

PROMETHEUS

2008 Prometheus Award Winners Announced

The Libertarian Futurist Society presented awards to the winners of the annual Prometheus Award in Denver, Colorado at Denvention 3, the 66th World Science Fiction Convention, on August 6th 2008.

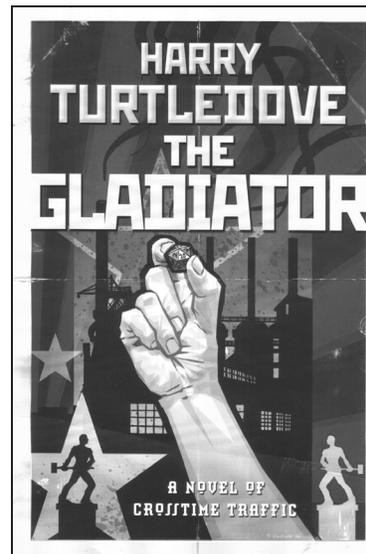
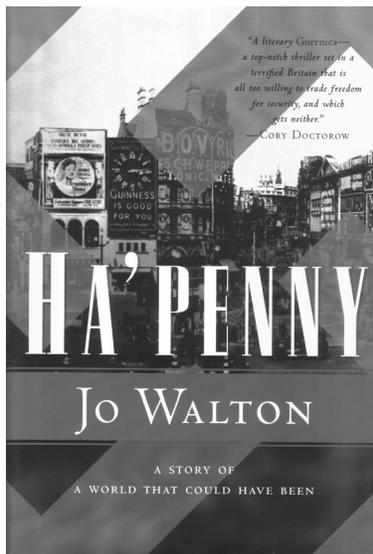
For the first time since the award was established in 1979 there was a tie in voting for the Best Novel award, so Jo Walton and Harry Turtledove each received a plaque and a one-ounce gold coin. The Co-winners are *Ha'penny*, by Jo Walton (Tor Books), and *The Gladiator*, by Harry Turtledove (Tor Books).

The award for Best Classic Fiction (the Hall of Fame award) Hall of Fame Award goes to *A Clockwork Orange*, a novel by Anthony Burgess.

Harry Turtledove received a previous Best Novel nomination in 1999 for *Between the Rivers* from TOR Books, but this is his first time to win the award. *The Gladiator* is part of Turtledove's Crosstime Traffic series, which is aimed at young adults. The story follows some teenagers in an alternate Italy with a communist government and a mostly compliant society. The youngsters discover a store selling role-playing games that promote entrepreneurial behavior and independent thinking and learn a lot about their society as they explore the games.

This was Jo Walton's first nomination for a Prometheus. *Ha'penny* is a follow-up to *Farthing*, published in 2006. The novels are alternate histories that take place in a Britain that made peace with Hitler in 1941 and has slowly been turning more fascist itself. In *Ha'penny*, Scotland Yard Inspector Peter Carmichael is assigned to investigate an explosion in a London Suburb that leads to evidence of a conspiracy. The story portrays the fall of a society into totalitarianism, emphasizing subtle moral corruption rather than overt brutality.

A Clockwork Orange has been nominated several times in



the past. Burgess's novel is a graphic depiction of a dystopian and authoritarian society. Alex is an unapologetic ultraviolent criminal who is eventually captured and sent to prison. The ultimate horror occurs when he is subjected to an experimental form of aversion therapy, and his love of music is taken away along with his taste for violence.

The other finalists for Best Novel were *Ragamuffin*, by Tobias S. Buckell; *The Execution Channel*, by Ken MacLeod; and *Fleet of Worlds*, by Larry Niven and Edward

—Continued on page 10

Inside Prometheus:

Reviews:

In War Times, by Kathleen Ann Goonan

Bright the Sky & A World Too Near,

by Kay Kenyon

Hurricane Moon, by Alexis Glynn Latner

Publicani, by Zak Maymin

The Coming Convergence, by Stanley Schmidt

Roswell, Texas, by L. Neil Smith, Rex May,

Scott Bieser, Jen Zach

Halting State, by Charles Stross

Opening Atlantis, by Harry Turtledove

Ha'penny, by Jo Walton

Serenity: Better Days, by Joss Whedon et al

Franz Kafka's *The Trial*, Directed by

Orson Welles

PROMETHEUS

The newsletter of the
Libertarian Futurist Society

Editor

Anders Monsen

Contributors

Chris Hibbert
Thomas E. Jackson
Max Jahr
Phil Maymin
William H. Stoddard
Fran Van Cleave

The Libertarian Futurist Society

Board members

President — Chris Hibbert
Vice President — William H. Stoddard
Treasurer — Fred Curtis Moulton
Secretary — Michael Grossberg
David Tuchman, Rick Triplett, & Joseph P. Martino

Director — Charles Morrison
Assistant Director — Steve Burgauer

Webmaster

Tod Casasent

Letters and Submissions:

Anders Monsen
501 Abiso Ave.
San Antonio, TX 78209
editor@lfs.org

Subscriptions & Advertisements

Libertarian Futurist Society
650 Castro St. Suite 120-433
Mountain View, CA 94041
moulton@moulton.com

LFS Online:

<http://www.lfs.org>

Basic Membership: \$25/yr (\$30 int'l)
Full Membership: \$50/yr
Sponsors: \$100/yr
Benefactors: \$200/yr
Subscriptions: \$20/yr (\$25 int'l)
All memberships include one-year subscriptions to *Prometheus*.

Classified ads: 50 cents/word, 10 percent off for multiple insertions. Display ad rates available. All checks payable to the Libertarian Futurist Society.

Prometheus © 2008 the Libertarian Futurist Society. The LFS retains a non-exclusive license to republish accepted articles on its Web site; all other rights revert to the contributor. Letters and reviews are welcome. Bylined articles are strictly the opinion of the writer and do not necessarily reflect the opinion of the LFS or its members.

2008 Prometheus Awards News



Fran Van Cleave holds the Hall of Fame Award for Anthony Burgess' novel, A Clockwork Orange.



Harry Turtledove and Jo Walton, co-winners of the Prometheus Award for Best Novel, for The Gladiator and Ha'penny, respectively.

The 2008 Prometheus Awards for Best Novel and Best Classic Fiction were held Wednesday afternoon at 2:30 pm in the Denver Convention Center at Denvention, the 66th World Science Fiction Convention. This year marked two firsts in the history of the Prometheus Awards for Best Novel: First female winner and first tie.

Both of the Best Novel winners were on hand for the presentation of the awards, which was hosted by LFS representative, Fred Curtis Moulton. Fran

Van Cleave, also representing the LFS, accepted the award for Classic Fiction, also known as the Hall of Fame, for Anthony Burgess's savagely dystopian novel, *A Clockwork Orange*. Burgess died in 1993.

