

So is it done? It might be.

*If the 2016 presidential election were held today, instead of a year from now, Hillary Clinton would win 60% of the vote.*

It wasn't just the first debate, although she was strong and steady and better-informed and funny. True, the debate forced the media to stop its ceaseless bawling about e-mail servers and such drivel and get out of the woman's way. The *NY Times* of October 12<sup>th</sup> pegged it: there was Hillary and there was the rest of the world. But more so, I think, her triumph this season came from the repellant Benghazi hearing, where she took everything the House Republicans – those bitter and



A zine of  
opinion and  
drivel from  
GUY H. LILLIAN iii,  
1390 Holly Ave  
Merritt Island  
FL 32952

[GHLIII@yahoo.com](mailto:GHLIII@yahoo.com)

318 218 2345

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Illo from the label  
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crazy people – could throw at her, and with wit and barely concealed contempt, smeared their faces with their own effluvia. Someone should have told that committee of high school vice principals that sometimes their hysteria and their smugness and their vindictiveness and the e-mails they fake puts their target in a corner – and then the target turns, and they're trash. *That's the problem with witch hunts – sometimes you find one. And she's got magic on her side.*

A lot can happen in a year, but barring a cataclysm, *Hillary wins.*

I want Hillary to win. At first it was because I wanted a woman to be President, see another burst in historical creativity before I lay me down and fertilize the Earth, but now I want *her* to be President, to be the tough and resilient and challenging and defiant face America gives to the world, to form the Supreme Court whose wisdom will form American law through the middle of this century, to act for us in this world. There is no candidate anywhere to match Hillary's toughness and resilience and defiance. She's earned her chance through passage through all the fire and bullshit the world and the Republicans could bring to bear.

I must admit to prejudice. In 1992 *la Clinton* came to New Orleans in support of her husband's campaign for President, and gave

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a speech. Unfortunately, it was *the exact same speech* Al Gore had given two days before. We audience members kept glancing at each other in embarrassment – for truthfully, the attractive woman trying to rouse us into a Democratic fervor was nowhere near as effective as Gore had been. (She’s gotten better.) Nevertheless, when she made the rounds and shook my hand I said, “Hi, beautiful!” and she ~~had me killed~~ faked a good-natured laugh and said “Thank you!” I feel compelled to support her after that.

Hillary’s Democratic opposition offers character and conscience, and these are splendid things – Bernie Sanders has been and should stay the Democratic conscience; but as a candidate he’s now reduced to reminding us of that. He’s a righteous dude who has voted his conscience and the party’s for decades and decades – but has nothing now to say but to pin everything from nuclear war to bad breath on the billionaire class. As someone who was Clean for Gene (McCarthy) in 1968, I recognize his appeal and am glad to have him – he *is* the party’s conscience, a reminder of what Democrats and progressives are supposed to be about. Do the Republicans have a conscience? Do they have a point? Is there anything at all to them? Who do they have? Donald Trump?

I wasn’t surprised by Trump’s late summer ascendancy on the Republican side, although I am mightily ashamed of why I am not surprised. The flamboyant billionaire exemplifies the caricature of America a bitter lifetime has taught me, a cartoonish image I had hoped to discard. The distortion? That this is fundamentally a society of bullies and bimbos, where what finally matters is what you can buy and who you can hurt. Trump is a man whose idea of dealing with others is to malign a critic by saying she’s on her period, who can offer no hope for America but a fanciful and impossible barrier between us and the brown people to our south (see the 9/21 *National Memo* on the subject of his Mexican wall), who believes his wealth is his self. It seems in November as if his star is fading as that of the incredibly maladroit physician Ben Carson waxes – but I suspect the pitifully ill-informed doctor, too, is a flavor of the month who will sour as time goes on. The burden of his truly loony opinions and self-aggrandizing bullshit cannot be ignored.

Nevertheless, these “Outsider” candidates have a popularity in this cycle that bears notice. A panelist on Bill Maurer’s show – and of all people, a Republican – said something in early November that should provoke serious thought. He pointed to the growth in Boomer suicides and tied that lamentable stat to the Outsider phenomenon, saying that many of a certain socioeconomic background didn’t trust politicians and liberals in particular because neither addressed the ailment which most deeply affected them: *despair*. I understand this completely, because I have long been one of those people who feels the world has no place for him. My advantage is that unlike many, I can see beyond my own nose and, if I can accept it, there’s proof in my marriage that my stubborn fantasy was untrue. Anyway, it’d be a good idea for us on the left to discard the arrogance and smugness evident in a Maurer and *understand* – because after all, helping people, even those outside of the popular voting blocs, is what liberalism – what citizenship, what simple humanity – should be all about.

An aside about the debates. The Republicans have complained about the moderators of their encounters, saying they engage in “gotcha” questioning and have a liberal bias. Trump seemed to think that true even of the Fox newsmen in the first debate. I’d like to see them – all of them, Republican and Democrat – hit with a panel of genuine minds, like Bill Moyers, Fareed Zakaria, Rachel Maddow and a Republican of intelligence (George Will, maybe) whose wits surge beyond mere partisan agendas. See how the pols’ semi-snappy patter could stand up to real brainpower. Sudden inspiration: Neil Tyson!



Two moments adherent to the Pope’s recent visit to America stick with me and require comment. The first was his climactic appearance at Ground Zero, centered among local leaders of many faiths. Frankly, I was reminded of the horror I felt when I visited Dachau late in his life. It hurt, and I found, hurts still to think of decent men being exposed to the evil as still must vibrate in those terrible places.

