

# PROMETHEUS

## Political narratives of science fiction 2009 Prometheus Award Best Novel acceptance speech

By Cory Doctorow

Thank you very much, and a special thanks to the jury of the Libertarian Futurist Society. I find myself in very good company this year, of course, and it's a double honor to win in a field that includes such books as *Half a Crown* and *Saturn's Children*. It's really marvelous. I'd also like to thank my wife, Alice, who unfortunately is in the hotel with strep throat, but Alice is one the most patient and understanding and supportive spouses a writer could hope for. I actually finished the last chapter of the first draft of *Little Brother* at 5 in the morning in our hotel room in Rome on our anniversary. Rather than celebrating our anniversary I had gotten up at 4 to finish the book and by 5 I was done. I woke her up to celebrate. She is an extremely patient and understanding wife who deserves all thanks even as she can't make it tonight. I'd like to thank my editor Patrick Nielsen Hayden who really ushered this book into existence and oversaw it. And also my agent Russell Galen, who isn't here tonight but between he and Patrick were integral to making the book the book that it is today and the success that it is today.

So I want to talk for my remarks tonight a little about science fiction's role in envisioning ways of governance and in telling the story that becomes the narrative that drives our politics. It's one of its most socially important roles, to contrive these situations that make the case for some set of values or another. And that power isn't always used for good. Obviously we're now all familiar with 24 ginning up these situations in where it seems moral and ethical for Jack Bauer to stick his revolver in someone's thigh, pull the trigger and blow a bullet into the meat of it in order to get him to tell him where the ticking bomb is going. And science fiction can also contrive situations in which any kind of authoritarian or extraordinary measure can be made to feel right. Heinlein in *Farnham's Freehold* contrives an elaborate situation in which life-boat rules can be justified. The idea that people should have a say in how things should be can be thrown out the window because imminent danger is at the door. And of course when there's imminent danger at your door all notions of self-determination or consensus or of individual liberty can be thrown away. The situation is

itself contrivance.

As John Kessel's pointed out, in [Orson Scott Card's] *Ender's Game* we have an incredibly powerful and ultimately manipulative argument for the doctrine of pre-emption, where you have a character who is really one of the most sympathetic characters in science fiction, I think, who repeatedly finds himself bullied by people who make him feel uncomfortable and who responds by killing them. And who time and again is made to seem the good guy for having done so, because we're made to see that if he didn't kill them eventually they would have killed him, the bullying would have just escalated. We see also in non-science fiction from some of science fiction's practioners, books like [David Brin's] *The Transparent Society*, the kind of council of defeat that holds that our ability to control our political rulers will never allow us to stop them from spying on us, so we should just give up, and nevertheless hope that we can somehow have enough power over our

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The newsletter of the Libertarian Futurist Society

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## A splendid triumph of style over substance—Impressions of *Avatar*

By Anders Monsen

Buoyed by elevated 3D and IMAX ticket prices, glowing reviews (at least when it comes to the visual aspects), good word of mouth, and repeat viewers, director James Cameron's movie *Avatar* is now the biggest money-making movie of all time. In second place? *Titanic*, another Cameron movie, and coincidentally the movie he made prior to *Avatar*, a distant 12 years ago.

I contributed in part to the success of this movie, in the sense that I spent \$16 to see the IMAX 3D version a few days after the official release date. While I tried to see it the weekend it came out, on a Sunday morning, I learned while in line that all shows that day were sold out, and even the Tuesday night showing I went to sold out, though this time I wised up and bought the ticket online. Say what you will about the story itself, science fiction is taken very seriously by the movie-going public. I have heard glowing reviews about the experience from people in Norway and South Africa.

The nearly three-hour-long movie is a breathtaking and an unforgettable experience on the big screen. There were times I felt that the characters and scenery were part of the movie theatre. The action in the second and especially third acts were palpable, visceral. I can honestly say I have never experienced another movie like it. Although other sf movies that may have caused some similar moments exist—the opening scene of *Star Wars: A New Hope*, Cameron's own *Aliens*, and certainly *The Matrix*. The future of movies came of age in 2009 — 3D cinema makes going to movie theaters almost attractive again, if not critical in certain instances.

And what of the story itself? Most reviews I have read focus on this dichotomy. Leave your mind at the door. Cameron admitted to picking through every sf story he read and loved while growing up. Grumbles have been made from fans of Poul Anderson, who feel that Cameron ripped his protagonist directly from an Anderson story. Other reviews have mocked *Avatar* as Smurfs with spears, or *Ferngully* for adults, or Disney's *Pocahontas* in space, or derived from more serious movies like *At Play in the Fields of the Lord* or *The Emerald Forest*. Other allusions abound; one review I read mentioned Ursula LeGuin's story, *The Word for World is Forest*. *Avatar* certainly uses the same lack of economic sense as LeGuin's story (why someone travels six years each way to mine Pandora for rocks when Earth is a barren planet makes absolutely no sense). The similarity may in part have inspired Gary Westfahl at *Locus Online* to state that “this film is all about Vietnam,” an error that in my opinion ignores that this film is more about the Native American destruction of the 19th century.

