

PROMETHEUS

Appreciation: Scrooge McDuck and his Creator

By Phillip Salin

“Who is Carl Barks?” In the future that question may seem just as silly as “Who is Aesop?”

Phil Salin brings us up to date on the importance of the man who created Uncle Scrooge...

Once upon a time there was a wonderfully inventive storyteller and artist whose works were loved by millions, yet whose name was known by no one. Roughly twice a month, for over twenty years, the unknown storyteller wrote and illustrated a brand new humorous tale or action adventure for millions of loyal readers, who lived in many countries and spoke many different languages.

The settings of the stories were as wide as the world, indeed wider: stories were set in mythological and historic places, in addition to the most exotic of foreign locales. As well as elements of the past, elements of present and future technology frequently played a critical role.

Most of the stories centered around themes such as the importance of individual initiative; the virtues of hard work; the dangers of incompetence; the need to resist thieves, bullies and tyrants. Yet somehow, the stories were never didactic or boring; somehow, these truisms were made fresh and entertaining. These stories were full of libertarian values, yet were never advertised as such.

All this lay hidden from the awareness of most parents, lurking within the pages of mere comic books. I am talking, of course, about the Uncle Scrooge and Donald Duck stories of Carl Barks.

From 1943 to 1963, Barks wrote and drew over 500 humorous stories which were published under someone else’s name: “Walt Disney.” Approximately every two weeks throughout this period he created a story starring either “Walt Disney’s” Donald Duck or “Walt Disney’s” Uncle Scrooge. Yet it was Barks, not Walt Disney, who defined the unique comic book Donald—as different from the cartoon or newspaper strip versions as butter is from margarine, or as Hans Christian Andersen is from Fractured Fairy Tales. It was Barks, not Disney, who created and fleshed out the satiric world of “Duckburg” and populated it with an enduring set of humorous new characters including two central, remarkably non-“Mickey Mouse” heroes: Uncle Scrooge, the “richest duck on earth,” and Gyro Gearloose,

the world’s greatest inventor. It was Barks, not Disney, who invented these and other Duckburg characters and plot devices used without attribution by the Disney organization ever since, both in print and on the TV screen: Scrooge’s Money Bin, the Junior Woodchucks and their all-encompassing Manual, Gladstone Gander, Magica DeSpell, Flintheart Glomgold, and the Beagle Boys. It was Barks, not Disney, who wrote and drew those marvelous, memorable stories, month after month, year after year, and gave them substance.

A Taste for Feathers

I started reading Barks’ stories as a kid in the mid-1950s. As I got older, one by one, I gave away or sold most of my other comics; but not the Donald Ducks. Somehow they seemed to stay amusing when other comics faded. There was something refreshing about them that I never seemed to grow tired of; nor was I alone. Starting in college, I found that an alarmingly large percentage of my friends seemed to be acquiring a taste for spending an occasional hour sprawled in the living room, chuckling at Duck tales, reading and rereading the best ones, just as I had always done. Perhaps there was more to this than mere nostalgia. Perhaps I had fallen in with a bad lot. Or

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PROMETHEUS

The newsletter of the Libertarian Futurist Society

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Subscriptions: \$20/year (\$25 international)
All memberships include one-year subscriptions to *Prometheus*.

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2011 Prometheus Award Finalists

The Libertarian Futurist Society has selected Best Novel finalists for the Prometheus Awards. Winners for Best Novel and Best Classic Fiction (Hall of Fame) will be presented in an awards ceremony at Renovation, the 69th World Science Fiction Convention to be held August 17-21 in Reno, Nevada.

The Prometheus Award finalists for Best Novel are (in alphabetical order by author):

For the Win, by Cory Doctorow (TOR Books)

Darkship Thieves, by Sarah Hoyt (Baen Books)

The Last Trumpet Project, by Kevin MacArdry (lasttrumpetproject.com)

Live Free or Die, by John Ringo (Baen Books)

Ceres, by L. Neil Smith (Phoenix Pick (print edition) and Big Head Press (online edition))

For the Win is Doctorow's portrait of a future in which the world's poor adopt entrepreneurial strategies and Internet/virtual technologies to challenge the statist status quo and achieve freedom through self-empowerment. Doctorow has been nominated several times for the Prometheus Award and won in 2009 for *Little Brother*.

Darkship Thieves features an exciting, coming-of-age saga in which a heroic woman fights for her freedom and identity against a tyrannical Earth. Hoyt's novel depicts a plausible anarchist society among the asteroids. This is Hoyt's first time as Prometheus finalist.

The Last Trumpet Project tells the story of a future in which virtual reality and uploading people's minds into computers have merged. In this milieu, freedom struggles against a tyrannical government allied with religious zealots who will go to any length to ensure their vision of the future. The hopeful and utopian work is MacArdry's first published novel.

Live Free or Die is Ringo's rollicking saga of entrepreneurial humans using free-market capitalism and the spirit of old-fashioned Yankee individualism to defend Earth from imperialist aliens after first contact embroils us in galactic politics. This is Ringo's first time as a Prometheus finalist.

Ceres, the sequel to Smith's Prometheus Award-winning novel *Pallas* (1994), dramatizes a conflict between a libertarian society based in the asteroids and a statist Earth government. Smith also won the Prometheus Award for *The Probability Broach* (1982) and *The Forge of the Elders* (2001).

Ten novels published in 2010 were nominated for this year's Best Novel category. The other nominees were *Directive 51*, by John Barnes (Ace Books); *Zendegi*, by Greg Egan (Night Shade Books); *Migration*, by James Hogan (Baen Books); *The Unincorporated War*, by Dani and Eytan Kollin (TOR Books); and *A Mighty Fortress*, by David Weber (TOR Books)

The Prometheus Award, sponsored by the Libertarian Futurist Society (LFS), was established in 1979, making it one of the most enduring awards after the Nebula and Hugo awards, and one of the oldest fan-based awards currently in sf. Presented annually since 1982 at the World Science Fiction Convention, the Prometheus Awards include a gold coin and plaque for the winners.

Among Others

By Jo Walton

Tor, 2011

Reviewed by William H. Stoddard

Critics have remarked on how often a first novel is a kind of autobiography. It's no surprise that Jo Walton does things differently: *Among Others* is her *ninth* novel. The result is a richer literary work: The correspondences to her own life are more imaginatively transformed, in ways that serve the needs of the premise, not the author's unfinished business. As Keats said of poetry, this is "emotion recollected in tranquility." The practice should recommend itself to other authors.

