



NO. 35 NOV. 2019

SPARTAGUS

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GHLIII PRESS PUB #1264

So it is happening – Donald Trump is undoubtedly being impeached. Televised hearings fill the daylight hours. Witnesses detail America’s poisoned relationship with Ukraine. Republicans savage them as “Never Trumpers” or traitors despite their general history of dedication and patriotism. Trump’s sins against America and Law come tumbling forth: essential extortion against Ukraine demanding

“investigation” of Joe Biden in *quid pro quo* for needed arms. Behind this sleaze, surely a crime, surely intolerable, Trump’s unilateral desertion of the Kurds – the actions of Rudy Giuliani and his goombahs – petulant abandonment of the Paris climate accords – more and more, a new blot on our national honor every day. Adam Schiff – my candidate for vice president on an Elizabeth Warren ticket – scores time and again against this reckless, unstable fraud, announcing, like Zola, that “We denounce him to all honest men.” And women.

But is anyone listening? I still have little hope that any of this story will penetrate the common American mind. Besides, there are some – many – who have found in Trump the iconoclastic dictator they desire. Their noisy disgust with “the deep state,” and their surety that this impeachment is just political posture, represents nothing more than ignorance of and contempt for national history and the idea of Law. Can we who claim liberality and progressive thought reach these fellow Americans with any sort of argument at all? To *Esquire* I do turn.

FROM THE *ESQUIRE* WEBSITE. BY JACK HOLMES

OCT 11, 2019

It was surely a swift process for some people. Here's a talk-radio soundboard running for president, yelling about Mexicans and Muslims and how we need a Big, Beautiful Wall to keep Those People out. He knows whose country this is. He knows who should make the rules, and who ought to shut up and follow them. He knows who gets a seat at the table in America. They were in from the jump, from the moment they first stood at a rally and felt that twisted power coursing through their veins.

But others, you have to think, were more gradual converts. Maybe they felt the world was passing them by. Maybe they didn't know until he came along how much they needed an outlet for their rage at a million quotidian cuts—the new boss who doesn't look like a boss should look, having to press "1" for English. They were primed for it, sure, but it took a while to fully commit. Day after day, as they continued to support him—through the racist tirades and the attacks on veterans and their families and the exploding allegations that he is a serial sexual predator—they were forced to give up more and more of themselves to stay on-board. And as they gave up more of themselves, they became more and more devout in their allegiance to The Movement. At some point, the sunk cost became insurmountable. There is no going back now. They have given all of themselves to him.

That is how we arrived in the place we did on Thursday night at a rally in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Donald Trump, American president took the stage and, among a great many other things, did this. The crowd laughed and cheered.

He may once have told you, in his way, not to believe your eyes and ears. But you can. The President of the United States did indeed just act out some sort of sexual fantasy, in front of thousands and on C-SPAN, between two characters from his extended Deep State Conspiracy Universe. The stars of this show were Peter Strzok and Lisa Page, two FBI employees involved in the Russia probe who were having an affair and were opposed to the president's candidacy for president. (There is no evidence of misconduct.)

This is the president channeling everything he learned from Vince McMahon, pausing after he recites the names of the various heels so the crowd can howl their derision. The details aren't important. This is the show, where the enemies get bashed and We cheer together. This is the president deliberately debasing his office, going lower than ever before and bringing his supporters with him, because he knows they have ventured into the deep and dark together now and they can't see any path back. They will follow him until he is stopped, and the farther they follow, the more they are his. There is nothing that cannot be excused away with half-

baked crap about Fake News or What About Hillary. Nihilism is at the heart of things now. There are no standards or ethics to be observed, only enemies to lash out at from the darkness.

The rest of last night's national disgrace was predictable by now. The president cooked up egregious lies about Democratic leaders in Congress. He recited the names of his greatest allies on State TV and talked about how great their ratings are. He proudly said, "There was no blackmail," on his call with the leader of Ukraine. Mr. President: Thank you. He accused his enemies of that which he is guilty. He *joked* about serving more than his constitutionally mandated two terms. He exhibited clear signs of cognitive decline. He said Joe Biden, the former Vice President of the United States, only got the job "because he understood how to kiss Barack Obama's ass." And what exactly was Proper Evangelical Good Boy Mike Pence doing while the president simulated orgasms on-stage last night? After all, he and Mother were standing there in the arena.