All these charges bear some truth, for the story itself is recycled Hollywood stuff. *IO9*'s Annalee Newitz leveled more serious charges in her review, citing the movie as a racist, white messiah fantasy, something *New York Times* writer David

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## Libertarians from Space: The pioneering work of John Mantley

By Rick Triplett

If you grew up as I did, fascinated with George Pal, Ray Harryhausen, and just about any scifi movie from the 1950's, you have trouble understanding how folks today can regard them as corny. But we were young then, and just learning to wonder and to dream. Turner Classic Movies recently showed *The 27th Day* (1957) starring Gene Barry. It's not available yet on DVD, but watching it again after being enthralled as a young teen fifty years ago was a treat and even led me to reread the book, by John Mantley (1920–2003). My paperback was long lost, but through Amazon I paid a few cents for a used copy, which brought me a hardbound first edition, complete with cracking library plastic cover and those quaint due date hand stamps of yore.

This is a story of alien/human contact. Highly advanced aliens secretly visit Earth, but communicate only with six people around the world. Their home system will go nova soon, and they are looking for a new planet. They give the chosen humans capsules that can be used to destroy large numbers of humans, tasking them to use them or not. If used, of course, then Earth will be largely opened up for colonization. How the six deal with this awesome responsibility and how their lives are driven when the rest of the world finds out about them make up most of the adventure. The critical point here, overlooked by shallower audiences, is that the aliens are quite capable of taking over Earth and just moving in. But they assert that their ethics do not permit this.

Like the movie, the book has a context: the Cold War years. In this context, the western countries are bastions of freedom and Communism is blatantly evil. Joe McCarthy's excesses had not yet given anticommunism a bad name and "creeping socialism" had only just begun its relentless advance. The plot in this story focuses on the desperate plight of the six humans once their governments find out about them and on a budding romance between the American and British members of this group. Moreover as in many of these mid-century stories, a scientist, also one of the six, gradually becomes the central character and learns things about the aliens and the capsules that make for a plot twist and a nerve-wracking ending.

Although not up to the scripting and production standards we take for granted two generations later, the movie is good fun and—like the book—treats a simple but important theme in a dramatic way. Critics can easily quibble with the story, but romantic realists are invited to set aside such matters and enjoy the ride. In our modern world surfeit with shallow action movies, here is tale of powerful aliens who would rather meet their demise than attack another race. What a concept!

## By Heresies Distressed

By David Weber

TOR, 2009

Reviewed by William H. Stoddard

The new novel in David Weber's Safehold series continues the themes of the earlier novels: the conflict between enlightenment and deliberate ignorance, and its embodiment on one hand in naval warfare and on the other in religious dispute. His imaginary colony planet of Safehold, after centuries of domination by an authoritarian church, is experiencing the birth of freedom and technological progress...and it's a difficult and bloody birth, which is what gives the story its drama.

Weber takes some trouble to make it clear that his theme is not the evil of religion as such. There are religious people on both sides of his conflict. But one group have faith that God wants people to obey and submit, and the other that God wants people to know and question. His second group distinguish themselves by adhering to modern Western ideals of religious tolerance, notably by not suppressing the churches of the first group by force. In fact, their worst offense is to punish priests for their crimes just as if they were ordinary human beings. But that's enough to condemn them in the eyes of the established priesthood, and especially of its principal inquisitor.

In a sense, this novel is retelling the story of the Anglican church splitting off from the Roman...but without the self-centered and corrupt motives that drove Henry VIII, and without a saintly Thomas More figure to protest. This is clearly the English movement to Protestantism as we would like it to have been, with more ethical ideals and less brutality.

And the same could be said of the treatment of naval warfare. Weber's love of ships at sea has long been obvious; here he gives us literal wooden ships with sails and cannon. Seafaring has long been a sphere of human action where technological advances pay off in a big way, and Weber does a good job of showing how this works. But this reinforces the point that he's retelling the story of the Anglosphere, the realm of international trade and (comparatively) liberal political institutions that spread out from England to North America, and then to the dominions, and may now be taking hold in India.

Another of Weber's idealizations in this is a happier relationship between England and France, embodied here in the marriage of his "English" king to a "French" queen who admires him and shares his ideals. The main new plot in this book is the dramatic tension over whether Queen Sharleyann is going to share in her husband's knowledge of the secret true history of Safehold and the identity of his "bodyguard" Merlin. Unfortunately, it's false drama, brought about by a legal technicality rather than a real conflict, and ultimately resolved without climactic struggle. Sharleyann is a sympathetic character, but not one who proves her convictions by making hard choices.

Having read three novels in this series, I'd say that's their one big limitation. They're a fine spectacle, a kind of pag-

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—*Doctorow*, continued from page 1

political rulers that we can force them to let us spy on them.

The fact is that you get any situation that you can contrive. All of these situations involve a narrative in which the author has from a whole cloth created a set of circumstances that led inexorably to this conclusion and made it feel like authoritarianism, like surrender, like pre-emption were the right course to take. This is a seductive and powerful way of conveying values, for as human beings we have the infinite capacity to use post hoc logic to defend vigilantism or pre-emption or the naked arrogation of power as something that was somehow necessary or even inevitable. These narratives becomes the substance of our political and social reality.

In the United Kingdom where I live as an immigrant, I'm constantly meeting people who have a narrative about immigration. The story about immigration is really the last place in which people can say things that are ultimately racist but not feel like they're being racist, who say things like "Of course, the people who are trying to enter our country today aren't the kind of people like *you*. You're the right kind of immigrant. They're the wrong kind of immigrant. They come from a country with backward values. They come in having told a lie to get across the border, because they want to sneak in and jump the queue."

