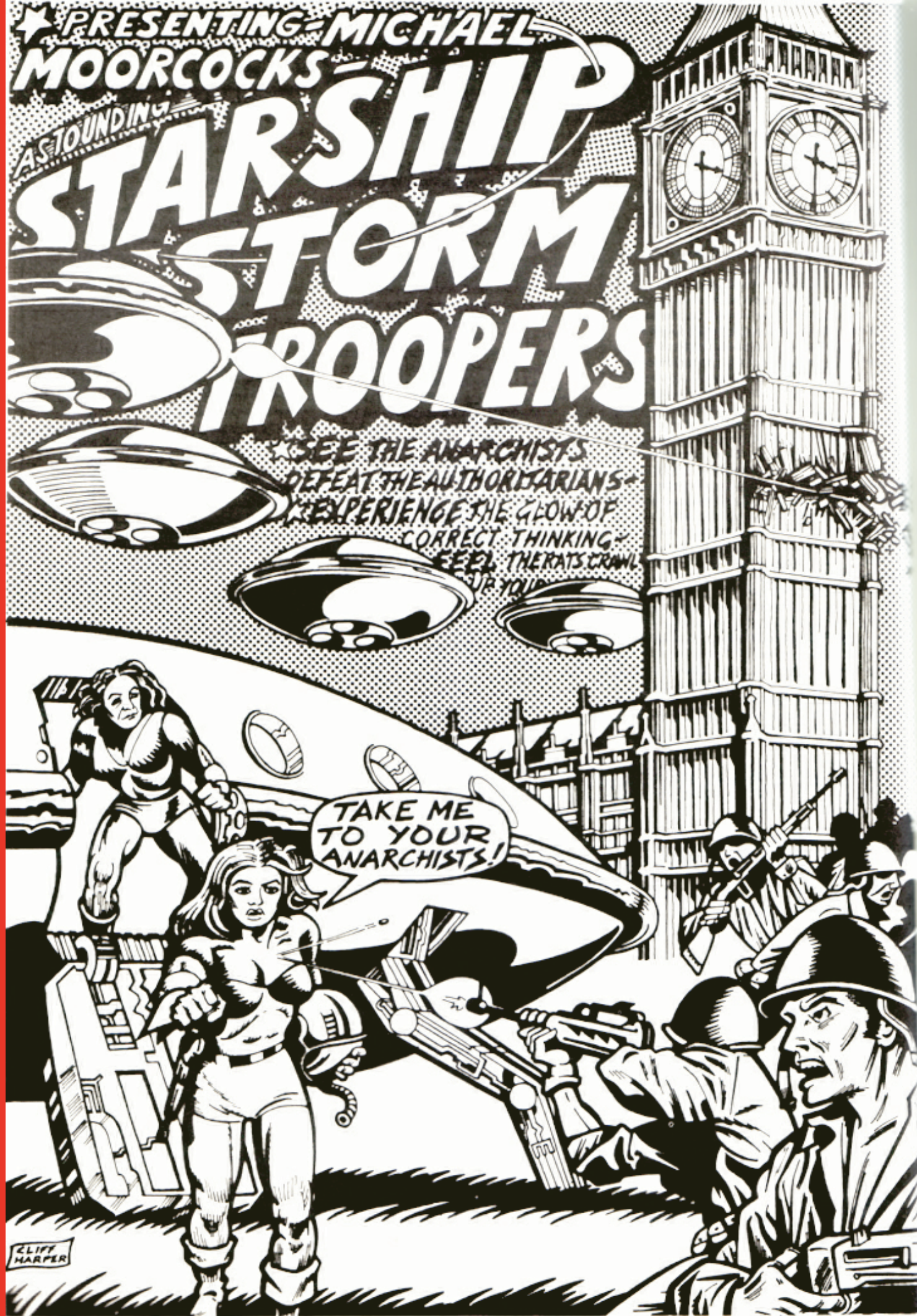


★ PRESENTING - MICHAEL
MOORCOCKS -
ASTOUNDING
**STARSHIP
STORM
TROOPERS**

★ SEE THE ANARCHISTS
DEFEAT THE AUTHORITARIANS -
★ EXPERIENCE THE GLOW OF
CORRECT THINKING -
FEEL THE RATS CRAWL
UP YOUR

TAKE ME
TO YOUR
ANARCHISTS!