Turtledove then made a brief statement, followed by Walton. The floor was then opened for questions, and the awards presentation closed with photographs of the winners.

A full WorldCon report with all speeches will appear in the Fall issue.

BOOK REVIEWS

Halting State

By Charles Stross

Ace, 2007

Reviewed by William H. Stoddard

When I bought *Halting State*, I hoped it might turn out to be a suitable nominee for this year's Prometheus award. Stross's previous fiction has often used libertarian ideas in an intelligent and informed way (notably in *Singularity Sky* and its sequel, *Iron Sunrise*); and I'd read that this novel involved a financial firm called Hayek Associates, which sounded like a promising little joke. Having read it twice, though, I don't see much in the way of libertarian content. It's merely an intelligent, well-written, and sometimes quite funny novel that I found a delight to read.

Halting State is the same kind of departure for Stross that *Rainbows End* was for Vernor Vinge. It represents a move from the distant interstellar future to events a decade or two from now, from space opera to technothriller. In fact, the two novels have a lot of common themes, including international political conflict, the transformation of espionage by radical decentralization based on computer networks, and the real-world impact of virtual reality and computer games. They're also alike in having a strong sense of place: *Rainbows End* takes place in San Diego, and *Halting State* mainly in Edinburgh and Glasgow, meaning that each author is writing about a place and a cultural milieu he's personally familiar with, extrapolated by a decade or two.

Halting State has many elements of another genre: the police procedural. One of its viewpoint characters, Sue Smith, is a detective in Edinburgh who's called in to investigate a bank robbery. But this is an unusual sort of bank robbery: the bank is located in a virtual world, its clients are player characters in a fantasy game setting, and the robbers were a band of orcs backed up by a fire-breathing dragon. On the other hand, the simulated currency of this setting has an exchange value, not just with the simulated currencies of other game environments, but with real world currencies. (This point, by the way, is not an invention or even an extrapolation; virtual gaming environments already have such currencies, and government agencies such as the Internal Revenue Service are starting to make rulings about them.) The plot grows out of this situation, as several different viewpoint characters investigate different aspects of the break-in—and find themselves in deeper trouble.

The handling of viewpoint is one of this novel's gimmicks. Like "choose your own adventure" books, or the text in many computer games, it's written in the second person: the viewpoint character in each chapter is not "I," "he," or "she" but "you." I take this to be a deliberate stylistic device to reinforce the link to gaming. I expected to find it irritating; in fact, after a couple of chapters, it seemed so natural that I stopped noticing it.

The other two investigators in this story are a professional auditor and a programmer she hires as a consultant. Both have backgrounds in virtual reality games, but of very different kinds. The three focal characters are dissimilar enough to be easily told apart, but they have at least one important thing in common: all three are competent, not just technically but as a general attitude toward life—they have what Ayn Rand and her followers called "efficacy." Reading about people like this is one of the pleasures of science fiction and some other forms of genre fiction, less often found in mainstream fiction, and Stross provides it in good measure. By the end of the novel, the competence of all three viewpoint characters has been repeatedly tested.

The other thing that made this book enjoyable to read was its undercurrent of humor. This is partly a matter of characterization, and partly of ingenious small references to the science fictional subculture. All the way through my first reading, I kept pausing to smile or laugh out loud. All in all, I recommend this as an entertaining and thought-provoking book for anyone who likes police procedurals, technothrillers, cyberpunk, or just clever extrapolations of the near future.

Publicani

By Zak Maymin

BookSurge Publishing, 2008

Reviewed by Phil Maymin

You never hear people badmouth the income tax anymore. Not even this week, when each of our three hundred thousand Fairfield County households will on average fork over twenty thousand dollars, hundreds of pieces of private and personal information, dozens of otherwise enjoyable hours, and all of our self-respect.

Maybe it's the Stockholm Syndrome in action, where, as hostages, we begin to sympathize with our captors who punish and rape us. Whatever the reason, it's nearly impossible to say the income tax is evil. You're either labeled a nut, an insurgent, or a greedy bastard. But is it really crazy to observe that an income tax penalizes effort? Is it really unpatriotic to want your country to be free? Is it greedy to want to keep what's yours?

There are so many things wrong with the income tax—inefficiency, unfairness, counter productivity—that it is hard to know how best to argue against it. But one local author has figured it out.

His name is Zak and he has written a fiction book called *Publicani*. You've probably heard him on various radio shows over the past week or so, both in English and in Russian. Not everybody can get an interview with him. It helps if you're his son.

Zak Maymin immigrated from the Soviet Union to America with his family, yours truly included, in 1980, and, despite knowing barely any English, earned his Ph.D. in mathematics from MIT that first year. He says he feels he has "come back from the future." He can see which direction our country is

—Continued on page 4

—*Publicani* review, Continued from page 3

going and he knows the end result: “I came from a country that had free health care, free education, complete job security, total political participation of all the people. Most of the people were happy and smiling. Good family values. All of these, that are discussed as goals for America, were implemented in the country I came from and which was an evil empire, as Reagan said. And I don’t want America to become an evil empire and that’s the major reason why I wrote this book.”

Publicani is a family vs. government thriller. “Something that belongs to an individual, nobody can take it from him forcefully,” my dad explained. “And if it is taken, the individual has the right to defend himself.”

The income tax is never mentioned in the book, but on some level, every word on every page is about it. The original “publicani” were Roman tax farmers during the time of Jesus. “There are, by the way, several chapters in the book where I discuss some religious history and how this principle of individual freedom was traced in other religions and how it is related to Jesus Christ – and where was he, by the way, before he showed up at 30 years old and started doing all these miracles?” *Publicani* answers this question.

But why the income tax? Of all the bad things that could motivate a work of fiction, why this?

“To kill a vampire, you cannot shoot him. You cannot cut his arms and legs. You have to drive a wooden stake through his heart, and it should be wooden and not a silver stick or an iron stick. You have to find one target that is the worst and that is the root of all this evil that is happening in this country, and in my opinion, that’s the income tax.”

“Okay,” I asked him, “but why is the income tax the root?”

“It is immoral. It takes by force from others what belongs to them. And it’s the clearest example of stealing that government does.”

And what is the best possible thing that could happen with the publication of this book, which is a bit of a cross between *Enemy of the State*, *Fiddler on the Roof*, and *Atlas Shrugged*, all of which were commercial successes but did not stem the growth of government?

