

PROMETHEUS

Quantum Vibe Volume 1: Nicole

By Scott Bieser

Big Head Press, 2013

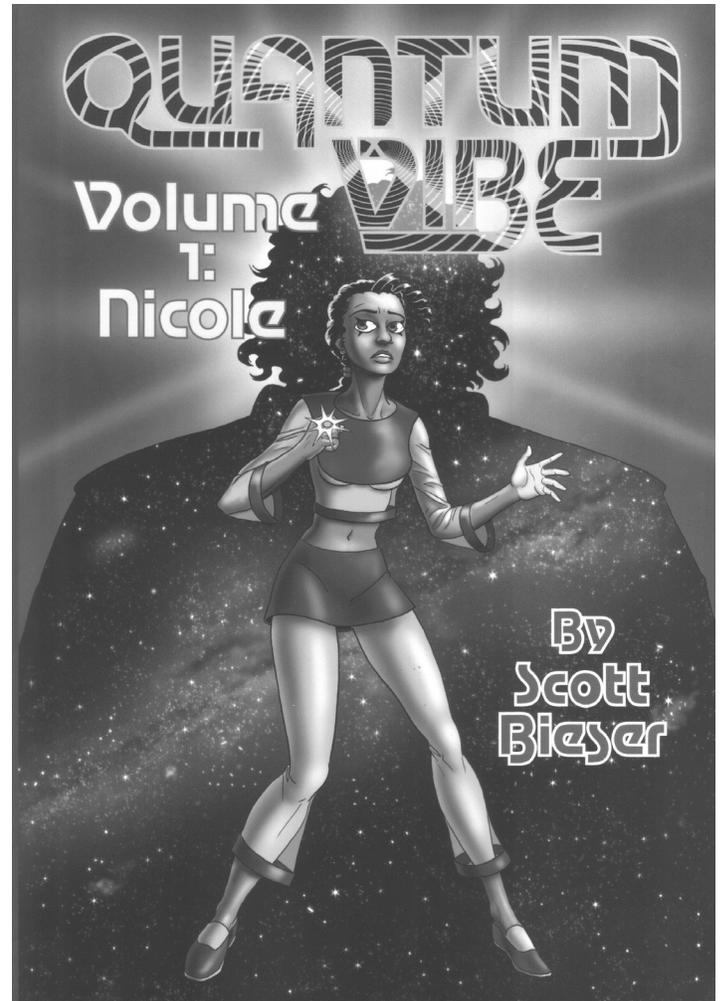
Reviewed by Anders Monsen

I have been following Scott Bieser's serialized online graphic novel, *Quantum Vibe*, since day one. Now the first volume of his panels has been published as a book, available from the usual sources. Weighing in at 236 pages, the first volume focuses on Nicole, a young woman—often irresponsible and prone to drink and emotional scenes—who embarks on a new career and life of adventure after getting dumped by her flaky boyfriend.

In the aftermath of her depression and self-indulgence, she is fired and forced to look for new work. She interviews for a job as personal assistant to a peripatetic inventor/businessman, Dr. Seamus O'Murchadha, who has a bold and ambitious project that needs a pilot and all-around gopher. Nicole at first is overwhelmed, but later accepts the job, and begins a journey that will take her from the sun and outward, with stops along the way at various planets and orbital stations.

The title comes from O'Murchadha's project, a refinement of Quantum Vibremonics, or parallel universes. His initial effort is to have Nicole fly a ship into the sun's upper atmosphere to drop nuclear payloads in an experiment to test his thesis. His scheduled itinerary takes them from the sun to Mercury, Luna, Mars, Europa and Titan, though at the conclusion of this volume they are approximately halfway along their journey (the story continues online, and now has entered volume 2, which should appear in book form later in 2013). Nicole, all fire and impulse, appears at first a poor choice for her role, but plays her part well, to the point that enemies of O'Murchadha take notice and seek to remove her from the chessboard in their game against their rival.

