



PARADISE GARDENS

SUSAN I. WEINSTEIN

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Paradise Gardens by Susan I. Weinstein

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PREFACE TO THE NEW EDITION

It was the age of Reagan, 1980s, when I began *Paradise Gardens*. I had just read a book on how capitalism evolved from feudalism and was living in “Morning in America.” I began to imagine capitalism devolving into a modern corporatized feudalism, as a conservative ideal of America. Originally entitled *Inside the U.R.S.* (The United Religious System), the novel was written as a cautionary tale, since this was a time of ascendancy for far-right religious groups. Some were believers in the rapture, the apocalypse and rise to heaven of the faithful—after the 4 horsemen did their work. It seemed those in power were doing all they could to accelerate the end times.

Whether messianic or fiscal ideals, they manifested in actions, such as closing mental hospitals and having patients on the streets with no treatment. A vague plan for patients being integrated into “the community” never occurred. Benefiting corporations, stockholders and generally wealthy individuals was the higher objective. They had risen, because they were superior beings. It was a point of government to serve the elite doing the deity’s work. Ayn Rand was again in vogue, along with a social Darwinism.

This attitude trickled down, not any financial benefit to average people, from huge tax breaks and unfettered business. I remember a casual conversation at a bar with a Wall Street investment banker. He told me, quite ear-

nestly, that I should leave my rent-controlled apartment. I was preventing the real estate from achieving its market destiny. I was impeding the greater good of business. So before 1984, in this environment (an ethos culminating in 1987's "Greed is Good" in *Wall Street*), I began to dream *Paradise Gardens*.

The novel began with an image of a young woman in a corporate office, who was a model employee. In that time, I worked temp jobs in corporations and had a publishing job in the devilishly numbered 666 Fifth Ave building, which had a lush red carpet. I also was a publicist for Bluejay Books, which focused on science fiction classics in beautiful hard covers. I was a literary person, who had an interest in utopias, from Thomas More's to American experiments—from the Shakers to communes in the 1960s. Writing press kits and talking to people like Harlan Ellison, Vernor Vinge (whose *True Names* anticipated the Internet), and most of all Theodore Sturgeon, widened my idea of classics.

Sturgeon, who started out wanting to be a fiction writer for *The New Yorker*, fairly invented in the '50s the genre of something weird in the suburbs. Spielberg once acknowledged that if he hadn't read Sturgeon in his youth, he would not have made his suburban movies (his *E.T.* is a direct cousin of Sturgeon's story, "It!") Sturgeon also inspired Vonnegut's janitor Kilgore Trout (one of his various roles in Vonnegut novels). Science fiction could be literary and down to earth. I read Philip K. Dick and remember how *Time Out of Joint* blasted the compla-

gency of day-to-day life. I could see the direct line from Kafka's *Penal Colony* to Dick's *Man in the High Castle*.

But my roots are in social realists; Zola and the Americans, Dreiser, Dos Passos, and Sinclair Lewis. Lewis' *It Can't Happen Here* is a cautionary tale about fascism, through America's Jaycees and Lions Clubs. Patriotism is flaked by a president, an Ad Man selling America a bill of goods. It was written in the thirties and I considered it a period piece, though a very plausible one. *Paradise Gardens* has an edge of satire and Dick's wide-ranging freedom of invention. This story grew, was improvised, cut back and redrafted for about ten years.

Paradise Gardens is a dark book. It begins when the Earth's surface is too polluted to support human life. In the wake of the dissolution of the Old Federal government, corporations flee underground to the ultimate real estate project Paradise Gardens. I have been haunted by what occurs, because it is lived by characters who became real to me. And as the story was always present, in the back of my mind, I dreamed segments, as well as imagined them awake. The characters evolved their world in my consciousness. Before it was serialized, I found I had to update things that had already occurred in my book, before they happened in reality. The World Trade Center is partially destroyed, the Information Pirates, their billboards and missions to preserve facts, operated before there was an Internet. Some updates were new science relevant for our time.

Now we find ourselves at what to the apocalyptic seems the beginning of the end of our democracy, with a president-elect who has sold angry voters what appears to be another bill of dubious goods. To the more pragmatic, this presidency just means four years of a regressive agenda—yet it’s crucial for the international climate crisis, which can’t be undone. Like all dystopians, I hope that reality does not continue to merge with my fiction.

