

PROMETHEUS

The White Rose of Munich and the Dark Angels of France

By Anders Monsen

Sophie Schöll: The Final Days

Zeitgeist Films, 2006

Directed by Marc Rothemund

Starring: Julia Jentsch, Fabian Hinrichs, Gerald Alexander Held

Army of Shadows

Rialto Pictures, 2006

Directed by Jean-Pierre Melville

Starring: Lino Ventura, Simone Signoret, Paul Meurisse

Tucked away amid the blockbusters and Oscar-aimed independents in 2006 were two movies that made barely a ripple in America. Both films looked at almost forgotten episodes in World War II; one dealt with true events in Nazi Germany, and the other fictionalized experiences during the French occupation by German forces, seen from the view of members of the Resistance. Both the members of the White Rose, the group of students fighting Hitler's regime through non-violent means, and the armed fighters of the French Resistance (who often killed informers and collaborators as well as the German occupiers), were seen as terrorists by the people in charge. In this sense, both these movies might be in violation of a new British law enacted in the same year that these movies came out (see review on page 6). Aside from that almost shallow observation, these two movies actually remind us in different ways of the costs of resistance against tyranny, and should be watched by any friend of liberty. What they lack in the action and entertainment value of *V for Vendetta* or *The Matrix* (two other movies about terrorists), they make up for in emotional impact.

Sophie Schöll: The Final Days gives us the last six days in the life of one of the members of the White Rose. This group of students (plus a professor of philosophy) and friends attempted, via the writing and distribution of pamphlets, to arouse public sentiment against Hitler. Taking their name from a novel by B. Traven (author of *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* and *The Ghost Ship*, among others), several of its members had experienced life on the Eastern Front, witnessed the terrible persecution of Jews, and upon their return to Munich decided to take a stand. Always aware of the terrible risks, they wrote six pamphlets (and were in the process of writing a seventh). During the bold distribution of the sixth pamphlet at the university in Munich, two of the members (Sophie and Hans Schöll—brother and sister) were discovered and turned over to the Gestapo. During their interrogation and the subsequent investigation, other members were reeled in and arrested. Several of the leaders were killed by guillotine after perfunctory show trials, and their actions in the latter months of 1942 and early 1943 seemed to have little effect on the war in general. The final pamphlet did get smuggled out of Germany to England, where it was printed up and dropped over the country by the thousands, but the war dragged on for another two and half years.

Given the seeming impossible odds facing a small group of students

trying to change minds through secretly distributed broadsides, the most pessimistic person might be excused when asking, why bother? As one of the characters remarked, with the alliance of American, British, and Soviet forces encircling Germany, it seemed only a matter of time before Hitler lost. But the point, as these young people savagely learned, is not that we sit back and let the forces of history run their course. The point is to “live honest and true lives, even though that may be difficult.”

Whereas the White Rose group consisted of at least a dozen individuals, and seven of these were executed, this movie focuses mainly on 21-year old Sophie Schöll. The opening act implies that she played a small role; her brother and two others are seen printing up copies and discussing tactics, while she listens to big band music on the radio with a friend. She is almost dragged along as an alibi when Hans decides to distribute thousands of copies of their latest effort outside classes during a lecture, and almost is released by the Gestapo who appear to believe her story that it all was just a lark. But then things get serious, and under continued interrogation Sophie changes course, and comes across as intellectually informed and strongly motivated against Hitler in the name of freedom. Sophie

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THE LIBERTARIAN FUTURIST SOCIETY

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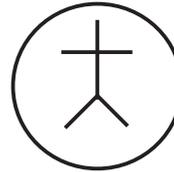
Giant Lizards from Another Star

By Ken MacLeod
NESFA Press, 2006

Reviewed by Anders Monsen

Better known for his novels, Prometheus Award winning author Ken MacLeod gathers most of his shorter fiction in this nicely produced volume by the New England Science Fiction Association (NESFA). However, *Giant Lizards from Another Star* isn't just a short story collection. MacLeod includes most of his published poetry and a slew of essays on science and science fiction, convention reviews, blog entries on political events, and some smallish squibs or fictional future history snippets. Published in February of 2006 with an edition of only 1200 copies, and sold primarily from NESFA's web site (www.nesfa.com), I heard of the book almost by accident late last year. This seems to indicate a lack of marketing, probably because NESFA's budget limits such an expense.

The book is split into sections, each grouped together by similarity in form. Leading off with poetry, then fiction, essays on fiction, essays on science, etc., this makes it easy for readers to wander off at leisure and tackle each section in any order they choose. I started off with the poetry, set the fiction aside for last, and went through the rest of the book first. I took this path because I had certain expectations going into the book, and saw several of those



expectations shattered, while others affirmed. MacLeod writes non-fiction essays often on his blog, The Early Days of a Better Nation <<http://kenmacleod.blogspot.com/>>, often about the Middle East, Scotland, and Marxism. Several of his essays were published in science and science fiction publications, fanzines, and newspapers.

Some of the most entertaining pieces in the collection include the con reports, usually from European cons in what might be considered the "outer rim" of fandom, such as Finland or Croatia.

The section "About science fiction" discusses political aspects as well as the current trends of sf books. MacLeod knows and admires fellow writer Charles Stross's books, and it's interesting how these two writers living in Scotland have influenced the sf field so much in the past decade. Some of the pieces appear a little too local, or maybe incidental. The audience for some of the essays on Scotland or British politics probably does not extend far into the US, but MacLeod is a polished and passionate writer. There is certainly great opportunity via the internet now to learn more about such matters. Of the handful of fiction stories, the two most interesting pieces are the novellas,

—Continued on page 4

BOOK REVIEWS

Off Armageddon Reef

By David Weber

Tor, 2007

Reviewed by William H. Stoddard

David Weber is best known for his Honor Harrington series, military science fiction that intentionally recreates both the historical situation of Napoleonic era naval warfare and the traditions of the British navy. Now, in *Off Armageddon Reef*, he presents actual naval warfare on another world—and re-creates those traditions even more closely. His setting is a technologically regressive society, deliberately set up by its founders to operate at a medieval level, and dominated by a religion that forbids innovation. As a result, his naval technology is comparable to that of the very beginning of the Age of Sail, the era of Lepanto (the last great battle between oared galleys), and the Spanish Armada (one of the first great battles between full-rigged sailing ships).

In fact, this technological retrogression is the underlying focus of the novel's primary conflict. One of the nations of his invented world—a seafaring island nation, remote from the central religious hierarchy and mistrusted by it—starts pushing at the edges of permitted technological advances. A lone survivor of the technologically advanced past, hoping to break the grip of the world church, offers aid to its rulers. The changes that result both speed up its advances and make it the target of a global war. This novel only shows the opening phases of that war, and leaves the underlying conflict unresolved; clearly Weber intends this to be the start of another long series.

