. You are what you eat, and you write what you dream. I used to think Tim Leary failed to conquer death, but now I'm not so sure. Maybe he's still dreaming. A novel is a really big dream that comes to you in parts, and the parts come out of order, like fractured images in a kaleidoscope. As it grows, you try piecing the parts together different ways, like trying to piece together a broken pot. Except there may be some shards that aren't really from the same pot; you have to be willing to set them aside and see if they fit the next pot. It's trial and error. The book has to keep surprising you or it gets stale.

The next book is about jazz and murder, about the jazz clubs where I'm hanging out and about the Las Vegas cops and a Las Vegas murder. We get a fair number of interesting murders in this town. You immerse yourself in those things till they're in your dreams and then you see what comes. You let the subconscious generate stuff and you take the great journey again and you trust it and you don't start asking what it all means, right away. And of course I use sex very differently from most writers, where it's a recreational activity—James Bond gets laid by two different women so you know one has to be the bad girl so he'll have to kill her and she'll usually be the one who's more sexually knowledgeable. And why is that? After a while you've got to surmise poor Ian Fleming's ideal woman was actually the inflatable kind, because they're not aggressive and they lie still and they don't talk too much. I find it much sexier for a woman to say, "I love you, pulse of my heart. Let's make lots of babies; can I be on top this morning?" It's time to go back and look at William Powell and Myrna Loy as Nick and Nora Charles. Why shouldn't marriage be sexy? Isn't that the way it's supposed to be?

Excerpted from a longer interview originally published at Sunni's Salon <www.endervidualism.com/salon/>, by Sunni Maravillosa. Reprinted with permission from the interviewer.

Space Tourists, or Where's My Flight to the Moon?

By Ivar Arnesen

On June 21, 2004, 7,000 people watched raptly as the first private spacecraft to enter outer space (defined as an altitude of 100 kilometers (62 miles)) took flight into history. SpaceShipOne, the rocket-powered vehicle, designed by Burt Rutan of Scaled Composites, fired its engines at roughly 14 kilometers after being lifted there by White Knight, which carried the smaller SpaceShipOne on its back for the first phase of the flight. When the new astronaut landed a few minutes later, an enterprising individual handed the crew a poster that read, "SpaceShipOne, Government Zero."

Over two years later, while private enterprise languishes, the government tied the game. The shuttle program, grounded since the 2003 Columbia disaster, when that shuttle disintegrated over Texas upon re-entry, launched Discovery in July 2006 on a two-week mission, despite run-ins with vultures and foam slamming the ship during take-off. Whether the act of political expediency in sending Discovery into space despite such failures will prove costly upon re-entry, the fact remains that despite SpaceShipOne's initial success, little or no concrete advances in private space-flight since have materialized.

Paul Allen, one of the co-founders of Microsoft and a long-

time fan of science fiction, invested \$20 million into Rutan's project. Allen is just one of a handful of new-tech billionaires pumping massive amounts of money and energy into the private space effort. Aside from Allen, Jeff Bezos (Amazon.com), Elon Musk (Paypal) and John Carmack (Doom video games) are perhaps the most famous names involved. Bezos's Blue Origin seeks to use reusable launch vehicles from a private spaceport in West Texas. Blue Origin remains in the theoretical stage at this point. Musk's project, Space Exploration Technologies, finds itself still in the hiring stage, yet engineers who might usually head to NASA now find other options on the table. Musk's focus is payload, not tourists. Carmack's spaceports in Texas and Oklahoma (the South West is ideal for spaceports, with acreage far from major populations). While its progressed to the stage of limited testing, Carmack remains far from launch stage, despite stating a few years ago the desire to compete for the X-Prize awarded to SpaceShipOne.

Shortly after the 2004 launch, the world was abuzz with news that Richard Branson, another billionaire, planned a fleet

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The Newsletter of the Libertarian Futurist Society
501 Abiso Ave.
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