O'Murchadha has been around for over three centuries, having undergone several rejuvenation treatments. His last round left him with certain side effects, rendering him massive and almost comical. Still, he seems to take this in stride, and Nicole gradually accepts this, as well as their working relationship. This book and subsequent comics are almost as much about Nicole growing up as much as anything else, though she seems to fight hard to remain the college-age kid



Inside Prometheus:

Reviews:

Quantum Vibe, by Scott Bieser

The Office of Mercy, by Ariel Djanikian

The Human Front, by Ken MacLeod

Reset, by Peter Bagge

Nexus, by Ramez Naam

Brilliance, by Matthew Sakey

—Continued on page 7

PROMETHEUS

The newsletter of the Libertarian Futurist Society

Editor

Anders Monsen

Contributors

Max Jahr
Fran Van Cleave

Letters and Submissions:

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

Award Chairs

Best Novel — bestnovel@lfs.org
Classic Fiction — halloffame@lfs.org

LFS Online:

http://lfs.org

Subscriptions & Advertisements

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

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

Libertarian Futurist Society
650 Castro St. Suite 120-433
Mountain View, CA 94041
president@lfs.org

Send mailing address changes to:
Membership
650 Castro St. Suite 120-433
Mountain View, CA 94041
treasurer@lfs.org

Prometheus © 2013 the Libertarian Futurist Society. The LFS retains a non-exclusive license to republish accepted articles on its web site; all other rights revert to the contributor. Letters and reviews are welcome. Bylined articles are strictly the opinion of the writer and do not necessarily reflect the opinion of the LFS or its members.

Confessions of a selective Luddite

Throughout the years I have owned (and continue to own) multiple computers, iPods, smart phones, tablets, and other electronic devices. When the first iPod came out in 2001, I acquired it right away. Like the Sony Walkman but infinitely better, the iPod allowed me to store my entire music library and listen to whatever I wanted, anywhere I wanted. I've loaded 10,000 songs on an iPod and flown thousands of miles with a variety of music genres at my fingertips.

However, I can count on one hand the number of books I have read on these devices: three Edgar Rice Burroughs books. I have loaded and started other books, but either something in me resents reading a non-paper edition of a book, or I get distracted by email, internet browsing or games and I abandon whatever story or book I am reading. Why are Kindles all the rage, and yet I see no reason to even consider owning one? I've tried iBook editions on an iPad and iPhone, and PDFs on the same devices. They neither inspire nor hold my attention. And yet, I listen to music on my devices. I'll watch movies on my devices. But when I want to read fiction, I turn to an actual book or magazine.

Lately I have reflected upon this selective Luddite attitude. I lean more and more toward publishing *Prometheus* only online, both as HTML text and as PDF editions of the newsletter; there is cost and time involved in a print newsletter, let alone the greater access by posting something online. I also have started viewing the migration to electronic publishing as a means to read short fiction, hoping to list any libertarian leaning short stories in *Prometheus*. I vividly remember Edgar Allan Poe's words about short fiction in his critical essay, "The Short Story," where he wrote about the vitality of short fiction:

We allude to the short prose narrative, requiring from

—Continued on page 7

Prometheus Submission Guidelines

Prometheus seeks reviews, interview, essays, articles, and columns of interest to libertarian science fiction fans. Any individual may submit material — membership in the LFS is not required.

As the newsletter of the Libertarian Futurist Society, *Prometheus* focuses on Prometheus Award-nominated works, but also publishes reviews and articles beyond the Prometheus Award candidates.

Letter of comment also are welcome, whether about the reviews, or any questions about LFS, the nominating and voting process. In this digital age the printed press continues to matter, but we need your help to sustain this newsletter.

Contact the editor for more details via email at: editor@lfs.org

The Human Front

By Ken MacLeod

PM Press, 2013

Reviewed by Anders Monsen

Ken MacLeod's novella *The Human Front* appears in print again, this time as a slim paperback from new imprint PM Press. The volume is part of its "outspoken authors" series, which includes writers like Nalo Hopkinson and Cory Doctorow. In addition to the novella, the PM Press edition reprints a brief note about the background for *The Human Front*, an interview with MacLeod by Terry Bisson, and a lengthy bibliography. Previously published as a chapbook by PS Publishing and then collected in both a "Best Of" anthology and in the NESFA Press volume of MacLeod's shorter works, *Giant Lizards from Outer Space*, *The Human Front* bears both a catchy title and a strongly SF theme: alien invasion.