STARSHIP STORM TROOPERS

by Michael Moorcock

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There are still a few things which bring a naive sense of shocked astonishment to me whenever I experience them—a church service in which the rituals of Dark Age superstition are performed without any apparent sense of incongruity in the participants—a fat Soviet bureaucrat pontificating about bourgeois decadence—a radical singing the praises of Ayn Rand or Robert Heinlein. If I were sitting in a tube train and all the people opposite me were reading *Mein Kampf* with obvious enjoyment and approval it probably wouldn't disturb me much more than if they were reading Heinlein, Tolkein or Richard Adams. All this visionary fiction seems to me to have a great deal in common. Utopian fiction has been predominantly reactionary in one form or another (as well as being predominantly dull) since it began. Most of it warns the world of 'decadence' in its contemporaries and the alternatives are usually authoritarian and sweeping—not to say simple-minded. A look at the books on sale to Cienfuegos customers shows the same old list of Lovecraft and Rand, Heinlein and Niven, beloved of so many people who would be horrified to be accused of subscribing to *The Daily Telegraph* or belonging to the Monday Club and yet are reading with every sign of satisfaction views by writers who would make *Telegraph* editorials look like the work of Bakunin and Monday Club members look like spokesmen for the Paris Commune.

Some years ago I remember reading an article by John Pilgrim in *Anarchy* in which he claimed Robert Heinlein as a revolutionary leftist writer. As a result of this article I could not for years bring myself to buy another issue. I'd been confused in the past by listening to hardline Communists offering views that were somewhat at odds with their anti-authoritarian claims, but I'd never expected to hear similar things from anarchists. My experience of science fiction fans at the conventions which are held annually in a number of countries (mainly the US and England) had taught me that those who attended were predominantly reactionary (often claiming, with familiar phrases, to be 'apolitical' but somehow always happy to vote Tory and believe Colin Jordan to 'have a point'), but I had always assumed that these were for one reason or another the exceptions among SF enthusiasts. Then the underground papers began to emerge and I found myself in sympathy with most of their attitudes—but once again I saw the old arguments aired:—Tolkein, C.S. Lewis, Frank Herbert, Isaac Asimov and the rest, bourgeois reactionaries to a man,

Christian apologists, crypto-Stalinists, were being praised in *IT*, *Frenz* and *Oz* and everywhere else by people whose general political ideals I thought I shared. I started writing about what I thought was the implicit authoritarianism of these writers and often as not found myself accused of being reactionary, elitist or at very best a rotten spoilsport who couldn't enjoy good SF for its own sake. But here I am again at Stuart Christie's request, to present arguments which I have presented more than once before—indeed in issue after issue of *New Worlds*, which the majority of SF fans accused of being insanely radical and given to promoting, according to many critics, anarchistic notions of a distasteful nature...

In common with many other periodicals *New Worlds* believed in revolution. Our emphasis was on fiction, the arts and sciences, because it was what we knew best. We attacked and were in turn attacked in the all-too familiar rituals. Smiths refused to continue distributing the magazine unless we 'toned down' our contents. We refused. We were, they said, obscene, blasphemous, nihilistic, etc., etc. The *Daily Express* attacked us. A Tory asked us a question about us in the House of Commons—why was public money (a small Arts Council grant) being spent on such filth. I recount all this not merely to establish what we were prepared to do to maintain our policies (we were eventually wiped out by Smiths and Menzies in a cynical series of manoeuvres) but to point out that we were the only SF magazine to pursue what you might call a determinedly radical approach—and SF buffs were the first to attack us with genuine vehemence. Our main serial running at the height of our troubles was called Bug Jack Barron, written by Norman Spinrad, who had taken an active part in radical politics in the US and used his story to display the abuse of democracy and the media in America. He later went on to write a satirical sword-and-sorcery epic, *The Iron Dream*, intended to display the fascist elements inherent to the form. The author of this novel existed, as it were, in an alternate history to our own. His name was Adolf Hitler. The book was meant to point up the number of authors who were, in a sense, 'unsuccessful Hitlers'.