“The problem with the federal income tax is not the government but the fact that people support it. People actually like it. Five percent of the population pays about half the taxes. Other people don’t really care. The same way people who were not peasants in Russia and who were not Jews in Germany, they didn’t think too much about those things. That’s who is the real target of this book. Not the government, but the people who think this way and I hope that maybe I’ll be able to change some people in this thinking.”

Now you can badmouth the income tax all you want. You are no longer alone.

This review first appeared in Fairfield Weekly on April 17, 2008. It is reprinted with permission from the author.

The Coming Convergence

By Stanley Schmidt, Ph.D.

Prometheus Books, 2008

Reviewed by Fran Van Cleave

As one contemplates how email and the internet have changed our culture over the past ten years, it’s a bit scary to envision the ever-increasing pace of technological change. How different will our lives become in the next decade or two?

Unfortunately, no one can answer that question exactly. Partly because of the quirky nature of invention, in that odd things such as looms lead to the creation of the internet, and partly because of human nature, which tends to fear change of any kind. In books for intelligent people, prognostication is less important than bringing converging biological and technological threads together, and posing critical questions about the ethical choices we’ll face. As a physicist and longtime science fiction editor (25 years at *Analog Science Fiction and Fact*) Dr. Schmidt is well-positioned to do so.

Dr. Schmidt brings up a number of issues involving privacy, such as the proliferation of data-mining, RFIDs in money and passports, and GPS transponders in vehicles. Many rental-car companies are monitoring the transponders in their rentals and charging drivers for speeding, even in cases where the driver was never stopped by police. Is this reasonable prudence on the part of these companies, or an intolerable intrusion of privacy?

All in all, a good read.

Hurricane Moon

By Alexis Glynn Latner

Pyr, 2007

Reviewed by William H. Stoddard

Hurricane Moon is a literary hybrid: at once a science fiction novel and a romance. It’s hardly the first such venture; writers such as Lois McMaster Bujold, Ann Maxwell, and Elizabeth Moon have been exploring this literary territory for years. And some such work has been well worth reading, both as science fiction or fantasy and as romance. I’m sorry to say that *Hurricane Moon* falls a little short as both.

The focus of a romance has to be on two characters with the potential to become lovers, but prevented from actually doing so by some obstacle. Latner gives us the two characters, Catherin Gault and Joseph Devreze, and a story that ends with their becoming a couple. But there’s surprisingly little sense of frustrated passion between them. Latner takes Devreze offstage shortly after the start of the novel, and leaves him there, literally frozen, from the end of chapter one till the start of chapter nine, over 25 percent of the length of the book. And when he does come back, he might as well be frozen still. The reader sees that he and Gault disagree with each other, but not that

—Continued next page

the disagreement is holding back any great passion. Devreze gets involved with other people, and even impregnates one of Gault's close friends; Gault gets involved with no one, seeming totally immersed in her work.

Latner offers the reader an external source of passion: The newly colonized planet where the story takes place is actually half of a double planet, one in which both bodies are Earth-sized. As a result, the colonists have a huge "moon" in the sky, which overstimulates the brain centers that evolved to respond to Earth's moon, leading to wildly emotional behavior. This is an ingenious idea, and something interesting might have been done with it. But the emotions don't seem to have much to do with what the characters normally feel, and thus don't reveal much about them—and ultimately, that makes them uninteresting.

On the science fictional side, this lunar influence is just one of a collection of big scientific speculations. We have relativistic starflight to find a new Earthlike planet after Earth becomes uninhabitable; cryonic hibernation leading to genetic damage that shortens lives and threatens to make reproduction impossible; a double planet with massive tides and a huge visible "moon"; the suggestion that the planet has never developed large animal life, contradicted by later discoveries; the evidence that one of the two planetary bodies was massively reshaped by intelligent entities that have now vanished. There are just a few too many ideas, and not quite enough effort to make them add up to anything specific. Nor does it help that the science isn't quite convincing. I was particularly jarred by the repeated references to "planetforming"; presumably this is meant to be "planetforming," a generalization of "terraforming," but was "corrected" at some point by an incompetent copy editor and not put right in proofreading.

The author's heart really seems to be less in either the science or the romance than in the colonists' religious beliefs. She shows them appealing to their religious heritage from Earth, and trying to come up with new religious rituals to commemorate their lives on a new planet. It's made clear that the colonists have diverse religious backgrounds and that some of them disagree with others' religious formulae—but this, too, is curiously passionless; no one comes to blows over a religious dispute, or insists on rejecting another person for their beliefs, or even walks out of the new ceremonies.

And I'm left wondering, at the end: Here is a single starship, with a population in the thousands, but certainly not in the millions. And yet they're able to sustain all the essential skills of an advanced technological economy. Their numbers are enough to plan to terraform an Earth-sized planet in an entirely new solar system, with the tools they can carry on one ship. And when the unexpected length of their voyage damages their chromosomes, they have a genius on board who can build new human DNA from scratch, founding a new human species. With all that, why are they making this incredibly difficult voyage anyway, rather than staying in the Solar System and terraforming Earth itself? Latner seems to want her love story to be embedded in a physical journey that's also a spiritual quest—but without genuine necessity for such a journey, the spiritual quest seems less than convincing.

In the last analysis, I found this book slow going. I never

had enough emotional involvement to feel compelled to turn the next page and see what happened to the characters, as I have with Bujold's Miles Vorkosigan or Moon's Kylara Vatta. The passions of Gault and Devreze never became real to me. And so I found it unsatisfactory, not only as science fiction, but as a romance.

Opening Atlantis

By Harry Turtledove

Roc, 2007

Reviewed by William H. Stoddard

Opening Atlantis is an alternate history novel from the genre's leading current practitioner. But unlike most alternate histories, its starting point isn't a human event with a different outcome, or even a random cosmic catastrophe like the comet impact in the back-story of S. M. Stirling's *The Peshawar Lancers*. Turtledove's new alternate history is based on an alternate geography: the presence of a large island or minor continent in the mid-Atlantic Ocean. (The map on the book's cover shows it as eastern North America, broken off at the Appalachians and displaced out to sea, but the text doesn't clearly support that configuration.)

This isn't the Atlantis of Plato's myth, though, or of 19th century archaeological speculation, or a fantasy realm such as J. R. R. Tolkien's Numenor. This is a natural body of land, named for the legendary Atlantis by the Europeans who colonize it, in the same way that California was named for a fictitious Amazon nation in a Spanish romance. Its discovery and colonization open up an era of European expansion, a couple of centuries earlier than the European discovery of America, and dominated not by Spain and Portugal, but by the English, Bretons, and Basques. And unlike the Americas, Atlantis has no indigenous civilizations and indeed no native populations. Its animals have never been hunted and, like animals on some real smaller islands, have no fear of human beings—and, in the years after the colonization starts, many of them die back from over-hunting.