MacLeod writes with a refreshing sense of humor, a strong dash of science. MacLeod is equally skilled at focusing on the particular and applying the wide brush of SF sense of wonder. It opens with the young narrator hearing about the death of Josef Stalin via wireless. We know we're in an alternate history from the very first sentence (which also alludes to a famous death, though in our world this happened on November 22, 1963): "Like most people of my generation, I remember where I was on March 17, 1963, the day Stalin died."

Young John Matheson, then about eight years old, lives with his family in Aird, a remote and bleak Scottish isle. His father, a doctor, takes John with him on his rounds, and also on visits to a nearby NATO base to buy goods at the local store. Some time after Stalin's death—shot by American soldiers as they hunted Stalin and his partisans—John and his father are at the base when an incident occurs. They witness the crash landing of a strange bomber. As the ground crew haul the wounded pilot from the bomber, John's father shoulders his way through the crowd with the words that he is a doctor. Immediately, men in black cordon off the area, and interview all the witnesses. John is pulled back while his father treats the pilot. When his father returns, shaken, he forbids John to mention the incident to anyone. Yet young John has seen something about the pilot he cannot forget, how small he was, and the grayish color of his skin.

As John grows up, they move to a larger Scottish city, Greenock, an industrial city on the Forth of Clyde, sooty and grimy, with sharp class divisions. Here John falls in with communist sympathizers, who begin to wage campaigns against Americans stationed in the area. His father scoffs at the naiveté, yet rather than argue with John gently suggests he look into the plane that crashed those years ago, and keep his eyes open

rather than blindly accept what people tell him.

John remains with the communists, who begin an open guerrilla campaign once enough of their cadre have military training from their national service. He and his small team plan to bomb a railroad bridge, but instead end up in the middle of a massive battle, where they capture another pilot, this time a seven-foot blond woman, who blithely mentions that she is from Venus, and the gray pilots from Mars. Before they can extract themselves from the battle, they are zapped, and awaken aboard a vast ship, which drops them off in a prisoner of war camp. While told they are on Venus, they plot their escape, in the course of which they learn the real truth behind the Martians and Venusians.

The Human Front manages to throw out one surprise after another. Suckered in by the first sentence, one might think this simply an alternate history, and indeed MacLeod talks at length about the roots of his alternate history take in one of the essays that accompanies the novella. Yet new elements continually appear to come to light about the story, and the reader almost must run to keep up. The political aspects are not one-sided. Even though the protagonist fights on the side of the communists, some of the other communists come across as nasty and equally willing to kill other communists (Trotskyists, for one) as Americans and Brits. There's a sense of immediacy and *verité* in MacLeod's narration; the Scottish setting and some of the political background seems very much taken from biographical material.

The Office of Mercy

By Ariel Djanikian

Viking, 2013

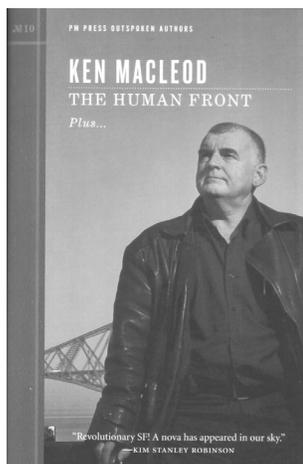
Reviewed by Anders Monsen

Ariel Djanikian's debut novel *The Office of Mercy* can trace its lineage to Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* and George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. In a post-apocalyptic world, humanity exists in small domes or habitats scattered across the North American continent. There are other habitats outside the North American zone, but the grim fact is that the earth's human population dropped dramatically from seven billion to a few million or less.

The humans who live in domes, isolated from the rugged nature outside, appear to be decanted not born, much like in Huxley's novel. Currently, there are four "generations" in habitat America-Five, with one more gestating in pods. Each generation goes by their sequential names: alpha, beta, gamma, etc. They view themselves as much a part of their generation as individuals. The younger generation also reveres the alphas, who are over 200 years old.