If a cautionary tale has a function, it raises consciousness of what can happen—to ward it off. This novel may be the equivalent of shamanic practices, where a tribe wards off a disaster by transferring negative energy to an object. Some also use earth to cleanse negative energy, water or fire to change its nature. Knowledge for any society is the best protection. And in our time, perhaps negative visualization has a function. This novel can purge our fear, allow a passage for changing dark “unthinkable” visualization to a positive future. *Paradise Gardens* is a passage and at the end, there is unity—of people, place, and nature.

—S.W.

CHAPTER 1

Year 3011, Underground, the United Business Estates

First Came Superstition

Janet McCarthy wasn't proud of her compulsion to cross-reference her life with the horoscopes in women's magazines but she no longer hid it. Her boundaries were within sanity. Horoscopes in monthly magazines were one thing, tabloid Jean Dixon blurbs quite another. Just a human need for entertainment, she told herself, a diversion from her tough responsibilities as claims adjustor at Rudimental Life, the chief underwriter for the United Business Estates. Horoscopes gave handy archetypes, a way to understand your life within a time period. Comforting outcomes that were not entirely in her hands.

Janet's business decisions often set precedents for policies of the Estates, because she could be clear-cut about claims that were ambiguous. She was unusually skillful at reconciling facts within the limitations of policies, except for the Robinson case. She couldn't figure out why. The facts were similar to many claims that crossed

her desk. It was the particulars that were disturbing: the man's appearance, the date of the accident, the sequence of events. And this nagging feeling of familiarity with a complete stranger.

A little discipline, she admonished herself, switching on her computer terminal for another look.

Robinson appeared a hard-working man in his 40s with light-colored chamois gloves hooked into his belt. He wore a tentative smile and thinning hair pushed back for the camera. He looked solid, except for the chance accident that brought him to her attention.

Seven years ago Robinson had been injured on his job at a cement factory in South Bend, Indiana. He'd been mixing ceramic components but the substance used as a catalyst had been substituted for a binder used in larger quantities. Robinson had been in the way of the explosion; a single error, a lone victim, no witnesses—too convenient? Coworkers had corroborated his wife's story about increasing lapses of memory following the accident. A month afterward he disappeared. She was petitioning the United Business Estates for widow status to receive the benefits of Rudimental Life's insurance policy for Average employees. Injury on the job leading to death *was* a legitimate claim for payment. And the result of Robinson's injury—his possible brain damage—was relevant, though unproven. But all too often in the U.B.E. the consequences of such damage, alleged amnesia or another disorder, meant disappearance not death.

Janet should have informed Robinson's wife that if her husband *had* been killed on the job there would be no question of her eligibility. She didn't have the heart for that, especially when the facts contradicted her hunch that Robinson was alive. (Abandoned wives were sad parentheses in any report.). Janet brought Robinson's image into closer focus. She noticed two dots, which she guessed weren't dust. Magnification confirmed what she suspected—a tiny scar resting above the eyebrow and one on the side of the wrist. The first was half-moon shaped, the second a vertical line. Neither was listed in his file under the heading, BODY MARKINGS. Yet both were significant indications that his personal plastics work, surgery required for employment, had lagged behind the accident.

It was probably one in a series that had marred his body, yet allowed him the floating status prized by members of the Unconnected. Seizing false identities, these illegals damaged operations within the Estates, before disappearing with an untraceable condition. They cheated the U.B.E by subverting labor pools and increasing the tithe burden on the public. Janet just knew Robinson was alive and wouldn't mind nailing him, if it weren't for his wife. Why should she suffer for her husband's treachery? And why did Janet care?

SORRY, DESERTION ISN'T CONSIDERED THE EQUIVALENT OF DEATH, Janet typed. The sentence dismayed her. She knew the claim was false, the tip of a small but growing threat to the U.B.E. Robinson's wife

was probably involved. So why did she let them off with a simple denial of benefits, instead of investigation?