Then I say my father was born in a refugee camp in Azerbaijan to Red Army deserters, and I'm not the right kind of immigrant either because they stole their papers and cheated and lied their way across Europe to find their way to Canada and a freer life because that was the only way that they could get there. Ultimately, all of us who are the children of immigrants have a story like that in our background, whether or not we want to admit it.

But, nevertheless these narratives start to dominate the way that we feel about people. Again, it's a rare week that goes by if you talk about prison life with people in crime that doesn't tell you about how cushy and easy people have it in prison. All you need to do is point to the Amnesty reports and the other reports that have been prepared by organizations like the John Howard Society on the prevalence of things like rape as a means of coercion among prisoners to really make that narrative pop like the soap bubble that it really is. Nevertheless that narrative, because we hear it told so many times, persists.

Story-telling has in its remit to create, abolish, justify or defend a multiverse of political realities. And all fiction has done this from Genesis to *Sense and Sensibility*. Science fiction does that explicitly. I actually think that's the best news that we have about science fiction because it means that it's part of our toolkit for understanding what the stories are and what they mean. We can say and admit that this is one of



*Cory Doctorow, winner of the 2009 Prometheus Award for Best Novel for Little Brother, and Pat Reynolds accepting on behalf of J. R. R. Tolkien's Lord of the Rings trilogy, which won in the Hall of Fame category.*

the reasons that we write it. And it's what I set out to do with *Little Brother* because I see the narratives of authority and of pre-emption and of surrender gaining ground everywhere in the three countries that I call my home—the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom.

Tony Benn, the very astute and really wonderful British politician, a man who renounced his royal title because he thinks that they're rubbish, was recently on Canadian radio describing the problem of politicians today is that they've come to see themselves as managers of the people rather than representatives of the people. I think that this is a really key insight into what's happened to our political reality.

Technology can enslave us or liberate us, and it depends on what story we tell about it, as to which outcome we get. If we see the role of government to manage us rather than to represent us, then we can defend any number of measures that use technology to be more intrusive and to take away more of our liberty day to day. If we see the role of government to represent us then again technology can be used to expand the ability of individuals to collaborate together to take on some the roles that a manager might otherwise have to fulfill, and to have a truly anti-authoritarian regime in which personal liberty lives comfortably alongside the idea of solving some society's greater ills through governance. That eschews this narrative of defeatism that says that we have to allow governments to spy on us and that the best that we can hope for is that they may allow us to spy on them as well. So thank you very much for this award.

## Hall of Fame acceptance speech on behalf of J. R. R. Tolkien

By Pat Reynolds

Thank you.

There are many reasons why you may have chosen *The Lord of the Rings* as a recipient of your Hall of Fame award. As the archivist of the Tolkien Society, there is one particular passage which I hope added in its own small way to the value of the whole, and which I would like to read to you to provide a framework for my thanks.

“At no time had Hobbits of any kind been warlike, and they had never fought among themselves. In olden days they had, of course, been often obliged to fight to maintain themselves in a hard world; but in Bilbo’s time that was very ancient history. The last battle, before this story opens, and indeed the only one that had ever been fought within the borders of the Shire, was beyond living memory: the Battle of Greenfields, S.R. 1147, in which Bandobras Took routed an invasion of Orcs. Even the weathers had grown milder, and the wolves that had once come ravening out of the North in bitter white winters were now only a grandfather’s tale. So, though there was still some store of weapons in the Shire, these were used mostly as trophies, hanging above hearths or on walls, or gathered into the museum at Michel Delving. The Mathom-house it was called; for anything that Hobbits had no immediate use for, but were unwilling to throw away, they called a mathom. Their dwellings were apt to become rather crowded with mathoms, and many of the presents that passed from hand to hand were of that sort.” (pages 15/16).

Mathom houses are one of the Shire’s “memory institutions,” places which we might recognize here in Montreal as libraries, museums, archives, historic places, websites and so on. The importance of the memory institution in preserving freedom is one small thread that runs through the *Lord of the Rings*, but one that I personally am rather fond of. The Tolkien Society’s archive, and the Libertarian Futurist Society’s Hall of Fame in their own ways are partly fulfilling the same function as the Mathom-house at Michel Delving.

So, thank you for this mathom.

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*Pat Reynolds is the archivist of the Tolkien Society. She presented her remarks at the 2009 Worldcon during the Prometheus Award presentation, for J. R. R. Tolkien’s influential Lord of the Rings trilogy.*



*Cory Doctorow displays his one ounce gold coin Best Novel award alongside LFS Presenter Fred Curtis Moulton.*



*Cory Doctorow, Fred Curtis Moulton, and Pat Reynolds at the 2009 Prometheus Awards presentation at Anticipation, the 2009 Worldcon held in Montreal, Canada.*

# Anticipation: 2009 Worldcon report

By *Fred Curtis Moulton*

Montreal is a great city with many fantastic places to visit and wonderful places to eat and drink ranging from family diners to wonderful restaurants and bars. The predominant language is French, however most people speak English and it usually not difficult to figure out the signs in French with a bit of thought. The people of Montreal are very hospitable. The city is clean and bustling.