Opening Atlantis is mainly an action/adventure story, divided into three parts, each with an analog in the real history of the New World: the colonial era, followed by Caribbean piracy, followed by the French and Indian Wars (but without the Indians!). In fact, it's an odd hybrid of the history of the proto-United States and that of the Caribbean, with runaway black and native American slaves forming rebellious communities in the interior, and with a pirate-ruled free port. But there are several historical themes that libertarians will recognize and find interesting.

This is especially true in the first part, with the essentially un-governed colonies founded by European fishermen eventually being visited by European nobles intent on making themselves rulers. This is very exactly the Nock-Oppenheim conquest theory of the origins of the state. And Turtledove's colonists view their new rulers' "taxes" as no more than robbery, and

—Continued on page 8

Serenity: Better Days

By Joss Whedon, Brett Matthews,
Will Conrad, Michelle Madsen
Dark Horse Comics, 2008
Reviewed by Max Jahr

Better Days is the second three-part comic book series in the *Firefly/Serenity* 'verse issued by Dark Horse Comics. It might not be the last, as there are reports of another round, this time focusing on the back-story of just one character, Shepherd Book, titled *The Shepherd's Tale*, with a planned publication date later in 2008, or early 2009. The three small comics that make up *Better Days* appeared between the months of March and May 2008. In truth it should have been called *Firefly: Better Days*, as the tale takes place prior to the events in the *Serenity* movie, but for the sake of consistency and marking, these books now fall under the *Serenity* label.

The story opens with a heist in progress, much like the opening of the movie, *Serenity*. Mal and his crew appear to be hitting a museum, which triggers a smart robotic drone in pursuit. The owners of this drone are using this heist to demonstrate their new, technologically advanced, mechanical guard-dog, and the news looks bad for the would-be robbers. In a nice twist, it seems that the actual target was the drone itself, and thus the crew of *Serenity* earn a nice bonus and a vicious and vindictive enemy in one swoop.

From their heist of this drone, the crew literally stumble upon a huge payout in cash, and find themselves wealthy beyond their dreams. For some of the crew, this is a wondrous opportunity to dream of life away from the ship, but for others this is bad news indeed. Poor Mal Reynolds. One can almost sense him cringing with despair at the prospect of losing his crew, one by one, as they plan

their new lives of leisure and wealth. Several pages are dedicated to the crew's varied musings and dreams about how they plan to spend their money.

But luck has a way of turning on this hapless crew. A side plot involves a fierce Alliance soldier, who having just availed himself of Inara's delectable companion services, mentions to her that he is hunting former Browncoat terrorists, who went by the name of Dust Devils. Inara's sense of fear and logic leads her to believe Mal might have

been one of these Dust Devils, that her client is hunting Mal, and perhaps along the same lines we all fall into that trap, too.

The two hunters converge upon the crew, currently enjoying a moment of R & R on a vacation planet, before splitting the cash and probably parting ways. As Mal is captured, the true Dust Devil stands up and urges a rescue attempt. In a sense, this switcheroo should not really have come as a surprise to readers familiar with

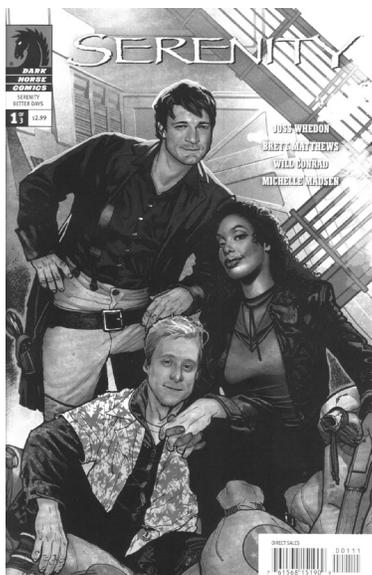
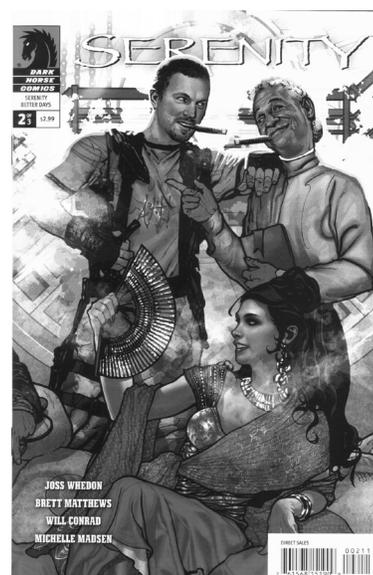
the char-

acters. Rather than give away the identity of this Dust Devil, I'd prefer to leave this to the readers to discover on their own. The rescue itself seems a little anti-climactic, but the sad surprise awaits the crew upon their return. Instead of everything most of them dreamed and fantasized about, a sense of *déjà vu* settles around the ending. Still, future adventures await the *Serenity*'s crew; the events in the movie lie ahead in the not too distant future.

Comic books as a genre sometimes create problems in how the reader has to interpret events, intentions, and the action. There were three of four scenes where nothing quite made sense, scenes that lacked any transition such that I had to re-read those panels multiple times without quite understanding why things happened in that sequence.

Long-time fans of Joss Whedon's sf universe, with its blend of wild west action, space opera, and Dickensian characters may experience some solace and enjoyment from this comic book. Although it does not advance any story lines from the TV series or movie, the fact that all characters return in full glory abates somewhat the bitter loss of two main characters in the movie. The artwork is nicely rendered, and dialog is such that the characters virtually come to life in the pages.

The comic book industry is rich and vibrant. Much like the printed page industry, it has experienced ups and downs throughout the years. Comic books tend to be dominated by the super heroes, cranked out non-stop by the mega-publishers Marvel and DC Comics. Beyond Superman and Batman, Spider-man and Hellboy, there lies a vast and fertile field of smaller characters and stories. Some emerge from TV, others end up on the big screen. As long as there are Whedon fans these *Serenity* comic books will sell, and probably sell briskly. If we can't have another movie or TV show, these small gems help keep some hope alive.