The theme isn't a new one to science fiction, of course; it has appeared in novels from *Anthem* to *Lord of Light* to *Singularity Sky*. It's one readers of *Prometheus* are likely to find sympathetic; it's easy for us to favor Weber's heroes. Weber seems to believe in English exceptionalism, the idea of the English-speaking nations as distinctively receptive to freedom and progress. His nation of Charis is a very close re-creation of England, and its naval traditions are almost exactly those of the British age of sail; close enough in both cases to be something of an obstacle to suspension of disbelief, though Weber takes some care to re-create the geographical and cultural factors that made England distinctive. Note the choice of the name "Charis," from the Greek word for grace (the root of the English "charisma"): Weber is setting this up as a conflict between two different understandings of religion, one that turns its back on scientific truth and technological advances, and one that embraces them as one of God's revelations, and making it clear which view he favors—a theme with obvious applicability to our own world.

Mainly, though, this is an action/adventure novel, without many subtleties of theme or characterization. The reader's attention is focused on the political and religious intrigues that lead up to the war on Charis, and on the naval battles that work it out. The viewpoint character is, in effect, a superhero, with an extraordinary origin story and superhuman powers, operating in secret under a false name—and, like proto-superheroes such as Zorro and the Scarlet Pimpernel, fighting not against street crime or megalomaniacal villains, but against an oppressive political regime, both with fighting skills like those of the heroes of Hong Kong martial arts films,

and with subtle, mainly informational advanced technology. But Weber carefully limits this character's freedom to act, giving the human characters something meaningful to do in the story. At times his plot seems a little predictable—it's possible to see some of its developments coming—but the machine works: the climactic scenes are still compelling reading. Similarly, though it's possible to foresee plot developments of future novels, such as the relationship between Charis and the neighboring country of Chisholm, and between their respective rulers, it seems likely that they'll be entertaining.

Ayn Rand made a distinction between melodrama, in which the conflict is between one person's values and another's, and drama, in which characters experience inner conflict among their own values; in those terms, *Off Armageddon Reef* is almost entirely melodrama. It has both Weber's typical weaknesses—a contrived setting that's too close a fit to its historical prototype to be quite believable, and a protagonist with superfluous distinctive traits (in this case, the viewpoint character's anomalous gender) that don't advance the plot and that aren't explored in depth—and his typical strengths, the ability to write an action novel that never loses narrative momentum, and to evoke the naval traditions its author clearly loves. One might wonder why he doesn't write actual historical fiction, instead of historical fiction in outer space; on the other hand, his invented setting frees him from fussy concern with exact details of chronology and character, and allows him to shape the plot freely to his theme. On the other hand, I have to note an astonishing slip, in a short passage about oared warships in Earth's history (page 328 of the novel), that casts doubt on Weber's qualifications as a naval historian: He seems to have confused Xerxes with Xenophon. Checking this would have taken less than a minute online, and either Weber or his publisher ought to have made sure it was right!

Weber clearly aims to entertain readers, and he succeeds. This novel isn't overburdened with theme, but it has enough to give direction to its story, and to point the way to sequels; and while it's not specifically libertarian, it's one that most readers of *Prometheus* will find sympathetic.

The Mount

By Carol Emshwiller

Small Beer Press, 2003

Reviewed by David Wayland

Carol Emshwiller's novel, *The Mount*, is a curious yet insightful study of slave mentality. Perhaps "curious" is not the correct word, for the scientific and socio-historical background in the novel seems tenuous and at times ridiculous. The narrator, an adolescent boy who writes the story within the context of growing up a willing slave, is more interesting than what the surrounding plot elements. This boy is trained as a mount, functioning like a horse to alien invaders with atrophied legs and small stature, who have taken over Earth and ride human around in the neo-primitive remains. These alien riders are called Hoots, for the loud method in which they communicate, and they appear to have conquered earth with no overwhelming technology, but rather by their powerful sonic voice and the ability to strangle humans with quick and powerful hands.

—Continued on page 4

—*The Mount* review, continued from page 3

Generations after the conquest, humans exist only to serve the Hoots, and have been bred specifically for their running and load-carrying ability. Hoots and humans live in small, scattered compounds, and most travel appears to be relegated to human feet. The two main human breeds are the sturdy, powerful Seattles and the endurance trained Tennesseans. A few wild humans exist in the mountains, mainly ignored by the Hoots. Given biological constraints, the breeding program outlined by Emshwiller seems impossible. Instead, it's purely a construct upon which to hang her plot, though often it detracts from the overall feel of the novel.

These objections aside, what makes the story readable is how she handles the absolute acceptance of the narrator's role and servitude. All the time while reading the novel I wondered at the tipping point: when would the narrator realize the difference between liberty and servitude, and what then would he attempt?

How did the Hoots create a society of willing slaves, content to exist in the role with just a few gaudy incentives? Perhaps this is no different from human societies with slavery or under totalitarian regimes? People have the almost infinite capacity to reduce the inequities of life into personal growth charts, where they ponder and struggle to advance through social or party ranks to achieve privilege for themselves within existing bounds, rather than freedom from those bounds. Charly, the young narrator, yearns to become a great and renowned Seattle, and this becomes his life, at the cost of personal relationships with his estranged father, a former thoroughbred racing Seattle.

Emshwiller introduces chaos and doubt in the form of Charly's father, who returns to break him out of captivity. Now leading a band of free men in the mountains (who believe freedom means voting on virtually everything), they see as their goal the liberation of all humans from the Hoots. When they liberate Charly they also capture Charly's rider, a young Hoot destined to rule all Hoots, and by extension all humans. Charly reacts poorly to his freedom, but as he and the young Hoot deal with the loss of their former life and the changing nature of their roles as master and servant to that of friends, they absorb qualities from each other. After the inevitable confrontation between Hoots and humans on a grander scale takes place, both Charly and his rider must choose the future, and life for both races hangs in the balance. Whether the solution is optional or not, Emshwiller does raise some interesting questions. I don't see any fully thought-out sense of political freedom or philosophy in the book, but rather as Walter Mosley's *47* dealt with a few years ago, this novel is about the mentality of slaves and masters, and how that can change.

At times the suspension of disbelief required by the reader takes this novel out of the realm of sf and into fantasy, or even gonzo fiction. As the book is told from Charly's perspective, the narrative appears deliberately unsophisticated and rough, as befitting a poorly educated slave. This style detracted from my experience as a reader, but *The Mount* managed to present a unique coming-of-age tale amidst alien invaders. I just wish those invaders had not appeared as silly as in this story. For a more powerful tale of humans used as beast-like slaves, I'd turn to Neal Barrett Jr.'s *Through Darkest America*.

—*Giant Lizards* review, continued from page 2

"Cydonia" and "The Human Front." The former first appeared as a UK paperback in 1998, as part of the series called The Web. There are signs of the pre-dot-com internet boom in the story, back from the days when the world was getting wired and the future seemed unlimited. Tie in some conspiracy theory stuff from the *X-Files*, mix in politics and kids, and it is quite a nice little tale, though it certainly shows signs of aging. "The Human Front" was probably the longest MacLeod story that I had never read. Initially available in UK editions, it appeared in a *Years's Best Science Fiction* anthology back in 2002 (edited by Gardner Dozois), and so a paperback version should now be available. (The crudely reprinted logo is lifted from that story's text, with apologies to MacLeod.) There are elements of the conspiracy theory in this story as well; the focus is two-fold with a political rebellion alongside tales of gray aliens in advanced aircraft. But what seems like a simple tale of deceit and power becomes a little weirder, turning into a sort of parallel worlds trope. Saving it for last made the effort worth the wait.

