

Report from the 2004 Prometheus Award celebration

Reviews: Neal Stephenson, Clive Cussler,
Michael Gear, *Firefly*, *Farscape: The Peacekeeper Wars*,
Kim Stanley Robinson, John Brunner.

**The newsletter of the
Libertarian Futurist Society**

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From the President (and Interim Editor)

By Chris Hibbert

I continue to be pleased with the progress and stability the LFS is showing. We did have a problem getting the newsletter published over the last six months, missing one issue and sending another only via email. As part of transitioning to a new editor, I agreed to edit this issue, with assistance from various people (see the credits in the sidebar on page 2).

In parallel, we sent out a call for volunteers, and as a result, I'm pleased to announce that past Editor Anders Monsen (he edited the newsletter from 1994 through 1998) has agreed to return and edit the newsletter again.

As he said in his opening message to me, one of the reason he stepped down five years ago was all the other tasks he had to handle for most of his tenure. The list of responsibilities he had then includes a substantial proportion of the volunteer positions that are now handled by separate people: membership coordinator, finances, webmaster, contacting publishers, arranging awards ceremonies, and conducting ballots for the awards. Since Anders will be able to focus on the newsletter, he should find the position to stay enjoyable over the long term, and we can hope that he will

want to continue for quite some time.

Yet another sign of stability is that the board of directors, first elected in 2001, has gone through a complete cycle. We started out with three groups of directors elected to one-, two- and three-year terms, and now each group has cycled through and been elected to a new three year term, in the process replacing two retiring board members with new leaders from within the organization.

Our newest new board member is Jorge Codina, a longtime libertarian activist who has run for public office, and who has been a member of the LFS for more than five years. Jorge lives in Costa Rica, but the Internet makes it easy to stay in touch. He replaced Tod Casasent, who stepped down from the board, but will continue as webmaster for the lfs.org web site. Welcome Jorge, and thanks to Tod.

With that, I'll get out of the way, and let you read the rest of this issue. We have reviews of new and old fiction in book and DVD form, a report on the 2004 WorldCon and our awards ceremonies, as well as a remembrance for a too-soon departed LFS member. Expect more and better in the next issue from our new editor.

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REVIEWS

The Confusion

By Neal Stephenson

William Morrow, 2004: \$27.95

ISBN 0060523867

The System of the World

By Neal Stephenson

William Morrow, 2004: \$27.95

ISBN 0060523875

Reviewed by William H. Stoddard

With these two books, Neal Stephenson completes the Baroque Cycle, which began in 2003 with **Quicksilver**. Effectively, this is one gigantic novel, each of whose parts is on the scale of **Atlas Shrugged** or **The Lord of the Rings**. Moreover, the entire Baroque Cycle is, in effect, a prequel to Stephenson's previous book, **Cryptonomicon**, which explored the linkage between computation, cryptography, and international finance in two linked narratives, taking place during World War II and several decades later. The Baroque Cycle takes the reader back several centuries, to the century following the Restoration, to show the ancestors of the heroes of **Cryptonomicon** and their involvement with earlier forms of the same developments.

Structurally, this story has multiple layers. It starts out with one of its major characters, Daniel Waterhouse, as an old man in Massachusetts Bay Colony, summoned back to England to mediate a quarrel between Newton and Leibnitz. Stephenson then takes the reader back to Waterhouse's youth and his involvement with the Puritan revolution and the founding of the Royal Society. Then the story takes a sharp turn to introduce two other major characters, Jack Shafto, a mercenary soldier serving in Vienna, and Eliza, an escaped slave from the harem of the Turkish sultan. They fall in love, fall into misunderstandings, and are parted. In the course of the second volume, Stephenson follows their separate careers—Jack's as a seafarer circumnavigating the globe, and

Eliza's as a spy, financial manipulator, and eventually duchess. All this in fact is backstory; the third volume moves forward again to show England, many years later, as shaped by their various actions. It also picks up Waterhouse's story, and his involvement with Newton, Leibnitz, and 18th-century English politics. And in the end, Stephenson actually ties all these stories together in a single conclusion.

For libertarians, this series has a great deal of interest. One of its themes is the birth of the ideas that are now called libertarian, in an age when anything like libertarianism had scarcely been thought of. Stephenson shows the first people to dream of one day making an end to slavery, and the creation of a banking system intended to prevent kings from destroying the currency. One of the minor delights of the book is its unabashed sympathy for whiggery. Many generations of writers have romanticized the younger Stuart pretender, "Bonnie Prince Charlie" (for example, Victor Hugo's **The Man Who Laughs** hints at Stuart sympathies by having its hero turn out to be the lost Lord Clancharlie), and by extension the Stuart cause; but in reality the Stuart cause was almost entirely reactionary, favoring the Catholic church and landed wealth. Stephenson's heroes are Whig sympathizers, and thus attached to the party where proto-libertarian ideas found a home.

Beyond this, the wider intellectual scope of this story is impressive. The second volume, for example, has an amazingly lucid explanation of Leibnitz's theories of pre-established harmony and how they fit into the rest of his ideas. The third volume does the same for Newton's alchemical preoccupations, which took him away from physics and mathematics for so many years.