Old Montreal is a fun place to walk and see the sights, ranging from old and interesting buildings to fountains and modern sculpture in the small parks in Central Montreal. The original walls of Montreal have been the subject of serious archaeological work over the years and these walls can be seen in the lower level of the Pointe-à-Callière, the Montreal Museum of Archeology and History. The museum is built on pillars instead of a traditional foundation so that the stone walls which have been excavated are protected and can be seen by visitors. Anyone interested in history or archeology will enjoy a visit and there are docent tours in both English and French. The Museum also had a special exhibit on Pirates, Privateers and Freebooters which was attempted to hold the attention of both the young and the old which is difficult to do with such a broad topic. The displays ranged from the stories of pirates in the Caribbean to the difficulties of life on a ship. There are many other sites to visit in Montreal and the surrounding area. The Biodome is a very worthwhile visit and is easily accessible via the Metro.

The Worldcon ran from August 6th through 10th, 2009. The main Worldcon facility for programming was the Palais des congrès de Montréal which everyone shortened to just Palais. The Palais is a large structure long with multiple floors and walking the length of the facility to get from event to event meant that walking time was a consideration. I found the exercise beneficial and a good way to stretch the legs after a panel. The first floor has shops and restaurants. The second floor was used for Worldcon registration, information desk, Voodoo Board, the Dealers Room, the Art Show and other exhibits. Site Selection was also on the second floor in the exhibits area and the voting results were that Reno will host the 2011 Worldcon and Raleigh will host the 2010 NASFiC since Worldcon will be in Melbourne in 2010. The fifth floor of the Palais had a large room which worked well for the Opening, Closing, Hugos and Masquerade. The fifth floor also had most of the panel rooms.

Since this Worldcon did not occur over Labor Day it was easier for families with children to attend since many schools are starting in mid-August. There were specific tracks and programs for children and teens and the reports I heard were that they were successful.

The filking and party hotel was the Delta Centre-Ville which

was about 500 to 600 meters from the Palais depending on the route you took. Central Montreal has underground walkways which connect many of the buildings and Metro (Subway) stops and shops and food courts like an underground city with many services. The Delta was connected to the Palais via this underground walkway which was convenient if there was a rain shower. Walking underground from the Delta to the Palais also had the benefit that you did not have to wait at traffic lights. There were other hotels closer to the Palais however in general the typical distance from most hotels to the Palais was no worse than other recent Worldcons. The Holiday Inn was diagonally across the street from the Palais and also adjacent to the small but vibrant Chinatown. The Montreal Chinatown covers just a few blocks but its restaurants and bakeries were good and well used by the Worldcon attendees.

Overall the Worldcon was a success. There were a few minor glitches related to panel schedules. The range of Panel topics and the persons on the panels meant that there was almost always something which would interest you. This Worldcon had some unusual program items such as Nobel prize economist Paul Krugman. Whether one agrees with Krugman or not he did attract crowds and was not the usual Worldcon panelist. Paul Krugman and Charles Stross had a well-attended discussion which is now available online. The most commonly heard complaint was that the scheduling and rescheduling of panels had some problems and was not always well communicated and thus disrupted schedules.

The Dealers Room did not have as many book dealers as Worldcon have had historically. One commonly held perception was that the Dealers Room and the Art Show suffered from people not wanting to deal with border issues; of course other factors such as the economy might have been in play. The Masquerade was enjoyable and went off with out any major problems. The Hugos were enjoyable and felt properly paced. Results for the Masquerade and Hugos are available numerous places online.

Julie Czerneda was the Master of Ceremonies and did a wonderful job. There were French speakers to assist with much of the translation of the larger events. The Guests of Honor were well received and seemed to be enjoying themselves. Of course there was a demand for the Neil Gaiman autograph session so I am told there were tickets issued.

The Prometheus Awards event was relatively well attended with about 25 people. This is not a bad turnout considering that there were over 15 other events scheduled for that same time slot. This was a common thread through the entire con; lots of programming with usually 15 or more simultaneous events. Panels started at 9:00AM and continued into the evening with the last panels scheduled to end at midnight. Plus

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—*Con report, continued from previous page*

most of the parties started at 9:00PM. So getting about 25 people was a good turnout.

Pat Reynolds, archivist of the Tolkien Society was present to accept the HOF award for LoTR and Cory Doctorow was present to accept the Best Novel award won by *Little Brother*. Following the remarks from Pat and Cory there was a question and answer session.

The morning of the last day of the con, Pat Reynolds, several LFS members, and their friends met for coffee at Van Hottee in the Palais and had a wonderful discussion on a wide range of SF related topics ranging from the discussion of the social science at SF cons to the history of SF. Some others who had wanted to join us were prevented due to some last minute panel rescheduling.

There were a variety of parties each night of the con on the 5th and 28th floor of the Delta. Some parties such as the Fanzine Lounge ran well into the wee hours. The Delta appears to have had an internal communications glitch with some of its night managers regarding parties and elevators resulting in some problems for some of the parties particularly Saturday night. Often fans resorted to using the stairs since using the stairs was often faster than waiting for an elevator. The Delta just needs a bit of better staff training and improved procedures in order to be ready for an event like Worldcon.

In summary Montreal was wonderful and the 67th Worldcon was fantastic.



*Fred Curtis Moulton and Pat Reynolds display the Hall of Fame Award for J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*.*

—*Editorial, continued from page 2*

Brooks echoed Newitz almost thought for thought in his own editorial a few weeks later. Newitz bemoans the fact that *Avatar* (and movies like *Dances with Wolves* and *The Last Samurai*) show a culture losing out to white invaders that triumphs only by accepting a white outsider as one of their own. This white male becomes a messiah-like figure giving them the chance to transcend above their own limitations and defeat the invaders. While such an analysis does indeed bear some element of truth, I offer another suggestion: in order to become successful in Hollywood, a movie must appeal to its core audience. The predominant market for action movies when sold to Hollywood producers is the white American male. Thus white "American" males dominate as movie protagonists. In order to explain other cultures, such as the Na'vi, the audience needs a characters with whom they can identify.