So, is *Giant Lizards from Another Star* for Ken MacLeod completists only? Most likely, the answer is possibly, maybe. For a small press edition, the \$25 cover price is quite a fair deal. Not every work in here is memorable, but you learn a great deal about MacLeod as a writer and person in these pages. You will be hard pressed to find these stories elsewhere. Some stories, essays, and poems may have a rather narrow audience. Others deserve a great deal more.

Brasyl

By Ian McDonald

Pyr/Prometheus Books, 2007

Reviewed by Anders Monsen

Ian McDonald's *River of Gods* merged AI and near-future India to show a dazzling alien world. In *Brasyl*, McDonald manages to repeat his alien-in-our-world theme, turning South America's vast country into a prism of the future, which goes to show that for most American and European readers, you don't really need off-planet adventures and space operas to experience the truly alien. Brazil's strong cultural and historical ties to Portugal through centuries of colonization make it less alien than India, perhaps. At the same time the wholesale blending of African (through slavery), European, and native cultures result in a wild mix.

Brasyl tangles together three seemingly disconnected narratives, from the years 2006, 2032, and 1732. In the present, we experience the life of an aggressive TV producer fighting and scratching to advance through the ranks. In the future, dominated by RFID and perpetual surveillance, a young businessman from the favelas stumbles upon quantum mechanics and alternate world theory. Meanwhile, 300 years in the past, a young priest arrives from Europe to admonish a rogue colleague in a *Heart of Darkness/Apocalypse Now* vein. Amid tales of a frog's toxin with the powers to make people walk through worlds, the three threads slowly come together.

McDonald's novel is a tense and edgy book, almost permanently on fast forward. The heavy use of Portuguese words and Brazilian slang adds to the otherworldliness. McDonald's present and future reminded me of the gritty movie *City of God*. The result is a colorful, heart-pounding sf thriller, well worth every Brazilian *Real*.

The Gardener's Tale

By Bruce Boston

Sam's Dot Publishing, 2007, \$19.95

Reviewed by Anders Monsen

In fiction, dystopian societies often tend to overwhelm the characters that inhabit them. With the possible exception of Winston Smith from George Orwell's *1984*, most readers tend not to remember the names of the characters from such books as Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, Ayn Rand's *Anthem*, Ira Levin's *This Perfect Day*, or Yevgeny Zamiatin's *We*. These novels are among the pre-eminent classics of dystopian fiction. For the most part, things tend to go bad in dystopias (of the above books, Levin and Rand are exceptions), as it seems that the authors seek to showcase their worlds rather than their characters. Orwell's *1984* is certainly the best known of these books, with its now familiar themes of eternal war, memory hole, constant surveillance (which the UK these days is desperately trying to emulate), and the use of political language. The general dystopian theme itself strikes a chord deep within each reader, particularly those with an anti-authoritarian streak. Still, in general there aren't that many memorable dystopian works. Perhaps the concepts are too similar to present any originality, or maybe the depressive nature of these books is such that most authors tend to shy away from them.

Along comes Bruce Boston's novel, *The Gardener's Tale*, published by a small press called Sam's Dot Publishing, with a staggeringly small run of 200 copies. Given this number of copies, it's very likely that this novel will slip below the radar of most readers and critics. This is truly unfortunate, as *The Gardener's Tale* stands firmly in the same company as the classics mentioned above. It is an ambiguous novel, with no real hero, and leaves many unanswered questions. But still, Boston addresses the issues of individuality in a seemingly perfect world, a world that in actuality is rife with problems.

The society in Boston's book is fairly calm and organized, but also quite regimented, with a minor but important social outlet. The citizens generally live comfortable lives, advance through professional ranks, and suffer only if they stray outside certain rules. They suffer few apparent wants, and release any tension through a weekly night out where they don masks and act out sexual and social fantasies. A small corps of Gardeners maintains order, and few people are killed as punishment. Every citizen is scanned, and their potential for deviancy tracked, plotted, and forecast through an intricate visual picture of their personality. Mental adjustment takes care of most cases, while others are exiled to the countryside. Still, the vast majority seems content. Occasionally, a few incurable individuals crop up, such as Richard Thorne.

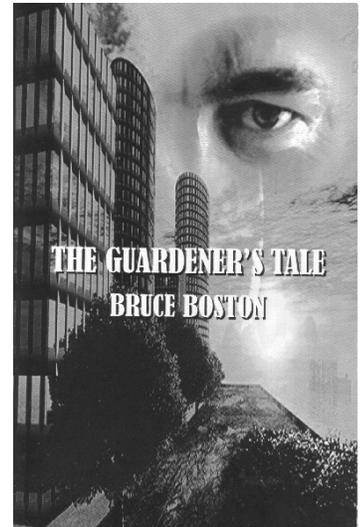
The Gardener-ruled society endures a few flaws, such as minor slums where intractable persons live, and wastelands outside the main cities. In these slums live people who refused to fit into the more regimented society. Their options are limited, and most tend toward illegal activities, such as smuggling and prostitution. Some inhabitants appear to be able to choose to live outside the normal patterns, and they tend to congregate in these slums. Thorne is a disaffected computer operator, somewhat aware he doesn't fit the normal mold in his society. He seems to lack ambition, and finds the weekly nights out contrary to his personality. His wife, or chosenmate, revels in her ambition and embraces her nights on the town. Thorne instead takes to wandering in the slums as an outlet, and befriends a disaffected co-worker already on the edge of social deviancy.

This co-worker introduces Thorne to a prostitute, Josie Jimson, the daughter of a former radical leader who disappeared many years ago after a failed revolution. Unexpectedly, Thorne falls in love with Josie, and spends more and more time with her instead of his chosenmate. Josie introduces him to banned books, marijuana, and whiskey, all guaranteed to land him in trouble should the Gardeners discover his activities. Complications ensue when his chosenmate, Diana, becomes prey to a powerful architect who blackmails her for sexual favors. When she finally confesses this

to Thorne, he is enraged despite his new emotional distance from her; a new persona has emerged, and he takes action that attracts the notice of the authorities. Thorne's infatuation with Josie has driven a usually calm and indifferent man over the edge, and once committed he confesses his affair to Diana, stating his intent to leave her. Unwilling to let go, she drags him into a virtual vacation that forces Thorne's mind to unravel, and the Gardeners step in, taking stock of all events and drastic action to restore equilibrium to society.