Are these books science fiction? The question came up during the choice of finalists for last year's Prometheus Award. The fantastic elements in **Quicksilver** did need to be looked for, but they were there; for one thing, the viewpoint character in the opening chapter was Enoch Root, who also appears as a major character in **Cryptonomicon**, during World War II. This series of books still

leaves more of the questions about Root unanswered, but gives enough information to make his fantastic qualities clear, building up the implications of his apparent immortality.

Beyond that, this is a novel that applies some of the key methods of science fictional writing to an earlier era in history. It has fantastic inventions (the efforts of several key characters to build mechanical computers), amazing natural discoveries (a form of gold that weighs more than other gold), heroic explorations (a circumnavigation of the world), heroic scientists (not only Waterhouse, but Hooke, Leibnitz, and Newton), and secret conspiracies to transform the world. It even has an imaginary country, the British realm of Qwghlm, first presented in **Cryptonomicon**, inhabited by people who speak a language with no known relatives, not even Basque. It uses all the familiar devices to show, not a future that might be, but a past that might have been. Except for the dates, it has everything that a science fiction reader could want—and a political and historical theme that libertarians will find sympathetic.

Forty Signs of Rain

By Kim Stanley Robinson

Bantam/Spectra, 2004: \$25

ISBN 0553803115

Reviewed by Michael Grossberg

Global warming is coming. Run for your lives! But fans of Kim Stanley Robinson might prefer to walk, not run, to pick up a copy of his leisurely latest novel.

Forty Signs of Rain, the first of a projected global-warming trilogy, might qualify as "fiction about science," as Robinson has suggested, but it's not satisfying science fiction.

Robinson, a top-notch talent who explores environmental theses in **Antartica** and the award-winning "Mars" trilogy [**Red Mars**, **Blue Mars**, and **Green Mars—editor**], clearly wants to grab readers and shake them into awareness

—Continued on page 6

2004 Prometheus Awards

Noreascon 2004 Report

by Fred Moulton

The 62nd World Science Fiction Convention was held September 2nd through September 6th at the Hynes Convention Center in Boston. Boston is a great city with rich historical setting. The Freedom Trail walking tour is interesting and educational. It takes you past many sites associated with the Revolutionary War era. The Freedom Trail begins in Boston Common and proceeds past several interesting locations such as Paul Revere's house and the Granary Burying Ground where Samuel Adams and John Hancock are buried. Boston was a fine location for the convention with good accommodations, fine food and a pleasant charm. Walking is one of the best ways to learn about a city.

The convention was well attended. Several LFS members were in attendance and it was good to see them again. I found the registration process well organized and quick and that was a good beginning. Although there were some glitches during various parts of the convention there were none that were catastrophic. The main item of LFS focus is the LFS meeting and awards event. I had been in contact with Priscilla Olson of Noreason programming during the time leading up to the con and Priscilla was able to

accommodate us on the day and time we had requested.

Thursday night the LFS and Heinlein Society had a joint party at the suite the Heinlein Society had in the Hilton. The Hilton was not the main party hotel so it was not a large turnout, rather the attendees were there because of interest and that led to a good atmosphere. The LFS covered half of the food cost and the Heinlein Society team presented it well. There was good conversation and good food. Along with discussion of SF, libertarianism and Heinlein, one of the topics of the evening was the blood drive organized by the Heinlein Society for the next day.

I spent the first part of Friday making the final touches on the Prometheus Awards schedule and the press release for the con newsletter, *The Triplanetary Gazette*. I had lunch and then time to donate blood at the blood drive vans parked in front of the Hynes Center. Then it was time to meet with other LFS members who were going to be involved in the Prometheus Awards Ceremony (and annual meeting). We met at 3:30 outside the room where the awards ceremony would be held. We went over the last minute details and then were able to enter the room at about 3:55. We got the meeting started at about 4:05 or 4:10. Joseph Martino assisted by video-taping the event and Kent VanCleave took numerous still photos.

Victoria Varga chaired the meeting and opened the meeting with

Victoria Varga chaired the meeting and opened the meeting with



F. Paul Wilson accepting the Prometheus Award for *Sims*.

a fine welcome to all present. Victoria introduced Fran Van Cleave for the presentation of the Prometheus Best Novel Award. Fran spoke about reading and enjoying *Sims* by F. Paul Wilson then nominating it for the award. She expressed her pleasure at being able to present the award. F. Paul Wilson, in his acceptance speech, talked about how the novel was not originally designed to be a "libertarian" novel but the story took a natural turn in that direction. He was most happy to win the award and had won previously in 1979 for **Wheels Within Wheels**.

Victoria then introduced me as the presenter for the Hall of Fame award, which was won by the short story "The Ungoverned" by Vernor Vinge. I was glad to be presenting the Hall of Fame award for this work because I find it both entertaining as a work of fiction and also stimulating as it raises



Left to right: David Friedman, Fred Moulton, Victoria Varga, Fran van Cleave, F. Paul Wilson.