Many other Americans came to use the *NW* as a vehicle because they couldn't get their stories published in the U.S. Thomas M. Disch, John Sladek, Harvey Jacobs, Harlan Ellison and many others published a good deal of their best and at

the time most controversial work in *MW* — and Heinlein fans actually attacked us for ‘destroying’ science fiction. Escapism this mainly American form might be, but it posed as a ‘literature of ideas’ and that, we contended, it wasn’t—unless *The Green Berets* was a profoundly philosophical movie.

Another example: in 1967 Judith Merrill, a founder member of the Science Fiction Writers of America, an ex-Trotskyist turned libertarian, proposed that this organization would buy advertising space in the SF magazines condemning the war in Vietnam. I was around when this was proposed. A good number of members agreed with alacrity—including English members like myself, John Brunner, Brian Aldiss, etc. Robert Silverberg and Harry Harrison were keen, as were Harlan Ellison, James Blish and, to be fair, Frank Herbert and Larry Niven. But quite as many were outraged by the idea, saying that the SFWA ‘shouldn’t interfere in politics.’ Okay, said Merrill, then let’s say ‘The following members of the SFWA condemn American involvement in the Vietnam War, etc.’ Finally the SF magazines contained two ads—one against the war and one in support of American involvement. Those in support included Poul Anderson, Robert Heinlein, Ann McCaffrey, Daniel F. Galouye, Keith Laumer and as many other popular SF writers as were against the war. The interesting thing was that at the time many of the pro-US-involvement writers were (and by and large still are) the most popular SF writers in the English speaking world, let alone Japan, the Soviet Union, France, Germany, Italy and Spain, where a good many SF readers think of themselves as radicals. One or two of these writers (British as well as American) are dear friends of mine who are personally kindly and courageous people of considerable integrity — but their political statements (if not always, by any means, their actions) are stomach-turning! Most people have to be judged by their actions rather than their remarks, which are often surprisingly at odds, but writers, when they are writing, can only be judged on the substance of their work—it is where they have the greatest influence. The majority of the SF writers most popular with radicals are by and large crypto-fascists to a man and woman! There is Lovecraft, the misogynic racist; there is Heinlein, the authoritarian militarist; there is Ayn Rand, the rabid opponent of trade unionism and the left, who like many a reactionary before her, sees the problems of the world as a failure by capitalists to assume the responsibilities of ‘good leadership’; there is Tolkien and that group of middle-class fantasists who constantly sing the praises of the bourgeois virtues and whose villains are thinly-disguised working class agitators—fear of the Mob permeates their rural romances. To all these and more the working class is a mindless beast (the Id perhaps) which must be controlled or it will savage the world (i.e. bourgeois security)—the

answer is always leadership, ‘decency,’ paternalism (Heinlein is particularly strong on this), Christian values... What can this stuff have in common with radicals of any persuasion? The simple answer is, perhaps, Romance. The dividing line between rightist Romance (Nazi insignia and myth, etc.) and leftist Romance (insurgent cavalry, etc.) is not always easy to determine. A stirring image is a stirring image and can be employed to raise all sorts of atavistic or infantile emotions in us. Escapist or ‘genre’ fiction appeals to these emotions. It does no harm to escape from time to time but it can be dangerous to confuse simplified fiction with reality and that, of course, is what propaganda does.

The bandit hero—the underdog rebel—so frequently becomes the political tyrant; and we are perpetually astonished! Such figures appeal to our infantile selves—what is harmful about them in real life is that they are usually immature, without self-discipline, frequently surviving on their ‘charm.’ Fiction lets them stay, like Zorro or Robin Hood, perpetually charming. In reality they become petulant, childish, relying on a mixture of threats and self-pitying pleading like any baby. These are too often the revolutionary figures on whom we pin our hopes, to whom we sometimes commit our lives and whom we sometimes try to be; because we fail to distinguish fact from fiction. In reality it is too often the small, fanatical men with the faces and stance of neurotic clerks who come to power while the charismatic heroes, if they are lucky, die gloriously, leaving us to discover that while we have been following them, imitating them, a new Tsar has manipulated himself into the position of power and Terror has returned with a vengeance while we have been using all our energies in living a romantic lie. Heroes betray us. By having them, in real life, we betray ourselves. The heroes of Heinlein and Ayn Rand are forever competent, forever right: they are oracles and protectors, magic parents (so long as we obey their rules). They are prepared to accept the responsibilities we would rather not bear. They are ‘leaders.’ Traditional SF is hero fiction on huge scales, but it is only when it poses as a fiction of ideas that it becomes pernicious. At its most spectacular it gives us Charlie Manson and Scientology (invented by the SF writer Ron Hubbard and an authoritarian system to rival the Pope’s). To enjoy it is one thing. To claim it as ‘radical’ is quite another. It is rather unimaginative; it is usually badly written; its characters are ciphers; its propaganda is simpleminded and conservative—good old-fashioned opium which might be specifically designed for dealing with the potential revolutionary deals with the society this stuff works so hard to protect. In a writer like Lovecraft a terror of sex often combines (or is confused for) a terror of the masses, the ‘ugly’ crowd. But this is so common to so much ‘horror’ fiction that it’s hardly worth discussing. Lovecraft