But the real ugliness came on a similarly predictable topic. Minneapolis is home to Ilhan Omar and the sizable Somali community there from which she hails, and it was always bound to feature in this *Thursday Night Raw-meets-Riefenstahl* with a script courtesy of Stephen Miller. First, he recited some evidence-free conspiracy theories he got off a right-wing blog.

The president makes a lot of things clear here. The only real "reporting" is whatever helps him and hurts his opponents. The same goes for what constitutes Fake News: it's any negative coverage of him. What is true—what's reflected in observable reality—is not relevant. But he is also very intent to cast the Minnesota congresswoman as The Other here. Not only is she a black Muslim woman, she must be smeared as someone who would violate basic codes of our society by marrying her brother. (Again, this is all horse shit.) She cannot be One of Us. She cannot be an American. She is The Other, and has no right to a seat at the table or a say in how we run our society. The crowd howled in response, including the kid, who couldn't have been older than 15, standing behind Trump on-camera.

This is more than dirty politics, though. Omar already receives a huge volume of death threats—particularly when the president mentions her by name—and members of a right-wing militia hatched a plot to bomb a Minnesota mosque in 2017. The president himself has embraced political violence repeatedly. While the vast majority of his supporters would not engage in it, some have, including a Florida man who sent pipe bombs to the president's perceived enemies at CNN. The president knows what he's doing. He wants to make it not just unpleasant but physically dangerous to oppose him. He wants his enemies to be afraid to participate in our politics. It is the language of force. He also wanted to make clear that Omar's Otherness was a proxy for the community she represents.

This is a virulently racist tirade aimed at ginning up the worst instincts of the people in the crowd. It is not a coincidence Trump chose to come here, or to target a refugee community that is black and Muslim. This is how he thinks he can win reelection: by continuing to pull his base of support towards more vitriolic expressions of this vision of America as a country for and by white people; by scaring other constituencies away from speaking out; by using the Republican Party's machinations to stop inconvenient voters from voting; by smearing his opponents as Just As Bad As Him, They Just Pretend to Be Prim and Proper; by soliciting foreign meddling that will benefit him in exchange for favors when he is re-elected.

All the while, he will drag his supporters deeper and deeper into the abyss. They cannot be reached now, only stopped.

And *then* convinced. One hopes.



We approach the year's end and the intensification it will bring to the presidential race. Explaining her hyper-ambitious Medicare for All program, even with believable assurances that it won't gut Americans

with new taxes, Liz frightened rather than inspired voters – and seems to have plateaued. Ascendant is Pete Buttigieg, who may win the Iowa caucuses – and has a fair chance of being the first gay nominee of a major party. Obama confronted racism head-on and trashed it. Hillary confronted sexism in the same way and won a clear plurality of votes. How would this young man of character and courage do? I cheer for Liz Warren, but given a choice between Mayor Pete and that ogre in the White House – well, there's no choice.



In the past few weeks I've visited my dentist, my nurse practitioner, and my nephrologist, and can report ... *stability*. The molar I thought busted was merely a chipped crown, no repair needed. My bloodwork reported high creatinine and chloride, but no higher than last time. So: except for the sickening residuum of my gut op eight years ago, I remain the same fat colaholic dweeb everyone in fandom and out knows and loves. (Thus the medical advice I heard: lose weight, more water, less cola.)



Senior fan-ed and SFPAn Bob Jennings remarked recently that he was delighted to see book reviews in *Spartacus*, as he'd gotten the impression that I'd just stopped reading. Now I must reinforce that perception. I must have started four or five novels since my last issue – and for various reasons, abandoned each. The books include Cixin Liu's *Supernova Era* and Ramsey Campbell's *The Darkest Part of the Woods*, Flannery O'Connor's classic *The Violent Bear It Away* and the Stoker winner, *The Bone Clocks*. The only tome I've made it through is Don Winslow's *The Force*, a driven, bloody narrative much like his magnificent – and driven, and bloody – *Cartel* trilogy, by far the dominant reading experience I'll carry away from 2019. I can't explain this lapse – I'll get back to the unfinished novels, especially the O'Connor, which is *brilliantly* composed – but there, alas, we are: stuck in the movie theatre.

Since it's autumn, the movie studios are releasing what they consider to be their class items – award contenders. Most have yet to make it to the wilds of mid-Florida, but some flicks have. SPOILERS SPOILERS SPOILERS!