Yet, there's a catch. There are other humans outside the habitats, and they are being killed in the thousands by members of each dome's special teams called The Office of Mercy. The dome inhabitants see it as their duty to end suffering in any form. Any life outside the habitat they view as nasty, brutish,

—Continued on page 4



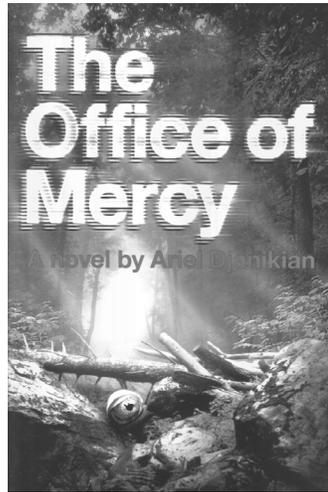
—*Office of Mercy review, continued from page 3*

and short. They hold that the rules of mercy dictate that they must alleviate suffering through instant death. Hunger, disease and superstition create unhappy and pointless lives, and the more enlightened people in the habitats view their role as necessary. To this end, they track all those outside, and when they believe the time is right, bomb them into oblivion.

Natasha Wiley, a young Gamman, works in the Office of Mercy, but as an observer only. She has not yet sent a missile to destroy young boys or girls, adults, or old people who travel in tribes through the land seeking food. Still, she is haunted by memories from childhood, and feels a sort of affinity or fascination for the savages outside the dome. Natasha is taken under the wing of Jeffrey, a zealous co-worker and her mentor. He is a generation older than her, and has personally fired missiles to kill hundreds of outsiders. She appears somewhat infatuated with Jeffrey, and is thrilled when she is selected to join a small team that will explore the outside. Their intent is both to scout the area and repair some of the cameras that have failed.

Despite intensive preparation and training, the young team encounters problems almost from the moment they set foot outside the dome. They come face to face with the savages, and for a brief while Natasha is their captive, before she manages to return to her team and back to safety. Like the Savage in Huxley's *Brave New World*, Djanikian's protagonist, Natasha, finds her world thrust upside down. Are the savages truly savage? Is their Office of Mercy merciful? A small group of dissenters bring Natasha into their fold, and they hatch a plot to equalize the current balance of power. They ally themselves with people outside, who state that they seek an end to the killings; in essence, remote-controlled drone attacks on innocent people.

But young Natasha is too naive to understand what's going on, both inside and outside her safe dome. As layers of both conspiracies are peeled away, we learn the true history of what caused the domes to be built, and the identities of the alphas, the people outside the dome, and even Natasha herself. When events come to a head, betrayals and counter-betrayals shatter Natasha's world. In the after-effects of her actions, her friends and co-conspirators experience similar reversals of opinion that Julia and Winston went through in George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, where they "learned to love big brother." Djanikian's novel may lack the ultimate power of Orwell and Huxley, but it is a well-told tale, a captivating story with an unexpected reveal. The stark ways in which those in the dome rationalize their actions portray "the humanitarians with a guillotine." Evil does not always chuckle and wear a monocle; far too often we justify it through the best intentions.



Brilliance

By Marcus Sakey

Thomas & Mercer, July 2013

Reviewed by Fran Van Cleave

Imagine an alternate history of the present, a time where one percent of American kids born after 1986 display a dazzling new intelligence. The opposite of "idiot savants," the Brilliants seem normal in all other respects. Which, as part of the human condition, includes the ability to sometimes cause trouble, particularly when they're bullied. Parents no longer want their children to be smart, because a few of these kids have forced Wall Street to shut down through clever financial manipulation, while others have used violent confrontation to bring the country to the edge of civil war.

Nick Cooper is a member of Equitable Services—the perfect blandly named black-budgeted Federal agency—who's been tasked to use lethal force to stop the violent Brilliants, AKA "abnorm terrorists," from destroying society.

Unfortunately for Nick, he's not only a divorced dad, he's a Brilliant, too. His talent is reading micro-expressions, which make him near-telepathic in his ability to predict a person's next move. But in his cat-and-mouse game against the Brilliants' elusive leader, John Smith (Sakey admits to being influenced by Ayn Rand's John Galt), Nick's talent isn't enough to stop a bombing by Smith's agent, nick-named "The Woman Who Walks Through Walls."

Does her name sound like a Heinlein influence? Yeah, I think so, too.

It seems that many of the Brilliants have moved to a Reservation in Montana—private land, where they won't be bothered by the federal government or harassed by "normals." Outside the Rez, the most highly gifted of the Brilliant kids are forced to attend special Federal schools from the age of five until eighteen. During that time, their names are changed, they're not allowed to see their families, and they're taught to trust nothing and no one except good old Uncle Sam. No one can opt out.