Meanwhile the American Right further demeans their association with the ideals of liberty by ripping the film as anti-American because it criticizes war and aggressive economic expansion. At one time conservatives were against intervention while progressives and liberals wanted to force their views onto the rest of the world. How times have changed. The world media slapped the terms cowboy imperialism on Reagan and Bush II out of scorn, but the ardent rush to accept this rude label as a vision of righteousness and God-given power is embarrassing and crude.

The most obvious take-away from the success of this movie

is not the politics or rehashed plot. These fall apart the moment you start to pick away at their various aspects. Often when someone raises the issue of style over substance this is meant as a dismissive sneer. While indeed the ideas and story are far from original, and I knew as I watched that movie that it was a paint-by-numbers script, *Avatar* is the kind of movie that makes movie-going such a visceral experience that far too often these days falls short. As an audience we have seen it all. We know all about stuntmen, wires, green screens, and computer CGI. And while we may hunger for compelling story lines as well, leave that to books, at least in this case. The only drawback to *Avatar's* success is that Cameron now will be tempted to make sequels and try to come up with some story to redeem the original's lack of ideas. There's magic on the screen the moment *Avatar* opens. Let it remain as such.

## Classifieds

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

# Boundaries of Order Private Property as a Social System

By Butler Shaffer  
Ludwig von Mises Institute,  
Auburn, AL, 2009 323 pp  
*Reviewed by Jerry Jewett*

Professor Shaffer teaches at Southwestern University School of Law, in Los Angeles, and also writes, all from the libertarian perspective. He challenges students and readers to consider well the costs the State imposes, versus the dubious results it produces. One hopes law professors are well educated in the humanities and not pure technicians. When the professor has read works as far afield as those of Alfred Korzybski and Oswald Spengler, plus solid mainstream fare, one may believe his knowledge has breadth as well as depth.

Shaffer published *Calculated Chaos Institutional Threats to Peace and Human Survival* in 1985. There, he outlined and explored the relationship between organizations that have become institutions, and the diverging interests, and conflict, between such institutions and their members. Hence the name, as Shaffer revealed that dominating institutions, the State foremost, engineer social disorder at one hand, in order to step in with the other hand to impose coerced order. The libertarian theme is prominent.

His latest offering, *Boundaries of Order Private Property as a Social System*, provides the most comprehensive, and perhaps startling, analysis and findings of his academic writing career. As a sidelight, we might note that A.E. Van Vogt also read Count Korzybski's works, using some of the non-Aristotelian propositions to build up his super-hero in *The World of Non-A* and sequels, to the apparent amusement of Korzybski, whose hopes and claims for General Semantics never reached the level to which Van Vogt fictionally drove them. Robert Heinlein also played with General Semantics concepts in early work, though not to such an extent.

Professor Shaffer nods to Korzybski in *Boundaries of Order*. The non-Aristotelian orientation is the differentiating central theme of Korzybski's formulations, while Shaffer's incorporation of the dynamics of chaos theory and insights such as the holographic model of society are his distinguishers. Analysis of relations between Korzybski's questions and Shaffer's answers awaits further development in my forthcoming *Liberty, Tyranny and Chaos*. But more interesting here is that he may answer questions Korzybski raised. Korzybski had novel views of society, property, law and economics, as readers will recall. "It is the counsel of wisdom to discover the laws of nature, including the laws of human nature, and then to live in accordance with them." *Manhood of Humanity*. Time-binding was considered foremost in the laws of human nature, per the Count. Time-binding included an inherent universal claim to the bound-up energies of past generations for distribution among people in general, including future generations. One catches a hint of Proudhon in the Count's sympathies, though

not in his Bibliography.

Korzybski said, "It will be seen that to live righteously, to live ethically, is to live in accordance with the laws of human nature; and when it is clearly seen that man is a natural being, a part of nature literally, then it will be seen that the laws of human nature—the only possible rules for ethical conduct—are no more supernatural and no more man-made than is the law of gravitation, for example, or any other natural law." Id., (page 14).

Had Korzybski's proposals been widely understood and accepted, very substantial changes (with possibly counter-intuitive results) would have followed in the legal and economic systems of any society that adopted his General Semantics principles. His legacy has been far less than he hoped, with his challenge to adopt the non-Aristotelian point of view largely ignored, his sense of Time-Binding very dimly understood—even where known—and only a few remaining devotees carrying on in his name.

But his challenge to subsequent thinkers to formulate some method of social organization that eliminates brutality and conflict to the encouragement of peace and harmony was non-trivial, nor has it been fully answered to date. Ayn Rand did well with

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**"[T]he laws of human nature—the only possible rules for ethical conduct—are no more supernatural and no more man-made than is the law of gravitation, for example, or any other natural law."**

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*Atlas Shrugged*, showing a fictional libertarian sub-society and inspiring many discontented individuals to consider a world where liberty meant something. Rand's *Capitalism: The Unknown Ideal* explored the theoretical underpinnings of such a society, marking a further advance in the direction of more liberty and personal responsibility. Yet for all the thought she provoked and inspiration she left, perhaps Alan Greenspan is the most obvious legacy of Rand; if so, what a sad commentary that is.