There was the odd coincidence that the date of the accident, seven years ago last spring, was also the date of her first “peak” experience as an employee of Rudimental; the first day she felt connected to her job in the significant way desired by the U.B.E. There were the scars she could have described without magnification and the peculiar sense of *déjà vu* she felt about Robinson’s whole appearance; as though he were a good friend masquerading in some clever costume. It was incomprehensible that she felt sentimental about him. Janet’s psychologist might have an explanation though she would resist that call. Autonomy might be a regressive instinct but she stubbornly retained it; deep as DNA and beyond reprogramming.

A cheery female voice chirped Rudimental’s lunch-time theme. She would finalize the Robinson case after her break. Janet put her screen to sleep and opened her refrigerator drawer. She removed a tuna on rye, along with her horoscope chart and an envelope of raw copy from her life and popular magazines. She bit into the sandwich mechanically, thinking she couldn’t help her attraction to astrology, a fact her new boyfriend, Michael, seemed unable to accept. “When did you start reading horoscopes and why?” he asked repeatedly. “It violates the rationalism so vital for your occupation.”

Her superstition had become an issue in their relationship. She had to find a reason that would satisfy him. It wasn't easy. How could an aristocrat understand her needs? Michael had declared his loyalty the U.B.E. in the usual rituals but he was unhindered by the will of an estate. He *chose* his occupation, while she was merely a professional dreaming of a future without continual overtime.

Janet laid out blocks of copy. The stars had ancient descriptions of personalities like hers. Why couldn't Michael be more tolerant? After all—she almost blushed—he was unorthodox about more dangerous compulsions. Why pick on her horoscope?

“You live like an Indian staring at the moon,” he said, when she first confided her secret. “You're too passive, just letting things happen. Wake up, Janet! How can you call an escape a system for living?” Janet was sorry she had revealed herself. She liked his muscular legs, which looked more than cosmetic. She liked his genuinely crooked teeth and the way he smiled not trying to hide them. She didn't want Michael to think she was flakey. New York men were touchy. You took your chances.

She had decided to sleep with Michael on their third date, in harmony with his forecast for romance. They had turned up Bleeker Street on the way to his apartment. If he proved too weird, she could always leave. But things would probably be okay. Michael came with fine references from their mutual friend in the records depart-

ment. Even so, walking on his arm that first night, Janet felt paranoid. In front of a parrot store, she noticed a girl with waist-length blonde hair looking fixedly at a pair of million dollar love-birds. The girl's pure profile was interrupted by a growth of beard. She turned and displayed the stub of an arm. The freak was wearing a gingham dress over a lace-trimmed petticoat.

Michael was unmoved. Freaks were not all that uncommon. Even average people were no longer displaying an expected surface appearance but some hidden opposite. Ambiguity was no longer just an intriguing aspect of personality. Janet wished she knew Michael better; wished she knew the safe precincts—taboos negotiated warily by competent family psychologists. Michael did not fit the ordinary personality profiles.

"I think I'll call it a night," she said half-way up Bleeker Street.

"You have no reason to be chicken," Michael said, "I'm a decent human being."

"Please explain."

Michael kissed Janet on the lips, insistent on emotional connection. His intensity shocked her, hinting at the forbidden forms of sex. Sleeping with someone was one thing, direct contact quite another.

"I'm Caucasian," Michael said, "I'm educated and I make money. I live on Earth in a functional, if not extravagant place. I like women, you in particular, and want to sleep with you. My tastes are not quite missionary but

neither are yours, I imagine.”

Michael ran his hand lightly up her side, ribs to armpit, careful not to wander to her breast—not without the right equipment. Janet was relieved. He could be trusted to keep within the legal boundaries for safe sex.

“I travel. Tonight, tomorrow, next week I’ll be around. After that, I can’t say,” he said, seeming genuinely rueful.

Janet surprised herself by kissing him hard on the mouth, implying all the risks he had allayed. “I find it difficult to accept the implications of my feelings,” she said. “If you’re not around much, it’s all right.”

Old habits die hard, Janet thought in retrospect, knowing why she had disregarded the sexual bans. Her past may have been reconstructed but her emotional orientation remained primitive. She hated the stultifying price of conformity in the U.B.E. So in a moment of illegal intimacy, she had confessed her horoscope compulsion placing her professional integrity at Michael’s mercy—a man she barely knew!

