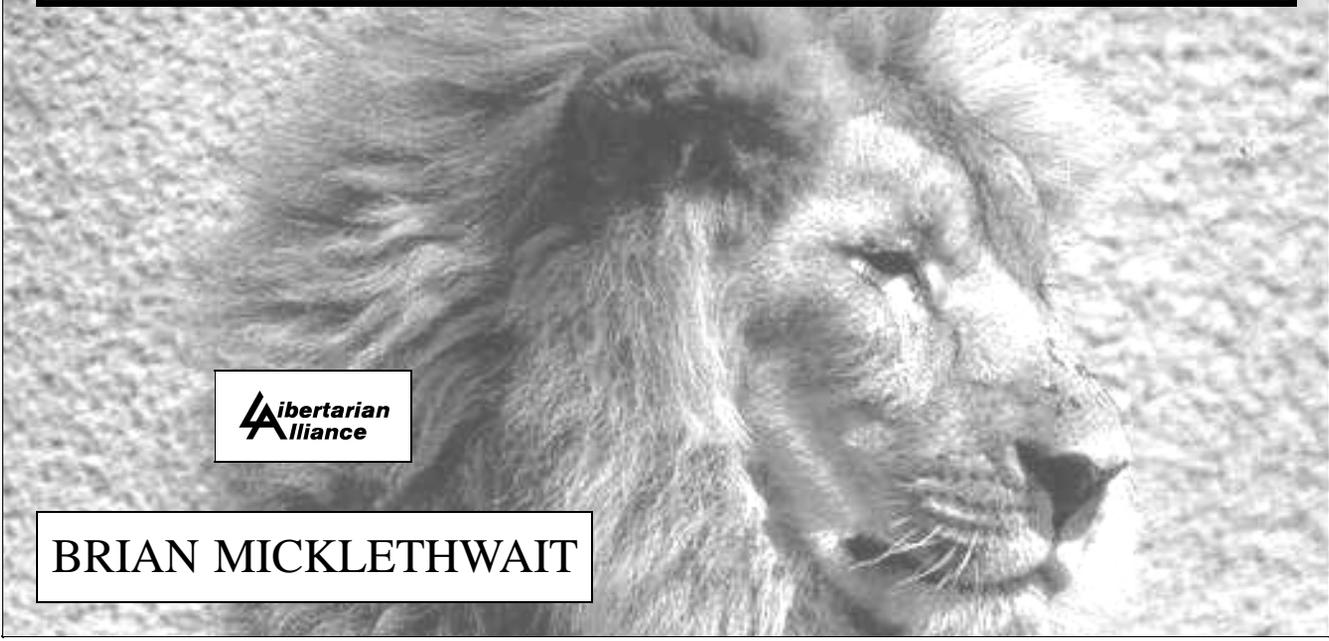


THE LION'S SHARE



**Libertarian
Alliance**

BRIAN MICKLETHWAIT

INTRODUCTORY NOTE — December 2209

Wandering about in what I still like to call my hard disc, I stumbled upon the following unpublished and when written unpublishable biographical essay. I wrote it more than a hundred years ago, about a man still regarded as one of the great giants of the Happy Times. The piece is now hopelessly out of date in its gleeful optimism about humanity and its affairs, but has become rather contemporary in its modified debunking of someone hitherto considered entirely wonderful. How times change. Enjoy, if you still know how.

As soon as he was old enough to think about such things, Starshine McKane (1971-2096), the product of a casual pop festival liaison, decided to be a murderer. At first he assumed that this meant operating in the private sector. But the murderers with the big body counts all worked for governments, or better still were in charge of governments, and when they murdered people they called it history. Starshine contemplated the slaughters of the twentieth century and concluded that even they were insufficient. He wanted to kill every other human being and seize the whole world for himself. How could that be accomplished?