However, Professor Shaffer takes a likewise novel look at the social and human condition, coming to substantially different conclusions than Korzybski or Rand did in pursuit of similar aims. What makes Shaffer's analysis effective is his penetration to the root of things, taking the radical approach, to issues of social order. Where many proponents of social change postulate the beneficent influence of some enlightened State, or an academy of enlightened advisors to a State, to lead society to a promised land, Shaffer harbors no such delusions.

Instead, he notes that we may be in the turn of an epoch, with the incipient collapse of the top-down, command-and-control, pyramidal hierarchies spawned through history, where dispersed horizontal networks are coming into being

—Continued next page

—*Shaffer review, continued from previous page*

and asserting influence as alternate centers of social power, knowledge, and opportunity. Unlike Korzybski's insistence upon epistemological changes in the general mind set as the key to peaceful and positive social changes to benefit all mankind, Shaffer sees the problem as very narrowly focused, though very widespread in effect. In short, derogation of the notion and utility of private property leads as if by design to endless conflict and strife, by means of which conflicts the State seeks aggrandizement, though it is the chief villain of the piece.

E.g., Shaffer says, "The central question in any social system, therefore, comes down to the property inquiry: how are decisions to be made in the world, and who will make them?" Who, indeed, Individual or State, decides what is a bit of property, and how it is to be used?

"The pyramid, with its top-down, command-and-control system of centralized authority, has been the dominant organizational model in Western society since at least the time of Plato." Moreover, Shaffer believes States and other rooted institutions recognize the menace decentralization poses to their dominance. "Because the authority of pyramidal systems is inseparable from their control over the lives and property of people, the threat of decentralist tendencies for institutional power cannot be overstated." Could decentralization make the pyramid fall apart? What happens if the pyramid falls apart? Is it possible that institutional power senses any threat at all? How seriously might institutional power be taking the threat of decentralist tendencies?

California Representative Jane Harmon offered a domestic terrorism and extremist prevention bill, to oppose change by typical Federal means of enshrining and subsidizing the status quo, encouraging traditional Federal practices of preemption, propaganda and coercive intervention. Shaffer suggests that such as this is not coincidental but in keeping with the changes in the wind, for he says, "The need to moderate or even prevent change engenders conflict with individuals seeking to promote their interests through means incompatible with those of institutions. It is at this point that institutions, particularly the state, create enforceable rules and machinery that pit the forces of restraint and permanency against autonomous and innovative processes. These practices necessarily interfere with the efforts of individuals to resist entropic forces. As such restraints metastasize throughout the society, they call into question the very survival of civilization itself."

Korzybski blazed new trails (most of which have since 'grown over') and coined new usages. He never used the phrase "paradigm shift" in the two principal books, but showed a keen interest in new formulations, and appeared to hope for a comprehensive, improved "doctrinal function," which would foment the development of new and better social doctrines.

Shaffer shows full awareness of the need for a paradigm shift, proposed in plain terms.

Regarding institutionalism, Shaffer says its "essential premise is that the self-interests of some are to have priority over the interests of others, and that restrictions upon the activities of the latter may be justified by the presumed superiority of purpose of the former." Orwell meant this in *Animal Farm* when he said some animals are more equal than others. "For the sake of our living well—perhaps of our living at all—humanity is in need of a major paradigm shift regarding the nature of order in society." And private property stands as the most elemental root of order in society, a point he argues and supports in good detail though the book.

"If our relationships are based upon mutual respect for our individuality and the inviolability of our respective boundaries, there will be no contradiction between individual and social interests." And "Respect for the inviolability of private property is the defining characteristic of a free market system." Contempt for the inviolability of private property is the defining characteristic of a statist system, of course. Also, "Should we continue to delude ourselves that *outside* forces are responsible for our *inner* collapse, and that more powerful mechanisms of state coercion are all that is needed to correct our course, our civilization will most likely continue toward its entropic fate." The forces and horrors of totalitarianism that Hannah Arendt so carefully documented remain in the wings, waiting for the opportunity to overwhelm us.

"Life functions in a material context: if they are to survive, organisms must occupy space and consume resources to the exclusion of everyone and everything else. This is not a normative proposition—a matter of ideological faith—but a statement of indisputable fact. [A scientific natural law, Korzybski would have said, had he thought this way about

this issue.] From the simplest to the most complex life forms—be they animal or vegetable—every living thing is engaged in a continuous process of possessing and absorbing some portion of its physical environment." This is the key characteristic which Korzybski missed but Shaffer catches.

Korzybski's time-binding led him to a collectivist turn of mind, repudiating the "animal ethics" of private ownership, yet Korzybski

himself insisted that nature's ways be the model for natural laws. Perhaps these internal inconsistencies explain his sub-optimal legacy.

Shaffer asks, "Are we individuals entitled to pursue our own ends through the control of our own resources, or are we but the means to the ends of others, to be exploited and disposed of as befits their purposes?" Most of us would rather have a sense of autonomy than see ourselves as a little cog in a big machine operated by someone else, one hopes. Recognizing the right

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—*Shaffer Review*, continued from page 9

of private property amounts to respecting the inviolability of the individual. Boundary, claim, and control are key terms to the discussion and understanding of the property concept, and Shaffer explains them aptly through the following chapters: Introduction, The Eroding Structure, Foundations of Order, Boundary: What Can Be Owned, Claim: The Will to Own, Control as Ownership, Private Property and Social Order, Property and the Environment, Individualism vs. Collectivism, Property and the State, and Conclusion.