Among Others isn't overtly libertarian—though LFS members will be delighted by the conversation about Robert A. Heinlein on pages 248-249. It couldn't really be expected to be, inasmuch as Walton's own views aren't libertarian (see her acceptance speech for the Prometheus Award for *Ha'Penny*), but on the left; her common ground with libertarians is in recognition of the dangers of political authoritarianism, especially the moral dangers to the integrity of people caught up in it. But *Among Others* isn't overtly political in this sense. It's about other things entirely.

In the first place, it's about encountering the supernatural. Walton's protagonist, Mori Phelps (short for Morwenna), has something like "second sight": she can see beings she calls fairies—neither pretty little creatures with wings in the Victorian style, nor Tolkienian elves, but mysterious creatures, often not humanoid, which perceive and communicate mostly in nonhuman ways. She can also see the spirit of her dead twin sister Morganna, lingering on Earth after a traumatic experience that left Morwenna lame. Seemingly this awareness is tied up with the ability to work magic—not the magic of sword and sorcery, with memorized spells and elaborate rituals that produce reliable results, but something more intuitive and unpredictable. These abilities seem to be hereditary: Mori's mother has them as well, and in fact part of the story is an ongoing magical conflict between the two.

Another part is a school story: After Mori goes to live with her father, she's sent to the boarding school that his three sisters attended. This fits many of the common tropes of boarding school stories: administrative rigidity about what courses Mori can take, clear class differences and snobbery about them, a minor subplot about another girl being romantically attracted to Mori. Standing against the difficulties, there are Mori's friendships with some of the other girls, and the support she receives from the school librarian.

Ironically, for many American readers, this sort of setting has an imaginative appeal in its own right, as an exotic frame for a story; this is part of the attraction of J. K. Rowling's novels, for example. It's a neat reversal that at one point Mori comments to another character about the imaginative education scheme invented by Roger Zelazny and Heinlein for some of their fiction, in which college students are free to choose courses that interest them, and graduate when they have enough completed courses, only to have him say, "That's what they really do in America."

The third part—almost in a thesis/antithesis/synthesis pattern (which may work better as a literary frame than it does as social theory!)—is Mori's involvement in a group of science fiction readers, to which the school librarian introduces her after learning about it. In fact, a recurrent motif of *Among Others* is the listing of books and stories Mori has read; and since Mori's attendance at the school starts in 1979, these will mostly be familiar titles for LFS members. Walton does a brilliant job of re-creating the experience of discovering fellow enthusiasts and talking about interests one thought no one else shared; and she makes it a source of magical strength in itself, one that Mori can turn to at the novel's climax.

At the same time, it's the focus of an ethical dilemma about magic, one that hits Mori very hard. Her magic is the raw stuff, the power of consciousness to reshape reality to its own wishes, not just in the present, but retroactively—in the words of an old joke, "Please, God, make it didn't happen." But if she can do this, are other people's actions really theirs? Is her group of fellow science fiction readers real, or did her own desires create it? An important part of Mori's characterization is her struggle with the ethics of power. At a very deep level, then, the theme of *Among Others* reflects concerns that will make sense to libertarians. Walton's concern with such issues is a key to her appeal to libertarian readers, despite many disagreements on political issues as usually defined.

For the Win

By Cory Doctorow

Tor, 2010

Reviewed by David Wayland

For the Win opens in the midst of several Massively multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPG), a virtual equivalent of *Little Brother's* Alternate Reality Games (ARGs). In MMORPGs players interact with each other and computer created beings and environments, either through internet browsers or specially created applications. These games, like *World of Warcraft*, *Second Life*, *EVE Online*, *EverQuest*, and a considerable number of other worlds that range from *Star Wars* to *Lego* to Pixar's *World of Cars* (aimed at the younger set) *ad infinitum*. These games are extremely popular, especially with males between 18 and 40, but increasingly with females. And especially in the wealthy Western world, where people have the money and leisure time to spend a third of their waking hours or more immersed in their favorite non-reality world.

Some typical elements of these games include guilds or teams of individuals who form together to participate in group raids, bosses at the end of each raid, and a market for virtual goods to level-up their virtual characters. And wherever there is a market, there is opportunity for what Friedrich von Hayek termed *catalaxis*, a spontaneous self-organizing system of voluntary cooperation. People with money but little time seek the tools needed to gain experience points, special weapons, and other enhancements to their characters. And thus

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Fiction: *To Remain Free, part 1*

By Jay McIntyre

Europa. So far, the furthest reach of humanity's grasp. Robotic probes had gone further, and indeed the initial data streams coming back from the Proxima Centauri system were surprisingly promising. But Europa remains the most distant colony from Earth.

Terraforming is a proposition, albeit a difficult and expensive one; and still in its earliest stages. Thus far, there are only four colonies on Europa, or perhaps better to say three on it and one within it.

The three surface colonies are domed cities, protected against meteorite strike by missile and laser defense systems. But in truth, they are more defended by the hope that any meteors will be drawn instead to Jupiter itself.

The fourth colony is the oldest, and the most viable, and was created by a consortium of private concerns that tunneled through the icy surface. Below lies their colony, Prospero; a vast sprawling platform on the icy ammonia ocean surface, connected by tubes to the colony proper below, on the sea floor. Here more than thirty thousand people live and thrive, despite the conditions, or perhaps because of them.

This has caused some jealousy and frustration in the surface colonies, outliers of various Earth-based governments, as they struggle to survive.....

He floated in a different sort of sea. The sea of information.

Datastreams were, after all, what connected the colonies to each other and distant Earth. As humanity had grown more and more attached to its information technologies, there occurred a schism; everyone was 'plugged into the net' now, of course. But there were some who just used it, and others who lived inside it.

Thus the true cyborgs were born. Not so much people with cybernetic enhancements, though such indeed existed. But more people who were permanently plugged into the datastreams, who spent their entire lives connected to the network. Interfacers, they were called. On Earth, they were useful to society; out here in the isolated colonies, they were essential.

His name was Georg Danislaus, at least legally. But he thought of himself as Green-Blue-278. His thoughts were still human...more or less.

His primary task was to monitor communications with the surface colonies and Earth. Normal humans thought this meant that he was watching communications channels all the time. In practice, he floated through the multilayered datastreams of the colony, and from that perspective watched numerous things, communications with the other colonies, Mars, the mining colonies on Mars' moons and in the asteroid belt, and finally Earth itself.