But it's also heartening. The answer to evil men is, after all, decent men. And however upsetting it is to think of good people being exposed to bad acts, their survival and the survival of their goodness is a sign of victory.

There is no doubt in any serious mind that Pope Francis is such a good man, even though the general ecstasy over his autumn visit to America was bruised, a bit, by the revelation *hahaha* that he had met Kim Davis shortly after returning to Rome. Davis, of course, is the Kentucky Clerk of Court who refused to issue marriage licenses to gay couples in defiance of federal law and a specific court order. She said she could not recognize homosexual unions because of her religious beliefs. She got herself jailed and became a *cause celebre* among political evangelicals. The Pope, privately, applauded her stance.

It goes without saying that, this being a secular society in terms of its law, a public official is duty bound to follow the law. If such a person finds that said duty requires her to violate her conscience, she should either make arrangements for another person to handle that responsibility or resign. Personally, Davis' opinion seems imperceptible from one condemning interracial or inter-faith marriages, so I cannot agree with Francis that her moral stance was anything but offensive to sane social mores and her actions anything but wrong. But in the Pope's perspective, faith is prime – and even a foolish error based in faith should be supported.

Personally, I don't think Ms. Davis should have been jailed for contempt of court. She should have been *fined* – and since wingers throughout the country would have contributed and footed the bill, that would have made money for the county, as opposed to wasting the funds necessary to feed her in the clink. But the real question, Faith vs. Duty, is a conflict as old as civilization. Jesus, no surprise, had the best idea for a solution. *Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's*. The couples get their marriage licenses and the secular law is served. *Render unto God the things that are God's*. Davis personally doesn't have to do the paperwork, and her conscience should be clear. Back to the shadows with her.



A David Gerrold quote from Sasquan: "I'd like another Hugo but I'm not adopting another kid for it."

So what about the proposal pending before the WSFS to correct the ugly Sad/Rabid Puppy ballot-packing that so afflicted Sasquan: "E Pluribus Hugo"? Here's an explanation I've read of it.

"It is designed to prevent a minority from sweeping the nominations by generating two numbers from the nomination data. The first is the number of nominations for each nominee, just like always. The other is to assign points based on how many nominees each ballot has in each category and add that number for each nominee. By comparing these two numbers for nominees and eliminating from the bottom up (and re-adding the points after each elimination) a situation is created where nominees from slates will end up eliminating each other until only one 'survives.' The reason this works is that, unlike slated nominees who are made by a large number of people from a broad number of possibilities, slated works will tend to have the same number of nominations and the same number of points as each other and in the elimination rounds will mainly challenge and eliminate each other."

*What?*

Fandom doesn't need this. Fandom doesn't need some ridiculous algorithm to decide who or what gets on our Hugo ballot. We simply need to pay attention to the field as it develops throughout the year, keep thinking Hugo, and promote and nominate the best and most-deserving people and works. I give it a try in a page or two, and call for suggestions!

Speaking of suggestions, the best suggestion I've heard for the new World Fantasy Award, as long as they insist: a dragon rampant.



## “A” IS A LETTER. SO ARE THESE.



*A bit of background. I asked my old friend and SFPA Sista **Toni Weisskopf** why people were upset by the “asterisk” coaster passed out at the Sasquan Hugo reception. She replied:*

People are upset because it was a calculated insult. There are two meanings that were intended. First, as in baseball stats, the asterisks indicates a record that is somehow clouded. The first use was, I believe, when Roger Maris broke Babe Ruth’s record for single year homeruns, but only in a year in which there were more games. When the steroid scandal broke out, there was similar talk of asterisks, footnotes if you will.

This first is the more benign meaning, but still implies that the nominees were illegitimate, no matter if they were on somebody’s recommended list or not. As they were given to ALL the nominees (or at least intended for them; I did not accept mine) it was a blanket insult to all, not just the people who happened to be “tainted” by being liked by ... other supporting members of Worldcon.

That insult by the committee—these were “official Worldcon asterisks” – permitting this to be done at a reception ostensibly to honor the nominees, was what caused me to leave the proceedings (and informed Warren, who was at the door working for the concom, that I was leaving and why). Which pisses me off, because I missed Ben winning the Big Heart Award as a result.

Hell, I wish I was just being too sensitive. But it turns out there was more, on such a crude level, one to which even I didn’t think professionals would descend:

The second meaning is purely scatological. Gerrold referenced Vonnegut (*Breakfast of Champions*) and his use of “asterisk” for “ass.”

(<http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=asterisk&defid=3605473>)

How do we know this was the meaning intended? Gerrold used “assterisk” back in April 14<sup>th</sup> on Facebook when he was posting about the controversy and his position. [Here is the link:

[https://www.facebook.com/david.gerrold/posts/10205360779551319?hc\\_location=ufi](https://www.facebook.com/david.gerrold/posts/10205360779551319?hc_location=ufi) ].

Apparently there were other popular culture usages of this meaning – in the *Community* TV show, *South Park* were two I’ve seen referenced. So this is not trying to pull an obscure meaning out of something that was not intended.

See also below, the asterisk coasters’ maker’s report on Facebook. Note also he sees absolutely nothing wrong with what he did or what he was asked to do. It’s all a big joke to him.