Nick belatedly discovers the terrible agenda of these schools shortly before his be-loved four-year-old daughter Kate is reported by some busybody as "likely top-tier Brilliant." He's immediately desperate to keep her out of brainwashing school, which in her case would start ASAP.

He offers his boss a deal: in exchange for his daughter never having to go to one of these soul-crushing "schools," he'll pretend to go rogue, go to the Montana reservation and talk the Brilliants into letting him join up, and then kill John Smith. Who nobody in Equitable Services has ever seen.

As you might imagine, John Smith and the Woman Who Walks Through Walls are at least as Brilliant as poor Nick, who's also fighting off a serious attraction to this dangerous woman.

And this is where the story takes off like a hypersonic rocket. If you love sharply-written Libertarian thrillers, you've got to read this one. Oh, and the book is already being made into a movie, with a sequel due in 2014.

Reset

By Peter Bagge

Dark Horse, January 2013

Reviewed by Max Jahr

Peter Bagge's weird comic genius appears regularly in the pages of *Reason* magazine. He's also written a serialized comic (*Apocalypse Nerd*), and now a graphic novel that falls under the wide tent of science fiction. *Reset* deals with a Guy Krause, failed former TV personality, now in the throes of middle age looking back on what went wrong with his life. When offered a chance to relive some of his past failures and try to make amends, he reluctantly signs onto what he thinks will reset his life.



Both *Apocalypse Nerd* and *Reset* feature anti-heroes wallowing in self-misery. They appear powerless and emasculated when faced with reality and other people. They are sad sacks who cry out for some sympathy, yet at the same time make the kind of mistakes that render them at the same time less sympathetic. Krause, mired in his failures, accepts an job as a lab experiment: reliving past failures. However, he tries to alter some of the requirements when he finds portions disagreeable. As he negotiates and subtly alters some of the terms with the two people working the experiment, it becomes obvious that something else is going on behind the scenes. Krause must experience parts of his life over and over again, many of them shifted towards the most negative, humiliating, and depressing moments of his life. Krause thinks he is given a reset button, but each decision he makes seems to have the opposite effect. Rather than atoning for his sins, he must experience them all over again. This leads him to rebel; he decides to push more and more to control his past experiences, rather than be forced to live them again.

The effects lead Krause to re-examine his current life. Perhaps he cannot reset his past, but he might be able to reset his future. He even discovers things in real life may not have happened the way he thought. When the people behind the experiment discover this, they push harder, and we learn some of the reasons behind merely using Krause as a way for them to learn a more effective way to control people.

While *Reset* isn't explicitly libertarian, the story includes many important ideas, such as self-control, responsibility, and ability to learn and change. Bagge sketches many long libertarian comics in *Reason*. Perhaps one day he will create a book with more positive characters, ones you really want to root for, not reluctantly stick with for the sake of the story.

Nexus

By Ramez Naam

Angry Robot, 2013

Reviewed by Anders Monsen

Ramez Naam's debut novel brims with post-cyberpunk panache. Reminiscent of the crackling pace and prose of Bruce Sterling and Neal Stephenson, not to mention their ability to extrapolate current ideas into future possibilities, *Nexus* embraces the idea of human change through technology. All is not golden and light, as Naam looks at a wide spectrum of implications of nano-technology, from mind-control to scary body modifications, but also the ability to heal and improve oneself.

Samantha Cataranes, is a US government agent tasked to track down people experimenting with illegal technologies, especially mind and body enhancing drugs and bio-engineering modifications. Her current target is Kade Lane, a post-graduate student working on a new version of a drug called *Nexus*. This drug contains software tools that allow users (or controllers) to program their bodies and minds. Kade and his friends have perfected *Nexus 5* as *Nexus OS*, letting them essentially re-write their minds to suppress or enhance drugs produced in the body that alters their mood. They can gain confidence, calm nerves, speed up reactions, and even interact with other *Nexus OS* enabled individuals. This interaction forms a sort of hive mind. Cataranes and her superiors are very interested in neutralizing Kade's experiments. The US government agents want to shut down his activity, but they realize his potential to gain access to a Chinese-controlled scientist, Su-Yong Shu, who appears to have progressed far beyond Kade toward a post-human future. Su-Yong Shu is a respected neuroscientist whom the US government suspects of making radical advances in neuro-biological mind control, and of working with the Chinese government. The US suspects her and the Chinese of being able to subvert people and turn them into meat-puppets, ideal tools of assassination and infiltration.