is morbid and equates to that negative romanticism found so much in Nazi art. He was a confused anti-Semite and misanthrope, a promoter of anti-rationalist ideas about racial 'instinct' and so on, which have much in common with ideas found in *Mein Kampf*. A dedicated supporter of 'Aryanism' and conservatism, a hater of women, he wound up marrying a Jewess (which might or might not have been a sign of hope—we haven't her view of the matter). Lovecraft appeals to us primarily when we are feeling morbid ourselves, but apart from his offensively awful writing and a resultant inability to describe his horrors (leaving us to do the work—the secret of his success—we're all better writers than he is!) he is rarely as frightening, by implication, as most of the other highly popular writers whose concerns are not with 'meeping Things' but with idealized versions of society. It's not such a big step, for instance from Farnham's Freehold to Hitler's *Lebensraum*.

I must admit I'm not describing the books I mention or following a properly argued critical line. I'm arguing on the assumption that my readers are at least familiar with some of the books and authors I mention. I would not be attacking these books if they were not the favourite reading of so many radicals. Georgette Heyer, Agatha Christie and the rest are read pretty much entirely by the bourgeoisie; we take for granted that they promote certain assumptions about society. Nor am I attacking the books for their superficial fascination with quasi-mediaeval social systems (à la Frank Herbert). Fiction about kings and queens is not necessarily royalist fiction any more than fiction about anarchists is likely to be libertarian fiction. As a writer I have produced a good many fantastic romances in which kings and queens, lords and ladies, figure largely—yet I am an avowed anti-monarchist. *Catch-22* never seemed to me to be in favour of militarism. And just because many of Heinlein's characters are soldiers or ex-soldiers I don't automatically assume he must therefore be in favour of war. It depends what use you make of such characters in a story and what, in the final analysis, you are saying.

Jules Verne in *The Masterless Man* put some pretty decent sentiments in the mouth of Kaw-djer the anarchist, and his best characters, like Captain Nemo, are embittered 'rebels' who have retreated from society. Even the aerial anarchists of *The Angel of the Revolution* by George Griffiths have something to be said for them, for all their inherent authoritarianism, but they are essentially romantic 'outlaws' and the views they express are not sophisticated even by the standards of the 1890s.

H.G. Wells was no more the 'father' of science fiction than Jules Verne. He inherited a tradition going back some thirty or forty years in the form