It was, for him, a peaceful, tranquil existence, and he often did it while half asleep.

But now, something jerked him wide awake within his life

support pod. There were four—no, five—interfacers from the surface colonies moving about within the streams, talking to each other, their colonies, and Earth. Talking about something they didn't want him to hear.

He "watched" and "listened" carefully. They knew he was in the datastreams, of course—he wasn't the only Prospero interfacers—but not exactly where. His signal-masking technology was better than theirs. But if he moved to close, they not only would be able to pinpoint his location, they would be able to penetrate his hyperwalls. Not with viruses or trojans—all of that had become charmingly outdated fifty years ago. Now they would simply send an EM pulse through his connection and fry his brain.

And they would, too. He had no doubt of that. Relations with the other colonies had gotten steadily worse over the last five years, and interfacers were always at the frontline of any such argument. At least until actual troops were landed, which was not an ideal prospect out here on Europa.

So if they were planning something...he'd better find out what it was, and fast.

Tapping into their datastreams in and of itself would be easy. Doing so in a way that would go undetected....that was hard.

Inside the fluid environment of his life support pod, his eyes rolled under their closed lids, and the implants at his temples flashed green and gold. His fingers spasmed meaninglessly, an echo of his ancestors who still operated computers by touchscreens and keyboards.

Finally, he was able to engage two passive taps. The spylinks were bad, and the datastreams hard to "hear". He "listened" closer...

((...no, Earth based governments don't want to get involved if they don't have to. Times are tough for our people back on the homeworld. Too many of these glorified anarchists running around.))

((They don't see it that way.))

((Yeah well, that's the problem, isn't it? These idiots don't understand anything. Their ideas were outdated before we left the homeworld. Centuries before. The basic factor is this; we're on our own.))

((That leaves us with two options, then; we can infiltrate Prospero and slowly adjust its policies to a more sensible, modern paradigm, or we can use what resources we have to invade.))

((The second stratagem is more difficult than the first. We will, of course, have to consult with the unhooked leadership about this.))

((Of course, they will decide policy. But their thinking is already in line with ours. That is why we were directed to contact Earth in the first place.))

((You said there were two possibilities. I know you mean well, scanner; but your datum is incorrect. There is a third

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outcome.))

((And that is?))

((That both of the first two plans will fail...in which case, destruction of Prospero will be our only option.))

((How do you scan that? If the first two thoughts fail, we just try again; or show said failures as proof to Earth that we need assistance.))

((That's a null zero, scanner. If we fail, Prospero will be alerted and will plan a return strike. You know these backwards types; they're big on retaliation. We'll have to erase them to prevent that.))

((I can't scan that, chief. Seems a waste of resources.))

((I read your wavelength, scanner; but if we follow that path, is better to leave them alone. And leadership already decided that was not an option.))

((Unless the refusal of Earth to help us changes their minds.))

((Probability on that is below five percent, scanner.))

((Yeah I know. But the idea is to help them come around, not kill them.))

((That's the hope. But we've gotta be pragmatic about this. If they won't accept the truth and their faction rarely can--then we'll have to neutralize the potential threat. Lowest common denominator? We can rebuild on Prospero's ruins.))

((I guess. What kind of name is Prospero, anyhow?))

((I believe it's freeze. You reading a tap?))

He didn't wait to hear a reply. He disconnected, fast.

But that was no assurance of safety; they would almost certainly come to him. Only one option. Only one way to ensure his survival.....

....he had to unhook.

The Prospero shareholders had received the alert; one of their interfacers had disengaged from the network.

Voluntarily.

Wren Kai was one of the leading shareholders; she agreed to go. She raced down the metal stairwells into the depths of the network life support pods. Anyone could access the network, but to be connected to it full time required a life support pod to attend to all bodily functions. For an interfacer to disconnect was always a medical emergency; for one to do so of their own free will and they might have succumbed to madness.

But the interfacer, gasping and wheezing painfully, had asked the healer technician for a shareholder. So Wren had come.

The medtech and two assistants were already seeing to the interfacer. A relatively young man, even for one of his long-lived kind, the interfacer had the usual grayish skin and thinning hair of his kind. His eyes still had a hint of blue, but were mostly silverish and reflective. But he seemed to see well enough. He was sitting up in his open pod, head and shoulders coming out of the fluid, thin, flabby arms braced on the pod's edge. The medtech's assistants held him there while monitoring his life signs. The medtech himself had an oxygen mask and eye goggles standing by.

Wren looked to the medtech, who nodded. "He was ready for us, and signalled beforehand," the thin-faced older man

said. "He knew what he was doing. Brain scan shows no signs of insanity. Just the usual interfacer fixations."

Wren nodded, then turned her attention to the interfacer. "Georg, isn't it? I am shareholder Kai."

"Salutations, Kai. I am Green-Blue-278, Georg Danislaus by your records. I have already transmitted the relevant data—" he gagged and coughed "—to the shareholder database; I unhooked to save my own life from rival interfacers. That being so...." he paused for breath, and the medtech slapped the oxygen mask over his mouth.

Georg drew two deep breaths, then waved feebly at the medtech with one weak arm. The medtech pulled the mask away. "...I felt it best to reiterate the essential data points live."

Carefully, Wren sat on the edge of the pod, trying not to inhale the vinegar scent of the fluid. "And those points are?"

"The surface colonies," he paused for another breath on the mask. "They have petitioned Earth for help against us. This plea having failed, they now target us."

Wren's eyebrows shot up. "For what?"

"For either infiltration...or invasion."

...To be continued

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.

Moving?

Please send any changes in your mailing address to:
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—*Scrooge McDuck*, continued from page 1

perhaps I had discovered a new communicable disease.

Naturally, it had never occurred to me to wonder who created these stories—the answer was printed prominently in large, cursive letters on the cover and at the beginning of every story: Walt Disney. If I had thought about it, I would have realized that Walt probably had other things to do besides drawing and writing 15-30 pages of comic books each month. I would have thought about the implications of the fact that some Duck stories were obviously drawn and written by crude artists, while others were just as obviously “good stuff.” I would have noticed that it was only The Duck stories, not “Walt Disney’s” Mickey Mouse, or “Walt Disney’s” Chip and Dale, that were ever interesting. And, of course, most strikingly, I would have noticed that I wasn’t interested in Donald Duck film or newspaper cartoons. Just the comic books.

