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## the might of mont blanc

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# the might of mont blanc

R. Ryan Brandys

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When my tax forms come in the mail, I would love to throw them out and move on with my life. Inside the envelope: just black words on white paper. But since they're government forms, well, those have a special power: an obligation that is not to be ignored. There is an almost magical quality in those words on your IL-941.

You've heard philosophers tell you that the pen is mightier than the sword - that the power of a signature exceeds the power of violence. But the pen symbolizes more than just an authorization on a check. The pen symbolizes the advent of language, and the whole of culture built on language. Culture has become a tremendous force of organization, administration, and execution. My signature doesn't just endorse the power of the dollar. It endorses the power of the bureaucracy that enforces the dollar.

In the early days of the thirteen colonies, if a white imperialist marched onto Indian land with a deed that said he owned the place, he met with the business end of a spear. The abstract idea of an **economy** - was not globally accepted as a dominant social context.

Imagine a guy walking into your hut with some crazy symbols on a sheet of parchment, and he tells you to get out because the paper says so - well - he's going to discover that in the world of the sword, pen and paper are pitifully fragile.

But today the pen rules the nation-state. It has a power so mighty you can measure it to eight decimal places. Like here on my tax form, Mr. Pen so eloquently asks me how many numbers I have accumulated this year - how much I have left over. Then it tells me to send most of it in. I can't avoid the tax form; I can't fight it with a sword any more, because the sword has become an enforcement tool of the state. The sword has become the pen's bitch.

The pen has every other tool at its disposal. It can pay the hammer to build; it can pay the handcuffs to enforce; it can pay Halliburton to go overseas and steal the oil from those who had it first. The pen is the tool of the wealthy against the lowly

laborer, now it is the only tool you need to govern effectively. The pen has become a religion. Legions of practitioners line up to worship numbers at the New York Stock Exchange.

Mr. Pen would have you believe that his enforcement of language is all that stands between civilization and anarchy. That's the core of the conflict between the pen and the sword. Either you "endorse" our society and participate in it financially, or you meet with violent resistance. But today, Violence is not acceptable in suburbia. This is civilization, after all. So you have no choice but to let the pen draw up a life that suits you., and file your Form IL-941 before they hunt you down and weasel those tax dollars out of you. It's just another form of control. The pen may be less aggressive than the sword, but it is doing exactly the same thing. It might be less painful, but is the enforcement of the pen any less cruel?

With the pen, it's easier to be cruel. You're not bludgeoning your victims; you're just burying them in debt. It accomplishes the same goal. All the essential elements of slavery are still there, except now we've got eight significant figures of precision.