Although Thorne is not a very likeable person, yet he does have a strong personality. I felt somewhat frustrated with Thorne as a character, but he is not a typical heroic character, and his flaws seem to make him more human than the society in which he lives. Perhaps this frustration stems from the source of the person writing the story, whose own feelings certainly might cloud the way the characters are portrayed? As the title states, the narrator is one of the Gardeners, a certain Sol Thatcher. Thatcher is an older agent, very even keel. And yet he sees something in Thorne's actions that affects him deeply. Thatcher indeed is the person who undergoes the most radical change in the novel. Through the investigation of Thorne, this veteran and staid Gardener begins to question the very fabric of his society and especially his own role within that society, at tremendous personal and professional cost.

Dystopias tend to be damned near impossible to conquer. Inevitably, humans prove malleable, breakable; they tend to fall back into the society from which they're trying to escape. Yet in the end this is a book about individuals. Boston occasionally falters, such as in portraying Diana's blackmailer as so blatantly and lecherously evil, and perhaps even Diana as too flighty. Josie Jimson could have stepped forward a great deal more; she seemed to mainly as a bit-character, without any of the fire that she seemed to stoke in Richard Thorne. Thorne's changes could be attributed to lust and passion, but he also develops a taste in the more epicurean matters of life, and in this regard any respect for the state and Gardeners vanishes. One almost imagines Thorne taking up the mantle of Josie's father, but not every revolution seeks the overthrow of the state. The pace moves relatively quickly towards the end, though I found the virtual honeymoon episode a little distracting. The narration sometimes seems stilted and melodramatic, but in general this book certainly belongs as a great anti-authoritarian novel for the ages.



Terror, terror, burning bright, in the forests of the mind

Glorifying Terrorism

Edited by Farah Mendelsohn

Rackstraw Press, 2007, £15/\$34

<http://rackstrawpress.nfshost.com/>

Reviewed by Anders Monsen

"A philosopher-mathematician loaded with explosives, lucid and reckless, resolute without optimism. If that's not a hero, what is a hero?"

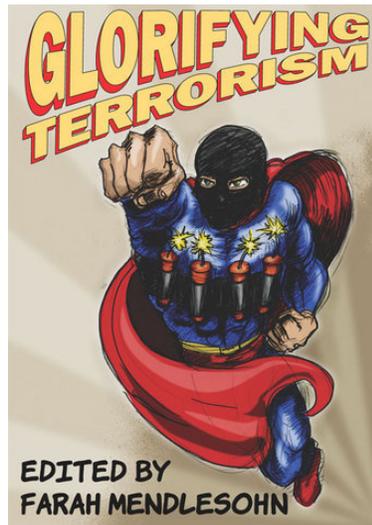
—Georges Canguilhem

In the current "war on terror," long-held ideas on freedom of speech in the US and UK slowly are being stripped away under the guise of national security. In combating certain dangerous views, a far broader blanket of silence is imposed. The 2006 Terrorism Act in the UK punishes anyone who is perceived to "incite or encourage acts of terrorism" whether these acts are in the past, future, or present. Given this view, the American Revolution, the French Resistance during WWII, and other battles against oppressive regimes now could be considered acts of terror. *Glorifying Terrorism*, an sf anthology of original stories edited by sf critic Farah Mendelsohn, steps forth and declares if this be terrorism, then make the most of it.

Collecting 24 short stories and one poem by a diverse group of pros and new writers, Mendelsohn adds an important work to the literature of dissent. It is almost impossible not to debate the nature of terrorism when considering these stories, as most people would be quick to distance themselves from acts of violence against innocents, while at the same time lending at least implicit support to the idea that resistance is noble and virtuous. Some of the works in this book do in fact seem to favorably portray the worst aspects of modern non-state inspired terrorists: the taking of innocent lives as an end in itself. Other stories are more traditionally anti-authoritarian, so to speak, and therefore probably more palatable.

With two dozen stories covering the same theme, it becomes difficult to pick ones that stand out. There are no instant classics like Kurt Vonnegut's "Harrison Bergeron" or Harlan Ellison's "Repent, Harlequin! Said the Ticktockman." Many tales tend to fall into a variation of resistance or anti-authoritarian actions. Very often the narrators engage in some self-sacrificial act, a martyrdom for the cause. Some stories are more thoughtful, while others seem to be about hooligans just having a go at society, like the protagonists in the movie *A Clockwork Orange*, where violence seems normal.

James A. Trimarco's "The Sundial Brigade" is maybe the most memorable story in this book. Humans who settled Mars return centuries later, discover they want to experience authentic ancient history, and convert terran cities to museums. They force people to play set roles, to make everything more authentic. A few people attempt resistance, but allies in the struggle may not always be what they seem. The other significant story is Adam Roberts's "Here Comes the Flood" which imagines a future where governments handle resistance by spreading terror through nightmares. A super story, inventive and rife with memorable prose. The opening line, for example, about the president stating it is "better to send terrorists



than troops" into a country, catches reader off-guard, until they learn that the meaning of terror in Adams's story is not exactly what we currently associate with the word.

Meanwhile, a few stories deal with the phenomena of going native, such as Elizabeth Sourbut's "How I took care of my pals," which fails to convey real empathy, and suffers from a confusing back story. Marie Brennan's "Execution Morning" also shows sympathy to oppressed people from within, and comes across as the prologue to a longer fantasy novel. A trio of tales tackle the issue of revenge as motivation, and a couple others the violent act of resistance, although one story takes the distribution of information as resistance; it seems tame in comparison to some stories, but far purer from a libertarian viewpoint, I think.

Charles Stross's "Minutes of the Labor Party Conference, 2016" seems almost tame. Consist-

ing of a brief set of notes, the view of the future in the UK is a grim one, though this Labor Party seems quite unlike the current authoritarian version. I find it difficult to label this a short story; it is more a non-fiction vision of the future, though that probably does not make much sense. Ian Watson's "Hijack Holiday;" on the other hand, carries a disclaimer from the author—although written before the events of 9/11—part of the plot is eerily similar. Watson uses the ultra-rich and their ennui-driven lifestyles to mock consumerism in his deadly story. There is little empathy for any of the characters, and less so for the terrorists.

Meanwhile, Jo Walton's brief story is little more than a fragment, as is Ken MacLeod's "MS Found on a Hard Drive." I think MacLeod's strengths lie in longer stories, from novellas and upward, where he can develop his ideas and stretch the level of debate. Gwyneth Jones's "2020: I am an Anarchist" does little but give anarchism a bad name. Katherine Sparrow's "Be the Bomb You Throw" portrays a useful idiot, who aids a group against the government. Kira Franz blends a "blame whitey" view with a suicide bomber sculptor in "The Lion Waiting." Little attention is given to dead children who suffer from the so-called noble act of this sculptor, and her story takes the title quite literally. Davin Ireland's "Engaging the Irdl" is another invader story, though far more balanced. It still left me feeling somewhat uneasy, as it elevates those who see nothing wrong with killing children; in this case, the victim is from within the tribe, and murdered for accepting gifts from strangers. Likewise, Kathryn Allen's "Count Me In" seems to condone killing innocents for some imagined greater purpose, while Chaz Brenchly's "Freecell" deals with punks who just want to get on TV.