Ad Astra – I remember the exact point at which I determined that *Ad Astra* would be a disappointment: Brad Pitt's space-suited character is trying to hitch a ride to the outer solar system and must stow away aboard a ship heading thither. He does so, through the exhaust manifold, *as the ship is taking off*. Before that silly moment, I'd been well taken up with the story, but that absurdity drove my disbelief instantly free of its state of willing suspension. Out at the orbit of Neptune, Pitt finds his long-missing father – Tommy Lee Jones, dreadfully miscast – and comes to a dreary conclusion about man's solitude among the stars. We're supposed to ignore the fact that the borders of our solar system – which extend far beyond Neptune's orbit, of course – are nowhere near distant enough to allow a comprehensive survey of the universe such as this reveal implies. Bah.

Zombieland: Double Tap – On first viewing, and I doubt there will be another, I liked this sequel to the clever original; it's just more of the same goofy undead-boppin' b.s., dressed up this time with a gloriously-caricatured *limited* blonde. (Gotta watch how I put that.) I've become unsure if the zombie trope works as black comedy, but who cares? I stuffed my chops with popcorn and left happy. Oh – one character herein is nicknamed "Berkeley." Of course he's a toad.

Terminator: Dark Fate – is Terminator Lite Weight, exploring yet another alternate future in the Schwarzenegger universe. As ever, Arnold is a hoot ("I do drapery") and the movie is diverting enough, but a bit sluggish and more than a bit derivative. I was quite upset by Linda Hamilton's appearance – specifically, her voice. Everyone ages, but she *sounds* like she's been puffing down three packs of Tiparillos a day.

The Current War – A historical treatment of the competition between Thomas Edison (played, with his usual *elan*, by Benedict Cumberbatch) and George Westinghouse. Nothing too electrifying HAHAHA but well-made and worth an evening's watch on Home Box.

Doctor Sleep – It's unfortunate that this Stephen King adaptation has tanked at the box office, since it impresses me as an impeccable merger of two imaginations by a third. Let me explain. King's novel *Doctor Sleep* is a sequel to King's novel *The Shining*. Stanley Kubrick's movie of the novel took great liberties with the book. For instance, in the book, the chef is white and survives, and the Overlook Hotel gets blown to pieces. In Kubrick's movie – vilified at the time, but regarded as a masterpiece since – the chef is a black guy who catches an axe in the gut, and the hotel survives. This film's director, Mike Flanagan, is tasked with creating a sequel to both ... merges the two visions successfully and entertainingly. Must breathe most heavily over the villainess, head of a coven which preys on the shine-gifted. Rose the Hat is a succubus – probably the most seductive creature I've seen in a film this year: Rebecca Ferguson, a Swedish brunette, Lady Jessica in the next *Dune* rendition. Made me feel 15 again.

The Lighthouse is a self-conscious, pretentious wannabe-art film which, like many movies that aspire towards Ingmar Bergman, succeeds mainly at excess, mistakes incomprehensibility for profundity and ugliness for depth. The great Willem Dafoe and the ever-improving Robert Pattinson venture far into caricature as they portray two salts going crazy in a ... lighthouse, whose lamp is evidently supposed to symbolize ... something. Beautiful b&w photography, but the movie far from works.

Ford vs. Ferrari -- Auto racing nuts will think they've gone to Heaven. Terrific pavement-level photography, racing pacing, good acting though a predictable story, it's lots of fun for anyone not in search of high art or gross comedy. Most interesting to me were the portraits of Henry Ford II and Enzo Ferrari, business and automotive visionaries; such guys are a different species from the rest of us.

And speaking of different, there's *Joker*. My old DC Woodchuck compadre, now Batman movie producer Michael Uslan is celebrating, at press time, *Joker*'s ascension into the rare billion-dollar climes of movie profits, altitudes scaled by such efforts as *Star Wars* and *Pirates of the Caribbean* (several of each) *Titanic* and *Avengers*. Awesome appeal, obviously, for a film that is much less superhero blockbuster than traumatic psychological nightmare. But this is a quality, not a detriment: *Joker*'s excellence is in its *normalcy*; it never stretches itself into the garish colors of comic books.