Gregory Benford and David Friedman

difficult questions about weapons and responsibility. Vernor Vinge was not able to attend; however his friend David Friedman was present to accept for him. David, an economist, is a long time libertarian and SF fan and is a professor in the law school at the Santa Clara University. David discussed the interplay of ideas in the fiction of Vinge and his own non-fiction writing.

to the con newsletter which carried the story of the award winners in their Saturday mid-day edition

(<http://www.noreascon4.org/pubs/newsletter/issue08.pdf>) During the con there were several panels on topics and writers of interest to LFS members. It was not uncommon to bump into other LFS members at one of these panels or in the concourse outside the dealers room.

The meeting and awards ceremony was very well attended by LFS members, fans, writers and publishers. Following the awards ceremony we had a few minutes of time for people to meet and chat before we had to clear the room for the next event. I did not get a chance to speak with everyone I wanted to; however I did get a chance to speak briefly with Gregory Benford and Eric Raymond. After we cleared the room I took the press release

LFS member Joseph Martino's mystery novel **The Justice Cooperative**, which was published this year, was on sale at one of the dealer booths. Works by other LFS members, friends of LFS and past LFS award winners) Greg Benford, L. Neil Smith, F. Paul Wilson, Poul Anderson, Vernor Vinge, and Ursula Le Guin, just to name a few) were available in the dealer's room. Although a somewhat sluggish economy appeared to have put a damper on sales the dealer's room had more energy than last year in Toronto.

Other writers have done a great job of discussing NorEascon in depth including the Retro Hugos, the Hugos, the Masquerade and the art show. In particular Cheryl Morgan has a great discussion of the con in issue 109 of her Hugo award winning fanzine *Emerald City*, available online at <http://www.emcit.com/emcit109.shtml>. Several people did live-at-the-con blogs and a list of these can be found at: <http://noreascon4.blogs.com/live/>

As I expect everyone knows the Nippon 2007 bid won and thus the Worldcon will be held in Yokohama, Japan August 30 through September 3, 2007. The 2005 Worldcon will be in Glasgow, Scotland and 2006 in Los Angeles.

2004 Prometheus Award best novel nominees

- **For Us the Living**, by Robert Heinlein (Scribner Books)
- **Anarquía**, by Brad Linaweaver and J. Kent Hastings (Sense of Wonder Press)
- **Newton's Wake**, by Ken MacLeod (TOR Books)
- **The Confusion**, by Neal Stephenson (William Morrow/ a HarperCollins imprint)
- **The System of the World**, by Neal Stephenson (William Morrow/ HarperCollins)
- **Iron Sunrise**, by Charlie Stross (Ace Books)
- **Freehold**, by Michael Z. Williamson. (Baen Books)

Seven 2004 novels have been nominated by LFS members for the Best Novel category of the Prometheus Awards, as of October 22, 2004.

LFS members are encouraged to nominate novels published in 2004—or in the last two months of 2003—as soon as possible by sending the title, author, publisher and publisher's contact info (email, phones) to LFS Best Novel judging committee chair, Michael Grossberg (mikegrossb@aol.com, 614-236-5040).

Final nominations deadline is February 15, 2005, but LFS members are strongly encouraged to submit nominations before the end of the year to ensure that novels can be obtained, read and seriously considered before the judging committee's voting deadline.

Moving?

Please send any changes in your mailing address to:

David Tuchman
1364 Mapleton Ave
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Or via email:
thetuck@excite.com

—Reviews, continued from page 3

of an imminent environmental catastrophe. **Signs** might put them to sleep instead. While the film **The Day After Tomorrow** exaggerated the effects of global warming for maximum suspense (but minimal scientific accuracy), **Signs** stretches the threat with more plausibility but less excitement.

Set in Washington, D.C., and California, the novel is best at charting the complex interactions between science and politics with depressing realism. The humdrum focus is on the office politics, turf battles and everyday family lives of scientists-administrators as they try to convince politicians that the threat is serious enough to demand action.

Libertarians will find it easy to interpret Robinson's clear evidence of the politicization of science as an argument against government funding and government control, but Robinson seems strangely blind to the implications of his own persuasively drawn portrait. The frustratingly slow pace comes partly from an overemphasis on the interior monologues of characters whose largely disconnected stories won't merge until the sequels.

Although the author might be trying to ground the story in strong characterizations before unleashing the forces of nature, it's hard to care much for the three lead characters.

Charlie Quibler is a househusband who cares for his sons while serving as a senator's environmental adviser. His wife, Anna, examines science grants and works for the National Science Foundation, where eligible bachelor Frank Vanderwal, on leave from the University of California, San Diego (Robinson's alma mater), heads a panel that is screening grant proposals.

Neither heroes nor villains, all three are likable but flawed people with relatively boring lives but interesting ideas. Vanderwal interprets human behavior through the prism of sociobiology, while others focus on biology, meteorology or mathematics in monologues that become mini-essays.

The most intriguing and sympathetic characters are the least developed: a group of exiled Tibetan monks who set

up an embassy in Washington to gain American help for their transplanted island community, a member of the League of Drowning Nations.