[https://www.facebook.com/Stonekettle/posts/882941225074615:0?hc\\_location=ufi](https://www.facebook.com/Stonekettle/posts/882941225074615:0?hc_location=ufi)

Tell me again how these people were protecting the best traditions of fandom? Don’t you think if this were true Steve Stiles would have won this year? And actual fanzines and fan artists would have won in all the recent years they were present but instead the award went to pros or semi-pros with the right politics? I don’t know, maybe you do. But this isn’t the fandom I came into; the one I came into really did put science fiction, fandom, and intellectual freedom before politics.

**Tom Feller**  
**PO Box 140937**  
**Nashville TN 37214**  
**tomfeller@aol.com**

I managed to read four of the Hugo-nominated short stories, four of the novelettes, all five of the novellas, and three of the novels by the time the voting deadline came around and voted based on merit. My overall judgement was that overall the short stories were actually better than last year's field and that while the quality in the novelette and novella categories was lower than last year's, the drop-off was not a

drastic one. As for the novels, I thought *The Three-Body Problem* was an excellent book and well worthy of the award. The other two nominees that I read, *The Goblin Emperor* and *The Dark Between the Stars*, were both good, but not on the same level.

I am like Taral Wayne in that I loved the original Star Trek when I saw it on its original network run, continued to watch it in reruns, read the James Blish short story adaptations, and read many of the early *Star Trek* novels. However, my interests, like many of us in SF fandom, go well beyond *Star Trek*.

**John Purcell**  
**3744 Marielene Circle**  
**College Station TX 77845**  
**j\_purcell54@yahoo.com**

*John graces us with a song ...*

**“The Sad Puppy Blues”**

Sung to the tune of “The Thrill is Gone”

The Hugo’s gone, the Hugo’s gone away.  
The Hugo’s gone, the Hugo’s gone away.  
You know you groused so much, puppy,  
You’ll be sorry someday.

The fans are pissed, the fans are mighty pissed;  
The fans are pissed, puppy, the fans are mighty pissed.  
You’ve gone and messed with the system,  
Faans sure don’t like being dissed.

The votes are ruined, the votes are ruined for good;  
The votes are ruined, puppy, the votes are ruined for good.  
I know you’ll form another voting bloc, puppy,  
Just like a poor writer should.

It don’t come free – no, it don’t come free no more;  
It don’t come free – no, it don’t come free no more.  
So I’m going to Kansas City  
And vote for good stuff, for sure.

But the Hugo’s gone, the Hugo’s gone away.  
The Hugo’s gone, the Hugo’s gone away.  
You know you groused so much, puppy,  
You’ll be sorry someday.

*And a LOC ...*

The Charleston, South Caroline church mass murder has definitely resulted in some much needed serious discussion about the use of the Confederate battle flag on the grounds of government buildings. It is a symbol of racial hatred and bigotry, so for that reason it deserves to be brought down if anything as a gesture of concession to a terrible past, a past that still lingers in persistent intolerance of others. One would think that America as a nation should have made much further strides towards ending such behavior, but old habits die hard. Gene Roddenberry's vision of a unified society looks more like a utopian flight of fantasy than as a science fictional vision of the future.

Getting back to another point of yours, I agree with you that the lessons of history should never be forgotten or discarded. Wasn't it Santayana who said “Those who do not learn history are doomed to

repeat it"? If anything, that is why the American Civil War should be studied, its causes and long-lasting effects, especially the social ramifications that nobody foresaw. I really liked the way you focused on General Lee's commitment to his integrity. In an alternate universe, he probably would have made a good United States President. Hmm. Did Harry Turtledove write a novel along those lines, or was that somebody else? It sounds familiar.

In other recent developments, I welcome the United States Supreme Court's decisions regarding PPACA and Same-Sex Marriage. At least *someone* in Washington, DC seems to be thinking clearly. Too bad the right wing nut jobs are fanatically committed to their policy of obstructionist provincialism. Hmm. GOP = Glorified Obstructionist Provincialism. I like that.

I cannot wait for MidAmeriCon, 2nd edition. We will be there with bells on. There are so many of us who were at Big MAC in 1976 as our first World Convention that all I can think of is a gigantic panoramic photograph of all the people attending the 2016 MidAmeriCon who were at the 1976 MidAmeriCon. Ken Keller has been doing a great job of informing everybody via Facebook of some of their plans. It sounds like it is going to be one hell of a good time.

**David Williams**  
**dbwilyumz@tds.net**

I endorse your views on the Confederate battle flag controversy. The flag has to come down from government buildings. These facilities belong to all the people and therefore cannot be used to display factional views. Let's keep in mind that "southern heritage" is just a denatured version of "white southern heritage," and there are millions of southern citizens who do not share that heritage and, indeed, are the victims of it.

However, I see no need to pull down statues, re-name streets, and otherwise attempt to extinguish all traces of Confederate history. General Lee and other Confederate leaders were prominent historical figures. I don't see any compelling reason to erase their memory. We don't need this kind of fanatical hysteria. The situation calls for some of the grace and forgiveness displayed by the families of the Charleston massacre victims.

I, for one, would not be vexed to see the battle flag flown over Confederate cemeteries. It was the flag that these men fought and died for, and they would wish it if we could ask them. It's a question of intent. The flag was raised over the South Carolina capitol in 1961 as a gesture of defiance against the new civil rights and desegregation laws. The same flag over a graveyard is meant to honor the dead, not assault the living.