Joaquin Phoenix is epic in the *Joker* role, a much less fantastical treatment than the character has received before. No dunks in industrial chemicals for this arch-criminal; he's simply an obsessive lunatic pursuing a pervasive illusion of power and value, a pitiable killer – but all the more effective for that. He should be Oscar-nominated, at least. The film itself ... well, along with *Once Upon a Time in ... Hollywood*, it's the light of 2019.

On the tube, good viewing includes *Jack Ryan* (season 2), *Watchmen* (about which I'm cautiously optimistic), *The Purge*, *Mom*, the last episodes of *The Deuce* (excellent last scene), and *Lawn Ordure: SVU*. A recent outing on that monumental idiocy *Survivor*, though, turned out to be quite disturbing. Several of the younger female contestants complained – to an older lady as well as the show's producers – that an older guy of their number was too touchy-feely and was making them feel “uncomfortable.” The producers braced the guy and the older lady tried to form a coalition to vote him off the island. It turned out that the accusation was at least partially a *tactic* – a way to advance in the show. Damn it, the others were trying to take the lessons of #MeToo seriously – and they ended up being Used. Not what it's about.

Sure they make incredible amounts of money but ... are Marvel movies art? **Martin Scorsese** says not, and surely he should know. He went on record this fall that such flicks are like theme park rides – trivial, artless diversions, not “cinema” at all. I understand where he's coming from, but the great Marty made himself sound snobbish. He needs to remember that while *Avengers* rates below *Goodfellas* in terms of artistry, *The Virgin Spring* and *La Dolce Vita* are of significantly higher rank. There's room on screen for all kinds of film – from *The Seventh Seal* to *Goodfellas* to *Iron Man* – and that the profits a popular and accessible diversion like *Avengers* earn make it possible for artistic work to be made and distributed. Popularity *bolsters* artistic courage. The great director should have acknowledged that. (I wonder if Scorsese's comment will cost *The Irishman* its chance at Oscar attention next year.)

LOC DOWN, LOC DOWN, TAKE PITY IF YOU CAN

(some responses to *Spartacus* #34)

Nic Farey

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A quick thanks, Guy – [*Spartacus* is] always a good read. It does tend to bring a smile to my face that you *still* have the goshwows...

Good arrers!

Rich Lynch

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You write that: “PC has run amok, as the parties responsible have renamed the John W. Campbell Award for Outstanding New SF Writer, based on the 2019 winner [Jeannette] Ng’s calumny that JWCJr. was ‘a fascist’. ... The insult to Campbell ... is reprehensible.” Her speech certainly blew up the Awards Ceremony, with the almost immediate result that the award was re-named the ‘*Astounding* Award for Best New Writer’. And yet, just three days earlier, that same John W. Campbell had received the ‘Best Editor’ Retrospective Hugo Award for the year 1944 from the same Worldcon members who went on to raucously applaud Ng’s angry acceptance speech. It was presented by former Ace Books editor-in-chief Ginjer Buchanan, and when Campbell’s grandson came onstage to accept the award he received a warm ovation from the large audience that was present. Go figure.

Take a look at Anders Bellis’ comments on JWCJr., following.

Anders Bellis, on Facebook:

CAMPBELL VERSUS NG ON THE SUBJECT OF FASCISM VERSUS DEMOCRACY

I am aware that I am somewhat of a Johnny-come-lately on this subject, but as I am currently going through and sorting my books and magazines - all of them, not just sf - I dug out my collection of *Astounding/Analog* issues edited by John W. Campbell.

Campbell's editorial in the November, 1958, issue of *Astounding* is rather astounding, but before quoting him, let me quote the definition of fascism:

"Fascism is a form of far-right, authoritarian ultranationalism characterised by dictatorial power, forcible suppression of opposition, and strong regimentation of society and of the economy."

I will now quote John. W. Campbell on his political views, as put forth in the editorial mentioned above:

" ... the right of the Freeman individual to think for himself, and to work for himself, as against the older concept of the individual as an entity owned by the state." / ... / " ...to allow the individual to achieve the full development of his individual potentials, unlimited by such arbitraries as aristocracy-of-birth, or other arbitrarily imposed restrictions." / .../ " ... all men /are/ to have equal opportunity to develop their own valuable potentials."

I will add that Campbell was arguing against what he called "hyperdemocracy", meaning to impose limits of various kinds on individuals so that they should not excel in any field - be it sports, science, or the arts - since that would (in a "hyperdemocratic" society) be "un-democratic". Everyone in such a system must be equal in every respect, or else there is no democracy.