Starshine found his answer in Marxism. Capitalism was, then as always, going about its business, and Starshine dismissed with

contempt the idea that Karl Marx's revolution had already occurred, in some such place as Russia or China. Mankind was clearly still enacting the capitalistic dramas described in the *Communist Manifesto*. Observing his unhappy mother and her various unhappy husbands, lovers, friends, colleagues and employers, Starshine concluded that the capitalists were indeed getting richer and fewer, that the masses were getting poorer and more numerous, and that world-wide revolution would in due course occur, just as Karl Marx said.

Starshine decided to become a capitalist, but not one of Karl Marx's regular capitalists, galloping in golden blinkers to their doom. Starshine would equip himself with weapons of mass destruction. Come the glorious day of supposed proletarian liberation, he, Starshine McKane, forewarned by Karl Marx that revolution was imminent, would slaughter the rest of humanity, now conveniently destitute, and take sole possession of the world and all its wealth.

So it was that Starshine McKane became a capitalist of the most ruthless and exploitative kind, and in due course colossally rich.

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Yet no matter how nastily Starshine behaved, no matter how many rival businesses he swallowed up or destroyed, no matter how little he paid his employees or how hard he made them work, he couldn't stop everyone loving him. He snarled and raged at his employees and associates, and they found his clarity of thought helpful and his contempt for managerial fads and niceties endearing. He demanded profit, profit and more profit, and everyone cheered. He exploited everything and everyone he had anything to do with, and the world couldn't get enough of him or of the ever swelling torrent of products and services that he offered it.

The eventual revolution and his chosen part in it gave Starshine other preoccupations besides profit, but this only made him more interesting to work for. In project after project he spent bigger and for longer than any simple lust for money could ever



Libertarian Fictions No. 3

ISSN 1361-7761 ISBN 1 85637 491 2

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

have justified. Commentators praised his strategic vision, and yet more clever people begged to work for him.

Come the revolution, Starshine would need weapons of mass destruction which he could operate on his own, not the cumbersome unanimous contraptions that the biggest governments then preferred. This meant advanced electronics. So did Starshine's concern for how the world would still function properly after he had killed everyone in it but himself, because then he would need lots of smart robots. Robots aside, his plan of post-revolutionary nirvana was that he, Starshine McKane, would live alone, which he didn't believe would be a problem, and for ever, which clearly might be. The resulting medical advances made Starshine several more fortunes, and the air of nastiness and lack of sentiment that he brought to his medical enterprises only made everything happen quicker and better.

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At first, Starshine assumed that old-fashioned capitalist viciousness would suffice to provoke revolution. But as the years went by and revolution showed no sign of erupting, Starshine decided that it would have to be made to happen despite itself. What, he pondered darkly, was to be done?

He investigated all the ways in which the death of humanity might materialise, or be made to materialise, unaided by any prelude of mass immiseration. Plague looked promising, a subject he already knew about through his armaments activities. More medical advances followed. That the environment might stop getting better and suddenly become much worse was a proposition that had, then as always, numerous advocates. Starshine investigated such things as global warming and global cooling, catastrophic climate changes and the depletion or excess of various vital or noxious atmospheric gases. He brooded on giant machines for suddenly exacerbating such problems.

Being surrounded by billions of contented people, Starshine dressed up his various projects of mass slaughter as the opposite. He disguised his explorations into how to cause plagues as efforts to prevent them. As he struggled to divert meteorites into the path travelled by the earth, he pretended that the point was to induce meteorites that were about to hit the earth to pass it by. He disguised his passion for the robots with which he planned to replace everyone as a mere enthusiasm for manufacturing, for unmanned space exploration and for computer add-ons.

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Starshine's desire personally to survive his revolution was the weak link in all his chains of annihilation, the soft underbelly of his multiple monstrosities. No sooner had he devised some new scheme of mass doom disguised as mass salvation, than he hit the problem of how he personally could stay alive, and in the comfort he was becoming ever more accustomed to. A plague which also killed him wouldn't do at all. If he shut down all the internets, how would he then control everything? If he poisoned the earth's atmosphere how would he breathe freely? If the earth was smashed to bits by a meteorite, where would he then live? And how could he transport enough of the earth's fruits and mechanisms to his new home?

