



GODS OF GEEKDOM

L. NEIL SMITH

L. Neil Smith is well up there on the geek scale—at least a 14. While there are plenty of moderately obscure science fiction authors out there, and a large proportion of science fiction authors explore extremes of social and or political ideals, Smith is nearly unique in the way his writing explores anarchy and other extremes of libertarianism as an ideal. The extremes of idiocy, stupidity, racism, hatred, hypocrisy, and other bile spewed by those who scrambled to the front of the recent surge in libertarian politics in the United States has made it extremely difficult to engage the conceptual and social thought that underlies libertarianism. Make no mistake; Smith is well out there on the fringes, particularly on the issue of guns. In fact, when it comes to guns, his rhetoric is about as extreme as it gets. However, unlike just about anyone else you might hear talking about weapon ownership or any of the other issues associated with libertarianism, Smith has explored the social and political dynamics of extremes of libertarianism and weapon

ownership and has shared that thought in his novels. In doing so, he has also provided a unique insight into the mind of the extreme libertarian, largely driven by fear, naïveté, and a deep-seated distrust of structurally constituted forms of power and authority. There is also a profound failure to understand that many of the restrictions on individual actions that libertarians despise also, or sometimes primarily, limit the powerful and wealthy as much if not more than the heroic individuals in Smith's stories.

Smith's novels show us many values that might be enhanced by escaping governed (or overgoverned) contexts, such as independence of thought and personal responsibility. Still, even though he is clearly advocating near anarchy as an ideal, his novels also expose the limits of libertarian ideals. In his novels, many of the things we ask of government are still there. They have been shifted to social norms or they are enforced by ad hoc collective activities, but they are still there.