

THOSE WHO CAN DO

BRIAN MICKLETHWAIT



We in the Libertarian Alliance have long known that there was one publication series, to set beside all our Notes (Political, Economic, Historical, Sociological, Psychological, Religious, Atheist, etc.), Perspectives (Personal, Foreign Policy), Heritages, Reprints, Study Guides and Pamphlets, which was conspicuous by its absence. So here, at long last, is issue number one of **Libertarian Fictions**.

I assume that if you want to get something good going you should start doing it yourself, thus encouraging others by your example to join in, so I have written LF1 myself. The message of my little story is — it so happens — that if you want to get something good going you should start doing it yourself, thus encouraging others by your example to join in. Any libertarian who thinks he or she can do better is welcome to try, and I am confident that many will succeed, what with fiction (especially science fiction) being such a big part of the libertarian literary enterprise. All would-be Libertarian Fictions must (as with other LA publications) be long enough to cover two sides of A4, short enough to be stapled together rather than bound, broadly sympathetic to libertarian ideas, clearly typed or printed and preferably on computer disc as well. Or you could try using email.

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Libertarian Fictions No. 1

ISSN 1361-7761 ISBN 1 85637 322 3

An occasional publication of the Libertarian Alliance,
25 Chapter Chambers, Esterbrooke Street, London SW1P 4NN
www.libertarian.co.uk email: admin@libertarian.co.uk

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FOR LIFE, LIBERTY AND PROPERTY

A struggling writer called Eric, and Jack, his struggling literary agent, were sitting in MacDonald's one afternoon, trying to explain to each other what was going wrong.

"Why are you writers all so bloody miserable?" said Jack, mounting one of his hobby horses. "Everything I get, it's bloody moan moan moan. I want stuff which is heroic, not bloody miserable. I want attention grabbing beginnings, exciting middles, happy endings, dragon captures girl, boy kills dragon, boy gets girl. Most of my writers wouldn't know a bloody dragon if it burned their bloody face off, or if they did have a dragon the bloody dragon would bloody win. They'd turn it into some sort of miserable bloody protest or something."

"Women write happy stories," said Eric.

"Yes but they just make it up," said Jack contemptuously.

At that moment seven Disaffected Youths entered the MacDonald's and started to bite bites out of quarter pounders that weren't theirs, to blow cigarette smoke into faces, to tickle ladies under their chins rather roughly, and to commit other similar offences.

The place was crowded but everyone sat still and did nothing, hoping they wouldn't be picked on next. It was the kind of situation that causes left of centre economists to call for state intervention to solve the problem of the "prisoner's dilemma", the dilemma being that whoever makes the first move will be on his own, hoping for the cooperation of others but overwhelmingly liable not to get it. Public opinion in the MacDonald's agreed unanimously with the economists.

“Where” everyone thought “are the Police?” Nowhere to be seen of course.

However, Eric the struggling writer now rose slowly to his feet and confronted the Disaffected Youths.

“Go away!” he said, in a stupendously loud voice.

Amazed silence. Then the Senior Disaffected Youth asked Eric who he was talking to. This was obvious enough, but it was all the Senior Disaffected Youth could think of.

“To you”, replied Eric, “and to these other louts. To whom did you think, you numbskull?”

The Senior Disaffected Youth replied that Eric must be out of his mind, and there was a murmur of agreement from his comrades. What on earth did this idiot think he was achieving? Disaffected Youth Three asked why Eric had chosen to interfere. Disaffected Youth Four signified his wish also to learn this. They all genuinely wanted to know.

“I am collecting material for my novel!” said Eric in a voice worthy of Lord Olivier in one of his Shakespeare films.

“Suppose” said Disaffected Youth Seven, a small person, “we were to smash you face in.”

“Fine!” exclaimed Eric, shrugging elaborately. “That would be very ...” he paused dramatically “... novelworthy!!!”

More silence.

Some of the Disaffected Youths sought clarification. What did “novelworthy” mean? Others of them simply wanted to beat Eric up at once.

But the Senior Disaffected Youth told them to wait. Not for the first time in the history of human conflict, an overwhelmingly superior force delayed the obliteration of its far weaker enemy, on the grounds that this could as easily be done later rather than sooner, and that in the meantime there was some fun to be had.

“This gentleman here” Eric continued, pointing at the appalled Jack, “is my literary agent. He wants stories with drama, action, excitement, heroism. Such episodes as this are just what the doctor ordered.”

Disaffected Youth Three said that Eric would soon be needing a doctor.

“Fine” said Eric. “Doctors figure prominently in literature.” He had in mind Doctor Zhivago.

“I know!” he said, interrupting himself imperiously and holding up his hand for more silence. “I may not survive this absurd confrontation. I may die. If I do die, it comforts me to think that your lives also will take a turn for the worse.”

There was a subdued cheer from a faraway table. The Disaffected Youths sensed that, despite the ab-

sence of state intervention, these people were somehow being lead by this bizarre person out of their prisoner’s dilemma. As if to prove them right, and just as the Disaffected Youths were about to beat Eric senseless, a fat little girl emerged from behind the serving counter with a large pan.

“Get out of here” she screamed, “or I’ll throw this boiling oil over you!”

There were several things wrong with this plan, the major one being that the oil was lukewarm, not boiling at all.

“You wouldn’t dare,” said Disaffected Youth Two. This was just what the girl was herself uncertain about, but luckily for her the vital shift in what the then USSR would have called the “correlation of forces” now arrived.

Disaffected Youth Five yelled: “You do and we’ll fuckin’ smash your tits off!”

“Shut your fucking mouth” snarled the Senior Disaffected Youth through clenched teeth, but it was too late. Now it was the MacDonald’s diners who were murmuring menacingly. They forgot about not getting involved and started to wallow noisily in self-righteous anger. At which point Jack, who saw how things were going and who was starting to smell a nice short story, opened fire on the Disaffected Youths with a plastic container of tomato ketchup, and enough of the other diners joined in with other fast foods to stop Eric or anyone else getting seriously hurt. But such was the mess that when the Police did finally show up they immediately radioed for ambulances, and the description of the incident which appeared on the front page of the local paper the following morning, complete with two colour photographs, was ludicrously exaggerated.

By the time the excitement died down, Eric was in charge of a freelance security guard company. At first he combined this with still trying to be a writer, but his earnings from guarding persons and their property made the occasional sums of money he got from Jack look puny. Every so often Eric’s work would erupt with episodes of extreme drama, and he heard all kinds of tales from his new cronies. But he didn’t like to betray confidences, and soon the only writing he did was when supplying reports to his clients or doing advertisements. These were always well written, and often rather inspiring.

Jack also gave up the literary life and got a job working for Eric. After he had learned to curb his bad language he settled in well. Disaffected Youths Two, Four and Six also got jobs with Eric.

The fat little girl became a less fat young woman. When Eric proposed marriage to her she accepted, and they both lived happily ever after.

The Senior Disaffected Youth also applied to Eric for a job, but was turned down. He became a writer.