Too often, the characters become thinly veiled mouthpieces for the left-liberal author, whose other views are caricatured or ignored. For anyone aware of the many questions about the causes and extent of global warming--and doubts about the conflicting measurements about whether global warming is even occurring--the novel's deepest assumptions will come across as frustratingly one-sided and undefended. Flooded with Robinson's polemics, the novel won't convince skeptics.

Robinson's dubious effort to combine science fiction and politics provides implicit cautionary lessons for libertarian sci-fi writers about the pitfalls of preaching to the already converted. Warning to disaster-novel fans: No major characters drown in *Signs*, although parts of the nation's capital are flooded and, clearly, more water is to come.

This is an expanded version of a review that appeared in The Dispatch (Columbus, Ohio), reprinted with permission.

The Artifact

By Michael Gear

Daw, 1998: \$6.99

ISBN 0886774063

Reviewed by Chris Hibbert

In a milieu of interstellar politics and war, a privateer, Archon, discovers an alien artifact of amazing power—in this case power designed to corrupt its wielder. The artifact has gone through the hands of many star-faring races, and it has led each of them to internecine war and eventually self-destruction. Michael Gear sets a wonderful story with all of the variety of human strengths and weaknesses on display.

Archon reveals enough about his discovery to convince the leaders of the independent worlds to go along with his request for a multi-faction expedition led by a widely respected war hero, Solomon Carrasco. Carrasco was on the opposite side in Archon's most recent battle and has only recently recovered from his (physical) wounds. Archon is a good

judge of character and he is banking on Carrasco to do the right thing with the powerful artifact, and to be able to keep the factions from each other's throats during the expedition.

The diplomatic members of the expedition are told that they will be responsible for writing a new constitution when they reach their destination, but they have heard rumors of the expedition's real purpose. This has them constantly at each other's throats. There is intrigue, betrayal, and murder. Other parties have figured out that something is up, and are shadowing Carrasco's ship the entire trip. This gives Carrasco a suitable reason to run near-constant drills to get his crew into shape for the inevitable battles, and gives the author an opportunity to show the characters growing into their responsibilities, and learning to respect Carrasco and one another.

The diplomats represent a variety of governments and manage to act out the weaknesses of most governmental forms. One of the continuing funny pieces is that the representative of the society descended from the failed Russian experiment with socialism uses Marxist-sounding rhetoric to defend his society's reliance on markets and freedom to protect the rights of the common man from the government. This contrasts well with an insufferable aristocrat who treats everyone as subservient to his slightest whim. The crew is made up of strong individuals and they display most of the traits that make humanity worth of respect.

Gear uses his material well. There are few surprising developments once he has set the characters and events in motion, but it is still a pleasure to read a well-written book with so many characters who start out worth of respect yet grow in various ways through the course of the action.



Firefly, The Complete Series

By Joss Whedon

20th Century Fox DVD, 2003. \$49.98

ISBN 0-24543-08929-2

Reviewed by Anders Monsen

Joss Whedon is best known for creating the popular, long-running TV shows, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, and its off-shoot, *Angel*. However, blink, and you too, might have missed the launch of Whedon's new show, *Firefly*, when it aired briefly the last three months of 2002, just like I did. The premise for the show is a blend of science fiction and Western. But there's more. As Whedon states, the point of the show is "to make space like now, like you're caught in it, rather than something grand and unapproachable." The Fox network ordered an initial 13 episodes, but only ten episodes aired before the network cancelled the show.

Firefly seemed in trouble from the start. The original two-hour pilot, "Serenity," was rejected by Fox as too slow, and a more action-packed episode was written over the course of one weekend. While "Serenity" introduced the cast and milieu, its replacement, "The Train Job," consisted of nice visuals but revealed little of the characters and their roles.

For fans of *Firefly*, and those who missed it, the complete series appeared on DVD in December, 2003. Along with all filmed episodes there are some behind the scenes featurettes, four deleted scenes, a small gag reel, and a few other tidbits. Seven of the 13 episodes feature commentary from writers and actors. Each episode runs around 43 minutes (minus commercials, but with the fade-outs still in place). Watching the episodes for the first time, and in the order envisioned by Whedon, I came to realize what thousands of fans saw in the show: *Firefly* truly is an entertaining experience.

Set 500 years in the future, the events center around the crew of *Serenity*, a Firefly-class space ship. The show's events occur six years after the major superpower, called the Anglo-Sino Alliance (aka, the Alliance), fought and defeated the last hold-outs to their regime, the Independents (also called "browncoats"). The captain of *Serenity*

is Malcom "Mal" Reynolds, who along with his first mate, Zoë, fought on the losing side. Unwilling to integrate fully into the Alliance, they work the fringes of known space, trafficking in legal and illegal goods while trying to avoid the Feds. The pilot, Wash, who is Zoë's husband, stayed out of the war. The engineer is a cute, back-planet girl, Kaylee, who sees good in everything. Counter-balancing this is Jayne, a hulking mercenary serving aboard *Serenity* as long as the paychecks continue to flow. Rounding out this bunch, though not properly part of the crew, is Inara, a companion (in the future, licensed and trained prostitutes are highly regarded). Inara rents one of the ship's two shuttles to use for business, and also lends an air of respectability to Mal's operations.

