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Better than "The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy"

A review of: "Icecubes in Rockets: A Future History of Human Folly"

- includes an essay on "The Hazards of Immortality"

by Robert L. Lee

232 pages

Price: \$20/- (plus \$3/- postage and handling for mail orders) - includes a floppy disk with annotations to the novel and an essay on sustainable energy

Available by mail (cheque or money order) from: Iconoclast Press Australia,

PO Box 4027, Eight Mile Plains, Queensland 4113

or **off the shelf at** The Medical Book Centre, 27 Douglas St, Milton, Brisbane

Excerpts may be read at: www.rationalist.com.au (issue 67)

This small book packs a huge wallop. Almost every page elucidates a profound idea or challenging concept (but sometimes may just contain a bad joke). The style is not ponderous but tends to be, as the author describes, somewhat flippant and whimsical. There is plenty of humorous wordplay. Despite the high level of thoughtfulness demanded of the reader, the story, or rather stories, are easy to follow and the delivery of scientific, sociological, economic, historical or political information is not at all dry - in fact events unfold in a fluid and entertaining manner. Readers will find themselves being educated along the way almost without realising it.

For instance, we all "know" that biodiversity is important for ecological systems, but do we know the specific reasons why? The vital importance of biodiversity is succinctly explained in a dialogue between two protagonists sitting in spaceships orbiting Mars - a scene which is absolutely relevant and which fits neatly like a jigsaw piece into the integrity of the entire novel.

Although this is a work of fiction, it explores the many foibles of Mankind including greed, self interest, political manipulation of the truth and lack of vision for the future, particularly by those in positions of influence.

It gives insight into the power wielded by the petrochemical industry in the US establishment and the lengths they may go to protect their financial wellbeing. Their views dominate the compliant commercial media. Consequently, superior alternative energy solutions are suppressed and an energy crisis supervenes which is dealt with in a clumsy manner.

This book expounds many issues facing Humanity at the present time and warns of dire consequences if we do not seek sensible solutions now. It should awaken within all of us the sense of urgency to deal with current problems before it is too late and reinforces the saying, "Power corrupts and Absolute Power corrupts absolutely."

The author does not disguise his left wing liberal leanings. Similarly inclined readers will find themselves nodding in agreement and dismay as they turn each page, muttering "how true, how true". Right wing readers will probably hate it, as the book unreservedly ridicules and condemns the American Republican Neoconservatives as liars, hypocrites and war mongers.

Despite the plethora of disparate weighty subjects (human immortality, petroleum depletion, sustainable energy, American hegemony, the power of Corporations, the rise of China, problems of interplanetary travel, space colonisation, the "demonic male primate" hypothesis, global mass extinction, brainwashing of cult members etc.) and apparently disjointed scenarios (mini-chapters which the author calls "snippets"), a coherent picture ultimately emerges. All is fully explained in due course and everything holds together in a satisfying and unexpected dramatic conclusion.

To say more will give away the unpredictable twists and turns which take place in the two main storylines. You may never look at shit the same way again.

Suffice to say that this is a Science Fiction Tragicomedy Romance which is utterly relevant to our contemporary world.

A cautionary tale indeed.

Associate Professor Frank Lepre

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