

SPECULATIVE FICTION REVIEW by Stephanie Young

TITLE *A Stainless Steel Rat Is Born*
AUTHOR Harry Harrison
PUBLISHER Bantam Spectra
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PRINTING 1985

The Iowa Canal Players put on a great comedy at this years' Archon/TuckerCon/NASFiC. As Janice and I were leaving, she was telling me what a great spoof it was on the *Stainless Steel Rat* books by Harry Harrison. She said I did not get much of the inside humor because I hadn't read these books yet. In order to correct this oversight I have extracted a couple of these novels from the farm library and started reading them.

Janice suggested I start with this one, every though it is not the first one he wrote, because it tells the tale of how Jimmy DeGriz became the above mentioned rodent (in name only – no metamorphic activity occurring).

The story starts with a very young Mr. DeGriz robbing a bank on the plant Bit O' Heaven, and then getting intentionally caught – you see he wants the criminal education only those on prison can give. Unfortunately Prison U. failed to provide the higher education our hero – and I feel comfortable calling him that as you will see later – required; thus a jailbreak with a somewhat reluctant partner. The one thing he gleaned was that a master criminal called "The Bishop" who could be the one to teach him what he yearns to know.

The one problem is that the gentleman with the chess piece moniker is retired and no one knows how to contact him. Jimmy figures the best way to flush him out is to commit a crime and make it look like the old guy did it.

He does, and meets him in an unusual scene and they end up having some very interesting adventures. Harrison writes with ease and keeps the ride going swiftly. Every time it looks like things are fine, another problem occurs. In the end Jimmy learns that he is not a crook or even a common criminal. He is one who lives outside the rules of everyone else and as such it is a lonely life but a rewarding one.

At first I had some issues with the philosophy of the Rat, but in the end I felt comfortable with the way Harrison justifies what Jimmy has become. He learns from the old man that even though they are outside of the normal rules of society, they have a strict set of rules they live by.

I recommend this book have started an omnibus of three other SSR novels. I am confident these will be as entertaining.

I give it 4 rings of Saturn.
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