In the original pilot, the crew took aboard three passengers: Book, a preacher or shepherd with a mysterious and possible Alliance past; Simon, a repressed doctor from the Alliance worlds, and the doctor's younger sister, River. Much of the mystery centers around these passengers, in particular the last, who is a refuge from Alliance medical experiments, and who seems strongly psychic, yet also somewhat psychotic.

There are no aliens in the *Firefly*

universe, but humanity is alien enough. There are the dreaded Reavers, pirates of the deep, who mutilate themselves and others, killing and possibly eating other humans. The Alliance worlds are totalitarian heavens, yet while clean and orderly they contain an oppressive air. On the other hand, time seems to have stopped for the outer worlds, which resemble the old American West in vernacular, clothing, manners, economics, and law. Did I mention everyone curses in Mandarin Chinese?

While each episode focuses on one or two exploits of the *Serenity* crew, usually dealing with their current cargo, or avoiding the Alliance Feds, we slowly begin to learn more about what makes River special, and why the Alliance is so interested in her. Mal Reynolds wears his values on his sleeve, and his fierce loyalty to his crew and sense of honor compels him to keep River on board, despite the huge bounty offered for her return. We learn that the original crew has been together a little less than a year. During the course of the series we see the three new members of the crew begin to bond with the others, and even current crew members gain a greater sense of fraternity and loyalty to each other; there are

—Continued on page 8

Kerry Pearson, RIP

In late February, 2004, I learned that Kerry Pearson had passed away on January 9, 2004, apparently from complications related to diabetes. He was 41 years old, which is shockingly far too young.

Kerry, known online to many sf and libertarian friends as Lux Lucre, was a long-time member of the Libertarian Futurist Society. He contributed several whimsical drawings to *Prometheus*, and I particularly remember his graphical juxtaposition of words from *The Prisoner* and the well-known Hillary Clinton quote—a Penny-Farthing bicycle containing the

words, "It takes the Village."

Kerry also created Flash-based web animations for other libertarians groups (<http://www.jonathangullible.com/>) and as personal creative endeavors (these can be seen at <http://www.luxlucre.com>).

He was active in fandom, especially the recent Josh Whedon sf TV series, *Firefly*, about which he wrote quite a few filk songs. His death is mourned by all who knew him. We have but a few years on this ball of earth. John Keats once wrote, "mine every rift with ore," something Kerry certainly lived.

—Anders Monsen

—Reviews, continued from page 7

betrayals, trust is often fragile, but the final episode, "Objects in Space" reveal the crew as quite close, even ready to listen to requests from someone no one trusted earlier.

It would have been interesting to the direction *Firefly* would have headed given a full season of 22 episodes or so. There are arcs and threads running through the episode that only hint of what's to come, from the personal relationship level, to the grander scheme of the browncoats rising again, or discovering the truth about the Blue Sun corporation, and those horrific experiments on River.

These and other questions soon may be answered, for word of mouth and a huge fan-base has caused *Firefly* to remain alive in the minds of fans, its actors, and the show's creators. A feature-length movie, *Serenity*, is due in movie theaters on April 22, 2005 bringing what Whedon calls "a powerful statement about the right to be free" to the big screen.

There are no space battles, but gunplay aplenty. We get to cheer for freedom and a very likable crew. Humor is rife, especially in Jayne's character—though I doubt Jayne intends the humor. (Strange aside here: I wonder who made the decision to airbrush out Jayne's goatee on the DVD covers, and why?) There's much to recommend in these four discs. You won't regret shelling out money for hours of entertainment. You'll experience both a sense of wonder and a sense of regret as to what might have been.

Lost City

By Clive Cussler, with Paul Kemprecos
Putnam, 1998: \$26.95
ISBN 039915177X

Reviewed by Michael Grossberg

If only Clive Cussler had discovered the secret of immortality in one of his earlier undersea adventure novels, then his aging hero Dirk Pitt might not have had to retire five books ago. Never fear, though, Cussler fans. Even those who miss Pitt, as I do, won't mind following the similarly heroic he-man exploits of Kurt Austin in *Lost City*, a ripsnort-

ing thriller about murderous efforts to conceal a search for a biotech-enhanced secret of eternal life. Austin, virtually a cardboard-cutout replacement for the similarly cardboard Pitt, is the platinum-haired hero of Cussler's NUMA Files series, which includes *White Death*, *Fire Ice*, *Blue Gold* and *Serpent*.

Coauthored by Paul Kemprecos, who also has written six underwater detective thrillers, the NUMA Files novels hew faithfully to Cussler's guy-oriented fare. Cussler doesn't pretend to be a good writer, but he's a good storyteller. His escapist formula spices waterlogged adventure with mystery, mythic history, violence, high-tech equipment, exotic locales and sexy women.

Lost City offers especially interesting mysteries within mysteries as scientists are murdered or kidnapped and the tunnels underneath a glacier are flooded for nefarious purposes. Among the mysteries: rumors of red-eyed beasts that might be mutants; the fast-growing spread of gorgonweed, which threatens to clog the oceans; and a centuries-old warrior's helmet that may hold clues to a vast conspiracy for world domination. (Ho hum; most Cussler novels involve a conspiracy for world domination.)