How had this happened? She was a marital floater, who had remained uncommitted for years! Human resources had erroneously sent men attracted by the maternal, compassionate aspects of her personality profile. Most applicants wanted less emotional, more aggressive—she didn’t know what these men wanted. She did know she wanted Michael. Why did she *have* to decipher her life from the oblique advice in women’s magazines?

Janet knew commercial slants. “Bizarre” was silver-

spoon oriented for the chic businesswoman socialite. “Glimmer” focused on lateral career and apartment moves for the young working woman. Myself” focused on physical development and emotional swings of middle-level careerists, while “Copula” combined sexual and redecorating know-how. Janet’s weeded out romantic hooks, marketing ploys and her own wishful thinking, when she interpreted her horoscope. She was left with “Spruce up your appearance,” “Pay attention to family matters,” “Attend to household chores,” and “Humor a loved one’s demands.”

Janet hoped for coherent direction for her life. GOD DOES NOT PLAY WITH DICE, the motto over the portals of Rudimental Life, offered little inspiration. If there were patterns for existence, only Einstein could read them, she once told her psychologist. She was seated cross-legged on a pillow, her eyes closed in meditation, when she confessed that she wanted to believe in the U.B.E.

In a gentle voice he had asked, “When did you develop a need for inner conviction?”

“I don’t know there was a specific time.”

“Past emotional content is key to your devotion to Rudimental Life. I know it was traumatic when...” he led her with a compassionate voice.

She opened her eyes onto his white robed figure. His shiny head was bowed. Mesmerizingly, he intoned “oom.” The sound transported her back to the witness

stand, when she testified. Her family was humiliated by the spectacle. The benches were full.

What was she saying? Her mouth was open, her face ashen with emotion but she couldn't make out the content. Public testimony followed the consolidation of the corporations under the U.B.E. How could such a charged memory be so indistinct? She let herself drift further on the psychologist's chanting. A focus came. She had run away from an estate and been apprehended. With incredible despair, Janet recalled words of sad inevitability:

“Information does not make us free. Enlightenment did not bring about economic fulfillment. We are happiest when our work is fulfilling. I have lost my previous expectations for life and will handle my assignments with grace. I discard my existential ambiguity and grant my psychologist the burden of spiritual uncertainty. Never again will I run away from responsibility.”

After a nebulous interval, she returned to the stand, swore her support and regained her family's slot at Rudimental Life. She told her psychologist about a distant feeling of despair, something incommunicable to Michael. He would simply point out that if she liked her job, she would have fewer doubts to lose in planetary movements.

Most of her colleagues *were* happy, opting for mobility through internal or lateral moves. They broadened their skill bases and passed options to their offspring. The strategy was not only rational but fulfilled the spiritual

aspiration for self-improvement cherished by all professionals, except Janet. She had more confidence in her cryptic method of divination.

CUT YOUR HAIR. CALL MOM ON HER BIRTHDAY. TAKE CLOTHES TO THE CLEANERS. BE PATIENT WITH MICHAEL'S QUESTIONS. Janet copied these actions onto white labels. The last was infuriating. How dare he probe her family background, former lovers, apartment history, occupational base, and even her financial destiny?

Who did he think he was to question her life? He had no need of fantasy. An ancestral stockpile of uranium was the foundation of his independence. His family was an individual subsidiary estate. What could he know of the pain that went with a muted personality? She only dared to do this work manually, under her computer's slumbering eye.

Janet positioned her labels onto her chart of the cosmos, remembering the trauma of her first surgery. She had donned youth, the official employment mask, and dutifully schooled herself in optimism. Plastic had given her a new face but her soul was anachronistic. When rebellion crept into the Estates in fashionable compulsions, was she willing to embrace the first superstition that came along?

Michael had too much freedom to believe in fashion. She would have less to explain, if he was old enough to put himself in her shoes! It was hard to tell. She was in

her 50s and looked 25. Michael, who looked 40, might be 20. Most people couldn't afford to match their faces with their psyches until retirement. Professional aberration or not, Janet would have to ask Michael's age. Then she would know how to answer his query.

Before pasting the labels onto the chart, Janet scanned for discrepancies between her actions and cosmic progressions. Tonight the process stimulated a bizarre link between her horoscope and the Robinson case. CUT YOUR HAIR brought to mind a vision of Robinson's thinning hair.