Roswell, Texas

By L. Neil Smith, Rex F. May, Scott Bieser, Jen Zach
Big Head Press, 2008
Reviewed by Anders Monsen

Alternate histories fill a vibrant part of the science fiction world. Like the Prometheus Award for libertarian fiction, there's even an annual award for best alternate history (long and short form), called the Sideways Award. Indeed, three out of the five finalists this year for the Prometheus Best Novel rely on alternate history as the setting of their story: Jo Walton's *Ha'penny*, Ken MacLeod's *The Execution Channel*, and Harry Turtledove's *The Gladiator*. Jo Walton's novel *Ha'penny* is a finalist for the Sideways Award as well, and Turtledove has made a career out of alternate history books. Creating alternate history often involves stretching that "what if" fulcrum for which SF is so well-known, and skewing real events into strange and believable histories that never existed. This makes the fact that L. Neil Smith's latest novel is published as a graphic novel and not as just text all the more baffling.

Smith has written about *Roswell, Texas* for many years, back when it went by the title, *Texas Über Alles*. What started as a project between Rex F. May and Smith bounced around for many years without a publisher. May, known to many libertarians as the artist Baloo, has published countless comics in magazines such as *Reason*, *The Voluntaryist*, *Liberty*, and elsewhere. The concept of alternate history set in Texas in 1947 and dealing with aliens seemed like just a great idea until Smith discovered artist Scott Bieser, and they collaborated on the graphic novel version of *The Probability Broach*. Now rose an opportunity to finally bring his project into print, though in a different format. Initially the book appeared online, serialized a few pages at a time for a little over a year at Big Head Press <<http://www.bigheadpress.com>>, before appearing in print in the summer of 2008. The project added two more contributors—colorist Jen Zach and letterer Zeke Bieser.

Roswell, Texas opens with a brief flashback to the battle of the Alamo, in which one Santa Anna was shot and killed by a Tennessee sharpshooter, and history diverged from our time line. The story then jumps to the 1964, as the new president of the Republic of Texas assumes office. President Charles Lindberg, Jr. uncovers some interesting notes left behind by one of his predecessors—his father—dealing with certain events around July 4th, 1947. He summons his father's right hand man, "Wild Bill" Bear, who relates the events that took place 17 years hence. This is the kind of alternate history one almost wishes really happened, with a cast of characters transformed into improbably wonderful new roles, in a world fine-tuned to signals audible only on clear nights when the air is chill and strange patterns among the planets reveal the truly unexpected (okay, that's not in the book, but the reviewer's mind).

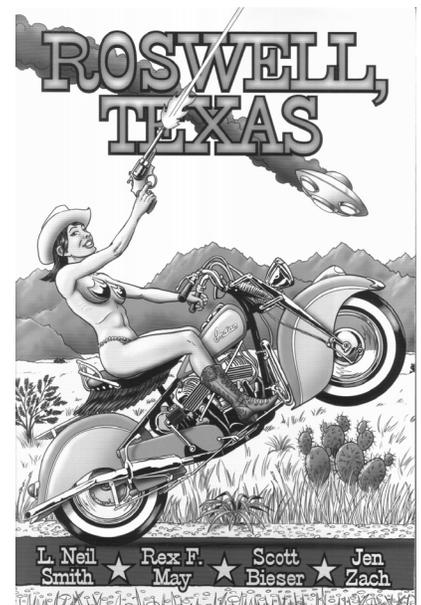
I've probably read through all 260 plus pages of this novel four of five times by now, and each time I discover nuances in the text and images that makes me flip the pages looking for clues and meanings. Undoubtedly there are many secrets still within the pages of the book, but beyond all the cameos and allusions lie the story, a classic alien invasion mixed with Smith's

near non-existent state world where the right to arms and self-defense is integral. In that regard Smith stands alone, even among libertarian writers, to the point where even some libertarians have found the ever-present side-arms distracting or embarrassing. Yet, in the context of American history, the right to bear arms is an essential aspect of individual liberty. In a free society any person can choose not to carry a gun, but in a world where criminals care little about the laws on the books and police departments act as archeologists or confiscators, sometimes self-defense means reliance upon the self for that defense.

When Wild Bill rides west with three noted Texas Rangers (including Malcolm Little and Meir Kahane) they are all armed, as are their enemies. As in any action adventure there are gun-fights, gorgeous women, and chase scenes. Humor is sprinkled throughout the pages by both the writers and artist. Texas has its own version of Mount Rushmore, with four famous Sams; Adolf Hitler migrated to Texas and became an artist, fathering a daughter who was elected president of Texas; Walt Disney runs a vast empire in California; Gene Roddenberry flies in the air defense force above the deserts of West Texas; and John Wayne goes under his real name as a cynical yet honorable marine serving in Californian military. There is a special appearance by a legendary pin-up girl in our universe, who lives a more modest lifestyle in this one, but still plays a central role in the story. Bieser's outshines himself in the artwork for this character.

As the Texas Rangers converge on Roswell, forces from other nations, both covert and openly hostile, also race to find the reported alien wreckage. When all these worlds collide fire arms heat up, and the massive shoot-out results in a vast shake-up of allegiances and purposes.

At times it seems like the novel contains *too much* of a good thing. The cast of characters makes keeping track of all the different entities and individuals almost impossible. Some of the dialog also tries to explain too much, and words are bolded or italicized such that the reader wonders at the importance of the highlighted words, a tough act when 25 to 50 percent of the text seems stressed in this manner. These few quibbles aside, I found this book one of the more enjoyable and exciting graphic novels, and alternate history ideas, that I have read in some time. This book is rife with entertainment and laughter, and while Smith's individualism continues to shine, in *Roswell, Texas*, it seems that the story is all about the characters. This is quite fitting, given the contributions of all five people to this book.



—*Opening Atlantis* review, continued from page 5

look for ways to free themselves of the imposition.

The second part shows us a pirate city, Avalon, and the efforts of the British, the Dutch, and some of the English-descended colonists to suppress its pirate fleets. Like historical pirates, Avalon has a measure of egalitarianism; each pirate ship is a kind of republic. The city as a whole has no overarching government; rather, pirate leaders have to personally agree to any common course of action. Turtledove shows the difficulties of mounting an effective “national defense” under these conditions—a theme and a problem of much interest to libertarians. And he also shows the earlier issue of Atlantean independence from direct European rule remaining an issue.

This theme somewhat recedes into the background in the third part, which focuses on a European war that spills over into the colonies, with the English fighting the French and Spanish. Colonial irregular warfare and alliances with runaway slave forces offer some rude surprises to the regular army officers sent over from Europe. Turtledove shows slavery becoming an issue, though in a less ideologically focused way than in the history of the United States. At the end of the novel, the issue remains unresolved, as does Atlantean resistance to European authority, clearly leaving room for a sequel.

In other words, there are a lot of libertarian themes running through this story of battles and journeys. LFS members are likely to find it sympathetic, as well as entertaining. The ideological content is light, but what there is is nearly all good. And the storytelling, as is usual with Turtledove, is skilled and enjoyable.

