

Novel focuses on future 'human' struggles

Mutant society explored

By Bryan Peterson
Staff Reporter

The Mutant Season
Karen Haber and Robert Silverberg
Bantam Books

"The mutant is science fiction's metaphor for the outsider, the loner, the alienated super-creature. The theme of mutation is one of the most valuable tools science fiction has for examining the nature of human society, the relation of one human being to another, and the ultimate destiny of our species."

-Robert Silverberg

"The Mutant Season" is a collaboration between wife-husband duo Karen Haber and Robert Silverberg and is the first in a projected four-volume series.

The work is set in 2017, when mutants — people with slight genetic variations as gifts — are struggling to exist as equals with the rest of humanity.

Mutants are not the disfigured grotesques one often associates with the word; aside from enhancing gifts like telekinesis or the ability to levitate, they look, think and live "normal" in every way in a sort of parallel culture within our own.

It is these gifts that bring trouble to the mutants, who often have abilities misunderstood and feared by "normals."

Silverberg tells us in the book's introduction that the mutants have

“*Whether one thinks of racism or homophobia, this story of the future can clearly tell us things about the world today.*”

always been with us, and that their special "gifts" have brought persecution upon them through the ages.

By 2017, the mutants have organized themselves into clans and emerged from secrecy. Their position in society is equivocal: A mutant senator has been elected to Congress (and later assassinated), yet the mutants face discrimination and suspicion in all areas of life.

Haber and Silverberg balance the efforts of the mutants toward political recognition with the personal struggles of the characters and thus capture the human element which is so often left out of science fiction.

The book's only serious flaw is its treatment of Melanie, a "null" mutant with no gift despite the tell-tale golden eyes possessed by all mutants.

Melanie is given much attention in the first half of the novel, then fades away for the remainder with only a brief final appearance.

"The Mutant Season" is the title of a short story written in 1973 by Silverberg, now an established

science fiction writer with one Nebula award to his name.

Silverberg and his wife collaborated on this volume, her first full-length work. The next volume of the series, "The Mutant Prime," is authored by Haber alone and is now available in hardback and paperback, with a third volume already in the works.

As a team, Haber and Silverberg have presented a fine science fiction novel that often serves as a metaphor for our own world, another sign of good science fiction.

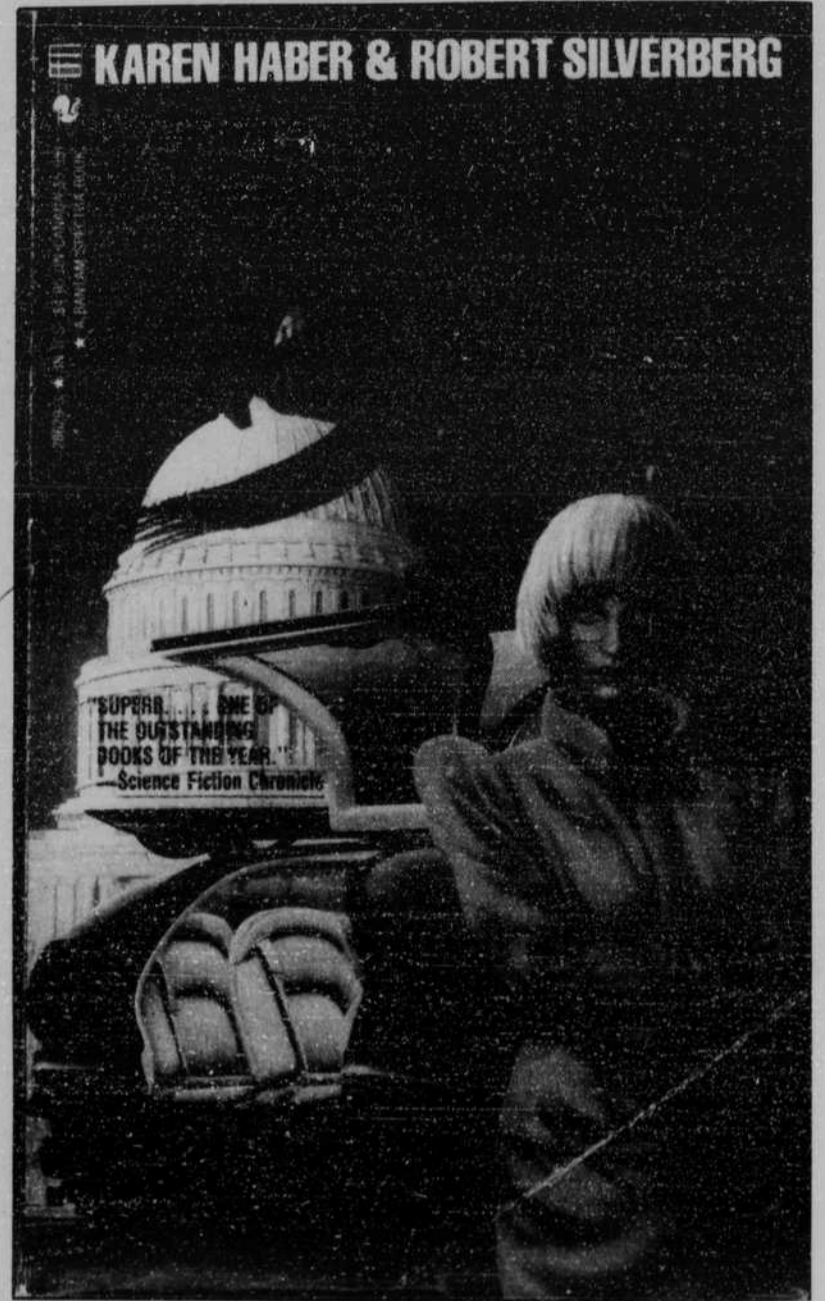
The reader might pay particular attention to passages like that below, which occurs between two non-mutant parents whose daughter, also a "normal," is seeing a mutant man, much to the chagrin of the woman's father.