How could phrases trigger fragments of a memory she didn't possess? Was she simply imagining the case history in an unusual, if frighteningly vivid way? She *was* overexcited about Michael. Was she projecting personal anxiety onto her professional identity? She must resolve their conflict tonight!

No confrontation was worth this insanity. CALL YOUR MOM ON HER BIRTHDAY evoked a discussion, in which Robinson said it was time for him to disappear. TAKE CLOTHES TO THE CLEANERS ticked off visions of chamois gloves and work clothes. Janet pasted the labels onto her chart, focusing on Michael's reality. He wouldn't use her confession about horoscopes to his economic advantage. He didn't have to with his own estate. Objects had been plentiful for so many generations he actually believed a man's life should merit something greater than himself.

Dealing antiques allowed him to combine an exciting quest with the merits of history. Michael was definitely noble, not a man you met through human resources referrals. Janet didn't want to alienate him but NO APOLOGIES, not for her horoscope or any professional maladjustment!. Why was she so worried about Michael? Had the Robinson case unnerved her? It was not an unusual claim, except for her sense not just that it was fake, but that it held some personal importance.

FORGET IT! Janet propped her finished chart against her terminal. Her course of action was clear. She and Michael would be naked, their bodies encircled. She would relate her reasons for doing horoscopes. He could laugh at her idiocy, if he liked. It wouldn't matter. In that cozy locus, she'd intuit his true feelings.



MADGE reached the peeling brown and gold enameled elevator doors and hit the Up button.



JANET rapped on the window of Michael's dimly lit store. He rapped back, thinking no sound of a limo. Was it possible she chanced an errant cab or walked? Not without weaponry and advanced certification in martial arts. Or craziness, Michael thought intrigued.

CHAPTER 12

Year 2259, The Earth's Surface

Janet McCarthy Meets Michael Thorpe with No Memory of their Past

Michael Thorpe would not easily forget Janet McCarthy's press conference. She had an awkwardness he found convincing, though she seemed transfixed by her mission. Conviction or hypnosis? Michael gave her a call. Since she lived nearby, how about him coming over with some puppets?

She preferred to come to his shop. She was in the process of moving from her village apartment to a loft downtown. The apartment was a family purchase, a long ago hedge against taxes. Though there was no market, Rudimental reimbursed the purchase price of the apartment to cover a more secure location for their valued spokesperson.

Janet rapped on the window of Michael's dimly lit store. He rapped back, thinking no sound of a limo. Was it possible she chanced an errant cab or walked? Not without weaponry and advanced certification in martial

arts. *Or craziness*, Michael thought intrigued. He turned off the alarm and ushered her into the shop, finding spotlights so she could see the shop's interior, the neatly-labeled rows of artifacts and a large basket filled with shadow puppets. She went to the basket and immediately selected the monkey king.

"I can relate to him," she smiled.

"Because of the sacred Ramayana?"

"A story too involved to remember."

"He's yours. A gift."

"Why?"

"I'm glad you came." Michael said.

She followed him back through the displays to his makeshift kitchen in the rear of the store. He offered her a hand-carved wooden stool. "I'm out of good ersatz coffee. I do have some brandy samples from a friend, who found vintage airline stock."

"Do you have herbal tea?"

"For lady customers."

"Have you many of those?"

"These days I'm astounded to have any customers. Our tea choices are Chamomile or Earl Gray."

"Chamomile."

Michael poured some bottled water into a kettle to heat on a hotplate. Then he poured himself brandy from a tiny bottle. "You seemed very credible in your broad-

cast. I understand why Nate values you.”

“Yes?” she said evenly.

He grinned. *A nervous edge, he guessed, keeps emotion down with great effort. Was she conflicted behind her mask of complacency? Not exactly Nate's messenger girl.*

“Why did you come here?” Michael asked.

“You're Nate's friend. Can we talk about the underground?” Janet asked, her large eyes searching. “I'm unconnected to anyone, except you at this moment.”

“I'll go first. My father believed in economic independence.” Michael said with strange irony. “I minimize how much pain people suffer in this Darwinian process.”

Weariness enveloped his eyes, bottomless dark eyes. “What process?” she asked, feeling less a stranger.

“Our global economy,” said Michael with some irony.