The novel also offers more imaginative locales and scenarios, some borrowed shamelessly from H.G. Wells (*The Island of Dr. Moreau*) and Jules Verne (*Mysterious Island*). The best elements pay explicit tribute to Edgar Allan Poe with suspenseful situations modeled on "The Cask of Amontillado," "The Pit and the Pendulum," and "The Masque of the Red Death."

One of the most irritating flaws of too many Cussler novels have been his ludicrously improbable villains. *Lost City* is one of the best Cussler novels in years, partly because of its more intriguing villain—actually, a series of convincing characters whose connections and motivations are revealed only gradually.

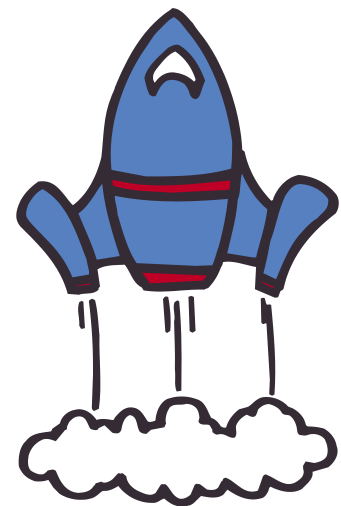
Some villains are associated with several generations of a secretive French family of arms merchants—and these days, it's easy to dislike the French. Using arms merchants as shadowy and suspicious but all-powerful characters is a mindless cliché of 19th century and

early 20th century melodrama that deflects attention from the coercive evils of government, no matter who tries to manipulate the political levers. Libertarians will have to put aside their impatience and disagreement with Cussler's crude and naive comic-book-level view of politics, economics, and history in order to enjoy his boyish escapist fare.

As for Pitt, he's mentioned briefly as an administrator of NUMA, the fictional National Underwater Marine Agency that gives Cussler such a globe-circling license to kill—and thrill.

It's a guy thing.

This is an expanded version of a review that appeared in The Dispatch (Columbus, Ohio), reprinted with permission.



Farscape: The Peacekeeper Wars

First aired October 17-18, 2004
on the Sci Fi Channel
Reviewed by Michael Grossberg

Some science-fiction fans prefer one of the *Star Trek* or *Stargate* series or *Babylon 5*, but a good many pick *Farscape* as the best recent sci-fi TV series. *Farscape: The Peacekeeper Wars*, a rollicking follow-up to the dearly departed Sci Fi Channel series, takes the swashbuckling elements that made the show so much fun and reweaves them with fresh wit, adventure and imagination.

Best known for its colorful aliens aug-

mented by the Jim Henson Company's puppetry, *Farscape* left loose ends in the final episode of its four-year saga about astronaut John Crichton, who forged bonds with a group of fugitive aliens in a distant part of the galaxy. Through cooperation, a pooling of alien perspectives and basic smarts, plus a bit of luck, Crichton and his friends survive on a sentient spacecraft in a part of the galaxy where interstellar politics, war and tyranny makes life and liberty precious indeed.

The two-part miniseries, briskly directed by Brian Henson, neatly wraps up most plotlines. It's a rip-snorting, rifle-shooting, alien-stomach-upheaving, alien-face-opening romp through the outer limits of the vivid *Farscape* universe. Like the best single episodes, the miniseries deftly blends drama and comedy as Crichton's plans to settle down with his pregnant fiancé on a quiet planet are interrupted by full-scale war between the brutal Scarrans and the devious Peacekeepers.

Nobody really dies in science fiction especially on *Farscape* and writers David Kemper and Rockne S. O'Bannon have found a way for pint-sized royal exile Rygel (a puppet voiced by Jonathan Hardy) to revive Crichton (Ben Browder) and Aeryn Sun (Claudia Black), who were pulverized into crystals that sank into the ocean in the last episode.

Browder and Black's romantic chemistry remains strong. Black is funnier than ever as the Sebacean warrior who refuses to give up her rifle even when she's about to give birth. "Shooting makes me feel better," she says.

Browder, a likable actor who adds passion and manly tenderness to his resourceful jock role, makes the most of the wisecracking dialogue. Hailing from 20th-century America, Crichton often relieves tension by making apt ironic references to such pop-cultural icons as *Dr. Strangelove*, the Death Star, Woody Allen, Kiss and the *Creature from the Black Lagoon*. The script also finds humor by putting human rituals into an alien context. During one of several wedding attempts, Rygel provides the ring—from his own stomach. Yuck. Just wipe it off, please, Crichton, before put-

ting it on Aeryn's finger.

The writers also pay satiric tribute to the final bedroom scene in **2001: A Space Odyssey** in one of the paranoid dream-conflicts between Crichton and telepathic Scorpius (Wayne Pygram), the cadaverous enemy/ally obsessed with finding the secret of wormhole travel implanted by the Ancients in Crichton's subconscious. The art design, space battles and effects are a step up from the TV series, making this the next best thing to the long-rumored *Farscape* feature film. The densely woven miniseries offers scant background to bring newcomers up to warp speed, but fans will like it.

"Too much fun," complains a Crichton ally. "Can we go now?"

