

Full Asylum

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Full Asylum is the debut novel written by libertarian author Michael Isenberg and published in 2012 by Monteferro Press. The story takes place in a not-too-distant future when the economy has crashed (again) and the Nanny State is out of control. Against this background, software engineer Gimbel O'Hare's obsession with spy movies leads him on the trail of a dangerous — and possibly imaginary — conspiracy to steal a presidential election and fundamentally transform America. Although a comedy, the novel treats many serious conservative themes, including the effects of government intervention on the economy and the relationship between freedom and excellence.^[1]

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Plot Summary

Full Asylum tells the story of Gimbel O'Hare, a talented code-breaker whose career is derailed when the government bans the encryption software on which he's working. Although his employer, Byte Yourself Software, is able to transfer him to another division, Gimbel finds that his new job doesn't challenge him. In addition, the politically correct culture of his new division grates on him, his boss is out to get him, the Department of Justice has him under surveillance, and one of his colleagues is suing him for sexual harassment. Gimbel takes refuge in spy movies; his particular obsession is Jon Dunn, secret agent Beta-11. As the stress on Gimbel builds and his obsession deepens, he starts to believe that he *is* Jon Dunn and that he must save the country from a supervillain known as "The Attorney General." Gimbel's final confrontation with the Attorney General comes when he breaks into the Department of Justice with the help of a diversion: a dozen escaped psychiatric patients in hospital gowns and slipper socks, all of whom think they're Jon Dunn, attack the building.

A subplot involves Cheri Tarte, a sexy professional wrestler. Having angered her boss, Cheri is prohibited from wrestling and is instead required to use her trash talking skills to promote recycling and vegetarianism.

A second subplot concerns the making of a Jon Dunn movie. The director struggles to create one simple and memorable stunt, but his team doesn't understand the difference between overbearing computer graphics and actual fun.^[1]

Conservative Themes

The primary theme of *Full Asylum* is the relationship between excellence and freedom. Tina Lee, the CEO of Byte Yourself, explains the connection. To excel, she says, “you have to have the freedom to do something different. You have to have the freedom to take the risk that something that hasn’t been tried before will work. Sometimes you have to have the freedom to be the fool that rushes in where angels fear to tread.” She deplors America’s dwindling liberty and the rise of a society that tells its citizens what to eat, what to do with their garbage, what health insurance they have to buy, how much to pay their employees, and what jokes they may tell.^[2]

Isenberg argues that when people are not permitted to excel — when the government substitutes its judgment for their own as to the best use of their time and resources — the economy suffers. A poor job market and an epidemic of homelessness are the backdrop for *Full Asylum*. In one scene, Gimbel discusses economics amid the ruins of a once-fashionable mall. “If people on their own pick the optimal outcome,” he says, “then some other outcome the government picks for them has to be less than optimal. The government can’t create wealth; all it can do is move wealth around. The more wealth it moves, the farther things get from the optimal distribution.”^[3]

Jon Dunn, of course, excels at everything. Gimbel’s obsession with him is due, in part, to being prevented from excelling in his own career. Being forced into mediocrity takes its toll psychologically. This theme of thwarted ambition is reflected in Cheri Tarte’s plotline, along with the stories of the escaped psychiatric patients. As Tina Lee puts it, “we built a society where there is no place to excel except the lunatic asylum.”^[4]

Liberalism is represented by the character Isaac Ross. Isaac is a competitor of Byte Yourself Software who makes his money by trading on his connections with the government. He believes that “a truck driver does not have the enlightenment to decide, for example, the best health care plan or the best way to fund his or her retirement. A software engineer does not have the compassion to ensure that society’s wealth is spread in a fair and equitable manner. Only a naturally enlightened and compassionate person is suited to be the brains of a healthy society.”^[5] As a liberal, Isaac believes he is the person who should be making decisions on behalf of everyone else and that he shouldn’t “be constrained by the rules set down for lesser people.” In spite of his pretense of compassion, he is condescending and vindictive towards the people who work for him.

Parody of the Nanny State runs throughout the book. Mandatory workplace calisthenics, bans on soft drinks and junk food, recycling, and sexual harassment laws are all targets of satire.

"I show what America will look like if we re-elect Barack Obama and continue on the path he has set for us," says Isenberg. "The issues this year are the same as they were in 1964, when Ronald Reagan asked us 'whether we believe in our capacity for self-government or whether we abandon the American Revolution and confess that a little intellectual elite in a far distant capital can plan our lives for us better than we can plan them ourselves.'"^[6]

Critical Reception

The initial reception of *Full Asylum* was overwhelmingly positive. Christine Morabito, President of Greater Boston Tea Party called it “*Atlas Shrugged* with professional wrestlers.”^[6] Other reviewers compared it to *1984*, *Dilbert*, and *The George Burns and Gracie Allen Show*.^{[7][8]}

Trivia

- Secret agent Jon Dunn was named after the ornithologist Jon L. Dunn, co-author of *Warblers*. Isenberg

saw *Warblers* in a bookstore next to *Birds of the West Indies* by James Bond. The latter book was the source of the name of Ian Fleming's secret agent 007.

- The characters Tina Lee, Miss Maxwell, and Desmond McCoy were named after the actors who played their counterparts in the early James Bond films: Bernard Lee, Lois Maxwell, and Desmond Llewelyn.
- In the world depicted in *Full Asylum*, liberals have erased all traces of the Republican Party. Monuments to Republican presidents such as Hoover Dam, Reagan National Airport, the Theodore Roosevelt Memorial Bridge, and the Lincoln Memorial have been renamed.
- The psychiatrist Dr. Pollan was based on Polonius from Hamlet. According to Isenberg, “After I wrote the scene in chapter 12 in which a doctor explains to concerned parents the cause of their son’s madness, it occurred to me that the situation was so reminiscent of Act 2, Scene 2 of Hamlet that I couldn’t not rewrite (and rename) Dr. Pollan based on Polonius.”^[9]

References

- ↑ ^{1.0} ^{1.1} Michael Isenberg, *Full Asylum*, (Boston: Monteferro Press, 2012).
- ↑ Isenberg 2012, pp. 310-311.
- ↑ Isenberg 2012, p. 251.
- ↑ Isenberg, 2012, p.311.
- ↑ Isenberg 2012, p. 129.
- ↑ ^{6.0} ^{6.1} “New Novel, Full Asylum, Delves into the Real Issues of 2012”, *Red Mass Group*, last modified June 18, 2012, <http://www.redmassgroup.com/diary/14911/new-novel-full-asylum-delves-into-the-real-issues-of-2012>.
- ↑ Cristina M. Crawford, “A genre unto itself”, *Amazon.com*, last modified June 3, 2012, <http://www.amazon.com/review/R3MHM3J31QGM69>.
- ↑ “Clever and fun!”, *Amazon.com*, last modified June 3, 2012, <http://www.amazon.com/review/R1J6Y66D5DCSXH>.
- ↑ Isenberg 2012, p. 372.

External links

Full Asylum (<http://www.FullAsylum.com>) *Official Site*

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- This page was last modified on 18 July 2012, at 18:57.