"But don't you see that the mutants seem to draw this kind of violence? And they have, ever since they came out in the nineties. I don't want our daughter mixed up in it. Do you?"

Whether one thinks of racism or homophobia, this story of the future can clearly tell us things about the world today.

Yet Haber and Silverberg are not preaching to the reader; the above passage was the most blatant in the book, and other, similar passages are more subtle in their presentation.

Mixing together elements of suspense and mystery with themes of political activism, family turmoil and group coherence, Haber and Silverberg have begun a promising series with a fine seminal novel.



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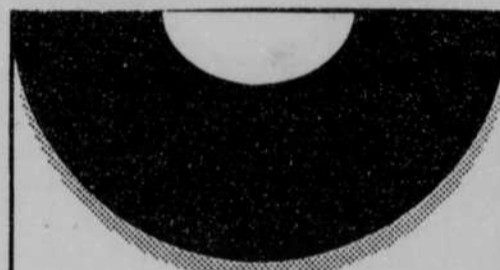
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Solid 'Bullet Proof' album proves impervious to shots

By Jim Hanna
Senior Reporter



Nick Robertson
"Bullet Proof Boy"
Charisma Records
Rating: 4

Ratings are 1 (bad) to 5 (excellent).

The world of ratty-haired, Birkenstock-wearing, Guatemalan bag-toting, coffee-shop playing, acoustic guitar-strumming alternative singers rarely sees much commercial success. Tracy Chapman, The Indigo Girls and their ilk are the exception, as most guitar folk artists live their professional lives in smoke-filled hippie bars.

That's too bad. Acoustic singer/songwriters tend to produce some of the most sincere, well-written and just plain good music around.

Nick Robertson is the latest folksy entry onto the commercial music scene. If there's any justice in the world, he will live to produce a follow-up to his debut album "Bullet Proof Boy."

While Robertson's first album doesn't contain any sure-fire chartbusters, it is consistently

strong from the first track to the last.

"Bullet Proof Boy" was produced by Pat Moran, who is best known for his work with Edie Brickell and Iggy Pop. In that alternative folk vein, Robertson, a native of Edinburgh, Scotland, warbles cool songs and plays even cooler guitar.

All of the songs on the album are simple and non-inflammatory and devoid of the heavy-handed political messages that have bogged down alternative groups like 10,000 Maniacs.

The most message he ever tries to cram into a song is on "She's Looking Tired," a bleak tune about a woman beaten down by life. It's somewhat dark but beautiful enough to stay out of the black abyss of the socially conscious dirge.

The best songs on "Bullet Proof Boy" are those without tons of instrumentation. Robertson is most successful when he is accompanied by his guitar, a piano and a little bit of percussion. "Pride and Joy" is good example of his simpler songs and is the best track on the album.

On the few occasions when Robertson goes wild and picks up the pace on a song, he still manages to make good music. "Slice of Heaven" goes way beyond the mellow tone of many of his songs but is still pretty hot.

The low point on the album is the title track, "Bullet Proof Boy," which is really just kind of gross. Still, the worst song on the album is not too bad at all.

Robertson's voice is not exceedingly beautiful but is still what makes the album distinctive. He gets a little carried away with overly funky vocal dips and glottal stops but never does lose control. His voice sounds a little like Tom Waits' without the nodes.

"Bullet Proof Boy" is a solid first effort for a musician who will hopefully move to the front of the alternative folk scene.

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