Ha’penny

By Jo Walton

Tor, 2007

Reviewed by Thomas E. Jackson

Usually, when one reads a thriller about a British detective hot on the heels of a group of terrorists and assassins, one would expect to be rooting for the detective.

In the case chronicled in Jo Walton’s alternative world science fiction novel *Ha’penny* though, the detective, Inspector Carmichael, is pursuing a terrorist cell that hopes to kill Hitler and a quisling prime minister, Mark Normanby, in a desperate attempt to halt Britain’s slide into fascism.

The detective in question is gay, a fact that his superiors use to blackmail him into complying with their wishes. And he’s a decent sort who despises the regime he works for and looks for a way to quietly leave Scotland Yard so that he can find a job that doesn’t wound his conscience.

Even as I rooted for the terrorist gang to succeed and kill Hitler—Walton pulls no punches in her depiction of the horror of Hitler’s regime—I could not help also pulling for the detective and admiring his professionalism.

It’s an odd sort of thriller that has you hoping the hero will fail, but Walton, while always putting herself on the side of

freedom, brilliantly exploits this sort of ambiguity over and over again. One of the plotters, indispensable to the success of the plot, is a despicable Stalinist, horrible and hypocritical in the way she treats other people. The reader comes to admire another character who is an IRA bomber and assassin. Hitler, although obviously a monster, turns out to be likable when he makes small talk with one of the narrators at a party.

Walton uses this sense of irony to make arguments for freedom that would sound stale and hackneyed if expressed in an ordinary way.

For example, in Chapter 18, Carmichael’s assistant, Royston, reports that another batch of Communists have been rounded up.

“I hear they arrested another lot of them yesterday, ones who’d come around protesting about their paper being closed down,” Royston said.

“That’s not a crime, surely?” Carmichael asked mildly.

“Royston laughed.”

The absurdity of closing a newspaper few people likely read in a regime seeking to preserve the illusion of freedom is thus coupled with the amusing irony of Communists’ putting themselves at risk on behalf of free speech.

The story is told in a series of alternating chapters, with chapters narrated by Viola Larkin, an actress, alternated with chapters narrated by Carmichael.

Larkin comes from a family of famous sisters, the Larkins (obviously modeled on the Mitford sisters). Very much against her wishes, she is recruited into a plot to kill Hitler and the quisling local leader, Normanby, with a bomb during the premiere of *Hamlet*. (The genders in the performance have been reversed; Larkin is supposed to help coordinate the attack while performing the lead role).

The reader roots for the plot to succeed, of course—Walton unsparingly describes the massacres and tyranny of Hitler’s regime—but because of Walton’s skill, one also finds one’s self eagerly watching Carmichael pursue the conspiracy.

Walton, a native of Wales who now resides in Canada, varies her settings from one project to the next, but has often displayed her love on history. In the preface, she notes that two of the incidents presented in her book did in fact really take place—the Irish Republican Army really did conduct a bombing campaign against England in 1939, and the Luftwaffe did accidentally drop a bomb on Dublin during its bombing campaign against the English.

Ha’penny is a sequel to the author’s *Farthing*, which I plan to read soon. The final book in the trilogy, *Half a Crown*, will be published in September 2008 by Tor.

Prometheus Submission Guidelines

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

Contact the editor at editor@lfs.org

Bright the Sky; A World Too Near

By Kay Kenyon

Pyr Books, 2007/2008

Reviewed by Anders Monsen

When I first started reading Kay Kenyon's novel *Bright the Sky*, I almost quit the book part way through the first chapter. The opening act seemed confusing, and the main character far from likeable; the dialog appeared clichéd, and the prose stumbled. But I persisted, and once Kenyon made it through her earthly setting and into the parallel universe of the Entire, the ship righted itself and sailed more smoothly into vast and alien waters. The book introduces Titus Quinn, a supposedly brilliant individual who chose a more menial role in life as a pilot. While ferrying passengers between planets his ship disappeared, and he showed up light-years away, alone and without any memory of what happened. Meanwhile, through accident and tragedy, a young scientist discovers a parallel universe, and corporate sharks circle around Quinn as a link to this alternate universe. Quinn, on the other hand, simply wants to be reunited with his wife and daughter, who apparently remain in the Entire.

Quinn convinces the people working on doorways into the Entire to send him alone into that universe, where due to his memory loss he must re-learn the language and culture. Although he appeared to have only been missing a short time from the perspective of Earth, in the Entire he aged ten years. His wife and daughter seem distant and lost as the Tarig, an alien race that governs the Entire, care little for human emotions. They consider Quinn a fugitive for leaving their world, and should he be identified probably end up imprisoned or killed for his rebellious actions.

The Entire is a strange design. Comprised of five radial arms or lobes on massive scale, these narrow sections are bordered by storm walls, and navigated via a strange "river" that lends the tale to a slow journey through worlds. There are alien species aplenty, and also a human analogy. The Tarig appear to possess vastly superior technology, and plucked humans from Earth (or the Rose, as they call our universe), and seeded the Entire before closing off the borders between the two universes. The human culture seems homogeneous, based on the rigid class structure of China; the names and behavior appear based along Chinese lines, a couple of dynasties hence.

Quinn is taken prisoner by a regional governor, who against his better judgment decides not to expose Quinn to the Tarig. Instead, this governor assists Quinn in his quest, and instructs one of the members of his family, Anzi, to teach him language, combat skills, and survival techniques, before letting Quinn set off to find his family.

In settings and strange characters this book reminded me of the works of Jack Vance, as well as Dan Simmons' *Hyperion* and Philip José Farmer's *Riverworld*. The descriptions of the aliens that Quinn encounters stagger the imagination. Kenyon reverses a major aspect of religion to an almost comedic effect, as most people fear any attention or favors from the

foremost deity, and priests are generally shunned and avoided. Although Quinn does not quite succeed in his primary quest, the first book ends with hints and promises.

In book two, *A World Too Near* we learn more about the fates of Quinn's wife and daughter, neither of whom has heard from him in almost ten years. Sidney, his daughter, has been blinded by the Tarig and made to serve as a rider for a horse-like race far from civilization. Meanwhile his wife, Johanna, lives as a prisoner and mistress of one of the most powerful Tarig council members, at the heart of the great engine of the entire. Johanna has discovered a terrible secret. She manages to encode a message that Quinn discovers, which warns that Earth has maybe a year left before its universe will be fed to the engine of Anennoon to sustain the universe of the Entire. As Quinn shifts his quest toward the destruction of this engine, his family will feel his betrayal to the Tarig and seek their own paths. Where this will take each person remains uncertain.