As the years went by, Starshine watched his various subterfuges unfold as everything that was publicly claimed for them. His underlings succeeded in diverting three quite threatening meteorites, using the explosive techniques which only they had perfected. Starshine utterly failed to ruin the world's climate. On the contrary, we owe to him the climate stabilisation systems that have done so much to abate the environmental pessimism that prevailed a century ago. He unleashed no plagues upon us, but did save us from a couple. The first was slow and small and hardly noticed. The second killed enough people in the four days of its public career to enthrone Starshine McKane as mankind's saviour, one of the all time great men of history.

His underlings loved it. They had been told that they would be saving humanity, and they did save it, several times over. Starshine thought about telling his underlings of their real purposes, but feared that if did they would rebel.

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Even Starshine's armaments business let him down. He cared nothing for hand-guns, clubs, swords or knives, in other words for the weapons which have traditionally killed the most people. He sold instant doomsday machines to any political organisation willing to pay what he charged. Inevitably, the threats then exchanged by politicians leaked out to the mere people.

But alas for Starshine's hopes that his high tech weapons would cause mayhem. All unknowingly he had stumbled upon that holy grail of the statesman's art, world peace. Guns and knives scare people, but they don't scare politicians of any importance, tucked up safely in their fortresses. But Starshine's rockets, bombs, beams and bugs terrified politicians everywhere, and thanks to Starshine, every political enterprise of any substance now had these devilish devices. This caused politicians everywhere to avoid quarrelling too fiercely with one another, to treat each other with respect and to listen carefully to each other's ideas and plans. By the time they'd finished being polite to each other, they had pretty much become the same combined operation, and were always careful to welcome new politicians into their ranks as and when they stepped forward.

For the first time in recorded human history, entire years passed without anybody dying in a war, anywhere. And Starshine's arms makers became less and less reluctant to point to the connection between what they were doing and what the world's soldiers were not now doing.

More and more of humanity's deaths became deaths of old age. And what with Starshine's intention to achieve personal immortality and his willingness to throw huge sums of money at that problem, old meant older and older for all of us, as the years went by. Humanity flourished as never before.

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Starshine became ever more frustrated. He passed seventy without having killed a single person, and having saved billions several times over, and enriched them, and delighted them, and kept them alive ever longer and more comfortably. What the hell was happening?

Instead of blaming himself for the implausibility of his plans, and for the fact that learning how to do good and learning how to do harm are often hard to distinguish, Starshine blamed his fellow capitalists. If they had only done their duty in the manner ordained by Karl Marx, revolution would surely have followed. Capitalists, he decided, were too damned nice. Many of them actually believed in paying taxes, and almost all of them believed in their workers being happy.

So Starshine sought out propagandists and political fixers and manipulators who believed in capitalism in its most brutal, most liberated and most tax-free form, and supported them with money and political clout, both of which he had in increasing quantities. Surely this would bring back Dickensian levels of poverty and exploitation. If these idiots couldn't provoke a revolution, reasoned Starshine, nobody could.

He was right. Nobody could. Starshine's catspaws of capitalism proved no better at antagonising the masses than Starshine himself. I know. I was one of these catspaws.

We pro-capitalists shone with exactly the sort of enthusiasm for our own opinions and indifference to the practical consequences of them being generally applied that Starshine wanted. Having been flogging away for years, complaining about everything and getting nowhere, we told Starshine that there should be giant leaps towards liberty (our word for his dark imaginings), not timid little steps. People would only agree to being denied their

government grants, pensions, tax exemptions and regulatory privileges, we told him, if we simultaneously cut their tax obligations to nothing, and allowed capitalism to let rip, thus making everyone too busy to remember old injustices. In fact, we said, what we really need are entirely new, no-tax countries — of the sort we ourselves, time and again, had ignominiously and often fraudulently failed to start.