I believe you were unjust in equating General Sherman with the psychotic killers Quantrill and Anderson in Bloody Kansas. Sherman was fulfilling his assigned mission as part of Grant's strategic plan to end the war (finally). That mission was to destroy railroads and the agricultural base that supported the Confederate war effort while Grant held Lee's nose in Virginia and other generals advanced simultaneously in all other theaters. Grant (and Lincoln) had come to realize that there would never be a political peace settlement with the south. The only solution, after four years of ghastly and often pointless battles, was to destroy the south's military power. So Sherman set out on his trail of destruction. But note: his mission was to destroy property, not kill civilians. The result was a lot of suffering, but that too helped end the war. Over the following months, about half the men in Lee's army in Virginia deserted to return home and aid their families. Without the manpower to maintain the defense of Richmond, the lines collapsed, Lee retreated west, was cornered by superior forces, and the war was finally ended. As someone once said, war is hell.

**Lloyd Penney**  
**1706-24 Eva Rd.**  
**Etobicoke, ON**  
**CANADA M9C 2B2**

I am not an American, so I did not grow up in a society that seems to be obsessed with guns, and that means I look at American society as being quite insane. I see what happens in the news, and yet while



having what appears to be an infinite number of guns available, no one blames the guns or that availability. Most parts of the world have much stricter gun laws, and fewer deaths. You'd think restricting guns would be common sense, but not in the USA. The rest of us just scratch our heads.

I do like the fact that Pope Francis has a master's degree in chemistry, and know what he's talking about, as opposed to those Republican fools who think he's just a know-nothing seminarian. Francis has been a refreshing change in Catholic doctrine, and he seems to somehow insult those "Christian" Republicans.

Nursing a grudge over what happened in the '70s? I wasn't treated when I started off in local fandom back then, but I don't think I am nursing a grudge. One thing I didn't like about *Trek* fans back then was the tendency to get on the convention committee, somehow get control, and then change the convention from whatever it had been into a *Trek* con. The local *Trek* con had been stolen out from under us many, many years ago, and Buffalo's local literary con was almost taken over by the local media fans. Seems to happen a lot.

**Allan Maurer**  
**allan.maurer@gmail.com**

First, on the subject of Robert E. Lee, I think it's a mistake to venerate him. He was a butcher who won battles by sending thousands of men to sure slaughter. Grant was no better. And "honor," I believe, is about being true to values beyond yourself, not "true to yourself." Any serial killer may be true to himself, but there is no honor in it. Lee was honorable in defeat, as you note, and made more gestures toward peace and acceptance than you mention.

*I cannot accept the description of either Lee or Grant as "butchers." They were smart commanders of disciplined armies composed of determined men fighting for causes in which they believed. For me, your pejorative conjures up a massacre of the helpless, and does an ugly disservice to every honest soldier, everywhere.*

I would also argue that slavery was first and last the primary cause of the Civil War, and the attempt to make it about states' rights or economic issues, and I've read many, are pretty much horse dorky. You're right that the average soldier was not fighting for slavery. Many never owned them. But that doesn't change the fact that slavery was the issue that started the war and sustained it.

You mentioned walking the Gettysburg battlefield. Last time I visited, I took a horseback tour and you could see what a long expanse the Rebs faced before getting anywhere near the Union line.

If the Rebs had taken the route Longstreet always advocated: dig in and make them attack you – the war may have ended in a stalemate. Lee's reckless attacking strategy got all the hurrahs, but it was a losing one.

*There's a story of "Old Pete," reviled after Gettysburg for his disagreement with Lee's strategy, being welcomed to a rebel reunion decades later with huzzahs. He was obviously right – the Federals had left a corridor open for the Confederates that could have led straight to Washington. But as Shelby Foote pointed out, Lee's blood was up – "those people" were **right there** – and he never backed away from a fight.*

I saw in the letters that the Sad Puppies debate is still going on, if winding down. I've noted before and likely will again, that these left-right battles have been part of fandom from the beginning. The "conservatives" barred the lefties from the first Worldcon in 1939. The "lefties" were the Futurians. Fred Pohl was a card carrying communist at the time, but he admitted he joined to get access to their mimeograph machine for fanzines. It happened again during the Vietnam War, with those supporting it and those opposing taking rival ads doing one or the other.

It seems to me it's always vitriolic. While I am, myself, as Norman Mailer once said in a bid to be Mayor of New York City, running to the left and right of everyone. Actually, I'm on the fully left-wing side of most issues.

It occasionally really bothers me: as in the SFWA dust-up over the Malzberg/Resnick comments about female editors. I thought that got out of hand, even though I agree we need to clean up our act in

how we refer to women, because language does matter. But they meant no harm and a wrist-slap was all that was necessary but it turned into a lot more than that.

That excludes religion. Pope Francis seems to me a real Christian, and the Catholic Church has taken a more enlightened view of science in this century - not least because of the influence of its Jesuit Priests, Francis among them, who are themselves scientists. But i fail to see how anyone can continue to defend the Catholic Church and its long, seriously nasty history of child abuse in many lands and cities and parishes. If any other institution had racked up a history like that, including cover-ups, ignoring the problem, and laughable punishments, that's what it would be, history. We give religions breaks they do not deserve (and that includes tax breaks). We give Islam a pass on its institutionalized approval of murdering anyone who disagrees with whichever particular flavor it espouses. Christians murdered each other for centuries over arcane theological issues and simpler ones (they were still burning Unitarians in England in the mid-1700s.) and many today would love to impose their views of contraception, abortion, gay rights, sexual and moral issues on us all and given the chance, would.