One of Korzybski's early admirers was mathematical philosopher Cassius J. Kaiser, whose 1922 lecture on Korzybski's Concept of Man nests as an appendix to *Manhood of Humanity*. Kaiser said, "What is to be the ethics of humanity's manhood?...It will be a natural ethics...a scientific ethics having the understandability, the authority, and the sanction of natural law, for it will be the embodiment, the living expression, of the laws,—natural laws...; human freedom will be freedom to live in accord with those laws and righteousness will be the quality of a life that does not contravene them." *Manhood*, (page 321). But what if private property is the fundamental natural right, and its inviolability the primary natural law? There's fertile ground to sow the seeds of yet more libertarian fiction, creating the scenarios showing transition from the status quo to the alternate future of full privatization, with all that implies.

Both Kaiser and Korzybski made more of time-binding than it could support. Shaffer looks instead to the private property concept as the key to peace and plenty, order and harmony, and brings many arguments to support the contention. Those who would agree in principle "but for the environment" do well to focus on Chapter 8, Property and the Environment, for a reminder that private owners care for and preserve their property, while communal owners exploit ruthlessly. Some evidence establishes that environmental spoliation in the former Soviet Union reached some kind of record level for consistent, enduring abuse of soils and waters.

Shaffer reminds us that, "Contrary to our high school civics class understanding, political processes do not consist of principled or rational inquiries into the kinds of profound philosophical questions that stirred the minds of Socrates, Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas, John Locke, or John Stuart Mill. ...recourse to politics as a means of determining the 'rights' of parties, is always a resort to legalized violence." The State claims the monopoly on the legitimate uses of violence, behaving as any monopolist would. As for those who say, 'If it's the law, it must be just' [that is, supporters of legal positivism], "Those who are inclined to celebrate the virtues of legal positivism should recall that the atrocities of Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union were carried out pursuant to legally defined criteria and mandates." What can we expect where we cede

to institutions all the power they demand over us?

"Do we regard one another's lives as having a fundamental sanctity, a respect essential to any decent and peaceful society, or do we look upon each other, mechanistically and materially, as only so much protoplasm to be exploited for our purposes?"

Shaffer draws from many sources: philosophy, jurisprudence, economics, philosophy of science, history, political science, and also chaos theory, which he finds quite relevant to current social conditions. As society exists in a state of turbulence, either a more stable natural order will emerge, or a more coercive order will arise in the desperate and futile attempt to roll back the clock and maintain that failing status quo. The social system of private property has the advantage of being a natural order. The value of recognizing this lies in the reduction or elimination of conflict, as people have only the responsibility of what they do with their own property in their own lives. No one need be a tyrant nor a slave in such a society.

Korzybski accepted the State, per se. He acknowledged that Germany had built up a terrific, unified State. His quibble was that its aim had been too low: it should have aimed to advance the welfare of the World, rather than merely the German State. Shaffer is well aware that the State operates from less philanthropic premises. "Were its attributes found within an individual, it [the state] would be aptly described as a psychopathic serial

killer! But its destructiveness can no longer be tolerated by a life system intent on survival." But still, "[I]t is time for us to acknowledge that the state has reached a terminal condition."

Much is published on natural law, natural order, and the state of nature. Anthony de Jasay tells us, in his penetrating volume, *The State* (1985, Basil Blackwell, London) that "the sole necessary feature of the state of nature, ... is that in it the participants do not surrender their sovereignty. No one has obtained a monopoly of the use of force; all keep their arms. But this condition need not be inconsistent with any given stage of civilization, backward or advanced." The fully private property scenario Shaffer puts forward would permit a very high level of natural law and natural order to be realized, a fulfilled state of nature, we may say. Given how he has reached his conclusions, one might argue that this information is available to us via natural revelation, in the most secular sense of the meaning of revelation, of course.

What is liberty? "'Liberty' is *life* pursuing what it wants to pursue, through its self-directed energy." Those who love liberty, those who hope that liberty will vanquish totalitarianism, those who seek a peaceful, flourishing social order, would do well to read *Boundaries of Order*. Those who remember Albert J. Nock fondly will appreciate the flyleaf inscription: "To the Remnant."

—*Weber Review*, continued from page 3

erent of the rise of English liberty and religious tolerance, certainly worthy goals. But they're more a spectacle than a drama. I would like to see Weber have his key characters make genuinely hard choices, choices that prove their devotion to freedom and scientific progress...or test it. The series so far has been satisfactory entertainment; I'd like to see Weber make it compelling.

### **This is Not a Game**

By Walter Jon Williams

Orbit, 2008

Reviewed by William H. Stoddard

*This Is Not a Game* fits into the same mode of near-future science fiction as Charles Stross's *Halting State* or Vernor Vinge's *Rainbows End*. Like Vinge's novel, it shows the use of distributed knowledge and intelligence brought together through computer networks to solve problems; in fact, it gives us more details on the actual mechanics of such cooperation than Vinge does. Like Stross's novel, it's about online financial transactions as motives for crime and intrigue. Also like Stross's novel, it's about the use of computers in playing games, and especially in alternate reality gaming, a new movement within the gaming community in which game spaces and actions are not set apart from actual life, but form part of it. The very title of the novel is also one of the slogans of this movement.