Although not all stories can be considered pro-liberty from a traditional libertarian standpoint, these are all anti-authoritarian. Yet I wonder whether the book would have had a greater impact with fewer entries. The type is small, and many stories so brief they offer little but ideas. The sheer number of tales in the same theme blend everything together, and there are really only a handful of good tales. Still, for publishing this anthology, editor Farah Mendelsohn deserves applause. The title and cover of *Glorifying Terrorism* may make some readers squirm, but the heart of the book is in the right place.

Encomiums, salutes, noble breast-beatings, laudatory allusions and the like

The Jack Vance Treasury

By Jack Vance

Subterranean Press, 2006

Reviewed by Anders Monsen

I'll state my disclaimer up front: Jack Vance is my favorite writer, and has been so for nearly 22 years. Since picking up the collection, **The Narrow Land**, in 1985 upon the recommendation of sf writer Øyvind Myhre, I've bought and read all Vance's books in countless editions and imprints. I own almost all of the Underwood-Miller hardcovers, including a few rare ones. I initially signed up for the Vance Integral Edition, but later balked at the \$1000 price tag. And yet, I bought without hesitation this latest collection of Vance stories, even though I have read them all before, some of them multiple times. Vance has that effect on his fans. In fact, while looking up the exact words for the title of this review, from **Lyonesse: Madouc**, I could not resist re-reading the entire novel. I then went back and read the other two books in the series. When I noticed two Magnus Ridolph stories in **The Jack Vance Treasury**, I had to pick up and re-read all the tales in **The Complete Magnus Ridolph**.

As in any retrospective collection, the keenest criticism lies in the selection. Despite weighing in at over 225,000 words, this book contains only a fraction of Vance's work. Many key stories are left out, a few are too similar. Where is "The Narrow Land," or that ultimate tale of revenge, "Chateau d'If?" Still, many of the works with are essential Vance: inventive, erudite, complex, graceful, and more. Since Vance stopped writing new material a couple of years ago, after the publication of his final novel, **Lurulu**, and most of his recent works were novels, these stories tend to be older works. Vance's career spanned six decades of work, starting with "The World Thinker" (another story missing from this book) in 1945, and he has written over sixty books. He is a winner of the Hugo, the Nebula, World Fantasy, and the Edgar (for his mystery novel, **The Man in the Cage**), and a Science Fiction Writers of America Grand Master. Vance is greatly admired and respected by his peers, but popular and commercial success always seem to have eluded him. His dying earth stories, Cugel the Clever books, the incomparable Lyonesse trilogy, and his Demon Prince quintet and Planet of Adventure quartet of novels mark, in my opinion, the highlights of his career.

Vance's shorter works, from brief sketches to fully realized novella length studies, all show up in this collection. Certain common threads tend to run through most of the stories. Many of the stories deal directly with the tipping points and causes of change in societies after years of ossifying tradition. This is prevalent especially in the longer works, such as "The Miracle Workers," "The Dragon Masters," and "The Last Castle." They show a build-up of tension between two forces, often invaders and natives who have co-existed uneasily for years (often decades or centuries). The need for change often is both inevitable and necessary, yet usually most of the characters resist out of conservative beliefs in tradition. Choosing sides as a reader is not always easy, yet Vance seems to favor not so much one over the other, but rather the agents of change, the innovators and early-adopters, the rebels and risk-takers.

The stories themselves range from detective efforts, to outright fantasy in the tradition of Lord Dunsany and Clark Ashton Smith. Vance may have literary forebears (P.G. Wodehouse and Jeffrey Farnol are cited as influences as well), but he never imitates. To use a word that often appears in his own fiction, Vance is non-pareil.

This treasury of tales proves valuable for new readers of Vance as well as old fans. Brief snippets of Vance's own words about the writing craft appear after each tale (though all are reprinted from many years ago, and do not always speak specifically to the tale that it follows). A fascinating autobiographical essay concludes the book, although it, too, is a reprint (albeit a very recent one). This essay lifts the curtain and reveals a little of Vance the person; Vance usually lets his fiction do the talking, and rarely himself steps out into the spotlight. While no recluse, Vance rarely frequented sf conventions like many other writers, and thus remains largely unknown to fans. Few of his works are currently in print, despite having published over sixty books in several genres. Many of his rarer works fetch vast sums on the used book market. This collection showcases many stories that are available only to those readers who trawl through used book stores or online clearinghouse sites like abebooks.com.

Several of Vance's longer works align well with libertarian ideas, such as **Blue World**, **Emphyrio**, **Wyst: Alastor 1716**, the Durdane trilogy, and to some degree, **Big Planet**. Some of his shorter works also display elements that libertarians can applaud, but often due to the shorter nature of these works, they are more focused on individuals and the recurring theme of change (often for the sake of change itself), to examine more political rooted ideas. In some cases, such as with his Dying Earth or Cugel books, morality seems non-existent or meaningless. This often also is the case in some of his less favorable societies encountered by more scrupulous protagonists; although not overtly evil, most of the antagonists in Vance's works often seek to take advantage of any and every person. Vance is a widely travelled individual, and it's certainly possible that encounters as a tourist with people from other cultures influence such negative opinions of people. More often than not, tourists or foreigners are seen as fair game by less scrupulous people. Even some regular individuals who might not rob their own neighbors see nothing wrong with lifting extra cash from strangers. One can see perhaps some of the same themes in many of Edgar Rice Burroughs' books, another influence sometimes cited by readers and critics of Vance. ERB's societies, especially in his Pellucidar novels, display similar stranger-averse societies; suspicion is normal, and treachery constant.

Perhaps Jack Vance is not a writer for every taste. That might be the reason his fame still suffers. His style often seems languid, too laconic or slow-moving compared to the more exciting adventure sf. Still, as I re-read his books again and again I never cease to marvel at his incomparable word choice, where often one word or phrase does the work of four or five words, and his endless imagination and insights. In *The Jack Vance Treasury* you can get lost inside worlds of marvel, and I can only hope the publication of this book will yield additional reprints of Vance's work, and that many more readers will discover the joys of his inventiveness and singular mind. Few writers carve their own style as distinctly as Jack Vance.

Matthew Gaylor, RIP

By Chris Baker

[*Matt Gaylor was an LFS member for more than half a decade in the late 1990s and early 2000s and for several years a Prometheus Awards finalist judge.*]

Matthew Gaylor died Thursday 28 June in Columbus, Ohio. He was best known for his mailing list, Freematt's Alerts. He distributed that list from 1996 to 2002. Matt was 47.

I first encountered Matt on the old Moderated Discussion of Objectivist Philosophy (MDOP). That was early 1996, and he announced that he was starting his own mailing list. I was one of Matt's first subscribers, and his list Freematt's Alerts was one of my first e-mail lists.

As a side note, the MDOP was my first e-mail list. A guy named Jimmy Wales had started it back in 1991. Today, Jimmy is known as the founder of Wikipedia.