he himself used and several centuries in the form of the Utopian romance. What was unusual about Wells, however, is that he was one of the first radicals of his time to take the trappings of the scientific romance and combine them with powerful and telling images to make Bunyanesque allegories like *The Time Machine* or *The Invisible Man*. Wells didn't have his characters talking socialism. He showed the results of capitalism, authoritarianism, superstition and other evils and because he was a far better writer than most of those who have ever written SF before or since he made his points with considerable clarity. Morris had been long-winded and backward-looking. Wells took the techniques of Kipling and preached his own brand of socialism. Until Wells—the most talented, original and intelligent writer of his kind—almost all SF had devoted itself to attacks on 'decadence' and military unpreparedness, urging our leaders to take a stronger moral line and our armies to re-equip and get better officers. By and large this was the tone of much of the SF which followed Wells, from Kipling's effective but reactionary *With the Night Mail* and *As Easy as ABC* (paternalistic aerial controllers whose rays pacify 'the mob') to stories by John Buchan, Michael Arlen, William Le Queux, E. Phillips Oppenheim and hundreds of others who predominantly were following Kipling in warning us of the dangers of socialism, mixed marriages, free love, anarchist plots, Zionist conspiracies, the yellow peril and so on and so on. Even Jack London wasn't what one might call an all-round libertarian any more than Wells was when he toyed with his ideas of an elite corps of 'samurai' who were actually not a great deal different to how Soviet Communist Party members saw themselves, or were described in official fiction and propaganda. The quasi-religious nature of SF (which I describe in a collection of pre-WWI SF, *Before Armageddon*) was producing on the whole quasi-religious substitutes (a variety of 'scientologists' and authoritarian socialist and fascist theories). A few attacked the theories of the emerging dictators (Murray Constantine's *Swastika Night*, 1937, seems to think that Christeianity could conquer Hitler but is otherwise a pretty incisive projection of Nazism several hundred years into the future) but by and large the world we got in the thirties was the world the SF writers of the day hoped we would have—'strong leaders' reshaping nations. The reality of these hero-leaders was not, of course, entirely what had been visualized—Nuremburg rallies and Strength Through Joy, perhaps—but *Kristallnacht* and gas ovens seemed to go a bit over the mark.

At least the American pulp magazines like *Amazing Stories* and *Thrilling Wonder Stories* were not, by and large, offering us high-profile 'leadership'—they just gave us the good old-fashioned mixture of implicit racialism/militarism/nationalism/paternalism carried a few hundred

years into the future or a few million light-years into space (E.E. Smith remains to this day one of the most popular writers of that era). John W. Campbell, who in the late thirties took over *Astounding Science Fiction Stories* and created what many believe to be a major development in the development of SF, was the chief creator of the school known to buffs as 'Golden Age' SF and produced by the likes of Heinlein, Asimov, and A.E. Van Vogt—wild-eyed paternalists to a man, fierce anti-socialists, good Americans (though only Heinlein was actually born there) whose conservatism reflected the deep-seated conservatism of the majority of Americans, who saw a Bolshevik menace in every union meeting and believed, in common with authoritarians everywhere, that any radical wanted to take over old-fashioned political power, turn the world into a uniform mass of 'workers' with themselves (the radicals) as commissars. They offered us such visions, when they made any overt discussion of politics at all. They were about as left-wing as *The National Enquirer* or *The Saturday Evening Post* (where their stories eventually, and occasionally, were to appear). They were xenophobic, smug and confident that the capitalist system would flourish throughout the universe, though they were, of course, against dictators and the worst sort of exploiters (no longer Jews but often still 'aliens'). Rugged individualism was the most sophisticated political concept they could manage—in the pulp tradition, the Code of the West became the Code of the Space Frontier, and a spaceship captain had to do what a spaceship captain had to do...

The war helped. It provided character types and a good deal of authoritative sounding technological terms which could be applied to scientific hardware and social problems alike and sounded reassuringly 'expert.' Those chaps had the tone of Vietnam twenty years earlier, and indeed, it's often been suggested that SF supplied a lot of the terms and atmosphere for American military and space technology (a 'Waldo' handling machine is a term taken straight from a Heinlein story, for instance). *Astounding* became full of crew-cut, wisecracking, cigar-chewing, competent guys (like Campbell's image of himself) of the kind often seen in John Ford/John Wayne movies. Nothing much wrong with that, really. Who doesn't enjoy a Ford Western? But Campbell and his writers (and they considered themselves something of a unified team) were not producing Westerns. They claimed to be producing a fiction of ideas. These competent guys were suggesting how the world should be run. By the early fifties *Astounding* had turned by almost anyone's standard into a crypto-fascist, deeply philistine magazine quite as horrifying as any mid-West newspaper of the period but pretending to intellectualism and offering idealistic kids an 'alternative' that was, of course, no alternative at all. Through the fifties Campbell used his whole magazine as propaganda