Williams focuses his story on four old friends whose lives have somewhat diverged: a venture capitalist, the head of a major corporation, a game designer, and a call center employee with a sideline in gold farming (playing online games to accumulate virtual assets that can then be sold for real money). They have a past history of gaming together in college; in fact, their respective game preferences are an important part of their characterization and are intelligently chosen. In the first part of the novel, one of them, Dagmar, is trapped in Indonesia when an international currency crisis shuts down all flights out and provokes riots in the city streets. She turns to the gaming community she supports for help, ingeniously defining the help as a way to score points within the game. In the second part, this same community becomes important once again as Dagmar finds herself enmeshed in corporate intrigue,

secretive financial transactions, and a series of murders, with herself as a likely target for the next one.

There are in fact several distinct engines driving this plot forward. One of them is software written by one of the major characters that has gone out of control, on a scale that can threaten the global economy. The financial crises in fact have an alarmingly prescient sound, given that Williams must have been delivering the manuscript to the publisher about when the housing bubble first started to fall apart! On the other hand, Williams's story has a happier ending than the real world economic crisis has had as yet.

At another level, this is a story about how the media affect the real world. In this, it's a lot like Norman Spinrad's ingenious *Pictures at Eleven*, published 15 years ago and now technologically obsolete, but still entertaining. In that story, a group of terrorists seize a Los Angeles television station and the station's newsroom staff, trying to save their own lives, end up manipulating the situation in ways that affect the real world. Williams examines a very different medium, but the same theme: how the events in the simulated reality of the medium affect the real world and vice versa. I think it has to be said that the resulting story delivers exactly what the title promises.

This isn't written quite as a science fiction novel; it's obviously aimed to be accessible to readers of mainstream fiction, in the simplicity of its plot drivers and the social realist feel of its characterization. It also comes very close to being a techno-thriller at some points. But I think science fiction readers will be able to enjoy it. Libertarian Futurist Society members won't find anything distinctively libertarian in it, but those who liked Vinge's and Stross's books that I mentioned at the start will likely enjoy this one too.

### **The Revolution Business**

By Charles Stross

TOR, 2009

Reviewed by William H. Stoddard

*The Revolution Business* is the penultimate volume of Charles Stross's paratemporal series *The Merchant Princes*, and it ends not just on a cliffhanger, but takes the reader over the edge. The pace has definitely picked up in this volume from the somewhat static middle volumes. Having introduced the reader to his fictional worlds in the first two volumes, and explored all the stresses of their politics and economics in the middle two, Stross has now set all the masses in motion.

As I said in reviewing the first book in the series, this isn't fantasy, but hard science fiction...but the science in this case is economics. (The cover of this volume quotes Paul Krugman as calling them "economic science fiction worth reading"; and while I doubt that many libertarian readers will be enthusiastic about his particular approach to economics, I'm glad that he's willing to read and praise a science fiction novel.) Stross's premise is that a secretive clan of people carry

## **Moving?**

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—*The Revolution Business*, continued from previous page

a gene that enables them, when looking at distinctive, complex patterns of knotwork, to move sideways in time. At the outset of the story we learned of one other world, a sort of hybrid between the Viking era and Renaissance absolutism; since then Stross's hero has learned of two more, and they could be only the start.

Miriam Berg's reaction to two-way travel between the worlds was to want to modernize the other world as quickly as possible. Much of the static quality of the previous volumes came from her running into massive resistance from the conservative factions among her otherworld relatives. Now she starts learning about the progressive factions, who also have ideas about modernization, though not along exactly the same lines. The two factions go to war. So do the monarchists and revolutionaries of the third parallel world, a kind of steampunk dystopia where the revolutionary impulses of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were largely suppressed.

But we also learn that Miriam's kin have penetrated our world more deeply than was evident before. This gives rise to a passage libertarians will find striking, after a U.S. DEA agent listens to taped evidence of Clan activities:

*Did I just hear that?* he wondered bleakly. *Did I just hear one of the biggest cocaine smugglers in North America ordering his accountant to donate half a million dollars to a zero-tolerance pressure group? Jesus, what is the world coming to?*

It made economic sense, if you looked at it from the right angle; it was not in the Clan's interest for the price of the commodity they shifted to drop—and drop it surely would, if it was legalized or if the pressure to keep up the war on drugs ever slackened. But for Mike Fleming, who'd willingly given the best years of his life to the DEA, it was a deeply unsettling idea; nauseating, even. *Bought and sold: We're doing the dealers' work for them, keeping prices high.*

This is followed by revelations of just how into the American political system the Clan have penetrated . . . revelations that have a disturbing plausibility. And that leads straight on to the climactic headlong leap into the abyss. Where it lands the next novel will show.

In the meantime, Stross has also been showing us a point that E. E. Smith made long ago: what science can achieve, science can duplicate. Researchers funded by the U.S. government prove able not just to understand, but to imitate the Clan's special talent, using methods of scientific research that the Clan's world hasn't yet invented and that most of the Clan don't understand. So even without the cliffhanger, the next and last novel would inevitably be a story of worlds in collision, with masks coming off and hidden truths revealed. Stross has made me eager, once again, to know if Miriam Berg is going to survive, drag her newfound family into the Enlightenment, and find true love.



The Newsletter of the Libertarian Futurist Society  
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