None of these thoughts crossed my mind until the mid-70s, after I had graduated from college, traveled a bit, and returned to my home town. The local comics store in San Rafael at that time consisted of a couple of boxes kept next to the counter at The Record King, owned and managed by Mr. Joe Colabella. I would occasionally drop in and browse through these boxes, more out of nostalgia than any acute interest. One day I noticed Joe had begun pinning copies of old Duck comics up on the wall, right next to the well-known superhero favorites: Superman, Spiderman, the Spirit, and the Justice League of America. So I asked about them. It turned out Joe was aggressively buying up all he could find—he was actively “accumulating” Ducks, so to speak! It was Joe who finally explained to me that there had been several authors and artists of the Donald Duck comics, but only one who did all the really great stories: Carl Barks.

Joe passed on a few additional tidbits of information that I find disquieting to this day. For many years, Barks was not told how many people read his work (the answer was: millions, every month). He had no idea that whenever the folks at Western Publishing used a Duck story by some other writer or artist, they received large quantities of angry mail protesting the change. He had no idea that people saved his stories, re-read them, and showed them to friends. For almost twenty years, the people he worked for neglected to give him copies of fan mail (presumably, there was quite a lot of it). Finally, in 1961, by accident, a fan letter happened to make it through; Barks found the praise in this letter so embarrassing he was convinced it was a hoax.

Moreover, Joe explained, Barks’ Duck comics were rapidly becoming widely collected and even valuable, in spite of the fact that they had always been printed in very large numbers. Slowly I came to realize that my continuing enjoyment of these stories was not some kind of lamentable lapse of taste or idiosyncrasy, but a common and justifiable response. It somewhat restored my confidence, and not just in myself. It was mighty nice to know that there were a lot of others out there who knew good fun when they saw it, and weren’t too stuffy to say so.

But, granted that Barks’ comics were great fun, could there be more to them than that?

In Defense of (Some) Comic Books

Nowadays I find most comic books unreadable; but as a kid, I loved them, all of them. One of my brothers swears he learned to enjoy reading books from reading comics, not from the public school system. At any rate, let’s agree that most comics are junk. Sturgeon’s Law—“90% of everything is crud”—certainly applies to comic books, as it applies to science fiction, television, sculpture, paintings, popular and classical music, and libertarian tracts.

What about the other 10% of comic books? These are the ones that use the form to its best advantage. Judging from the marketplace, comics are especially useful at portraying “larger than life” battles between good guys and bad guys, i.e., super-heroes and super-villains. The artwork is often appealing, sometimes innovative and exciting. I can’t say I’ve ever read a super-hero series whose stories struck me as particularly strong on insights about life, but I don’t find the possibility inconceivable.

Besides super-hero adventures, comic books have also long been used as vehicles of satiric, occasionally instructive tales, often involving a bunch of “funny animals.” It is a childish mistake to think that these stories are about animals. From Aesop’s *Fables* to Orwell’s *Animal Farm* and Adams’ *Watership Down*, many stories conveying mature insights about human life have been dressed in animal’s clothing. The idea that animal stories are only for kids is for the birds.

Whereas super-heroes tend to have uncommon, stylized physical characteristics (the Flash has uncommon speed; Superman is uncommonly strong), funny animals may have uncommon, stylized personal characteristics. This creates a great potential for amusing conflicts and broad satiric humor. So it is with Barks’ ducks. Uncle Scrooge is uncommonly industrious and acquisitive. Gyro Gearloose is uncommonly inventive. Uncle Donald is uncommonly stubborn. Huey, Dewey and Louie are uncommonly independent and resourceful. All are uncommonly enthusiastic and inclined to take the initiative.

Now, in the hands of a typical comic book hack, Uncle Scrooge would have been treated like any stereotypical miser; but in Barks’ hands, Scrooge’s uncommon thriftiness becomes not only tolerable, but (for the most part) actually appealing. When Donald is stubbornly wrongheaded, Barks plays tricks on him without mercy; but when Donald is steadfast in a good cause, Barks makes sure our sympathies are on his side. Here is where we begin to see the heart of Barks’ enduring appeal. It is not just that Barks is in the upper 10% of comic book artists and storytellers in terms of mere competence; it is that Barks is perceptive about human nature and values; When we read Barks’ fables, unlike Aesop’s, or “Walt Disney’s” we are reading stories that express a consistently upbeat, adventure-some, intensely individualistic sense of life.

Capitalist Adventures for All Ages

Most of Barks’ stories contain elements extolling the virtues of initiative and entrepreneurship. One of my favorites

—Continued next page

—*Scrooge McDuck*, continued from previous page

is *Maharajah Donald*[*]. It begins with Donald unfairly paying the nephews with only “an old stub pencil” after they have cleaned his garage. The irrepressible kids then initiate a series of clever, voluntary, and mutually beneficial exchanges until they are the proud owners of a steamship ticket to India. When they and Donald arrive there, Donald gets into deep trouble. He is held captive by a local prince and is about to be fed to ravenous royal tigers. The kids are rupeeless and desperate, wandering the streets outside the palace, searching for a way to get Donald out of his predicament. Walking along, they spot an object lying unclaimed and unwanted in the middle of the road. As only an entrepreneur could understand, the kids immediately exclaim, “An old stub pencil! We’re rich!” And in not too long, they are, and use their resources to bail Donald out of trouble.

Huey, Dewey and Louie would make great employees or great business partners. Never just along for the ride, their eyes are always open to new needs and opportunities. When in *Land of the Totem Poles*[*] Donald gets a job selling an unknown product (steam calliopes) in a brand new, exclusive territory (the Kickmiquick River, which is located, according to the map, “way up in the wildest country there is”), the kids’ immediate response is: “Say! That outghta be good country to sell something in! Why don’t we be salesmen, too? Sure! We’ll get a line of goods and clean up right along with Unca’ Donald.” Naturally, selling turns out to be a bit harder than anyone suspected; but not impossible. By the end of the story, as a result of paying special attention to customer demand, the kids have learned how to sell even such a white elephant as a steam calliope.