Scenting turmoil on a global scale, Starshine eagerly agreed, and doled out bounty and office space to the most radical and irresponsible of our number. Being big in armaments, Starshine had become an expert threatener and briber, charmer and terroriser of politicians. He purchased all the small and failing governments that he and we could lay our hands on, and told the horrified politicians of the rest of the world to allow us a free hand. In his new territories, Starshine enacted property laws of merciless clarity, so that the masses could have what little they still owned bought from them by Starshine for further trifling sums. Finally, some serious immiseration!

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As all the world knows, New Athens, as these places soon became known, were Starshine McKane's biggest success, that is to say his biggest failure. Starshine's scattered fleet of stateless states prospered, expanded and multiplied as no states ever had before, and Starshine had purchased enough property from the original owners to make him the most successful property developer in history. He was hailed as a second Pericles.

Poor immigrants aren't usually popular with their new neighbours. But poor newcomers to New Athens were usually charged an entry fee, and then further fees for their first few years as New Athenians, the proceeds — after the travel agents and sweat shop owners had taken their cuts — being distributed among existing New Athenians. The would-be exploited masses of the world poured in, greeted by bunting and rock bands at the airports. Richer and cleverer people also flowed in, as did political and religious malcontents of all kinds. Starshine rubbed his hands and waited for the mayhem to begin.

Many Old Worlders predicted the Dickensian squalor that Starshine himself was hoping for. Often they claimed to have found it, and with some justice. But other Old Worlders watching these *exposés* on their televisions couldn't help noticing that the newest and poorest New Athenians, while acknowledging their present misfortunes, would also talk of their hopes for the future, at which point they would break into huge grins.

The New Athenian bourgeoisie — who included many ex-malcontents — proved to be fiercely patriotic and amazingly public-spirited. Their desire to impress the world and each other, combined with about five percent of their rocketing incomes, proved more than enough to look after any deserving poor who truly couldn't manage to climb aboard the upward social escalator that was the New Athenian economy.

As for undeserving poor, there didn't seem to be any. As soon as you arrived in New Athens, people would beg you to work and to live somewhere better. You got a better job in a newer factory or on a nicer building site, or keeping an eye on a playground, or watching security camera TV sets, or serving sandwiches, or parading about in an animal costume, and soon, they were paying you what doctors and lawyers used to earn in your Old World country. You were on your way.

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In the richer Old World countries a very poor person couldn't get a job unless he had somewhere to live and wash, and couldn't afford somewhere to live and wash unless he had a job. In New Athens you could wash both yourself and your clothes in seconds by stepping into a Starshine Electric electro-shower, if necessary using one of the many public electro-showers provided by those generous bourgeois show-offs.

These devices were at first banned in many of the Old Countries, allegedly because of health hazards but actually because of opposition from the water companies and plumbing unions. True, the much publicised teething troubles associated with these now wondrous devices were rather gruesome. Several people were — approximately speaking — microwaved. One young female member of the British royal family famously stepped into an electro-shower wearing only one of the family tiaras and the tiara exploded, doing damage to the poor girl's head which in all earlier times would have killed her. As it was, saved by new medical methods similar to those embodied in the electro-shower itself, the girl made a full recovery, with her mental faculties, such as they were and so far as anyone could judge, unimpaired. The process of working out why these legendary jewels had disintegrated so dramatically yielded intellectual treasures worth far more. After a few years of New Athenians calling Old Worlders the "great unwashed", all objections to electro-hygiene melted away.

I mention electro-showers because this and other similarly miraculous New Athenian gadgets made the pursuit of happiness easier throughout the world. New Athenian education exploded, being both more fun for the pupils and more effective at teaching them things. New Athenian architecture mutated from efficiently ugly to magnificent. Other New Athens businesses offered toll-road, railway and airport management, and cheap medical care which cured you and made you live longer. New Athenian finance companies supplied pensions and other savings products which reflected the new medical realities. New Athens also abounded with efficient private armies and police forces, which Starshine had of course particularly encouraged, with — need I add? — mortifyingly peaceful and law abiding consequences.