Matt had long understood the power of this new media. He told me that he had been using e-mail since 1992 (very early for anyone outside of academia). It was also on Matt's list where I first learned about the attempts of governments to spy on the Net through programs like Echelon.

Matt never worked as a techie, but it was easy to have an intelligent conversation with him about technical subjects. He was also a dedicated Mac user and would quickly defend Macs against their detractors.

I finally met him 1998, when I moved to Columbus. Matt and I forged another bond as we had both been born in Wheeling, West Virginia. But he was 11 years older and had left the area at a much younger age.

Matt was the first person to tell me about all the problems within the Libertarian Party. He felt like it was truly a waste of time, although I felt (and still do) like I had nowhere else to go. He had a lot of stories of various problems and had reported problems with other groups as well. He suggested to me that the LP had even been infiltrated by various agent provocateurs for the sole purpose of sabotaging it.

It is a real tragedy that Matt never wrote his political memoirs or kept some type of journal. He stuck by the movement, even though

he had effectively been thrown out of the Ohio LP.

Matt actually made political activism fun. He simply didn't care whom he annoyed or angered. His criticisms weren't always fair, but he always called something a spade if he believed it was a spade.

He told me a great story about finding a negative article about John Kasich and distributing copies of it out at a Red Team fundraiser. I just laughed, as he was one of the few people who had the guts to try something like that. Matt loved being a troublemaker, just like the heroes who threw the tea into the Boston Harbor.

I especially enjoyed spending one Saturday night with him in the Ohio State University area in the fall of 2002. This was during a march against rape. Matt had distributed flyers around campus advising women to buy guns and "take aim against rape." OSU administration and the student newspaper were not happy.

Freematt's Alerts was a great tool for activism, and it was a great fit for Matt's personality. All Matt did was send out various articles (news and opinion) on subjects important to those who were sympathetic to the cause of freedom. Thus, he formed loose alliances with people in groups like Gun Owners of America, the Independent Institute, and the ACLU. Matt became friends with people like Jim Bovard, L Neil Smith, JJ Johnson, and Declan McCollough. Matt told me that he would even receive books from publishers, hoping that he would review them. I seem to remember Matt telling me that he had something like 700 subscribers.

It was the only e-mail list where I read just about everything that was sent out. It was my primary source of news on the World Trade Center. It was my source when I learned of the death of Robert Nozick and Poul Anderson. It was also on 14 September 2001 that I first read questions about whether United Flight 93 had crashed or had been shot down.

Matt's health steadily declined over the last few years of his life, and his interest in activism declined as well. He was severely overweight, and this naturally led to other problems.

Like RW Bradford, Matt never got any monetary compensation for his work. He took pleasure in just doing it. He was interested in revolution for the sake of revolution, or—borrowing words from Abbie Hoffman—"revolution for the hell of it."

Chris Baker interned at Liberty magazine (1996-7) and currently lives in Austin, Texas. He has also been published in The Freeman, Austin Chronicle, and Columbus Alive.

Timepeeper, new L. Neil Smith story debuts online August 2007

Let's say you're one of three teenaged friends who have "borrowed" a gadget from your school for use in a research project. And due to an accident, you lose the gadget. Because it's Friday, you have a couple of days before the school learns its gadget is missing. What do you do? Well, you go and find it, right?

The problem is, this "gadget" is something called a "TimePeeper," and you've sent it back 75 years in time from your home in 2080, when time-travel is still a very experimental and dangerous activity. So finding it and getting it back before Monday is going to be a very neat trick, indeed.

Such is the premise of the graphic novel *TimePeeper*, an all-new story written by L. Neil Smith and illustrated by Sherard Jackson, to be published online by Big Head Press. The story will be serialized on the BigHeadPress.Com site starting in August 2007, with plans for a printed version in the summer of 2008.

"Up until now, I've been the only artist associated with Smith's graphic novels," said Scott Bieser, who is also creative director for Big Head Press. "But, Neil has many more great story ideas than I have time to draw, so I had to find another artist, and the right artist, to work with him. I looked at scores of different artists before I found Sherard, or rather, he found us, in response to a call for artists on Warren Ellis' 'The ENGINE' web site."

Sherard Jackson began his illustration career in 1995 as one of the artists and co-founders of the indie comic book company, Noir Press. "Sharard's drawing style has a strong 'shonen manga' influence which I think will be very suitable for this story, which is essentially a teen adventure-comedy," Bieser said. "The three friends from 2080 have many of the same problems teen-agers today deal with, but the future technology they've grown up with give those problems a new dimension." — *from a Big Head Press release.*

Fallen Empire

Empire

By Orson Scott Card

Tor, 2006

Reviewed by Fred Curtis Moulton

Empire by Orson Scott Card is a novel set in a near future USA in most respects much like the current USA. In Card's novel the assassination of the President and Vice-President lead to the conservative Speaker of the House assuming the Presidency as next in line of succession. You might say "Wait! What! Assassinations?" Yes, assassinations. You see this novel is supposed to be a thriller.

The first chapter takes place outside the USA and is designed to introduce one of the main protagonists to the reader. It seems written in order to engender feelings of respect and affection for the protagonist, Captain Malich; promoted to Major by chapter's end. But this attempt at emotional manipulation is so blatant that the effect is lost. The development of Malich continues when he is in graduate school at Princeton taking classes from the renowned professor Averell Torrent.

In chapter three we are introduced to Captain Coleman, the other half of this dynamic duo through most of the rest of the book. We then meet Malich's blunt and impassable secretary, DeeNee Breen, then shortly thereafter Malich's virtually perfect wife.

When Malich and Coleman finally meet, the action heats up with the aforementioned assassinations. From then on the readers get some standard thriller fare with lots of weapons and action and intrigue and some extras that I discuss below. Some very odd plot twists follow, and of course, New York City with the 9/11 allusion plays a part.

New York City is invaded and taken over by a bunch of mechanical weapons devices and some troops in advanced body armor. The mechs rampage through New York City using loudspeakers to proclaim that they are there to protect New York City from the "unconstitutional government" in Washington DC and that everyone should stay off the streets in order not to be hurt. All the while these mechs are shooting at anything in a uniform, even an apartment building doorman. The mechs also shoot at our "Dynamic Good Guy Duo," who just happened to be in New York City because they decided to drive from New Jersey to go visit Ground Zero very early on Sunday morning; the traffic will be light and they can get back to New Jersey in time to go to church.

There is very little description of the mechs but what is given does not sound particularly plausible. We are told that the mechs are fourteen feet high, have two legs, are impervious to small arms fire and have enough space in the ball for a human operator. And the mechs can run, turn and shoot. There is little or no discussion of details, such as how they are powered, what kind communications they have or how they stay stable. At fourteen feet tall if half of the height is legs then there is a seven foot diameter ball on top of the legs. But it supposedly runs well and chases Malich and Coleman down the street. The discussion of "first responders" covers one group of police who are dead and another group that our Dynamic Duo team up with. This group is able to bring down one of the mechs and disable it. Then this group makes it to the Holland tunnel where they kill the "Bad Guys" and make their escape. The scene in New York City is just one example where the reader is hard pressed to decide if it is science fiction, thriller, political rant, or sermon. Or an unintentional parody of them all.