Although a number of Barks’ stories play with some aspect or other of business or economics, there is one in which economic theory plays the central role. This amazing story, *Money from Heaven* (my title—most of the stories had no titles) manages to address inflation, income redistribution, and the creation and maintenance of wealth. Its beginning is a meteorological version of wealth redistribution: a tornado picks up all the money from Uncle Scrooge’s famous money bin and randomly rains five billion quintuplatillion umptuplatillion multuplatillion impossibidillion fantasticatrillion dollars across the countryside. Uncle Scrooge is now a pauper and everyone else is a multi-millionaire. Most people immediately quit their jobs and hang out signs saying “gone to see the world.” Scrooge, however, simply keeps farming (even handing out guns to Huey, Dewey and Louie, to protect the property he is creating). In the finale, the wandering populace finds that goods have become scarce, since almost everyone has stopped producing them. When people get hungry, food is available at Scrooge’s farm—but for amazing prices: hams for \$1,000,000,000, cabbages for \$2,000,000, etc. etc. It’s not long before the Money Bin is full again. Life, and then prices, return to normal. “Easy money” is shown to be illusory, and the true fountainhead of wealth is shown to be focused, productive work.

To enterprise, hard work and ingenuity, Scrooge McDuck adds a love and appreciation of the dollar that borders on romance. This is how Barks’ Uncle Scrooge explains where his money came from, in *Only a Poor Rich Man*[*] “I made it

on the seas, and in the mines, and in the cattle wars of the old frontier! I made it by being tougher than the toughies, and smarter than the smarties! And I made it SQUARE! This silver dollar—1898! ... I got that in the Klondike! Froze my fingers to the bone digging nuggets out of the creeks! And I brought a fortune OUT, instead of spending it in the honkytonks! And this dollar—1882! I got that in Montana where I punched cows while I looked for a homestead!... You’d love your money, too, boys, if you got it the way I did—by thinking a little harder than the other guy—by jumping a little quicker.”

Tales of Judgment and Responsibility

One of the main Barksian norms is individual responsibility for exercising reason and judgment, combined with a ready ability to learn better, from experience, and from others.

Barks usually chooses Scrooge or the nephews as role models, as when Scrooge recounts how in the old days during the gold rush, “the other waddies laughed at me when I filed on a claim that was all mountains and rocks! But I’d poked around and I knew that under that scrubby grass was one-third of the world’s known copper!” Someone is always telling the kids what they can, can’t, or shouldn’t do; sometimes the kids obey, but not if they believe they know better. In *Frozen Gold*[*] Donald and the kids have flown a plane into a desolate arctic town. Shortly thereafter, Donald is kidnapped. When the kids ready the plane to go search for him, the local sheriff stops them: “Hold on, there! You lads are too small to fly that plane! Go back to the hotel before you hurt yourselves!” They protest that they do “know how to fly the plane! Honest, we do!” The sheriff decides: “You’re stubborn little fellers! I better lock you in your room! It’s for your own good!” Do they just stay put and do as the benevolent, all knowing (but wrong) authority figure says? Nope. And as a result of taking initiative, they manage to rescue Donald before he comes to harm.

Barks often treats Donald as the ultimate straight man, providing wonderfully ironic examples of how not to act. For example, in *Flipism*, Donald becomes an adherent of the fatalistic philosophy of flipism, which says that you should live your life by making all decisions with a coin flip. The story then shows what kinds of consequences would result from trying to avoid life’s responsibilities in such a way. In the climactic panel of this story, one of my great favorites, Donald and the kids drive their car over a hill and are suddenly presented with a surrealistic version of the LA freeway system. Donald exclaims, “Oh my Heavenly days,” while the kids’ caption reads, “We can see that here is where flipism gets the acid test!” Following a series of decisions made in devout adherence to the tenets of flipism, Donald ends up in court. The following dialog between the judge and Donald says it all:

Judge: So you drove the wrong way on a one-way road?

Donald: Yes, your honor. It was like this—I’m a flip-pist. I tossed a dime to see which way I’d go.

Judge: You did!...Well, that makes these charges against you seem rather silly! I’m not going to fine you

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—*Scrooge McDuck*, continued from page 7

the usual \$5.00 for wrong-way driving, nor the usual \$10.00 for disrupting traffic!

Donald: Thanks Judge.

Judge: But I am going to fine you \$50.00 for letting a dime do your thinking for you!

The Golden Helmet: A Libertarian Classic

The Golden Helmet [*] is one of the best libertarian stories I know of, but I have never seen it mentioned in any libertarian magazine.

As the story opens, Donald is a guard in the Duckburg museum, making his rounds. He spots a suspicious character snooping around an old viking ship, unsuccessfully looking for something. Later, Donald discovers an old map, which he gives to the museum's curator. The map describes the location of a golden helmet buried by a viking named Olaf the Blue on the coast of Labrador to prove himself the discoverer of the new land. Barks' plot now begins to thicken.

It seems that during the reign of Charlemagne, in 792 AD the rulers of all the nations gathered in Rome and drafted a law which read: "any man who discovers a new land beyond the seas shall be the Owner of that land, unless he claims it for his King!" Since Olaf the Blue claimed North America for his own, it now belongs to his nearest of Kin!

As the curator exclaims, "Great Caesar's ghost! That is the law! And it has never been repealed!"

The suspicious character turns out to be Azure Blue, the direct descendant and legal heir of Olaf the Blue. His attorney (Lawyer Sharky) now threatens: "Will you hand my client his map or must he have you and everyone in America arrested for trespassing on his property!" Blue intends to "return and exact tribute from you—my slaves!"

The rest of the story involves a race to find Olaf's golden helmet, for he who possesses it is the rightful owner of all of North America!

The Golden Helmet delightfully satirizes bad laws, lawyers, museums, modern art, and even naive interpretations of property rights theory. But to my mind the most significant aspect of this story is its ending: in turn, each character obtains the golden helmet, including the good guys.

Azure Blue grabs it so that all the inhabitants of North America will become his slaves. When the museum curator gets the golden helmet, he announces that "I'll run the country for the benefit of the Museums! Everybody will have to go to a museum twice a day!"

Donald starts out by announcing that he'll "throw this thing so doggoned far the fish won't even find it!" but then, egged on by Lawyer Sharky, he begins to fantasize: "I'll let people go on just as they are. I won't take a thing away from them! Let 'em have all the land and oil wells and mines they want but [I'll own] the air! I'll own the one thing that nobody can do without. I'll make people wear meters on their chests. And every breath they take will cost 'em money!"

Eventually Donald comes to his senses and renounces power. But now Lawyer Sharky makes his own grab for the helmet and begins proclaiming what life will be like with him

as Emperor.

Luckily, Huey, Dewey and Louie have not fallen prey to authoritarian fantasies. They pelt Sharky with dead fish, knocking the helmet off his head and into the ocean depths. As Huey announces "There goes the Golden Helmet! Now nobody will own North America!"

I challenge anyone to find a more libertarian tale than this.