After a ruthless raid where Cataranes infiltrates Kade's operation and experiences first-hand the hive-mind effect of *Nexus OS*, Kade is forced to collaborate with the government agency. He attends a conference in Bangkok, planning to meet Su-Yong Shu. There he runs into other forces, who also have progressed into the realm of mind-and-body modification. The various factions wrestle over Kade's allegiance, seeking his knowledge and skills for their own ends. He must try to navigate the various and treacherous factions and determine how best to deal with the *Nexus* potential, given its transformative effects. One side wants to control and limit *Nexus*, while others want to use it for their own ends, to control by leaping into a post-human future where they hold the keys.

Complicating matters is Watson "Wats" Cole, an ally of Kade. Wats is a former soldier, haunted by the loss of his team, and worried about his augmentations spawning cancerous cells in his body. Wats hopes to release the *Nexus OS* globally and

—Continued on page 8

LETTERS

Dear Anders,

Congratulations on your long and successful editorship of *Prometheus*. You must have a gray beard by now.

I never thought I'd be writing a stern letter to your pages in the 21st Century. Unfortunately, Fred Curtis Moulton made some astonishing complaints in Volume 30, Number 4, so I'm writing in to complain about him.

Here is his most offending passage:

"My perception is that the Prometheus Award has gained in reputation particularly when works such as *Ha'penny* and *Freedom Maze* win the award. This helps dispel the notion that libertarians are only interested in 'Gold and Guns' or can best be characterized as 'Conservatives who want to do drugs.'

"One problem with the stereotype is that too often it is libertarians who are reinforcing it. If the only time a libertarian speaks on a subject is to complain about high taxes used to build a medical clinic for poor children then do not be surprised if libertarians are dismissed as selfish jerks."

To borrow from Lenin, "What is to be done?"

As I gaze at the gold coin bearing the visage of Hayek on the plaque of my Prometheus award, I feel a wave of guilt that I might consider gold sometimes preferable to fiat money.

But that emotion fades as I struggle with the more disturbing notion that there is a problem with defending self-defense. A migraine headache is inevitable as I contemplate a firearm.

I'd consider using drugs to alleviate the pain, but I am probably abusing freedom if I need such a crutch, or even the pleasant distraction of altering my consciousness.

Well, at least I am resigned to high taxes to support all possible good works of the State. That's because Moulton has shown me the true meaning of Libertarianism. Now I know all the things to avoid.

Seriously, what the hell is going on here?

Think of how many Prometheus and Hall of Fame winners have been denigrated by Moulton's ill considered rant.

I could rattle off names of luminaries no longer with us, but there are living winners of the award negatively characterized by Moulton's remarks, including L. Neil Smith, the actual father of the Prometheus award. I include J. Neil Schulman and myself in the aggrieved party.

In addition to the aforementioned Prometheus winners, I'd throw in Prometheus finalist J. Kent Hastings, and a former editor of this journal, Bill Ritch (who has made professional short story sales) as two more old time libertarians whose approach to fiction might embarrass Fred Curtis Moulton.

Is embarrassment too strong a word?

Please consider another quote from Moulton:

"I know of one case where a person told me he ignored the LFS for years thinking we were not serious after seeing a weak title as a finalist."

Moulton is asking us to take two things on faith. He withholds the name of the mysterious Important Person. He

doesn't tell us the title of the inadequate work. Why should we believe him?

As a life member of SFWA, a Nebula finalist, and someone with a Masters degree (which last item I mention rarely) I've had decades in professional writing, and a few experiences in the academic world.

I've never encountered anyone who is such a snob that he would dismiss an entire award because of one finalist. Not even a winner, mind you, but just a finalist!

The LFS is not the Conservative Futurist Society, but neither is it the Liberal Futurist Society. Moulton is trying to turn it into the latter, and I'm fed up with it.

One of the great honors of my life was receiving Robert A. Heinlein's brass cannon as a bequest from Ginny Heinlein. The official Heinlein biographer, Bill Patterson, invited me to co-write with him the introduction to the Virginia edition of *The Moon is a Harsh Mistress*.