“I advise underdeveloped countries how to resist the lure of prosperity, eternal debt service, and destruction of their culture. It's been a losing battle. And I'm no hero. I sell their raw materials. I also export rare objects.”

“None of this is illegal.”

“Subversive in corporate circles; why I question Nate's persistence where I'm concerned.”

Was she deciding to take a risk? Wildness in her face. He liked and pitied it. What price did she pay for abandoning expectation?

“I've been an Information Pirate most of my working

life. My colleagues resent me going inactive before relocation. It's painful to say but our leader, my friend, doesn't believe I'll pursue our mission underground."

Her controlled image was blown. Now Michel understood. Did she actually fear hurting Paradise Gardens? "Do you care about the underground?"

Janet's eyes were still guarded. The Pirates come first. I only agreed to be a spokesperson so I could carry on our work. I'm lost if I abandon it."

"Truth as a way of life?" he asked incredulous. "Isn't it how information is perceived?"

"We preserve facts."

"Convenient?"

"Simple. If my secret gets out, there will be official denials."

"You have a way to continue pirate work without their approval?"

"Not yet. Only as a completely commercial entity, with a viable persona, can I pursue the Pirate agenda. You are Nate's friend. I think of you as mine also."

Michael wanted to kiss her but would not. She had called him friend, not lover. The helmet erased part of her memory of him, not essentials. "Do you want more hot water?" he asked.

"This trust business is difficult."

He handed her a miniature cognac bottle. "Some-

thing precious.”

She took a sip. “I’m hopeful you’ll be underground with me. It will be strange.”

“I’ll stay in touch.”

“What does that mean?” she asked, on guard.

“I also live with duality. I must be attached yet independent. I’m not sure the U.B.E can accommodate.”

“You can still set conditions,” she said showing fatigue. “I’d like a friend on the outside who played inside.”

Michael laughed, “Guilty as charged. Two of a kind.” Then he kissed her and she melted into their familiar embrace.

Janet trusted despite ever-present fear. Michael found her extraordinary. “PG won’t care about your affiliation as long as you’re effective. Madge can always write a release.”

“What about the revenge of my comrade? It may be too late,” she said, apprehension telescoping through her eyes.

“I’m good for escape. I can connect you with alternative networks.”

“Outsiders who are consummate insiders?” she asked with irony Michael took for another mask.

“A basis for friendship?” he responded.

“The best part of love,” she confirmed, “a healthy idea.”

“You’re the one going underground,” he said.

“You’ll be based there,” she said with certainty. “No other way to do business.”

“Did you come on your own tonight?”

“On foot.”

“Nervy,” he said.

She took his hand in hers, “Can we trust each other?”

“Less lonely if we do.”

“You want a way underground?”

“With autonomy,” he emphasized, his finger stroking her palm.

“You’ll have a friend there.”

“So earnest,” Michael kissed her again. He felt the weight of her face, moisture on her cheek, the imprint of her lips. Her eyes were closed, shut-down. Not a flicker.



About the Author

Susan I. Weinstein is a writer, playwright, and painter. *Paradise Gardens*, an Orwellian speculative fiction, was written in the 1980s. It was read in-progress, at the original Dixon Place and at Darinka, whose archive is now part of NYU's Fales Library and Special Collections. Pelekinesis published the new definitive editions of *The Anarchist's Girlfriend* (2016) and *Paradise Gardens* (2017), previously serialized by maglomaniac.com. *Tales of the Mer Family Onyx: Mermaid stories on land and under the Sea* will also appear in a new edition by Pelekinesis. Susan's short fiction and poetry have appeared in literary magazines, such as *The Metric* and *The Portable Lower East Side*. Currently, she is at work on a WWII novel based on blacked out V-mail.



About the Cover Artist

Cathy Saksa-Mydlowski is a painter specializing in commissions and her own work. She had her own studio in NYC that specialized in type design & illustration for book jackets. She has illustrated for a variety of different clients and has won many awards for her collage art & type design. Cathy holds a BFA from The Tyler School of Fine Art of Temple University. Currently, she lives in farm country outside of Princeton, NJ with her husband and daughter. She divides her time between “home” and Long Beach Island, NJ.