That's a stimulating zine you put out. Thanks.

**Rich Lynch**  
**P.O. Box 3120**  
**Gaithersburg, Maryland 20885**  
**rw\_lynch@yahoo.com**

On departed friends: "Zoning through Facebook on March 23, 2015, I hit – and was hit by – news that undoubtedly stunned you too: the death of Peggy Rae Sapienza." I read the news after it was sent through an email group, and yes, it was stunning. I had known Peggy Rae since about the time of the 1986 Atlanta Worldcon. Back then she was Peggy Rae Pavlat and a mover and shaker in fandom as she continued to be in the nearly three decades after that. Describing her as a 'mover and shaker' actually does her disservice. She was a force. She had a lot of good ideas, from conventions to various forms of outreach, and the ability to gather the right people around her to make them happen. Many people in fandom, both locally here in Maryland and far beyond (myself included), can make the prideful claim that "I mowed Peggy Rae's lawn!" which is to say that we were part of one of her initiatives. That she will be missed is a huge understatement. Fandom will not be the same without her.

**Jeff Copeland**  
**16205 NE 3<sup>rd</sup> Place**  
**Bellevue WA 98008**  
**copeland@alumni.caltech.edu**

*An explanation. Jeff begins with a quotation from me which I published in the Southern Fandom Press Alliance. The subject is self-explanatory. I liked his reply so much that I requested permission to reprint it here.*

"I salute the body of Aaron Sorkin's work, but not the cynical and condescending cutover of America voiced by Jeff Daniels in *The Newsroom*. The speech really missed the point, citing such statistics as the Swedes having a better infant mortality rate than we do and Germany a better literacy average and suchlike. The reason America is the greatest country in the world is that unique among nations, we are founded on ideas to which we have tried to adhere, and still try to adhere, despite failing often. That idea is still sought – we don't settle for less – and that goal and that effort justify our self-respect. Character was a creep and a bully, anyway."

That rant is a man frustrated with the state of his country's politics, its petty bickering, its abandonment of its principles for a pot of messages, over fear at the terrorists under the bed. It develops through the series that he's also disgusted with the hijacking of his political party by ideological forces that are selfish and undemocratic. If he is a bully, it's to the forces of the Tea Party who have hijacked the responsible voices in the Republican Party.

Yes, Sorkin's monologue may be incorrect in its base claim, but it's right in its underlying theme: The United States may still be the greatest country in the world. For now. Slightly. Yes, we're a bastion



of democracy. Barely, despite gerrymandering and rigged elections and failures of government. We're a beacon of freedom and people still want to immigrate. Despite having more people incarcerated per capita than any other country and two of our states executing more people per capita than any country except Saudi Arabia and China. We lead the world in scientific research for the moment. Even though we have members of Congress who are know-nothings and actively deny science, our spending on basic research is less than half a percent of the federal budget. But we used to be so much more.

We no longer have the best-educated populace. We no longer lead the world in life expectancy, or trail it in infant mortality. We no longer make things. We've given away our auto industry, our bulk steel industry, our clothing industry, and are barely holding onto our aerospace industry. According to the annual Sunday supplement article on "What People Earn" in the 12 April *Parade*, the five occupations with the most new jobs are personal care aides, registered nurses, retail salespeople, home health aides, and food preparation and serving workers. We're reduced to a nation of ass wipers and burger flippers. Mostly at minimum wage. The only one of those that's a professional position is registered nurse. Those jobs aren't to build cars or locomotives. Nor to teach or write. Nor to explore or create.

We no longer have common purpose. We are no longer willing to sacrifice anything, however small, for the good of our fellow citizens. We are parochial and petty for our own ends. We would rather score points for ourselves than gain success for us all.

Conservative columnist David Brooks has just written a book *Road to Character: The Humble Journey to an Excellent Life*. His jumping off point was listening to a radio broadcast from the day after the Japanese surrender in 1945. "I was really struck at this supreme moment of American triumph that they weren't beating their chests. They weren't super proud of themselves; they were deeply humble. And I found that so beautiful and so moving. And I thought there's really something to admire in that public culture." He's correct: one doesn't picture Harry Truman standing beneath a banner reading "Mission Accomplished." Indeed, one can't conceive of an Iraq war that *wasn't* born out of a sense of American arrogance, completely counter to the spirit of responsibility which drove us into the Second World War. Even Tom Brokaw, chronicler of The Greatest Generation recently wrote, "What happened to the America I thought I knew? Have we simply wandered off course, but only temporarily? Or have we allowed ourselves to be so divided that we are easy prey for hijackers who could steer us onto a path to a crash landing?"

As I mentioned to you last time, I recently gave a speech in which I explained that even though the Pledge of Allegiance is a lie, we need to keep saying it. It is a plea to heed the better angels of our nature. It is a prayer to do better. It is a promise to our country, right or wrong, *especially* to make it right if it is wrong. That speech came out of the same place as Aaron Sorkin's writing for that rant.

**Sheila Strickland**  
**6204 Molino Dr.**  
**Baker LA 70714**  
**stricklandsheila@yahoo.com**

The Civil War was a great tragedy for this country; it split it and left anger and resentments that still live on. The Confederate battle flag belongs only in a museum, not flying above a statehouse. To me, anyone who waves it says that they want to go back to that dreadful time. I don't know how I feel about taking down Confederate monuments – I have no attachment to them and I'm not one of the people who was victimized by that failed nation.