It should come as no surprise that over the years I considered launching a new libertarian science fiction award as an alternative to the Prometheus Award. The name of such an award would have to be the Brass Cannon.

But I decided against it. The reason is that we can't ignore the long and rich history of the Prometheus Award. A new award is a surrender.

Besides, with my luck, if I did launch an alternative award, some Fred Curtis Moulton of the future would show up and try to make it respectable.

— Brad Linaweaver

Simply put, I find Anders' arguments defining which works can be considered for the annual award more compelling than Fred's. I would agree, however, that changing the voting date makes excellent sense [*Fred suggested changing the announcement to January from the current July date—editor*].

Thank you,
Steven Burgauer

David Tuchman, RIP

David C. Tuchman, longtime member of the Libertarian Futurist Society, died on Friday, June 28, 2013, from cancer.

Born February 7, 1956, Dave managed the LFS membership records for many years, handling address changes, dealing with new member queries. His efforts throughout many years in an all-volunteer organization were invaluable.

While I never knew Dave personally, we communicated often to make sure membership lists for Prometheus were updated and current. His job took him to various places, including Iraq in the mid-2000. His web site (for as long as it remains online) includes pictures from his time in Iraq, with a few comments about what he saw there.

He will be missed.

—Anders Monsen

—*Quantum Vibe review, continued from page 1*

who likes to party and get drunk. Her easy nature and trust tends to get her into trouble, landing her into a nasty situation in jail on a planet that has embraced statism and strict personal control. This episode both hardens Nicole and makes her more vulnerable. She also bonds with a fellow inmate, who joins Nicole on their quest.

Bieser's libertarian politics bubble to the surface fairly often. The story itself doesn't sacrifice its narrative for politics, but uses various political themes for different societies, as well as how inhabitants treat each other. The nature of the plot, which takes the duo from one location to the next, allows Bieser to explore a variety of societies and customs. Colorful characters abound, with hidden plots appearing now and then to spice up events.

When you read the comic one page per day you sometimes miss things, such as important characters introduced early in the story who later re-appear such that they are forgotten. Another problem with serialized stories is that the narrative flow never seems to have a purpose, as new characters appear at odd moments, new plot twists jump and swirl from one day to the next. Also, in prose, those characters usually appear with names, describing their actions and appearance. In comics you need to rely more on faces and appearances, and some characters resemble others, making their role fuzzy at times. When read as part of a single volume and without having to wait for daily installments, suddenly you become more aware

—*Confessions of a selective Luddite, continued from page 2*

a half-hour to one or two hours in its perusal...Worldly interests intervening during the pauses of perusal, modify, annul, or counteract, in a greater or less degree, the impressions of the book. But simple cessation in reading, would, of itself, be sufficient to destroy the true unity. In the brief tale, however, the author is enabled to carry out the fullness of his intention, be it what it may. During the hour of perusal the soul of the reader is at the writer's control. There are no external or extrinsic influences—resulting from weariness or interruption.

One day, perhaps, when paper books are a thing of the past, a memory found only in museums, and all books are read on electronic devices, perhaps the attention span won't be an issue when reading a novel on such a device. But for now, maybe the short story is a perfect fit, at least in my case. I can understand why travelers enjoy eReaders because they are light and store multiple works. *War and Peace* or *Infinite Jest* in carry-on? I think not. On the other hand: battery required.

To investigate the new-fangled technology (tongue slightly in cheek, of course), I downloaded a sample Kindle edition of *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*. Kindle software works on the iPad, so I loaded this into my library and started reading. Alas, the short story was poorly written, so I abandoned it. However, I did read the issue's three essays on books, and found that I was able to finish them without

of these characters and you spot them more easily. One such character appears early in a minor role, then gains prominence later on in the book. In fact, she becomes so important that the next volume is named after her. But that's another story.