—Continued on page 12

—Sophie Schöll & *Army of Shadows*, continued from page 1

skillfully spars with both her interrogator and her judge; the former abandons his criminology defense to simply fall back on authority, whereas the latter loudly harangues her without listening to what she has to say. The ending appears inevitable, but is no less shocking.

Meanwhile, in France, the Resistance takes up the battle against Vichy collaborators and German occupiers. The Allies gave these men and women little logistical support, but saw some use in their activities. *Army of Shadows* shows the grim realities of such a war—compromised individuals had to be dealt with as surely as the enemy, and the ultimate cost seemed almost natural. Several of the characters in the movie were based on real people, and both the director and author fought in the Resistance. This movie actually was released in 1969 from a book written in 1943. It saw limited release in America, and now is available in a superb Criterion two-disc DVD. The movie is nearly two and half hours, shot with minimalist dialog, and each scene and moment lingers in aching detail. Much of the events and meanings have to be inferred, and not every loose end is cleared up during the movie, which has



been called one of the best portrayals of the French Resistance on the screen. As to this statement, I can neither confirm nor disprove the claim, but as a whole it is a serious and compelling tale, a work

of art despite a pace somewhat at odds with our times. The impressions from this movie lasted a long time, though left me with countless questions about the history and actions of the Resistance.

When considering that the quest for liberty must be one in opposition against authority, there are few examples better of the personal cost involved than these two films, one in German and the other in French. Imagine for a moment young college-age individuals putting their lives on the line for what they believe, without raising a weapon. Is that less noble than taking up arms? Is that less an act against the state? Then again, when faced with brutal occupation, who could not resist wanting to defeat invaders by hurting or killing them? Whether or not either group had any effect is debatable, but I think the effort and the idea matter in and of themselves more than results. Let Hans Schöll's last words echo throughout time: "*Es lebe die Freiheit!*" (*Long live freedom!*).

Mappa Mundi

By Justina Robson

Pyr, 2007

Reviewed by Anders Monsen

Vernor Vinge's novel *Rainbows End* (2006) raised the spectre of You Gotta Believe Me technology. As a type of mind control, YGBM insidiously and silently infiltrated the mind, changing people's very world view without any apparent internal notice. People in the business of ideas in our times are probably as much inclined to kill you as attempt non-violent persuasion, but this idea of rewriting ways of thinking as a non-violent method of change already appeared in 2001 in Justina Robson's novel, *Mappa Mundi*. Previously available only as a UK edition, in 2006 Pyr/Prometheus Books released a trade paperback edition in the US. Robson, who is consistently shortlisted for several science fiction awards such as the Arthur C. Clarke Award, has written a tense and scary work of cutting-edge sf.

Still, in the end, Robson can't really escape the constraints of writing about the future with current mental tools. Robson's not alone in this aspect. The entire concept of the Singularity, from John von Neumann to Vernor Vinge and Charles Stross, posits the eventual merger of human and machine mind. Once that's accomplished, and we can rewrite our own brains, what's to stop someone else from hacking into our mind? In a review in Prometheus a couple of years ago of Ray Kurzweil's *The Singularity is Near*, I raised this possibility to counter his overtly enthusiastic view of re-coding ourselves through smart machines inside our bloodstream. As zombie PC spambots spewing out junk email and viruses go, so might humans in this future. (Imagine the darkest scenario, as you constantly need to patch yourself to prevent being hijacked into spewing spam, or "spat," in conversations with other humans.)

Before Human OS 1.0, however, there are a few hurdles to clear, and in the end I'm not sure the transition is as straightforward as in works of fiction. Still, it makes for a good story, one that has been mined by several writers, and probably will continue to evolve as

technology evolves, and as our understanding of the human brain grows.

In *Mappa Mundi*, the effort towards the goal of mapping the instructional process of the brain has been well under way for most of the 20th century. Groups working behind the scenes are very close to a breakthrough, and have been planning for this event for many years. British psychologist Natalie Armstrong is unaware of the greater picture or threat, and views her work on the human brain as a means to understand and treat severe mental illness, such as schizophrenia. Across the Atlantic, FBI special agent Jude Westhorpe becomes involved when his half-sister, a Native American with strong anti-government views falls into a rogue government experiment in mind-control airborne viruses.

As Jude digs deeper into this mystery, he begins to connect the dots back to Armstrong's work. Jude has his own problems, such as running away from his Native Indian roots, and questioning his trust for his razor-sharp and dangerously ambitious partner. The process accelerates almost out of control when one of Armstrong's experiments goes wrong, prompted in a different direction by the shadowy group interested in the bigger picture. As June and Armstrong fall for each other, they discover that the effects of her experiment are not limited to her subject, and she in fact may already be changing into something else altogether. There are conflicting views and players involved even in this group, with a private business seeking to implant humans with ways to prevent mind control, a firewall so to speak, and teams from the US government eager to implant ideas of democracy right into the mind's rootkit. While their ends differ, their methods still rely on spreading an airborne and infectious virus that re-wires the human mind. Any government might see this as an opportunity to control their citizens, or convert people to political or religious ideas on a massive and non-violent scale. And after all, isn't avoiding violence a good idea? Here is the crux of the issue of the humanitarian with a guillotine. People want to do good things to make this world a utopia, and unfortunately not everyone realizes good intentions when they see them. Those who oppose this utopia may suffer, but in light of the greater good, this is sad but unavoidable. Libertarians, however, might differ in this respect.

Using software coding as a template for the human brain is a nice metaphor, but we live in the age of programming code, and thus see things through the eyes of that code. Conceptual re-mapping of informational instruction sets might sound neat, but as time changes, the metaphor of the brain probably will evolve beyond seeing it through lines of codes, into something that makes more sense. The brain is not a machine awaiting the right key or instruction book. Software geeks may be king in our time of Open Source developers writing applications for everything and hackers seeking to take advantage of pervasively bad code (cough, Microsoft, cough), but that time will pass.

Mappa Mundi works well as a piece of near-future fiction exploring potent ideas. It is also a decent thriller, populated with very human characters facing tough choices. As a writer Robson seems to be improving from book to book. Her characters often harbor broken souls, which are not always mended when the book ends. Still, they are believable and memorable, the two protagonists in *Mappa Mundi* much more so than the main villain. People face tough choices in life, and they do not always make the best of them. In *Mappa Mundi*, the characters realize the hardest thing about difficult choices is that ultimately we have to live with them, and we do have a choice in how we act after those choices.

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 books nominated for the Prometheus Award, but as a publication on liberty, art, and culture, *Prometheus* also publishes reviews and articles beyond the Prometheus Award.

Reviews of books, movies, TV series, and other media are welcome. For books, include author's name, complete title, publisher, date of publication, and current price. For movies include the director, studio, release date, and main cast. If released on DVD also include the price.

