



Published on Free Software Magazine (<http://www.freesoftwaremagazine.com>)

Book review: Bounty Hunters (Metaphors for Fair Intellectual Property Laws) by *Greg London*

By Terry Hancock

Greg London is an author and a frequent contributor to the Creative Commons licensing mailing list. In *Bounty Hunters*, he attempts to reinvent the metaphors we use to talk about the ethics and law of copyright.



Bounty Hunters

The central metaphor of London's book is that of the romanticized Old West, with town meetings, gunslingers, and of course, bounty hunters. He looks at the problem that copyright was originally meant to solve—creating content for a rich public domain—to the similarly hard to remunerate task of controlling crime in the largely uncontrolled Western frontier. The metaphor is shaky in places and suffers from being a rather violent image, but London's point is basically sound, and so the book works.

The central metaphor of London's book is that of the romanticized Old West, with town meetings, gunslingers, and of course, bounty hunters

The contents

Ironically, this book starts with a quote from Bill Gates which kicks off the central thread of the essay: "What incentive systems should exist in the world?" London says that Gates asked the right question, but didn't answer it, and his book is an attempt to answer that question.

The story quickly moves on to an elaborate parable of a little town in the Old West, called "Eureka", with all the features we expect of Old West towns. The town finds the traditional method of just hiring more police to catch crooks a little too inefficient, and so turns to hiring bounty hunters. So far, it's all pretty simple—but it doesn't stay that way: Eureka ends up with a whole lot of problems ranging from bounty hunters demanding protection from competition to a corrupt mayor who gives them their payoff in order to stay in office.

Book review: Bounty Hunters (Metaphors for Fair Intellectual Property Laws) by Greg London

London then, of course, gets down to the business of mapping this problem to the history and current state of affairs of copyright. But the book goes further than that, mapping the concept of patents onto a metaphor of gold mines and maps to reach them. From there, he moves on to a very insightful investigation of modern copyright law, patents (including software patents), the struggles of free software, and the impact of digital rights management. The book finishes off with a collection of references and original sources.

Who's this book for?

If you know anybody who still thinks that copyright is about “natural rights” and “preventing theft” of “intellectual property”, you need to hog tie them in front of this book (okay, I guess you'd better leave a hand free to turn pages). Unfortunately, there is such a dedicated effort by the people who benefit from public confusion about the ethics and law of copyright that there are an awful lot of people who would benefit from that kind of reprogramming!

Relevance to free software

This book is about the central issue in free software and free culture: the ethics and law of the sharing of information. Which do we value more: intellectual freedom or intellectual property?

Which do we value more: intellectual freedom or intellectual property?

Pros

The book makes its point pretty clearly, and the battle between intellectual freedom and intellectual property needs to be addressed with serious, down-to-earth books with concrete images like this one. The author also practices what he preaches: the book is free-licensed, and you can read it [online](#) as well as buy a copy in [paperback](#).

Cons

At times the “bounty hunter” metaphor is a bit strained, and there are less violent images for the same basic idea. The book is occasionally repetitive and perhaps a bit too stuck on maintaining its romanticized nature as a parable.

Title	Bounty Hunters (Metaphors for Fair Intellectual Property Laws)
Author	Greg London
Publisher	Self-published via Lulu
ISBN	N/A
Year	2006
Pages	81
CD included	No
FS Oriented	10
Over all score	8

In short

Cons

Biography

Terry Hancock (/user/5" title="View user profile.): Terry Hancock is co-owner and technical officer of Anansi Spaceworks (<http://www.anansispaceworks.com/>), dedicated to the application of free software methods to the development of space.

Copyright information

This article is made available under the "Attribution-Sharealike" Creative Commons License 3.0 available from <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/>.

Source URL:

http://www.freesoftwaremagazine.com/articles/book_review_understanding_copyright