for the ideas he promoted in his editorials. His writers, by and large, were enthusiastic. Those who were not fell away from him, disturbed by his increasingly messianic disposition (Alfred Bester gives a good account of this). Over the years Campbell promoted the mystical, quasi-scientific Scientology (first proposed by one of his regular writers L. Ron Hubbard and aired for the first time in *Astounding* as *Dianetics: The New Science of the Mind*), a perpetual motion machine known as the 'Dean Drive,' a series of plans to ensure that the highways weren't 'abused,' and dozens of half-baked notions, all in the context of cold-war thinking. He also, when faced with the Watts riots of the mid-sixties, seriously proposed and went on proposing that there were 'natural' slaves who were unhappy if freed. I sat on a panel with him in 1965, as he pointed out that the worker bee when unable to work dies of misery, that the moujiks when freed went to their masters and begged to be enslaved again, that the ideals of the anti-slavers who fought in the Civil War were merely expressions of self-interest and that the blacks were 'against' emancipation, which was fundamentally why they were indulging in 'leaderless' riots in the suburbs of Los Angeles! I was speechless (actually I said four words in all—'science fiction'—'psychology'—'Jesus Christ!'—before I collapsed), leaving John Brunner to do an excellent job of cool demolition of Campbell's arguments, which left the editor calling on God in support of his views—an experience rather more intense for me than watching Doctor Strangelove at the cinema.

Starship Troopers (serialized in *Astounding* as was most of Heinlein's fiction until the early sixties) was probably Heinlein's last 'straight' SF serial for Campbell before he began his 'serious' books such as *Farnham's Freehold* and *Stranger in a Strange Land*—taking the simplified characters of genre fiction and producing some of the most ludicrously unlikely people ever to appear in print. In *Starship Troopers* we find a slightly rebellious cadet gradually learning that wars are inevitable, that the army is always right, that his duty is to obey the rules and protect the human race against the alien menace. It is pure debased Ford out of Kipling and it set the pattern for Heinlein's more ambitious paternalistic, xenophobic (but equally sentimental) stories which became for me steadily more hilarious until I realized with some surprise that people were taking them as seriously as they had taken, say, *Atlas Shrugged* a generation before—in hundreds of thousands! That middle-America could regard such stuff as 'radical' was easy enough to understand—but I kept finding that supporters of the Angry Brigade were enthusiastic about Heinlein, that people with whom I thought I shared libertarian principles were also getting off on every paternalistic, bourgeois writer who had ever given me the creeps! I still can't fully understand it. Certainly I can't doubt the sincerity

of their idealism. But how does it equate with their celebration of writers like Tolkein and Heinlein? The clue could be the very vagueness of the prose, which allows for liberal interpretation; it could be that the ciphers they use instead of characters are capable of suggesting a wholly different meaning to readers. To me, their naive and emblematic reading of society is fundamentally misanthropic and therefore anti-libertarian. We are faced, once again, with quasi-religion, presented to us as radicalism. At best it is the philosophy of the West applied to the complex social problems of the twentieth century—it is Reaganism, it is John Wayne in *Big John Maclean* and *The Green Berets*, it is George Wallace and Joe Macarthy—at its most refined it is William F. Buckley Jr., who is already a long way more sophisticated than Heinlein and is still pretty simple-minded.

Rugged individualism also goes hand in hand with a strong faith in paternalism—albeit a tolerant and somewhat distant paternalism—and many otherwise sharp-witted libertarians seem to see nothing in the morality of a John Wayne Western to conflict with their views. Heinlein's paternalism is at heart the same as Wayne's and in the final analysis it is a kind of easy-going militarism favoured by the veteran professional soldier—the chain of command is complex—many adult responsibilities can be left to that chain as long as broad, but firmly enforced, rules from 'high up' are adhered to. Heinlein is Eisenhower Man and his views seem to me to be more pernicious than ordinary infantile back-to-the-land Christian communism, with its mysticism and hatred of technology. To be an anarchist, surely, is to reject authority but to accept self-discipline and community responsibility. To be a rugged individualist à la Heinlein and others is to be forever a child who must obey, charm and cajole to be tolerated by some benign, omniscient father: Rooster Cogburn shuffling his feet in front of a judge he respects for his office (but not necessarily himself) in *True Grit*.