Not yet, *Farscapers*—not until you share another adventure.

This is an expanded version of a review that appeared in The Dispatch (Columbus, Ohio), reprinted with permission.

The Shockwave Rider

By John Brunner

Del Rey, 1995: \$19

ISBN 0345467175

Reviewed by Jorge Codina

The Shockwave Rider, first published in 1975, is one of Brunner's classic dystopian novels. Like his other dystopian works, he focuses on one specific topic. In **Stand on Zanzibar** he deals with overpopulation, in **The Sheep Look Up** with pollution and in **The Jagged Orbit** with racism. **The Shockwave Rider** looks at future shock, or information overload, along with an omni-present state. In my opinion it is the best of the four.

It contains two messages for libertarians. The first is the future in which government officials and their friends, obsessed with keeping power, manipulate the information people have access to, use information about everyone for their own nefarious purposes, and treat people, not as individuals with rights, but merely data items to be used and discarded as necessary. The state does not exist to protect people, in fact has absolutely no interest in doing so. The resultant society is one where no one

has any effective rights and people are plagued by individual and institutional predators. This is Brunner's intended message.

The other message is equally, if not more important, for those who value freedom. The solution proposed by the protagonist will result in a society that will also lack liberty and be just as restrictive, just in different ways. The solution to the evils of one set of elites running the government, is to replace them with another set of elites. Not to recognize the rights of individuals, not to ensure liberty for all. This is even more disturbing than the society portrayed. I doubt this was the author's intent.

It is fascinating to look at this book from the retrospect of 29 years. While many of the concepts, such as people constantly changing their life style and going into shock because of it, or routine nuclear reactor meltdowns, seem a bit far fetched, many of the specifics referred to in the book have come to pass or are starting to occur. Some are quite frightening.

Very early in the book we learn that the police, and just about anybody else, can monitor any communication. All information about everyone is online and available to those who know how to manipulate the net. You can destroy someone's credit rating to the point where their power is cut off and they

—Continued on page 10

Classified

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—Reviews, continued from page 9

can't even use the telephone. Of course this can be sorted out, but it takes a long time. This is very similar to the problems many face today with identity theft and other information related crimes.

Public schools are warehouses for children where they are subjected to constantly changing theories of "education", none of them having to do with imparting knowledge. The violence of society is magnified in the schools. Multiple marriage couples need to figure out how to allocate children. Everyone, from children to adults, taking several drugs to solve problems, real and imagined. We see people turning to bizarre methods of therapy. While the current world has not, to my knowledge, produced a method as horrific as Anti-Trauma we do have "Attachment Therapy" and other methods which have resulted in injury and sometimes even death for patients.

It does not take much imagination to see what we call "Reality TV" turning into the sick, twisted spectacle of children walking on a thin plank over a pit of live alligators.

One could argue that science has always been politicized and dogmatized, but today even more so.

The book has a version of the Internet, complete with online gambling, a futures market in ideas and worms. In fact, the term "worm" was coined at Xerox PARC from the tapeworm in the book. Keep in mind that this was written less than

a year after the TCP protocol was first specified.

Brunner also predicted the response to information overload on the part of some people. "...some people can handle only a restricted range of stimuli, and prefer to head for a mountain commune...or even emigrate to an underdeveloped country..." You see this in the Voluntary Simplicity, Back to Earth and Intentional Community movements. Also in the increasing numbers of younger couples, many with children, that are emigrating to countries such as Costa Rica. When asked why they left their home countries (typically the US and Canada) most say "to escape the constant commercialism,"

It is here one gets the first warning that the book will not propose a libertarian solution to society's problems. We are informed that in China, Brazil, Korea, Ghana and the Philippines, "wise" leaders have emerged and are making great strides in solving the problems of their countries.

i.e. information overload.

All in all, as a predictive work, **The Shockwave Rider** was amazingly perceptive.

The book opens with the protagonist, Nick, being interrogated by Paul Freeman. Nick has been captured six years after he escaped from a special school, where the stated purpose was to achieve "wisdom." In reality it was to train captive genius. The brain race having long replaced the arms race, governments all over the world are making every attempt to ensure that they have "wisdom" on their side.

It is here one gets the first warning that the book will not propose a libertarian solution to society's problems. We are informed that in China, Brazil, Korea, Ghana and the Philippines, "wise" leaders have emerged and are making great strides in solving the problems of their countries. There is no indication that they are doing this by handing responsibility to individuals. There are a few hints that, in fact, exactly the opposite

is happening.

Freeman is both trying to find out everything Nick did during those six years and convince him that the government's current approach is in fact the only viable one. During this process we learn more and more about the society, and see that Freeman is both failing to convince Nick, and that his own convictions are wavering.

Nick gets caught by making a series of mistakes. First of all he joins a major corporation so that he can use their resources to find out if his personal code is still safe. While there, he gets noticed enough to be offered an interview for a permanent position. On the interview

board will be a staff member from his old school. Nick panics, and with the help of Kate, runs off to a paid avoidance zone. Inadvertently drawing attention to himself, he and Kate leave for Precipice, a very extreme paid avoidance community, where they are not connected to the all pervasive data net.

