



The Weapon Makers

A.E. van Vogt

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Following the success of the stories that formed *The Weapon Shops of Isher*, van Vogt wrote the novel, *The Weapon Makers*, in 1943, to enlarge the story of human immortality, the conflict between a controlling government, *The House of Isher*, the mysterious *Weapon Shops* and man's place in the universe.

The promise of the *Weapon Shops'* slogan, *The Right to Buy Weapons is the Right to Be Free*, is described thus:

"Many of these weapons still carried the old names. "Guns" they were called, or "revolvers," or "rifles," but there the resemblance ended. These "guns" did not shoot bullets, they discharged energy in many forms and quantities. Some of them could kill or destroy at a thousand miles if necessary, and yet they were controlled by the same sensitive elements as the *Weapon Shop* door. Just as the door refused to open for police officers, Imperial soldiers or people unfriendly to the *Shops*, so these guns had been set to fire only in self-defense, and against certain animals during open season.

They also had other special qualities, particularly as to defense and speed of operation."

The Weapon Makers Details

Date : Published 1966 by Ace Books M153 (first published 1947)

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Author : A.E. van Vogt

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From Reader Review The Weapon Makers for online ebook

Glenn Schmelzle says

PLOT:

Humanity has spread throughout the solar system, but they can't venture farther, so over the centuries the House of Isher has governed...make that controlled, mankind. In opposition to them stood the Weapon Makers, who sell common citizens weapons whose design baffles imperial scientists. The weapons can only be used in self-defense, but they effectively hold the Empire's power in check. The Weapon Shops go beyond guns to other dazzling technology (I especially liked the Rings they could activate - reminded me of the way phones were used in the Matrix).

Our protagonist is Robert Hedrock, whom the Empress tries to assassinate and then whom the Weapon Makers rescue...only to put him on trial for sharing their secrets with the Empress. Hedrock's on the run for most of the book, working to keep both sides occupied while he schemes bigger schemes. Turns out that he is immortal who has been a consort to the last 13 Empresses while also being a central player among the Weapon Makers. He's been keeping them in balance, playing for time while he waits for two technologies to end this power struggle. An interstellar drive has been invented by the Empire and he's trying to expose their secret. He's also taken it upon himself to understand how he became immortal and release this innovation to benefit mankind. Of course, both organizations want to maintain the status quo, so Hedrock works alone to create a richer and more level playing field.

COMMENTS:

This is a pretty good book. For a story from 1946, it has really held up. Several things could have been the central crux of the book:

- Hedrock's immortality, concealed by clever disguises and alibis
- conflict between the Empire, the Weapon Shops and Hedrock
- Spider creatures evaluating humanity (e.g. telepathic bond between twins)
- Conflict with other star systems because of the interstellar drive

...but the book doesn't focus on any one of them; it tries to focus on all of them. This leaves the plot a bit leaky; don't expect all the loose ends to be tied up at the end. But I'll forgive that because it's his second book its good elements offset the bad.

I was bewildered by a few story developments and at times felt I was being yanked around so Van Vogt could slide in a new idea, but I think this I'm using a 21st century lens. If I instead imagined what impressed a reader in the 1940s, it would be the volume of awe-inspiring ideas and settings. By that measure, this book makes a nice melange in which the reader can lose themselves for a while.

Ron says

Classic Science Fiction at its best. The Weapon Makers was originally published in 1946 and may seem a little dated now, but this is a classic story of the battle between the immortal Hedrock and Empress Innelda over the Weapons Shops and "The Right to Buy Weapons is the Right to Be Free."

Aaron says

I was overjoyed to find my old copy of this at parents house this weekend after thinking it lost for 15 years. It wasn't exactly what i remembered, but still, a great story. For having been written in 1943, it hardly shows it's age and fully embraces a future with such advanced technology, it bears little resemblance to today. Looking forward to finding more van Vogt.

John says

1981 grade A

2009 grade B+

Series book WS1

The writing style is a bit out of date. The content is a bit abstract. All of it is mainly a factor of the age of the novel - the first copyright is 1943 I think.

I still consider it a classic must read novel and the sequel (Weapon Shops Of Isher) is even better.

(Note - my edition is Pocket 82267-5, 190 pages, First Pocket Books printing February 1979. Condition estimated at "Good." It is not in the list of editions and I don't feel like wading through Goodreads problematic edition editing process.)

Will says

Another fun cosmic romp, where the House of Isher and the Weapon Shops must be saved from themselves while simultaneously kept from knowing that an immortal superman is watching them.... when he finds that seemingly all-powerful aliens are watching HIM. And the trouble with aliens is... they're alien.

I again thought of John C. Wright's essays... in another, he takes up the common wisdom that in the Bad Old Days SF was bereft of Strong Female Characters. Really? Is the Empress Isher to be dismissed as "weak" because she does not take down a dozen Weapon Shop guards in personal combat, or immediately jump into bed with Hedrock? It is to laugh.

Mike (the Paladin) says

This story takes place aprox. 7 years after the Weapons Shops of Isher. I again give 4 rather than 5 simply because it's not quite as readable as some by Van Vogt.

Mark Cameron says

Cool book

There are lots of neat gadgets. There is an interesting relationship between the House of Isher (the monarchy) and the Weapon Shops (sort of a check and balance).