If you were running an Old World government, trying to square the circle of rising public spending and dwindling tax revenue, you could now shut down whichever state enterprise you were agonising about and allow New Athenian equivalents to open up local branches in your country. You didn't have to rely on failed politicians or sleazy share speculators to do the jobs in question. You didn't have to coax home-grown capitalists into life any more. You just lay back and let capitalism wash over you.

Before New Athens began, the world's problem was not that politicians quarrelled too much, but that they agreed too much. Pessimists speculated that global economic growth would soon be ended by world peace. "The thieves are all in the same gang" was how I and my friends put it. Come New Athens, the world's most important people went back to agreeing only about not killing one another. Starshine had hoped that there would be a huge war, but everyone was too scared and too fond of their luxuries for that. We ideologists traded our arguments and our insults. The world's many religions, new and old, did likewise. For everyone else, the business of the world was now business and its pleasure was pleasure.

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Life got better and better. Humanity fanned out into the solar system, whooping and singing. People everywhere, even the stay-at-homes, started to behave better, and to smile at and be more polite to their neighbours. Crime figures nosedived everywhere, seemingly of their own accord.

The twentieth century's art — including its popular commercial art — suddenly looked absurdly grim and dated: the dirty, lawless streets; the constant explosions; the innumerable dirges about failed romances. Cheer up, you miseries, it didn't happen! The official, subsidised art of those times which actually boasted of not making sense now looks silly even to art critics.

We used to be glad to die as soon as we did. Now, we can hope that by the time we get to two hundred longevity engineering will have added a couple more centuries to our lifespans, and rising. We're going to live for ever! We have become as gods!

Starshine McKane got the lion's share of the credit for all this. Having saved mankind from wars and plagues and thunderbolts, he had then saved the poor of the world from poverty, and almost everyone else from the economic water-treading that had formerly been their fate. Humanity was amazed that, in a mere handful of decades, one man could do so much for so many.

Starshine's refusal ever to appear or to speak in public put the final coat of varnish on his already uniquely resplendent public image. Told nothing by Starshine, writers and their readers wrote and believed what they wanted to believe, that Starshine McKane was a saint and a genius, the most perfect person ever.

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Eventually not even Starshine himself could convince anyone who mattered of his real intentions towards the rest of humanity. I got to know Starshine during what proved to be his last years, and bit by bit he told me the story that I am now telling you. I once hoped that I might persuade the world of the truth of what you are now reading, and I have persuaded a few people to take this version of Starshine's life seriously enough to try to dig a bit further. But I'm not optimistic. Too many persons who pride themselves on their ability to see things as they are have placed their bets on the heroic version of Starshine McKane's life and work to admit that actually things were otherwise. I recall Starshine raving away one day to some media people, about how he hated us all and wanted us all to die, die, all, all. A famous novelist, slumming for an Old World glossy magazine, muttered that the poor guy was obviously losing it, and went off to write his heroic story just like any newsnet hack.

What people can't accept is that a man of such obvious cleverness and such superhuman accomplishments could have been so nasty as to want the kill everybody except himself, and so foolish as to fail completely.

Starshine was immensely clever in his ability to seize hold of a simple plan and from then on to tolerate no objections to it, from himself or from anyone else. Like many men of action, he kept things simple. Concerning things that weren't as important to him as his plan for an upside down Marxist revolution, his judgments could be very quick and very shrewd. Scientists and technologists who collaborated with him spoke again and again of his extraordinary ability to ask the vital questions and get to the heart of the matter in minutes. Feeling himself to be permanently cut off from the rest of humanity — the world's ultimate *émigré*, as it were — he was able to judge the truth or falsehood of everyone else's cherished ideas with utter detachment.