Fun Beyond Ideology (Further Reading)

I have emphasized Barks' strengths as an individualist and libertarian moralist. However, many of Barks' finest stories are simply very funny. I especially recommend the following:

Omelet (in which Donald & the kids outrageously mismanage a chicken farm); *Stranger than Fiction* (pokes fun at literary snobs); *The Second Richest Duck* (aka "The Great Ball of String Contest") [**]; *The Land Beneath the Ground* (A treatise on where earthquakes come from, really) [**]; *Christmas for Santa* (memorable Holiday silliness); *Lost in the Andes* (Where do square eggs come from? Square chickens!) [*]; *Tralla La* (in which Scrooge accidentally initiates a money-economy in Shangri-La) [**]

Most of Barks' stories are fun reading at least once, though a few are weak, particularly some he wrote in the last few years before he retired. (Incidentally, Barks makes his home in Santa Barbara, California.) His best stories seem to stand reading and rereading extraordinarily well, much like a favorite song, book, or movie. From personal experience, and that of my friends and family, they are an excellent tonic for low spirits.

Obtaining copies of Barks' best work takes a bit of attention and involves trade-offs. The problem is, even though it is continually being reprinted, at any given point in time most of Barks' work is out of print. Even very large used-comic stores rarely have more than 5% of Barks' works in stock. And, of course, prices for used comics are sometimes rather high. (An original copy of *Maharajah Donald*, for example, currently costs more than \$1000!). Also, quality of reproduction has varied tremendously since the early 1940s (mostly going downhill).

I recommend starting by obtaining a copy of *Uncle Scrooge McDuck: His Life and Times*. This beautifully produced giant trade paperback was originally available only in an expensive, limited edition. It contains an Appreciation by George Lucas, an "Introduction" by Carl Barks, reprints of eleven classic Scrooge stories, and background information by Mike Barrier.

A good companion collection is *Walt Disney—Donald Duck* from Abbeville Press. Although the stories have been reprinted with all the frames re-sized to small scale (obscuring somewhat Barks' careful attention to pacing and emphasis), the color is excellent, the price is affordable, the binding is durable, the distribution is wide (bookstores as well as comic stores), and the selection of stories is quite good. (The book contains *The Golden Helmet*, and is the only place where *Maharajah Donald* has ever been reprinted since its first printing, 1947.) Abbeville also publishes a volume of "Uncle Scrooge" stories, as well as a volume of "Huey, Dewey & Louie" stories, both due to be reprinted soon.

—Continued next page

—*Scrooge McDuck*, continued from previous page

As a next step, consider asking your local comics store to begin saving copies of each month's crop of new reprints from Gladstone Publishing. Gladstone is an excellent publisher which is doing a great job of reprinting the stories with good quality reproduction, together with notes about their history. However, Gladstone is also reprinting for American audiences duck stories which were written in Europe by other people after Barks retired. Normally, each Gladstone comic contains at least one story by Barks. Be careful when reading the reprints to notice which stories were written and drawn by Barks and which ones were done by someone else. Although many of the European stories attempt to duplicate Barks' style, humor, and values, few succeed.

Also, you might see if your local store has inexpensive used copies of some of the better stories. If you can find a salesman who is knowledgeable, he may be willing to point you towards the "classics."

The best source of information about Barks and his work is *Carl Barks and the Art of the Comic Book* by Michael Barrier, available through comic stores.

You may wonder why I haven't suggested libraries. Most libraries won't carry anything to do with comic books. What do kids know, after all, about what's worth paying good cash money for, reading and re-reading, loaning to their friends so they'll read them too? It's quite an irony: even though customer demand has resulted in perhaps a billion copies of Barks' stories being printed world-wide so far—a figure equalled by mighty few artists of any medium—neither the literati nor the librarians have any idea who is Carl Barks.

The Last Trumpet Project

By Kevin MacArdrey

<http://www.lasttrumpetproject.com>, 2010

Reviewed by Chris Hibbert

Kevin MacArdrey's *The Last Trumpet Project* covers the consequences of a slightly future world in which realistic virtual realities and uploading of people's consciousnesses into software are becoming commonplace. The government and organized religion are both violently opposed to these developments (for different reasons) and work together to suppress the technology and the people promoting it. Since the technology is the result of decentralized processes, rather than a single company or organization, the efforts to suppress don't do much more than slow the tide.

The story is generally well-told, with plenty of excitement, intrigue, and reasonable character development. The one place where MacArdrey comes up short is in his depictions of the bad guys. They are caricatures of venal politicians and religious leaders, and may turn off (politically) mainstream readers. Their explicit drives and goals are for personal power, and they verbally admit that they don't care who gets hurt as long as they don't have to relinquish control.

MacArdrey presents a plausible economic story about the

Collections:

Barks, Carl: *Uncle Scrooge McDuck—His Life and Times*. Berkeley: Celestial Arts, 1987.

Barrier, Michael: *Carl Barks and the Art of the Comic Book*. Forest Hills, N. Y.: M. Lillien, 1981

Walt Disney—Donald Duck, New York: Abbeville Press, 1978. Introduction by Carl Barks.

Walt Disney—Uncle Scrooge McDuck, New York: Abbeville Press, 1979. Foreword by Carl Barks.

Walt Disney—Donald Duck and his Nephews, New York: Abbeville Press, 1933. Foreword by Carl Barks.

Individual Duck Stories:

Flipism, *Walt Disney's Comics & Stories*, #149, February 1953 (reprinted (#365))

Money from Heaven, *Walt Disney's Comics & Stories*, #126, March 1951 (reprinted #363).

Omelet, *Walt Disney's Comics & Stories*, #146, November 1952 (reprinted #358).

Stranger than Fiction, *Walt Disney's Comics & Stories*, #249, June 1961 (reprinted #409).

Footnotes:

[*] Included in *Walt Disney—Donald Duck*.

[**] Included in *Walt Disney—Uncle Scrooge McDuck*.

Philip Kenneth Salin (1950-1991) was an American economist and futurist, best known for his contributions to theories about the development of cyberspace and as a proponent of private (non-governmental) space exploration and development. This essay first appeared in Liberty magazine in September, 1988, and is reprinted by permission of Salin's widow.

development of the technology (the ability to view past events necessary for uploading dead people notwithstanding). As the fidelity of the VR improves, and there are more things to do and places to go there, more people spend more time there. The eventual consequence is that their real world activities and sources of income become harder to trace, which squeezes the tax authorities. This is the root of much of the governmental opposition. The religious opposition is stirred up based on the project to resurrect the dead into the artificial worlds.