Martin Morse Wooster rightly points out that he works at home "not oppressing anyone," but he may not realize that he does benefit from being white and male, just as I benefit from being white, straight and cis.

Taral Wayne brings some interesting history on the arrival of *Star Trek* fans into SF fandom and I can see why traditional fans were somewhat antagonistic to the *Trek* fans. What he doesn't get into is that some of those *Trek* fans (like me) liked SF, too. Sure, there were plenty of *Trek* fans who wanted to hear all *Trek* all the time, but I liked Heinlein, Clarke and Bradbury just as much as many of those old line fans. *Star Trek* was my entry into fandom, but I was already an SF reader.

Happily, Curt Phillips' worry that Teddy Beales's sins would sink the Helsinki in 2017 Worldcon bid didn't come true. I'm disappointed that I won't be able to go, but the happy outcome is that many more European fans will be better able to attend.

Toni Weisskopf may have been caught in the anti-Puppy backlash, but I read more than one person saying that they couldn't judge her quality as an editor without knowing a little more about what exactly she has done to deserve the Hugo. There are proposals to revamp the Editor category, though, so surely she'll have another chance.

**Milt Stevens**  
**6325 Keystone St.**  
**Simi Valley, CA 83063**  
**miltstevens@earthlink.net**

After reading *Spartacus* #9, I found myself thinking about the vices and virtues of the United States. We're not such a bad gang of joes and josephines. We've probably done fewer really rotten things than most major countries. (Of course, Switzerland hasn't done anything rotten. They didn't get the chance.) However, we do have one overwhelming vice.

We are so bloody self-righteous about everything. We are those wonderful folks who brought you Prohibition and the Hayes Office. The rest of the world views us with dark muttering. It isn't so much that we are insufferable but that we work on being insufferable.

I've come to regard nut jobs with guns as natural disasters. There are always a couple of percent of the population who are of dubious sanity. If they get too much of whatever, they do something really ill advised. I remember you writing on the subject of legal insanity. Running amok with guns or blowing yourself up still seems crazy to me.

BBC has had some comments on the state of democracy at the moment. They have noted that voters are increasingly antagonistic toward the people who supposedly represent them. This seems to be the situation in all countries that still have elections. What I hear seems to confirm the idea. I've heard remarks I would regard as intemperate at coffee shop and at the local gym. Maybe the comment makers expect me to express some form of affirmation. I don't. My mother told me not to talk to strangers, and that still seems to be a pretty good idea.

My LOC on *Spartacus* #8 seems to have gone astray. I wrote it and seem to have sent it to the right place. If it didn't arrive at all, I can send another copy.

*Your previous LOC did go astray, but here it is at last.*

As you say in *Spartacus* #8, Puppygate has been getting a lot of attention. If *File 770* wasn't a focal point fanzine before, it certainly is now. Mike Glycer's daily round-ups of Puppygate commentary get between 300 and 500 posts per day. That level of response would be entirely overwhelming for a monthly fanzine. Of course, response to a monthly fanzine couldn't feed on itself the way this has. However, the internet can handle this much response. Depending on how you look at it, that may be a good thing or a bad thing.

The summaries and comments on *File 770* do help to keep the controversy going. I don't think most people would go to Vox Day's blog to find out what he had to say. Day feeds on notoriety, and any sort of comment feeds his ego. The only possible strategy is to bury him in indifference.

I very much like *Three-Body Problem*, and I also like *Station Eleven*. *A Darkling Sea* was my favorite on my own nominating ballot. If all three had made it to the final ballot, I would have found it a difficult choice.

*A Darkling Sea, huh? Another title for the TBR list ...*

The controversy has attracted a huge number of supporting memberships. Most people think the additional supporting members have joined to oppose the puppies. While that is to be hoped, it isn't really a certainty. There is muttering that the increase might come from GamerGater thugs joining to support the puppies.

*Fortunately, the huge gush of supporting memberships was overwhelmingly anti-Puppy. Did you or anyone else encounter any sort of **organization** to the supporting explosion? Three thousand plus memberships pouring in at once is an amazing occurrence. By whom and how was it encouraged?*

There have been a number of rule changes suggested to stop future puppy pollution. Personally, I have borrowed a journalistic adage for my own political considerations. “If in doubt, leave it out.” The 4/6 idea seems reasonable, although I find myself wondering what sort of a ballot might be produced by and 4/8 or 5/10 plan. Any weighted vote plan that wouldn’t be understood by the non-mathematically inclined among us would be a bad idea. Getting rid of the 5% rule seems to be an entirely good idea. I don’t recall why we had that rule in the first place. Expanding worldcon membership to 20,000 to 50,000 to make slate voting unlikely by increasing participation is an idea that only appeals to people who have never had anything to do with running a worldcon. The business meeting would never allow a paid worldcon staff, and nobody would run a convention that size for free. Also, I wouldn’t want to attend a con that size anyway.

*I know nothing about these plans, which seems to me to be perfectly adequate information. I hold with keeping things simple and keeping things honest. The answer to bad speech is good speech. The answer to a bad slate of nominees is a good slate of nominees. You’ll find my suggestions below.*



And indeed, my Hugo recommendations so far: *The Dark Forest*, second book in Cixin Liu’s stunning trilogy – Paolo Bacigalupi’s grim, effective *The Water Knife* – Stan Robinson’s trope-challenging *Aurora*. *Not* recommended: Neal Stephenson’s *Seveneves* and John Sanford/Ctein’s *Saturn Run*.