The first volume of Bieser's massive saga only hints at what lies ahead. Clearly, the major arc of the saga will take his characters through the universe and their final destination. How they get there and what adventures befall them is the journey we all must take. Bieser has in the past illustrated several books created by other writers, but here demonstrates his own ability to weave a story as imaginative as that of any of his previous collaborators. While not the only libertarian graphic novelist writing stories, the vastness of his saga and the very explicit libertarian elements of some of his characters make Bieser unique. Alternating humor and comedy with serious political insights and comments, Bieser manages the graphic novel medium with aplomb. I find it difficult to consider a serialized book for the Prometheus Award, but I firmly believe, that at the story's conclusion the series as a whole certainly deserves a nomination. Bieser has created a fantastic universe, strong characters, and a captivating plot, that in a more traditional prose dressing probably would gain far more attention, especially from libertarian readers and critics. Comic books rarely get major respect (maybe Alan Moore and Frank Miller are exceptions), but *Quantum Vibe* might crack through that prose ceiling.

distraction. While I winced at the garbled rendering of the table of contents—whether this was caused by the Kindle software issue or device, I don't know, though I viewed it on multiple devices—I experienced no distracting extrinsic influences. As a means to read short stories, eReaders appear to be a decent solution.

One issue that I have found with short story magazines is that there are so many of them. Even if one attempts to stick with a specific handful of publications, the piles of small magazines over time will grow like kudzu vines, and overwhelm any library. Render the stories into ones and zeroes, able to fit on a single device the same size of an *Analog* or *Asimov's* or *F&SF*, and the space problem is no longer an issue. Recycling? A simple delete button. While avowed eReader users may laugh at my approach to this new medium, I take my books seriously. I like to see them on bookshelves, despite eternally cursing constant lack of shelf space.

Is it wrong to see short fiction differently (that is, not in collections on anthologies)? Even *Prometheus* might look better as an electronic option. We shall see. It will be interesting to see how the trends develop. Will eBooks replace paperbacks? In five or ten years what will happen to the book market, the magazine market? Postage and printing costs continue to rise, killing many magazines. Advertising revenue collapses. I think many SF magazines will make the move entirely away from paper, but I hope books continue to be made. Life wouldn't be the same without them.

—Anders Monsen

—*Nexus review*, continued from page 5

freely, viewing the hive-mind potential as liberating. After the initial raid, he goes underground, planning to liberate Kade from his government controllers. Both Wats and Cataranes are bio-enhanced; the government who seeks to limit public release of mind and body-altering technologies are more than willing to use those tools themselves. Naam explores a variety of ways nano maybe used, both for good and evil. While Cataranes and Wats have heightened abilities for combat, or neural links to intelligence databases, other augmented people become walking bombs.

Kade ultimately must make a choice that affects not only his future, but the entire world. He isn't the only person faces with choices. Cataranes and her superiors also realize the impact of what Kade's work with Nexus implies for humanity, or rather those who would embrace Nexus. What are the implications of any technology? The internet makes communication so much easier, but also generates spam and online bullying. Like nuclear power, which can harness energy but also kill and poison, the Nexus OS offers a vast potential for good and evil at the same time.

The idea of nanotechnology dates back several years. It has appeared in fiction from Greg Bear's *Blood Music* to Ian McDonald's young adult novel *Be My Enemy*, and on TV and cinema with the Borg since *Star Trek: The Next Generation* (the Borg are mentioned in the novel as a potential effect of the

hive mind of Nexus, which would obliterate individuality). Nanites, tiny robots that live and operate inside humans—usually in the blood stream—have been seen both as ways to improve humanity (by eradicating disease and viruses) and control people. Technology both excites and frightens. Visions of tiny machines running amok inside your bloodstream, or replicating endlessly into gray goo that consumes everything in its path, make for good thrillers. Good novels need the human element, which *Nexus* brings to the table with a variety of characters.

Ramez Naam writes a captivating near-future thriller. This book might have been a strong contender for the 2013 Prometheus Award for many of the points raised. The novel is ambivalent, making arguments for both sides. The feds come across as nasty and hypocritical, but many of Kade's so-called friends have the same hubris that governs so much of present political thought, that some people know what is best for others, that they belong in charge based on their vision, that the ends justify the means.

The book deals with the implications of widely available dangerous knowledge, government agencies that use the very weapons they heavily restrict and campaign against, agencies that show no qualms against using massive force in urban areas, blackmailing and kidnapping people whom they wish to silence. Naam has a deep background in technology and trans-humanist ideas, and writes tense, almost cinematic, action scenes.



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