There is a lot of good stuff in the book but it should have been more fleshed out.

It's old school sci-fi. It's not bogged down in technical details explaining how every little piece of technology works.

Carl Wilburn says

Conclusion of the Isher stories.

Matteo Pellegrini says

Come nelle «Cronache della Galassia» di un altro gigante della f.s., Isaac Asimov, anche in questo romanzo di Van Vogt il vero protagonista è il cosmo: avventure, viaggi, congiure, battaglie, tutto ha dimensioni sovrumane, tutto si svolge sullo sfondo smisurato e strabiliante dell'universo. E' la fantascienza epica al suo livello migliore, una saga del meraviglioso che dà al lettore il senso dell'inesauribile ricchezza dell'universo.

Adrian says

[in an interstellar drive, telepathic twins and an alien spider race (hide spoiler)]

Isabel (kittiwake) says

Set six years after "The Weapon Shops of Isher", this is story of how the immortal man behind the weapon shops manipulates both the weapon shops council and the Empress, to ensure that Isher society remains stable in the face of the development of a star ship drive and a possible attack by alien invaders.

Michelle B says

The concept isn't really new; the bones have been picked clean in dozens of other books. Maybe it was good once but I've seen too much of it to get worked up over.

Lisabet Sarai says

My husband has raved about the Weapon Shops books for decades. A popular article on the ways in which technology might help reduce gun violence finally motivated him to dig his 1943 paperback edition out of the boxes in the attic and share it with me.

Van Vogt wrote what I consider to be one of the best science fiction short stories I've ever read ("A Can of Paint"), so I had high expectations of this novel. Unfortunately, they weren't entirely realized.

The book offers some inspired ideas. An empire whose absolute power spans the solar system is kept in check by the existence of the Weapon Shops, purveyors of irresistible energy weapons that are tuned to their owners and can be fired only in self defense. Only ordinary citizens may purchase these weapons; the doors to the shops will not open to police and Imperial soldiers. Hence a delicate but peaceful balance has reigned for more than four millenia, between the powers of the Empire and the individual.

The invention of an interstellar drive threatens this balance, and only one man can stop the worlds of the empire from crumbling into devastating war. Robert Hedrock is not just any man, but an immortal, with intimate relationships to both centers of power. However, both the Empress and the shadowy organization behind the weapon shops believe he is a traitor. Both forces strive to destroy the only man who can save them.

This excellent premise, enhanced by many clever details, is spoiled by the absence of any limits on Hedrock's powers. I have the same complaint about some paranormal books. When magic (or in this case, technology) can do anything, I lose interest, because the outcomes become totally predictable. Indeed my favorite type of sci fi posits one single societal or technological change, and then explores its effects. This book is exactly the opposite, full of spy rays, matter transmitters, devices that temporarily turn rats or men into giants, and more.

I also found the style to be rather wooden. Most of the emotion (such as there was) feels flat and one dimensional. Furthermore, I sometimes had to read the convoluted sentences two or three times before I could figure out the intended meaning.

Van Vogt's treatment of sex particularly annoyed me - namely, the fact that he couldn't even bring himself to mention it. One of the main characters becomes pregnant after a few hours with Hedrock. Hard to imagine how, given what we're told.

On the other hand, this book has a fabulous alien encounter sequence, in the reaches of deep space. The aliens have the ability to enter Hedrock's mind and twist his perceptions. His attempts to understand and utilize their modes of thought as weapons against them were perhaps the most convincing aspects of the book.

Overall, I enjoyed *The Weapon Makers*, but I also found it deeply flawed. It is usually considered a product of science fiction's golden age. To me, it felt immature, far less rich and subtle than many more modern novels.

Steven Peterson says

A. E. Van Vogt was a science fiction writer who dealt with BIG ISSUES in his works. He was not so good with creating real human characters; his words do not soar. Here, we have a book that features the Weapon Makers as a check on the empire. The balance between the two forces prevents the empire from overwhelming human freedom. Here, we see relations among several key characters, the Empress Innelda, Captain Hedrock, Prince del Curtin.

Graham says

Really odd book, kind of loses the plot a bit at the end, but up to that point is at least interesting.

astaliegurec says

I'm sorry to say that A.E. van Vogt's "The Weapon Makers" is not a very good sequel to his "The Weapon Shops of Isher." The first half of the book is just as good as the previous book. But, once the protagonist launches himself into space, the book just turns silly. It loses all pretense of being Science Fiction and turns into some kind of..., well, I don't know what to call it: Science Farce? The first, and least problematical, issue is the lack of even lip-service to the speed of light being a limiting factor (even though Einstein wrote of that almost 40 years before this book was written and it had been accepted by physicists over 20 years prior). Much worse is that the abilities of the protagonist and various others become wacky. And, even worse than that, the actions and personalities of everyone in the book just turn silly. People start doing things that are ridiculous and no one behaves as they did a few pages before. It's just silly. So, I'm sorry to say that I have to rate the book at a Pretty Bad 2 stars out of 5.

The two novels in A.E. van Vogt's "Isher" series are:

1. The Weapon Shops of Isher
 2. The Weapon Makers (Isher)
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