Both of the latter novels are what I call *science fiction procedurals*, heavy on engineering tech, light on plot, ephemeral on characters. *Saturn Run* was particularly frustrating – its best character, a psychologist from New Orleans, was introduced early, played up, and then utterly ignored until the last pages of the book! Ctein is a very well-known SF fan and photog – second only to our late friend Jay Kay Klein in that regard – and has been a guest for Apollo launches in this very house (at one point monopolizing the bathroom to develop film) – so this is painful to say. But one can read only *so much* about cameras and lenses in a book ostensibly about alien contact! *Aurora* suffers with a light dose of the same ailment, but Robinson’s point – that interstellar colonization, far from being mankind’s salvation, may not even be possible – is so original it burns right through any tedious evocations of orbital mechanics.

In the short story category, I must nominate “Crystal Love” from *Perihelion*, and I anticipate naming “Astronaut Dreams” from the same source. The authors are my wife and father-in-law, y’see.

My nominations for long-form dramatic presentation – why don’t they cut the crap and just say “Best Film”? – will expand, I feel, once the year is out and the new *Star Wars* and *Hunger Games* films are viewed. The best SF movie I saw this year was *Mad Max: Fury Road*, but the Hugo will almost

undoubtedly go to *The Martian*, which we also greatly enjoyed. (Hey, maybe *Chastain* will come to KC to pick up the trophy! Dibs on buying her an ice cream cone!) I had problems, reported here, with *Ex Machina*, but I expect to name it, too, along with *Terminator: Genisys*, unjustly condemned as dull and humorless by critics who didn’t notice the delightfully confusing time-travel story, the brilliant FX, and that Arnold was an effing hoot. For the Short-Form drama Hugo, *The Walking Dead* produced an outstanding candidate, “Here’s Not Here”. That show offers much, much more than mere paranoid zombie horror.

Nothing surprising in my choices for fannish Hugo honors; I’ve often voiced my support for them and none have won before: Steve Stiles, Alan White, Marc Schirmeister, Charlie Williams, Taral Wayne, and I could go on and on, great fan artists being a treasure fandom enjoys a’many ... *Alexiad*, *Trap Door*, *Reluctant Famulus* ... Joe Major, James Bacon ... Hey, you read this stuff, what’s *your* take on it?



Nostalgia is one of the two great emotional indicators of aging, and I've got it, bad. I was a kid in the 1950s, and keep haunting YouTube, seeking to recapture the good feelings of that era through old episodes of *Alfred Hitchcock Presents* and *Twilight Zones* that haven't been butchered by SyFy's lust for more commercial time. Mainly, I seek out *Playhouse 90*, the epic drama anthology of the late fifties, and I admit that this is largely because of the music. That theme, played while a giant Christmas ornament star spins slowly on the screen, carries connotations to me of childhood's fond dreams of the promise of adulthood, of discoveries and revelations to come – and the feeling of excitement, sadness, and satisfaction that a *good story* made me feel.

And *90* gave good stories, many thanks to that most powerful of young television turks, Rod Serling. *Patterns*. *Bomber's Moon*. *The Comedian*, depressing though it was. *A Town Has Turned to Dust*, with the young William Shatner and the hammy Rod Steiger (nominated for an Emmy, though much better in Paddy Chayefsky's original *Marty*). Of course, the legendary TV version of *Requiem for a Heavyweight*, which, despite its superior cast, I prefer to the film, because it's infinitely more hopeful and less enraptured with noble humiliation and defeat.

Serling wasn't alone out there with early televised drama. There's *The Plot to Kill Stalin*, loaded like a clown car with great actors of the time. Cliff Robertson and Piper Laurie, tremendous performers, in the original *Days of Wine and Roses*. *Marty*, later – like *Wine and Roses* – brilliantly transferred to the movie screen. And there was a Halloween show about a pumpkin-headed scarecrow a witch brought to life – starring Dick van Dyke? IMDB says no – which spooked me silly when I was 7 or so. Damn! I'd love to see that again!

I wish someone would download more of these priceless productions. I'd fight bears to see the Claude Rains version of *Judgment at Nuremberg*, Lloyd Nolan's turn as Queeg in *The Caine Mutiny* *Court Martial*, Cliff Robertson's *The Two Worlds of Charlie Gordon*, his first, and he thought superior, adaptation of "Flowers for Algernon". Although television of today offers some excellent entertainment – I think of *The Last Ship* and *The Walking Dead*, *Homeland* and *Criminal Minds*, *Fargo*, *Longmire*, Hanoi Jane's exquisite *Grace & Frankie* – the sense of immediacy and intimacy in fifties TV, the similarity to living theatre, is something we miss. George Clooney tried to recapture the feeling when he made a live version of *Fail-Safe* some years ago. It was a one-shot experiment which I thought it came off well – someone should try such again.



The recent protests on campuses reveal a paradox: Students want their colleges to protect them and create "safe spaces," while simultaneously retaining the right to precisely dictate the terms of such an arrangement, regardless of its plausibility in a university system, let alone the so-called real world.  
*The Daily Beast*, 11-13-15

"Safe spaces" ...

To an extent, the current upheavals on certain college campuses remind me of the various movements at Berkeley when I was a student. There's a very significant difference. We wanted risk. They want safety. It's a pipe dream.