The first two books in Kay Kenyon's ambitious science fiction quartet sketch a fantastic universe of vast and terrible aliens who see humans the way we see pets. The Tarig custom of strangling their victims is peculiar and horrifying, but Kenyon's aliens rule their universe with willing humans. There are strong themes of individualism and rebellion against authority, as Quinn encounters several people who seek to overthrow the Tarig. Some of these humans seek their own power, but others genuinely want freedom, not just as a means to replace the current rulers. The two sequels are slated to appear in 2009 and 2010. Once inside this strange world of the Entire, exploring that world becomes almost addictive. It will be interesting to see how events play out, as to save one universe the other must be sacrificed. Will there be a third way?

In War Times

By Kathleen Ann Goonan

Tor, 2007

Reviewed by William H. Stoddard

In War Times is a novel for alternate history fans. But it's not quite a straight alternate history. In the first place, its story is the creation of an alternate history by the intentional establishment of a point of divergence. In the second place, and more unusually, the new history doesn't just develop on its own line, with no hint of "what might have been"; rather, the old and the new history remain in contact, though increasingly tenuously so, and people can travel back and forth between them. And, unusually, Goonan's viewpoint character is an inhabitant of the old history—in other words, of our history.

Goonan has made herself known as a writer partly through the inspiration of much of her fiction by jazz. That continues in this book. Jazz seems to be a metaphor for the interaction of the two histories; but, in addition, the creation of jazz is a metaphor for the creation of the second history. And, in addition, the viewpoint character is a talented jazz saxophonist, and spends part of his time interacting with historic jazzmen.

—Continued on page 10

—*In War Times* review, *Continued from page 9*

The starting point of *In War Times* is the early days of World War II. Sam Dance, a physical chemistry student serving in the army and being trained in advanced science and technology, is recruited by a brilliant woman physicist from Hungary to help her alter the course of history through devices based on quantum mechanics. She leaves one of the devices with him, and he carries it with him during his service in World War II, largely as a specialist in a new technology called radar. From time to time he gets evidence that something mysterious is happening with it. The story continues after the war ends, with the mysterious devices continuing to influence his family, and eventually drawing them into an attempt to change the course of history in his own timeline.

Goonan's hypothesis seems to be that there is a hidden impulse to brutality, violence, and authoritarianism in the human psyche—but one that can be changed through intervention at the quantum level. In a discussion midway through the novel, a visitor from her alternate timeline discusses the changes as involving biochemical modification of the human brain to enhance empathy and keep the adult brain actively learning. This leads to social changes including general peace, investment of money in technological growth rather than war, and a free market economy with universal access to information—a vision that libertarians will find sympathetic. In many ways, it's a return to the historical trends of the nineteenth century, which were so tragically disrupted by the Great War.

Regrettably, this book has a minor flaw: the author doesn't get her history of science quite right. For one example, Sam Dance visits a warehouse in London in 1944 where he finds and buys a rock labelled U-235—but the isotopic separation techniques that could yield pure uranium-235 cost millions of dollars and were top secret then. Shortly after, Goonan mentions a series of lectures being given in Glasgow, under the title "What Is Life?" by a physicist named Schopenhauer—but the physicist's actual name was Schrödinger; Schopenhauer was a famous pessimistic philosopher of the 19th century. Later on, in 1945, after the German surrender, two characters discuss the new discipline of molecular biology, which one of them learned about in premed; the term was coined in 1938, but it didn't come into general use until after Watson and Crick, and it doesn't seem likely that an undergraduate would have learned about it. I kept thinking that perhaps these changes pointed to the story taking place in a different timeline, but that seems not to be the author's intent. They don't lead into a different tonality; they're just the author getting a few notes of the history wrong. The novel was still interesting to read, but I kept getting distracted by minor details. It's too bad her editor didn't catch them.

Even so, I think LFS members will find this book worth reading. Unfortunately, it's no longer eligible for a Prometheus Award nomination.

—*2008 Prometheus Award Winners*, *continued from page 1*

M. Lerner. Seven novels published in 2007 were nominated for the 2008 award.

The other finalists for the Hall of Fame award were "As Easy as A.B.C.", a short story (1912) by Rudyard Kipling; *That Hideous Strength*, a novel (1945) that completes C.S. Lewis's space trilogy; the Lord of the Rings trilogy (1954) by J. R. R. Tolkien; and *The Once and Future King* and *The Book of Merlyn*, a five-part novel (1938-1958) by T. H. White.

The Prometheus awards for Best Novel, Best Classic Fiction (Hall of Fame) and (occasional) Special awards honor outstanding science fiction/fantasy that explores the possibilities of a free future, champions human rights (including personal and economic liberty), dramatizes the perennial conflict between individuals and coercive governments, or critiques the tragic consequences of abuse of power—especially by the state.

The Prometheus Award, sponsored by the Libertarian Futurist Society, was established in 1979, making it one of the most enduring awards after the Nebula and Hugo awards, and one of the oldest fan-based awards currently in sf.

The Hall of Fame, established in 1983, focuses on older classic fiction, including novels, novellas, short stories, poems and plays. Past Hall of Fame award winners range from Robert A. Heinlein and Ayn Rand, to Ray Bradbury and Ursula LeGuin. A complete listing of all nominees and winners can be found on the LFS web site (www.lfs.org).

Address Changes

Please send any changes in your mailing address to:
David Tuchman
1364 Mapleton Ave
Suffield, CT 06078
Email: dtuchman@gmail.com

Classifieds

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

Kafkaesque: Life, uncertainty, and terror

The Trial

Directed by Orson Welles

Starring Anthony Perkins, Jeanne Moreau

1962, Europa; 1998 Milestone

Reviewed by Anders Monsen

In searching for a term that describes bureaucratic senselessness and despair, a writer usually will reach for “kafkaesque.” This term is now so ingrained in the popular mind that the majority of people who understand this term have never read anything written by the Prague writer Franz Kafka (1883—1924). Indeed, that term has bent back on the author himself, and imbued his works with meanings probably never conceived by this solitary and reclusive writer who came to fame mainly after his death. Had his friend and executor Max Brod not ignored Kafka’s request to burn all his papers, and instead edited these and published them as stories and novels, the world probably would have needed to find another term to describe that faceless aspect of the 20th century bureaucratic state.