As befits a technology that people rely on so heavily (the resurrected can't exist without it), the software has actual security (not described) that enables owners to prevent bad actors from getting access to sensitive locations. Of course the weak spot is physical access to the servers hosting the system, and the enemy forces eventually figure that out, though they have a hard time connecting particular servers to particular virtual locations.

The Last Trumpet Project is a finalist for the Prometheus Award, and it has a reasonable chance. It may not be the best written candidate of this year's finalists, but it's one of the best at presenting a clear conflict between freedom and government repression.

—*For the Win review*, continued from page 3

a market appears, where individuals toil away in games not for leisure and fun, but essentially as a way to earn a living; farming gold from games to sell to willing buyers. These gold farmers tend to live in third world countries, especially India, Korea, and China.

Charles Stross covered the dark side of the geeky world of online gaming in his novel, *Halting State*. Cory Doctorow makes the gold farmers his focus in his 2010 novel, *For the Win*. And while fascinating as a premise, Doctorow manages to make the subject boring, his characters wooden and sterile—so unlike *Little Brother*. And, for being a Prometheus Award Best Novel finalist for best libertarian sf novel of 2010, *For the Win* is nothing if not *The Communist Manifesto* of the computer age: virtual workers of the world, unite.

Annelee Newitz from io9 wrote an interesting essay reviewing James Cameron's *Avatar*, pointing out the Caucasian savior theme in several movies. Although most of Doctorow's characters are Asian, there is one exception. Young Leonard Goldberg, a high schooler living in Southern California, is seriously obsessed with online gaming. His guild mates are all Chinese, and Leonard assumes the Chinese name Wei-Dong, and later smuggles himself into China to help his buddies, borrowing perhaps subconsciously the Caucasian savior theme like the characters in *Avatar* and *Dances With Wolves*.

Aside from one other main character, Connor Prikkel, who works for the Man overseeing the proper functioning of some online worlds, the other characters are either Indian, Chinese, or from other Asian countries. This is fairly unusual in Western fiction, and offers a fascinating glimpse into the world from their eyes, and perhaps the only aspect that made this novel readable. Some of the other notable protagonists include young gold farmers, teenagers recruited to play games all day for cruel bosses. Matthew Fong in China, one of Wei-Dong's guild members; and Mala aka General Robotwallah in India, who leads a pack of young players. And then there is Big Sister Nor, in Singapore, who is the focal point of the key plot—the leader in the effort to organize the gold farmers into a union, for as we all know, unions are the key to happiness and success. At the other end stands Connor Prikkel, the least of all evils, who as a lead developer at Coca Cola Games Central (apparently there is no greater bugaboo of consumer imperialism than Coca Cola). Prikkel just wants to police his world and ensure a fair playing field (though in reality consenting gamers who want to exchange real money for fake money is the libertarian virtual equivalent of consenting adults engaging in outlawed behavior). More sinister are the various bosses who rule their young gamers with an iron fist, the exploiters and modern day equivalent of the 19th century capitalists. And behind these bosses stands the power of the state, sent in to crush any small uprising, especially in China.

Riding on the ideological coat-tails of Ken MacLeod, even alluding to MacLeod's blog title in his dedication, Doctorow's message-novel sacrifices his characters for long moments of pontification on economics, politics, and third world development. His unionists proudly assume the mantle of the Wobblies (early 20th century labor union members and

organizers)—they call themselves Webblies, part of the IW-WWW. International workers of the web, in effect. Throw in an underground Chinese female talk show host, Jie, and her radio station directed to female Chinese factory workers, and we have lots of space for Message.

I don't know Cory Doctorow, but I doubt he's pushing any libertarian ideas here. I am just not sure why the LFS is pushing this novel as a work of libertarian fiction. That sounds like an award that has lost its mission, or at best, granting Doctorow major leeway for his brilliant (exception?) *Little Brother*. There are flashes in this novel, those that sketch the excitement of gaming, and one dealing with hi-tech smuggling. Those are few and far between. Certainly that itself was not enough to garner a nomination for the Prometheus Award?

Zendegi

By Greg Egan

Night Shade Books, 2010

Reviewed by Chris Hibbert

Greg Egan's *Zendegi* features social media being used by an underground movement to topple a government. But this is Greg Egan, so there must be something about silicon consciousness or artificial life involved, right? Well, yes there is, but the political plot works out to be more interesting this time around. Egan's focal characters are Martin Seymour, an ex-pat American journalist living in Iran and Nasim Golestani, an Iranian scientist who worked in the US but has now returned. At the beginning of the story Golestani is working on the Human Connectome project, which gives her a background in mapping the brain to software. Seymour gets involved when cell-phone pictures help topple the Iranian religious dictatorship.

In the second half of the novel, Golestani works on improving the AI for a virtual reality game company that is struggling to keep up with its competition, while Seymour runs a bookstore in Tehran. Golestani starts incorporating data and software from the Connectome project into the NPCs, which raises the ire of fundamentalists. Seymour, meanwhile, has contracted a fatal disease, and wants to find a way to ensure that someone he trusts will continue to provide guidance to his son, and hits on the idea of getting Golestani to build an artificial mind for him.

Egan's depiction in *Diaspora* of the development of consciousness in artificial minds was ground-breaking, but nothing of similar scope happens here. There are many scenes in virtual reality, but the story-telling emphasis is on Seymour's attention to influencing his son's maturation. The descriptions of the development of the artificial consciousnesses focused on brain mapping rather than awareness. In the end, the characters decide that the simulacrum of Seymour isn't up to the task of mentoring his son, which renders many of the interesting conflicts and questions moot. The protesters against enslaving artificial being can be pacified with a promise to keep them

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—*Zendegi review*, continued from previous page

below the level of a simple automaton, and Golestani doesn't have to grapple with her own moral sensibilities about just how conscious they might become. It feels like Egan really side-stepped the issue here. And his solution doesn't do anything to prevent other developers from taking the same step later.

It's especially bad because Egan has previously made it clear that understands these issues. His *Diaspora*, and *Permutation City* directly address issues related to artificial consciousness. In the latter work, his characters explore a large variety of different scenarios of partial experience, and directly discuss the issues concerning how real they are as persons, and what rights a partially aware entity should have.

While the story is well-written, topical, and engaging, the liberty-related themes are sparse and limited. The populace revolts against a corrupt dictatorship, but that's more celebration than presentation of issues. Artificial creatures are developed, but never get advanced enough for their rights to be a serious question.