Submissions can be of any length, from 2000-word critical reviews or essays on particular writers or books, to short paragraph notes on books or movies of interest.

Contact the editor via email at editor@lfs.org about your material. If you include your submission in the text of your email, also attach a document in Rich Text Format. All submissions may be edited for grammar, spelling, and style.

LETTERS

Dear Anders:

In the first sentence of his review, Rick Triplett describes *Variable Star* as “a novel that the master [Robert Heinlein] never got around to finishing.” This is, of course, how it’s described by Spider Robinson, the author, and by Tor, the publisher, and how it’s generally been received. But I suspect that it’s not actually true.

Robinson states that the outline of *Variable Star* was drafted in 1955, and mentions various titles that Heinlein considered for it, starting with *The Stars Are a Clock*. An important plot arc in the novel as Robinson completed it involves a young man who goes off to the stars on a slower-than-light starship, keeping in touch with Earth through telepaths linked to other telepaths back on Earth, which enables him to correspond with a young girl there. Through relativistic time distortion, she grows up faster than he ages, and eventually the invention of a faster-than-light stardrive enables them to meet face to face and marry.

Now, the central plot arc of *Time for the Stars*, published in 1956, involves a young man who is identified as a telepath and sent off to the stars on a slower-than-light starship, which he helps to keep in touch with Earth through his telepathic link, first with his twin brother, and then with the brother’s daughter, granddaughter, and great-granddaughter. Eventually the invention of a faster-than-light stardrive enables him to meet the granddaughter face to face and marry her; because of relativistic time distortion, he is biologically only a few years older than she is.

Of course, this *could* be no more than coincidence; I have no proof to the contrary. But I think a different history is more likely: That in 1955, Heinlein began working on the outline for his next juvenile book, which ultimately became *Time for the Stars*, producing the initial draft that Robinson worked from; that as he thought the story through, he decided that the relativistic time distortion was its central theme, made one of the telepathic “special communicators” the narrator and protagonist to bring it into sharper focus, and increased the span of time to make the time distortion more dramatic. Even the title of the published work, *Time for the Stars*, is obviously similar to the original title *The Stars Are a Clock*.

To suppose otherwise is to suppose that within the span of about a year, Heinlein outlined two different novels for the same market, with closely similar plot arcs, and even with similar titles, and drew no mental connection between them. And Occam’s Razor (which I learned about from Heinlein) makes it hard for me to believe this.

There may be undiscovered lost stories, or lost initial drafts or outlines of stories, buried in Heinlein’s literary remains. But I don’t think this book is one of them. I think it’s better viewed as an alternate universe version of *Time for the Stars*—one where it was not published as a juvenile! And though Robinson does a competent job of capturing the Heinleinian tone, I have to say I prefer the juvenile that was actually published.

This is, as I say, all speculation. But the coincidences seem quite striking. And I don’t see any suggestion that anyone involved in producing this book considered them, or checked to see if there was evidence to support or refute them. If they did, I hope someday we will hear more about it.

William H. Stoddard

Loved Mr. Monsen’s review of *The Book of Merlyn* in the latest newsletter. I read both *The Once and Future King* and *Merlyn* in the 70s, during my teenage, pre-libertarian years, and I don’t recall a thing about either of them. The excerpts Mr. Monsen published in his review make me want to take an overdue second look at White. Does the Merlyn of *King* have the same anarchistic streak as the Merlyn of *Merlyn*? And I wonder if White’s essays are freedom-oriented? Pity the fantasy market is not as prolific with libertarian ideas as the SF market, except for Terry Pratchett.

Michael Serafin

LFS community on LiveJournal

LiveJournal users now have a new community online, one dedicated to libertarian sf and the LFS in particular. Visitors from anywhere on the Web also can read posts in this LFS community. If you’re a LiveJournal user you can sign up at:

<http://community.livejournal.com/prometheuslfs/>

Discussions have covered current Prometheus Award and Hall of Fame nominees, as well as other subjects. There is a separate Yahoo driven LFS email list as well, which has been around since May of 2005. This list is open to LFS members only—contact LFS-discuss-owner@yahoo.com

“Within the next generation I believe that the world’s leaders will discover that infant conditioning and narco-hypnosis are more efficient, as instruments of government, than clubs and prisons, and that the lust for power can be just as completely satisfied by suggesting people into loving their servitude as by flogging them and kicking them into obedience.”

—Aldous Huxley

Classifieds

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

—*Empire* review, continued from page 9

The novel continues with a group called the Progressive Restoration announcing they are behind the New York City takeover and proclaiming the Progressive Restoration as the legitimate national government. Soon the New York City Council has announced it recognizes the Progressive Restoration as legitimate. Shortly thereafter some other cities and states do the same and you now have the split necessary for a civil war. But wait, there is more. While all of this has been going on, one of the “good guys” is being set up to take the fall for the assassinations and the “bad guys” have infiltrated the Pentagon. Thus the race is on for the good guys to clear their names, to find and defeat the bad guys and save the USA all while reflecting on sacrifice, honor, family, and other topics.

One thing which is obvious in this novel is it has a “Message” to preach. Many novels have messages and points of view and often writers can convey an idea or even sets of ideas and messages while keeping the reader engaged. Unfortunately this novel does not do well in handling messages. The messages in this novel lay heavily upon an already weak narrative pulling it down even farther. There is a lack of intellectual sophistication and an over-reliance on emotionalism.

As I mentioned previously, this novel has a major problem in that it is not clear if it is science fiction, thriller, political rant, or sermon. Mechanical weapons attacking a city are a science fiction trope with a long history; however, they need to be well thought-out and presented in a manner that does not cause the reader to stop and ponder how implausible is the scene they are reading. And if it is a thriller then

why weigh down the action with the sermonizing? If it is a political rant or a sermon then have some clue about how to present those kinds of ideas without relying on stereotypes and clichés.

Unfortunately, this novel has a lot of clichés where it should have characters. The “Bad Guys” are portrayed particularly simplistically. For example, consider the rebel captured in the “Bad Guy” stronghold. He is portrayed as a weak and uninteresting character whose primary function appears to be supplying dialog as springboards so we can hear more from the “Good Guys.”

Important ethical and moral questions can be considered in a worthwhile manner in a novel. But it is wise to present them in a well-written manner. It is not an attack on the ethical and moral questions when one points out how poorly they have been presented in a novel. And presenting them poorly is not a way to encourage their consideration. This novel ends with enough open and unresolved bits that a sequel is possible. And since this novel was part of an entertainment business plan, a sequel is quite likely. I do not look forward to the sequel.

This brings us to the question of how I rank this work as compared to the other 2007 Prometheus Best Novel finalists. To be even minimally qualified for the Prometheus Best Novel award I feel a novel must have high quality as a work of fiction and also do well in handling libertarian themes. This novel does not even come close to meeting the first part of that test because it is such a weak novel. And as far as libertarian themes are concerned, they are generally lacking.



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