Written in 1914-1915, but not published until 1925 as an incomplete novel, *The Trial* deals with Josef K., and his futile and confused struggle against an obscure legal system after he is arrested early one morning. The novel is a chaotic, despairing read, as K. struggles to come to terms with his strange arrest (he remains free to continue his work and also pursue legal recourse to his case, but in a court system like no other), and the bizarre people he encounters. There are many interpretations of the novel, but the one that has seized the imagination considers it a tale of bureaucracy gone mad, and a state that pursues legal proceedings with blind doggedness. Many writers and film-makers have echoed Kafka’s tale. One of these, Terry Gilliam’s film *Brazil*, bears a stark resemblance to *The Trial*. In both cases it seems a misunderstanding is at play, with a smear on an arrest warrant sending the police after the wrong man in *Brazil*, and Josef K., a bank manager being confronted at his first hearing with the words, “You are a painter.”

In 1962 the well-known director Orson Welles dramatized the novel in a black and white movie starring Anthony Perkins as Josef K., Welles himself as the Advocate, and a host of international actors in central roles. Filmed in Paris, Zagreb, Milan, and Rome, in an almost *film noir* expressionistic style, the movie hews closely to the novel, yet also creates its own version of Kafka’s story.

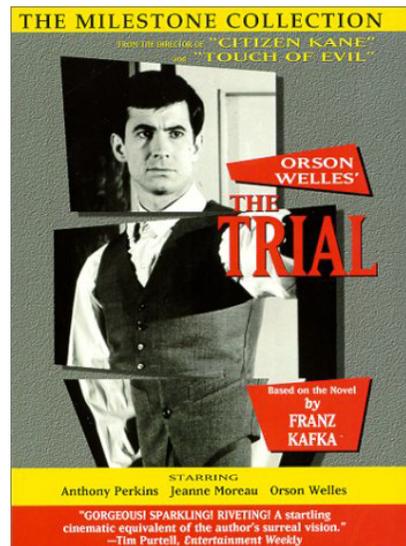
When I watched the movie my mind was clouded from having read the novel. When I read the novel, I brought a great deal of pop-culture baggage along for the ride. The essence of the book is fairly well-known, as these days it is nearly impossible to miss references to the book. A quick news search in Google produced nearly 150 hits on the term “kafkaesque” (including at least one commentary on the death of Alexander Solzhenitsyn); usually these stories are linked to trials or arrests under Byzantine and insane rules. I was surprised how this term is at best a superficial understanding of the novel, and really

a misrepresentation in hindsight of Kafka for modern purposes. Often the term combines the sense of several stories, including *The Judgment* and *The Castle*, two equally despairing books. From a libertarian perspective, the state almost by immutable laws of nature becomes kafkaesque, and many 20th century instances of terror and injustice aptly can be termed kafkaesque, such as the Holocaust and the Soviet Union’s Gulag

system. The latter is a closer approximation of the senselessness of the state. In Nazi Germany the concentration camps and gas chamber largely was driven by an ideological hatred of Jews. In the Soviet Union any person could be classified as an enemy of the state, and once classified as such immediately arrested, tried, found guilty, and sentenced to hard labor in exile. While Josef K. is termed guilty from the start, and suffered the fate of many Holocaust and Gulag victims, his arrest is unique in that he remains somewhat free.

Several libertarian theorists (Etienne de la Boetie, Murray Rothbard, to name a couple) have written about the willingness of the victim to remain in his state. We surrender to the mystique of the state, and thus feel compelled to live by the rules of the state, working within the system for change, and seem surprised when the system twists and bends to remain unchangeable, instead breaking those to strive for radical change.

Josef K., portrayed by the lanky and almost boyish Anthony Perkins (fresh off his career-defining role as Norman Bates in Alfred Hitchcock’s *Psycho* two years earlier), bounces from place to place with seemingly no purpose. Although in reality some time passes from the moment K. wakes up to discover the police in his room to the moment he meets his fate, the movie never pauses. Each scene melds into the next, with Welles knitting together exteriors from different cities in the same scene, all contributing to a disconcerting sense of chaos and uncertainty. Perkins blusters and stammers, rages and stalks his way throughout the movie, never sure of the reason for his arrest or what recourse he has, and seemingly indifferent. Women throw themselves at him, from his landlady to his Advocate’s nurse, as well as a charwoman in the court and a bevy of teenage Maenads. There are even two scenes



—Continued on page 12

—*The Trial* review, Continued from page 11

with his not-quite sixteen year old cousin that hints at implied sexuality there. And yet, in most of K.'s encounters with these women he never pursues, but is always on the receiving end, always the one being seduced. Much like Hamlet's famed indecisiveness, K. embodies passivity. His one major act of defiance, one where he appears bound in his conviction, is when he dismisses his advocate, a man whom throughout the movie who seems never to leave his room to advocate.

The Trial is one of those movies that you watch with an uncomfortable feeling, much like witnessing a person destroy themselves through drink, yet being unable to render any sort of aid, or even walk away. Although Welles called it "the best film I ever made," it is not the sort of movie that will appear on a list of favorite movies. The entire movie is noted for its bleakness. Filmed in black and white, it seems far older than its 1962 date. The novel itself is almost timeless, with no hints as to when or where it took place. The movie instead has a strong American focus, with the police alternating between American depression area gangsters and hardened cops interrogating K., answering every one of his questions with another question, and confiscating his identity papers without a glance at them to verify his identity.

And yet, even though it may not be a likeable movie, or contain any sympathetic characters (for unlike many a wrongly accused person hauled before the apparatus of the state, Josef K. seems like a dunce, a person without any moral compass,

neither innocent nor guilty, merely unable to grasp his situation or the events around him), *The Trial* is an important movie. Much like *1984* and *Brazil*, it creates a dystopian setting against which the protagonist must struggle. None of these movies are cheerful. This is not a we-shall-overcome type film. But the fact that there is some resistance, some defiance in their lives shows the hope within that struggle. The 20th century is perhaps the true Dark Ages, as millions of individuals were sent to prison or death, and few of them resisted. Few of them expected the treatment they received, the inhumanity of their captors or even fellow prisoners. There's the danger of reading too much into these works, of attaching political meaning into every image, every line of dialog. Yet I could not but transfer some of the despair felt in the movie to the events between the novel's conception and the movie's release.

Is *The Trial* about the numbing effects of bureaucracy, one man's impossible odds against the vast machinery of the state? Perhaps. There are strong hints that rather it deals with god, not the state. The parable of the man before the law has a sense of religious conversion about it. The idea of K.'s guilt even without knowing the charge points to the idea of original sin. Perhaps it is not a political story at all. Perhaps it is a novel about male/female relationships, given the way women behave toward K. But still, we have appropriated it as such, giving it meaning beyond or contrary to what Kafka might have imagined. To understand the essence of the term "kafkaesque" one should read the book or see the movie. The disturbing images in both will linger long in your soul.



The Newsletter of the Libertarian Futurist Society
501 Abiso Ave.
San Antonio, TX 78209