Overthrowing Heaven by Mark L. Van Name

An Outstanding Story Of Confrontation And Survival

It began as a favor to a woman trying to get away from abusive husband. Jon Moore grew up in a prison laboratory. When he escaped with nothing but his body's nanotech enhancements and more anger than even a long lifetime could wash away, an entire planet died behind him. Memories of the things he'd done still haunted him; because of them, he often ended up helping those in need. His kindnesses frequently didn't work out well. This one really didn't work out well. It hurled Jon and Lobo, the intelligent assault vehicle and Jon's only friend, down an accelerating, ever more dangerous spiral involving:

- Private armies
- Government covert ops teams
- A courtesan who always seems a step ahead of him
- Rival superpowers that define Good in terms of their own advantage and Ethics as whatever doesn't get in the way of their Good
- And a brilliant, amoral scientist to whom human beings are just more experimental animals—and who might be Lobo's creator.

Jon and Lobo take the reader on a headlong rush through armed enemies and untrustworthy allies and encounter what just might be the worst danger their partnership will face: the truth.

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My Personal Review:
Overthrowing Heaven (2009) is the third SF novel in the Jon & Lobo series, following Slanted Jack. In the previous volume, Jon shot Maggie and made a deal with Chaplet and Dougat to ignore the affair. Shooting started and Jon got out of the building just before the structure collapsed on Jack and Manu.

Then EC troops rushed the hangar and both groups surrendered after a few casualties. The EC took the weapons and Jon left the area in Lobo. Or so everybody else thought.
In this novel, Jon Moore is an independent operator who comes to Arctul for solitude and rest. He makes a deal with the Green Rising activists for permission to stay in a treehouse among the giant trees. He only has to provide occasional secure transit services to the Green Rising leaders.

Lobo is an armed and intelligent Predator Class Attack Vehicle. He gets to hang around the trees and keep watch except while carrying the activist leaders back and forth. Fortunately, Lobo doesn't get bored.

Priyana Suli is a new client that Jon has been persuaded to handle. She has a domestic crisis and wants to get off the planet. Since her partners have serious connections in the Arctul governments, she can't just hop a shuttle without being detained.

Jorge Wei is a scientist experimenting with human interactions with nanomachines. Naturally, such work is prohibited by all civilized governments. Since Jon has been a subject of such experiments, he is especially sensitive to these investigations.

Andrea Matahi is a well-known courtesan in Entreat on Heaven. Wei is one of her clients.

In this story, Jon meets Priyana and quickly learns that she has little experience in clandestine affairs. Yet he agrees to take her to the jump station. Then a team of professionals appears and try to capture Jon and his client.

Jon exits through a skylight and Lobo leaves the planet. On the way to the jump gate, Lobo is surrounded by eight ships. Then a Central Coalition Councilor requests their presence on the Sunset, one of the largest warships that Jon has ever seen.

In the ensuing conversion, Jon is told about the problem of Heaven, a former CC world. Now that its jump gate has developed connections to the Expansion Coalition, it has broken its ties to the CC and initiated a process of determining which federation to join. Since the EC is hovering on the wings, the CC is avoiding a violent resolution of the problem.

Now the CC has discovered a cause celebre to support their takeover of Heaven. They have reason to believe that the Heaven government is supporting a notorious criminal who is conducting nanomachine research on young children. So far, all the children have died.

The CC wants Jon to bring Jorge Wei to justice. Jon is disconcerted by the similarity to his own case and wants to withdraw back into Lobo to consider the matter. Then Priyana tells him that she is a member of the opposition movement on Heaven and begs him to do the job.
Jon is starting to walk out of the room when Lobo contacts him. Lobo also asks him to take the job. Jon cannot refuse Lobo, but pretends to reluctantly change his mind. The CC sends Suli along with him to Heaven.

This tale has Jon dealing with a totally inexperienced woman who takes everything at face value. In other words, someone just like Maggie. Her fellow opposition workers are not much better. Nothing like working with amateurs!

This work seems to follow the same formula as the previous volumes. One reason is Jon's unwillingness to have a hostage to fate. So he tries to avoid close relationships with women. Yet he doesn't seem to learn anything from these situations. But then Matahi introduces him to another way of using his mental abilities.

The story has a plethora of twists, turns and minor violence. Jon and Lobo complete the assignment, but not the way that the CC preferred. Read and enjoy!

Recommended for Van Name fans and for anyone else who enjoys tales of armed conflict, sentient machines, and political intrigue.

-Arthur W. Jordin

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