In other words, what Campbell was arguing against were tendencies of the Soviet variety, such as Kurt Vonnegut fiercely criticised in his excellent short story Harrison Bergeron.

But Campbell vehemently defends democracy in this editorial of his.

Astounding, isn't it?

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1969 does not seem like it was 50 years ago. Vietnam is just now a country on the map, but at least we got to the moon. You might have seen my wondering aloud on Facebook about when cons were a major part of our lives...not so much now. The cons we liked went away, or changed beyond our recognition, and I include Worldcon in that.

Why Trump isn't impeached by now, and cooling in a dark prison somewhere, with his whole family to follow, I don't know. Just recently, he announced that America's farmers were lazy, and all farm subsidies would be cut off. The fact his son has written a book on how badly he's been treated, and Dad is plugging it like crazy, making the emoluments clause look slim...well, I do not know why this is tolerated, unless impeachment is being stretched out to coincide with the next US federal election. As soon as he isn't president anymore. I hope the whole Trump clan spends the rest of their lives defending themselves in court over illegal money. They all deserve it.

And, in even more fan/pro politics, you've probably seen the shitstorm still coming on over the poor business behind CZP, ChiZine Publications, of Peterborough, Ontario, formerly of Toronto. I know the people in CZP, and I know many of the authors involved. They were truly a shining Canadian success story, until accusations of sexism, racism, ripoffs and shoddy business practices basically wiped the publishing house and their owners off the face of social media. I know nothing more beyond this, and cannot offer any opinion beyond this paragraph.

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Here I must note the passing of **Norm Metcalf**, known to me through years of sharing a SFPA roster and a single phone call early this year. Grand old fan, a connection with tales and scandals and data and people from the dawn of SF onward. I'm really glad we spoke.

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Thanks and a lift of the Lillian lid to the National Fantasy Fan Federation for nominating *Spartacus* as one candidate for Best Perzine. I believe we're the only non-N3F publication to make that short list.

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What were *you* fifty years ago this month? *I* was publishing the first issue of the first entry in my GHLIII fanzine press – an issue of the house journal of my Berkeley co-op dorm, *The Barrington Bull*. The *Bull* had impeccable SFnal cred, although I didn't know it at the time: Terry Carr and Ron Ellik had edited it in the late fifties (simultaneously with their Hugo-winning *FANAC*, in fact), and later, Terry kindly sent me 'roxes of their entire run. Like a fool, I left those gems at Barrington when I graduated and God knows where they are now. At least I got to thank him personally at a Worldcon.

That *Bull* – almost impossible to read, so little did I understand mimeography – wasn't my first zinac; I'd typed on a couple of oneshots at meetings of the New Orleans SF club, NOSFA. (I later reprinted them and gave them GHLIII Press Pub numbers.) Still, its rant against the brutality of the Alameda County deputies and page of crude jokes has something to say for itself 50 years later, for the obsessive craziness it started if naught else. In the half-century since, not a month has gone by without *another* GHLIII fanzine – or two, or three – and I feel no need to slow down now.

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From my *Aboriginal Route II*, September 2010: Dropping down to Hollywood Boulevard so I could show my beloved Grauman's [now Mann's] Chinese Theatre, we found the ... crowds included costumed street performers – catgirls gathered neat Michelle Pfeiffer's star on the Walk of Fame; a man-sized Elmo from Sesame Street chatted with Freddy Krueger; a sexy cop threw me into handcuffs; a tall wigged actor named **Christopher Dennis** posed as Superman. Dennis was cool – he's a real collector of super-memorabilia and spoke of visiting the birthplace of the icon: Kimberly and East 105th South in Cleveland, the home of Jerry Siegel.

In early November, after a life of street performing and many reverses, Chris Dennis was found lifeless inside a used clothing bin in Van Nuys. What cruelty or illness brought him there we do not know. We do know that he played Supes on the Walk of Fame for 25 years, appeared often on *Jimmy Kimmel*, had a severe drug problem, been mugged and left homeless – and gifted by friends and fans with a special fund that set him back on his feet. I hope that acceptance and generosity was forever on his mind, and that somewhere, somehow the Hollywood Boulevard Superman keeps on flying.