The Free Speech Movement of 1964 – the uprising which first drew my attention to UC and made it, from that moment onward, my first choice for an alma mater – insisted that the Cal administration recognize that students had the right to express their views. It was a revolt against the restriction of student speech. This movement seems in favor of it. There is no liberation here; there is conformity and restriction to a narrow set of opinions. Whereas the student movements of the Sixties fought against arbitrary control, this movement insists on it. The only difference is *who* controls.

These kids seem to crave not freedom but *safety*. They want to be free not of harm but of question; they are threatened not by violence but by *ideas*. What they lack is the authority to impose their views on administrations and other students, and they demand it. They claim the authority to silence ideas which threaten their notion of what is right and true. This concept is contrary to the growth of sophistication and knowledge that should be at the heart of the university experience. College campuses must not be allowed to become dictatorial enclaves of the noisiest momentary pressure group. Ideas and opinions, in the proper college setting, cannot be restricted, shouted down or banished. They must be *talked* through.

Not that the Sixties (and early Seventies) were models for any kind of civilized redress of grievances. I'm reminded of the Third World Liberation Front in the winter of '68-'69, when – for some pretty solid reasons – black, Hispanic and Asian students at Cal struck for a Third World College at the campus – an Ethnic Studies Department. Actually a pretty good idea, but they began threatening students who didn't participate, and some idiots even started fires in campus buildings. I have a souvenir from the destruction of Wheeler Auditorium – the charred leg off a seat.

I halfway believe that the fire was set by an agent *provocateur*. Ronald Reagan, then Governor, tried to squelch the TWLF, as he did every other student movement, with thuggish cops and tear gas, and his people were certainly capable of anything – as his cops proved with the murderous obscenity at People's Park a few months later. Reagan's brainless savagery made him popular with the 'burbs, and is either whitewashed or completely unmentioned in recent biographies, but it established him forever in the Berkeley mind as ruthless, rigid, heartless and brutal. (And yet I returned his grin and wave when I sneaked into a Republican fund-raiser at the Claremont Hotel in 1968 or so. Reagan was easy to hate, but hard to dislike.)

To return to my point. Then, we pleaded for justice. Today, we hear pleas for safety. Wrong planet. You can create justice. There *is* no safety. *Je suis Paris*.



It is a sad truth about life in 2015 that civilization exists under a constant threat, and civilization has yet to configure the best way to fight it. The enemy, in this case ISIL, has what the *NYTimes* calls a two-pronged attack plan, and the better forces of mankind, in this case the French and us, has to meet both..

The obscene attacks on Paris on Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>, November 2015 came from a small gang, possibly independent, connected tenuously to a broader terrorist network, certainly linked by ideology and aim with the downing of a Russian commercial jet a few weeks before, but probably not operating under common orders from a multi-national conspiracy's central control. Though phony passports were used and their suicide belts required financing, the amount of money expended was not huge, the weapons used were available anywhere, the suicide belts were crude, and the criminals were not professional soldiers. This is our great fortune and our great problem with ISIL: in large degree, it's small time. Its army sweeping across Arabia is no direct threat to the West. The threat to the West come from this sort of malcontented group inspired by the movement but, I am willing to bet, hardly controlled by it.

So fighting ISIL is hardly an instinctual matter. Massed armies won't work against such an enemy. Boots on the ground? Where? Syria? What side do we take? Who do we shoot? Where do we stop? We are up against a mercurial opponent on his own turf who seldom fights like the troops we've conquered in the past. Our policy is to single out terrorist leaders and destroy them, one by one. The very day of the attack on Paris, an American drone smoked the vicious and sadistic assassin "Jihadi John," a small victory on a day of great tragedy – at least the animal was not around to cheer on his comrades. One-by-one was the way to defeat Al Qaeda, which depended on the control of leaders; ISIL, though, seemingly has no leaders. If America knows who is in charge, we can kill him. So who's in charge of ISIL? So how do we destroy him, and it?

Two prongs.

To destroy the ISIL army, make a coalition – encourage France to invoke Article 5 of the NATO charter – and fight a smart fight. If we put boots on the ground, let them come in the form of quick strike

forces, not massive lumpen armies that take weeks to move. Put forth an army of SEALs and Rangers, quick and precise and deadly. Find those elusive leaders and stick cruise missiles where they'd do the most good. The small terror cells in place can be found through smart and ruthless intelligence. Edward Snowden be damned, let's use every tool at our command, and find the enemies of our people.

But the real danger of ISIL isn't on the field; as always, it's in the heart, in the mind. ISIL feeds off the frustrations of a feckless and alienated second generation of European immigrants. Our ultimate victory will come when ISIL's personnel supply is eliminated. Western civilization must give the disaffected something to live for, something true and hopeful to believe in; then they will *live* – and we'll succeed. ISIL is an idea. How do you defeat an idea? *With another idea.*

I have no worries about their victim this time. France has taken worse. The mother of liberty, the home of Lafayette, Voltaire and Danton, the inspiration for Thomas Jefferson, the gift-giver of our Lady in the harbor, will survive and fight and prosper. *Vive la France.*



I want to take a few pixels here to hail the memory of a splendid gentleman whom we lost in the last few weeks: Jerry Proctor, head of the great Proctor clan of Birmingham, lifelong newspaperman, SCAer, a short man with a giant self and a beautiful voice, in person and on the page. In Valhalla, I have no doubt, he toasts those of us who remain, and in return and gratitude, we who remain toast his memory.

*Illo by Charlie Williams*