But Starshine would allow nobody — not himself, not anyone else — to question his own deepest obsessions. If by clever you mean a willingness constantly to revise judgments, in the manner of a chairbound reveller in the world's complexities like me, then Starshine was not clever. He never admitted to intellectual error. For him, failure was only failure on the part of his collaborators or subordinates. His many brilliant ideas proved to him that his many bad ideas were brilliant also. Once Starshine had decided that freedom and freedom's midwives, solid property laws and low-to-zero taxes, would cause disaster, that was that.

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In such thoughts Starshine McKane was not alone. Lots of his contemporaries used to think like this. Just like Karl Marx before them, Starshine and his like-minded contemporaries had seen an apocalyptic vision of revolutionary slaughter, followed by another vision of heaven on earth, and that was how things were going to be.

As to why Starshine hated humanity, I think I can shed light on this also. In these happy times, malignancy like Starshine's demands elaborate psychological explanation. Only kindness seems natural. But having lived as an adult through the years of Starshine's youth (I was born in 1947) I can assure all younger

readers of this that nastiness with no apparent motive was then very common. An extraordinarily large proportion of the crimes committed around the time of Starshine's youth seemed to have been done for the pure hell of it, with no other gain in mind beyond the primitive pleasure of causing hurt and harm.

All sorts of people would talk quite calmly of millions of people dying horrible deaths, without anyone else considering such talk odd or unusual.

I recall an afternoon television show about a man who kept lions, who had got into trouble when one of his lions had killed its custodian. The lion owner assured the television viewers that he had now installed a new safety regime, and that it was now far less likely that anybody would be attacked by any of the lions. Yet later in the same conversation this same man, seemingly kind enough and genuinely saddened by the circumstances which had placed him in front of the television cameras, said that the earth was overcrowded and that if about a third of all humans were killed by disease or war or some other catastrophe, that would be a fine thing. There would otherwise be no room in the world for lions, presumably. I know it's hard to believe now, but such pronouncements used then to be quite common. We liked one another less in those days.

We now live in simpler and happier times. People now want to be nice, and they are. Current ideas about how to help others are themselves, on the whole, helpful. But when Starshine was growing up, things were different. The twentieth century's leading personalities were by no means all of them the movie villains that they're now presented as. Many of them were trying desperately to do good, and on a huge scale. Their problem was that their notions about how to do good did harm.

And then there was Starshine McKane. He wanted to do harm on a huge scale. But because he laboured under the same delusions as so many of his contemporaries, he didn't know how to do harm. He did good.

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There is much dispute about why Starshine McKane, who seemed to have everything to live for, nevertheless allowed himself to die. I've read the medical accounts, but they only say how he died, not why. This piece of writing tells you why. Starshine McKane died of a broken heart. He finally accepted that his murderous plans for the rest of humanity were not working and could never work, and he gave up the ghost.

The ever more simple daily procedures for rejuvenation — your personal mix of pills and a short spell in your personal med-shower — became more and more burdensome to him, repulsive even. He more than anyone else alive had devised these amazing rituals, and they became for him a daily reminder of all the happiness he had so reluctantly bestowed upon his fellow humans, and of his utter failure to kill not just everyone else, but anyone else. On March 11th 2096 Starshine McKane died, of unrequited hatred, four days after a particularly unendurable orgy of solar-system-wide public adulation of him associated with his one hundred and twenty fifth birthday.

POSTSCRIPT — October 2209:

That takes me back. Do I need to convince anyone now that people exist such as I say Starshine McKane was, and have ambitions like his ambitions?

As we now know, if McKane had only hung on for a few more decades he would have lived to see disasters engulf the human race that were almost as frightful as what he had wanted for it, in sheer numbers even more frightful. As we also know, these disasters were often survived by tiny gangs of clever or lucky humans in the same kinds of ways that Starshine McKane had himself dreamed of surviving his own imaginary holocausts. But these are other stories.