Directive 51

By John Barnes

Ace, 2010

Reviewed by Chris Hibbert

John Barnes's *Directive 51* is a fast-paced action story that covers a dystopian apocalypse and the struggle over presidential succession in a suddenly low-tech society which suffered huge losses. It's hard to call it libertarian, since the focus is on how the government will help people pull the country together again, but it does realistically show that the struggle for power trumps many other considerations, even when most of the survivors are fighting just to find food and shelter in an emergency.

The situation is that "Daybreak," a leaderless underground movement, has piggybacked on the Internet (there's a lot of that going around in SF this year, isn't there?) to put together a coordinated attack plan to destroy modern civilization. The participants all have different reasons and different objectives, but they agree that "the system" is broken, and we'd all be better off without it. Most of them haven't thought any deeper than that, and don't realize just how much they'd lose. Some of the movement's participants have invented bacteria that eat plastic and "nanoswarm" that gums up powered machinery. Others have devised plans to ensure that these destructive agents are spread far and wide (worldwide, though the story's focus is on the US) on the appointed day. All this, of course, results in the collapse of civilization, hundreds of millions of deaths, and nearly everyone else being reduced to fleeing refugees trying to get out of the major metropolitan areas.

All of that serves as background to the story that Barnes really wants to tell. *Directive 51* is (truthfully) the latest in a sequence of Presidential Directives laying out the process for maintaining constitutional government in the aftermath of a calamity that removes the bulk of the leadership of the federal

government. In this depiction, the consequences are a deadly struggle for power that seems to supersede the attention that should be paid just to getting people back on their feet.

In order to justify one faction's claims that the nation is still under attack, the book has to enable Daybreak to conduct a continuing series of hydrogen bomb attacks after the devastation has occurred. This is both out-of-character with the rest of Daybreak, and hard to believe technically. Nearly everything else has broken down, but the bombs keep falling.

The book was nominated for the Prometheus Award, and while it's an exciting story, and well-told, and it shows how power can corrupt even in a paramount emergency, I was disappointed that the focus of discussion of the recovery was largely on the government's efforts. It's clear that behind the scenes, individuals are doing most of the work independent of the government, but we're mostly watching federal efforts to ensure that the government continues to function. You might find that outweighed by the fact that people, acting on their own are the primary source of recovered food, the primary hope for growing more, as well as the drivers of a multitude of new inventions that provide some technologies that can continue to function in the face of the proliferating nanoswarm.

Live Free or Die

By John Ringo

Baen Books, 2010

Reviewed by David Wayland

The state of New Hampshire's official motto, which appears on license plates, is "Live Free or Die." This should in no way imply the state of New Hampshire is a libertarian Galt's Gulch. The title of John Ringo's 2010 novel and Prometheus Award Best Novel finalist is *Live Free or Die*. This should in no way imply his novel is libertarian, despite its appearance as a Prometheus Award finalist.

Ringo's turgid and stilted prose paints the opening background in broad strokes. Low-level star gazers track an object through space that seems natural, but ends up being a spaceship. It is, in effect, a gateway hauled into place by aliens, who tell the various leaders of earth that anyone can use it, friendly or hostile. Shortly thereafter the first hostile aliens appear, the Horvath, who start by immediately nuking major Earth cities and demanding tribute in the form of previous metals. This sets the stage for Ringo's oeuvre, military sf on a grand scale. And war, as the old saying goes, is the health of the state. With war, some people can dream big on the backs and minds of others, move vast armies around like set-pieces, and marshal forces into giga-projects to achieve greatness.

Ringo's novel varies this somewhat, as the central character, the confusingly named Tyler Alexander Vernon, starts from relative humble beginnings. After a successful career as an SF graphic artist crashes once SF becomes mundane, he works

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—*Live Free or Die review, continued from page 11*

five part-time jobs in New Hampshire, when a chance meeting with a more friendly yet non-interventionist alien turns him into the wealthiest man on Earth in one blinding instant, as he becomes the biggest drug dealer to the friendly aliens (their economy and society bears a striking resemblance to over-extended welfare states, with high taxation and unemployment, but strangely, the only controlled substance is Coca Cola, not this new drug). Tyler takes advantage of his new wealth to gain knowledge and technology, trying to find ways to struggle out from the iron heel of the aggressive aliens who control Earth. Meanwhile, every government actively collaborates with these aliens, including an Obama-like President of the US who sends his own troops to control the new addictive drug, which apparently is the only item on Earth that is trade-worthy.

I struggled almost in vain to find libertarian elements in this book. The “Live Free or Die” motto appears early, but fades away, replaced by the singular efforts of Tyler to create visions and methods no other human could conceive to try to defeat the nasty aliens who rule Earth. Dialog dominates the text, a head-buzzing and endless stream of info-dump and directives. Tyler, possibly an avatar of Ringo, is an admitted conservative, at times irritated with the government, especially the IRS, but quickly falls into bed with them when it meets his goal. Millions, perhaps billions, of humans die, yet only Tyler has the vision to see through the defeat of the Horvath.

This novel, the first in a trilogy, is all about ambition. Everything must happen quickly, and on a grand scale. I almost felt let down that Tyler didn’t blow up Venus or create a Dyson Sphere. Tyler is a purely one-dimensional character, clinical and emotionless, aside from occasional jokes about himself as an evil overlord, or modelled on Napoleon (both short and ambitious). Other characters talk about themselves as if with an external eye (the barbarian really *does* know that he is a barbarian), and the aliens and alien culture appear no different in tone from *Star Trek* aliens with ridges on their noses as the key indicator of their difference from humans. In fact, we learn little of these aliens, and they seem at most excuses for someone to drum up ideas and methods to bootstrap humans into space, for us to take our rightful and ascendent place in the stars among other species who roam between the stars.

While I enjoy good sf yarns (what I consider in the tradition of Rafael Sabatini in space), nothing in this book hooked me or made me care, not about the characters, nor the outcome. Maybe I don’t read enough military sf for this novel to appeal to me, but even personal preferences set aside, I would have thought the Libertarian Futurist Society had higher standards for their Best Novel Award. Awards demand excellence, and I would think among the practitioners of the craft of science fiction the LFS could find works that actually apply the idea of liberty, not just in the sense of “fight the alien invaders,” especially when the focus is all wrapped up in the cult of one person, one savior of mankind.



The Newsletter of the Libertarian Futurist Society
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