A READER'S GUIDE TO *PARADISE GARDENS*

Q. What inspired you to write *Paradise Gardens*?

A. It was the era of Reagan. “Morning in America” meant religious conservatives and corporate might were ascendant. The attitude culminated in the slogan “Greed is Good” from the movie *Wall Street*. I was working temp jobs in corporations, when a young banker in a bar conversation earnestly explained how I was preventing my rent-controlled apt from achieving its potential. He believed I should move out and allow progress. At the time, I was reading a book about the passage from Feudalism to Capitalism. I started writing about a corporate future world where that process was reversed.

Q. Is *Paradise Gardens* Science Fiction?

A. it is in the sense that it's a Dystopian future world, part of the tradition of political cautionary tales, like Sinclair Lewis' *It Can't Happen Here*. The earliest one is, I believe, Jack London's *Iron Heel* written in 1908 and considered the first modern Dystopia. I love classic science fiction, like Philip K. Dick and Theodore Sturgeon but my heart is with American social realists, like Dreiser, Lewis, Dos Passos. They were social Darwinians, supposedly inspired by French social realists like Zola. I like to think *Paradise Gardens* is part of a tradition.

Q. When was this first presented?

A. Like *Paradise Gardens*, parts of this novel were read at the first Dixon Place and in lower east side fundraising marathons for zines. *Paradise Gardens* was first published as a serial by an online publisher, who ran a chapter a week. At that time, people thought eBooks would replace print, but after it was over some people wanted books but it wasn't formally released or sent for reviews.

Q. What role does politics play in *Paradise Gardens*?

A. *Paradise Gardens* is the last viable refuge for people on Earth. In the 2050s, the surface is so polluted, people are ravaged with diseases. The air's not breathable, food and water scarce. Relocation is a viable strategy and *Paradise Gardens* is the ultimate project. It's underground, housing only for the U.B.E., the United Business Estates. Employees, clean of diseases, have the opportunity to relocate. The rest of the population, the "Unconnected" outside corporate influence, are left to die on the surface. The Old Fed, Federal Government had dissolved, some officials were already garrisoned underground.

Q. How does PG relate to 2016 New York City?

A. It's a number of steps away from our production of college graduates, who if fortunate, are chosen to enter the corporate class. If not, and their new Grad

status ages, they face diminishing options. In *Paradise Gardens*, human beings don't just serve their corporate employers, they are produced to fulfill positions in two categories, Average and Superior. Human destinies are aligned with corporate will by advisors called Psychologists. They are the monitors of a database that gives combinations, destiny lines; not just the outcomes of individuals but how these impact an evolving civilization. Capitalism has devolved into completely transformed into corporate feudalism. We have more free will in 2016, but the objectives of business are to ever greater extent governing every aspect of human life. And those outside corporate largesse may under Trump be abandoned with loss of Federal interest in their welfare.

Q. Would you consider PG the ultimate business fantasy?

A. This is essentially a feudal world. Each business estate has its own kingdom. Like peasants tied to their estates, employees' lives are determined before birth by the decisions of their business estates, working with the Psychologists, a kind of priestly techie class. The corporate business estates are self sufficient. Their markets are other estates and trade with survivors on the toxic surface. They also monitor the surface, so when years have passed and toxicity is bearable, they can recolonize the surface. So

this dark cautionary tale, looks at the devolution of capitalism to feudalism with capital as the ultimate value.

Q. What positive effect might your cautionary tale have on our present course?

A. Unfortunately, the need for cautionary tales seems to be cyclical. Jack London's 1908 *Iron Heel* preceded the first World War. His present begins with a future Socialist utopia, where a teacher recounts their origins in a war against Capitalists. London anticipated the evils of 19th century industrialists called "Robber Barons" for their unethical and monopolistic practices. *It Can't Happen Here*, written by Sinclair Lewis in 1935, while a world war waged against fascism, described a takeover in the U.S. through patriotic organizations, like The Jaycees and Lion's Clubs. An ad-man president with populist slogans, sells his vision. This alternative U.S.A. seems not unlike fears of a Trump America. *Paradise Gardens* is a Reagan era Dystopia that seems parallel to a new government to be run by business for business, replacing public service with corporate advancement. Maybe the extremes in my book, can inspire a halt or slow that march.

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