An anarchist is not a wild child, but a mature, realistic adult who imposes laws upon himself and modifies them according to his experience of life, his interpretation of the world. He is a 'rebel', certainly, but he does not assume 'rebellious charm' in order to placate authority, which is in essence what the rebel heroes of all these genre stories do. There always comes the depressing point where Robin Hood doffs a respectful cap to King Richard, having clobbered the rival king. This sort of implicit paternalism is seen in high relief in the currently popular *Star Wars* which also promotes a somewhat disturbing anti-rationalism in its quasi-religious 'Force' which unites the Jedi Knights (are we back to Wellsian 'samurai' again?) and upon whose power they can draw, like some

holy brotherhood, some band of Knights Templar. *Star Wars* is a pure example of the genre (in that it is a compendium of other people's ideas) in its implicit structure—quasi-children fighting for a paternalistic (or maternalistic) authority who win through in the end and are praised, standing bashfully before the princess while medals are placed around their necks. They might as well be nooses.

Star Wars carries the characteristic paternalistic messages of almost all generic adventure fiction (may the Force never arrive on your doorstep at three o'clock in the morning) and has all the right characters. It raises 'instinct' above reason (fundamental to Nazi doctrine) and promotes a kind of sentimental romanticism attractive to the young and idealistic and protective of existing institutions. It is the essence of a genre that it will continue to promote certain implicit ideas even if the author is unconscious of them. In this case the audience also seems unconscious of them.

It was Alfred Bester who first attracted me to science fiction as such. I'd read some fantasy and Edgar Rice Burroughs before that, but I thought that if *The Stars My Destination* (also called *Tiger! Tiger!*) was SF, then this was the fiction for me. It took me some years to realize that Bester was one of the few exceptions. At the ending of *The Stars My Destination* the self-educated, working class, 'scum of the spaceways,' Gully Foyle, comes into possession of the substance known as PyrE, capable of detonating at a thought and probably destroying the solar system at very least. The plot revolved around the attempts of various powerful people to get hold of the stuff. Foyle has it. Various moral arguments or forceful persuasions are brought against him to make him give the stuff up to a 'responsible' agency. In the end he scatters the stuff to 'the mob' of the solar system. Here you are, he says, it's yours. It's your destiny. Do with it how you see fit.

This is one of the very, very few 'libertarian' SF novels I have ever read. That it was the first and turned me on to reading SF is probably the purest accident. If I hadn't read it, I very much doubt I should have read any more SF. It's a wonderful adventure story. It has a hero developing from a completely stupefied, illiterate hand on a spaceship to a brilliant and mature individual taking his revenge first on those who have harmed him and then gradually developing what you might call a 'political conscience.' I know of no other SF book which so thoroughly combines romance with an idealism almost wholly acceptable to me and it is probably significant that it enjoys only a relatively small success compared to, say, *Stranger in a Strange Land*.

Leaving aside the very worthy but to my mind dull and journalistic *The Dispossessed* by U.K. Le Guin, leaving aside my own books which I should like to think speak for the same ideas of liberty and self-reliance and mutual cooperation which Bester speaks for, it is quite hard for me to find many other examples of SF books which, as it were, 'promote' libertarian ideas. M. John Harrison is an anarchist and his books are full of anarchists—some of them very bizarre like the anarchist-aesthetes of *The Centauri Device*. Typical of the *New Worlds* school he could be described as an existential anarchist. There is Brian Aldiss with his *Barefoot in the Head* vision of an LSD 'bombed' Europe almost totally liberated and developing bizarre new customs. There are J.G. Ballard's 'terminal ironies' such as *The Atrocity Exhibition* and *Crash* and so on, which have brought criticisms of 'nihilism' against him. So little SF has fundamental human values, let alone libertarian ones, that one is hard put to find other examples. My own taste, I suppose, is sometimes at odds

with my political views. I admire Barrington J. Bayley, whose stories are often extremely abstract. One of the most enjoyable recently published is *The Soul of the Robot*, which discusses the nature of individual identity. Charles L. Harness is another favourite of mine. *The Rose*, in particular, lacks the simplifications of most SF, and *The Paradox Men* with its sense of the nature of Time, its thief hero, its ironic references to America Imperial, is highly entertaining. I also have a soft spot for C.M. Kornbluth, who to my mind had a rather stronger political conscience than he allowed himself, so that his stories are sometimes confused as he tried to mesh middle-American ideas with his own radicalism. One of my favourites (though structurally it's a bit weak) is *The Syndic* (about a society where a rather benign Mafia is paramount). Fritz Lieber is probably the best of all the American SF writers for his prose-style, his wit and his humanity, as well as his abiding contempt for authoritarianism, and *Gather, Darkness* is one of the best SF books

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