Here we get the next indicator that a libertarian approach is not part of the author's vision. While walking through Precipice, Kate and Nick are overwhelmed by the amazing design of the community. They comment, "An architect who could do this could design a planet." You get the feeling that all one needs to do is put the right people in charge and things will be fine.

Precipice supports itself via grants from wealthy individuals because it runs a service called Hearing Aid, which listens to people's problems, thereby providing some comfort. The state hates Hearing Aid because, it rightly suspects, many people who call are revealing secret information. However, they can't shut it down because of a tapeworm that is being used for defense. If they attempt to shut it down it will destroy a large portion of the net. Nick, discovering an attempt to attack Hearing Aid, writes a much more effective tapeworm for them.

A fight causes Nick and Kate to leave Precipice. Kate returns home, but Nick

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goes to another community where he once again draws attention to himself, is identified and captured.

Freeman's interrogation does not yield the results his boss wants. Namely, how to shutdown the tapeworm that is protecting Hearing Aid. So, against Freeman's will, the government arrests Kate, and tells him to use her as a lever against Nick.

Freeman's convictions, already weakened by his conversations with Nick, collapse completely. He helps Nick and Kate escape, then vanishes himself.

In the months after their escape Nick works to bring down the state by using his hacking skills. His conversations with Kate show a real understanding of the problem. That government and organized crime are no different and "...you're in government. Your continuance in power has always depended on the ultimate sanction: 'if you don't obey we'll kill you.'"

He also seems to be leaning towards a freedom oriented solution with statements such as "...I absolutely had to find a way out—not just for you, not just for me, but for everybody." And "[t]he opposite of evil. Everything implied by the shopworn term 'free will.'"

At this point the libertarian reader has hope that the solution will increase freedom, despite the earlier contrary indications.

The attack starts by exposing all information that the government and its friends want hidden. Including the fact that Anti-Trauma therapy causes more problems and 41% of the government budget is either waste or corruption. Anyone can get any information regarding violation of laws or regulation concerning public health, environmental protection, corruption, fair business and taxation. A libertarian starts to seriously cringe. Despite Brunner's clear identification of state power as the problem, and freedom as the answer, the first attack on the state will have the effect of exposing many who have been

successfully resisting the corrupt state all along. It will put good people in danger because it treats those who resist the state the same as those who benefit from it. Only victims are spared. This is horrible.

Brunner's solution demands a technocratic state which will be larger than the one it replaces and will interfere much more directly in the lives of all the people.

And it gets worse, the ultimate solution is to hold a plebiscite, with two very simple

propositions. On the surface the propositions seem innocent enough, especially since there are libertarian approaches to implementing them, but libertarian approaches are not being considered.

The first proposition reads: "That this is a rich planet. Therefore poverty and hunger are unworthy of it, and since we can abolish them, we must." As explained a few pages before, what this means is that "[i]f people vote for Proposition #1, no greedy shivver will get his wall-to-wall three-vee as long as anybody's homeless. He won't get his round-the-planet airship cruise so long as people are dying from any disease we know how to cure."

The second reads: "That we are a civilized species. Therefore none shall henceforth gain illicit advantage by reason of the fact that we together know more than one of us can know." Now, if you use a libertarian interpretation of the term "illicit" then this is not bad. The wording needs a bit of work, but all in all it is ok. However, as we see when Nick is explaining the implementation of this to Kate, the interpretation of this is far from libertarian:

"Categorizes occupations on three axes. One: necessary special training, or uncommon talent in lieu—that's to cover people with exceptional creative gifts like musicians or artists. Two: drawbacks like unpredictable hours and dirty working conditions. Three: social indispensability. ...For instance a doctor will score high on special training and social importance too, but he can only get into the top pay

bracket if he accepts responsibility for helping emergency cases ... a garbage collector, though rating low on special training will do well on scales two and three. All public servants like police and fireman will automatically score high on scale three and most on scale two as well...a lot of parasites who were at the top...will now pay tax at ninety percent since they score zero on all three axes. ...People in advertising, for example."

Other than the gross lack of individual choice that the above imply, they also imply a huge government bureaucracy to define occupations and class them on the three scales. Of course, if I was in that department I would make sure that my position 1) required special training, 2) had "difficult" working conditions, and 3) was socially indispensable. You can just see the huge lobbying efforts, by, for example, advertising executives, to show how in fact they are more important to society than nurses, engineers, industrial workers and some types of "musicians" that just generate loud noise.

And of course, people like the FBI agents who captured Nick, Freeman and his boss, and other officials both elected and not, would "automatically score high." What bureaucrat wouldn't love this new system?

Brunner's solution demands a technocratic state which will be larger than the one it replaces and will interfere much more directly in the lives of all the people.

The warning for libertarians, and all who love freedom, is that those who want to get rid of the current evil are not necessarily offering something better. The new approach may in fact be worse.

Finally, the ending was disappointing from a story point of view. The tale was very imaginative and painted a society which was very believable. But the ending lacked imagination. Even a non-libertarian ending where a radically new form of government was instituted, one which dealt with the special characteristics of the information age, would have been much better.



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