



SPARTACUS

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318-218-2345 * GHLIII@yahoo.com * GHLIII Press Publication #1309 * October 2021

Just for a change, I thought I would lead off a *Spartacus* without mourning a death or lamenting some political disaster. Instead, here's **Jimmy Connors**, King of Earth and Master of All Magnetic Forces, exhorting a mass of whitebread supporters to madness at a U.S. Open some many years ago.

Connors had just won a point against a good Dutch player named Paul Haarhuis, returning Paul's bulleter smashes with a series of daring lobs before finishing him off with a brilliant passing shot. It's been called the greatest single point in U.S. Open history, and was even featured on *Family*

Guy as a ... umm ... *metaphor*. *Ahem*. Take a look at the video on YouTube. Connors' eyes tell it all: he wasn't facing Haarhuis out there, that was *eternity* on the other side of the net.

The right to say "shit" is the right to play tennis! Now and until the cows come home.



The horrible Gabby Petito case of early October keyed up the country, arousing pity and dismay. A lovely young woman – the quality, hope and future of our species – has been wasted and lost to a family that loved her and a species that needed her. It's a disaster beyond measure, of course. Now that her fiancé and probable killer has been found, we can only hope, as you undoubtedly do as well, that all the truth outs and justice, however legally inadequate, is considered done.

Gabby's tragedy has provoked complaints that the media hasn't paid anywhere near such attention gathered to thousands of missing indigenous women. I can't accept the guilt trip, since the circumstances of her case are unique and compelling – a fascinating and heart-wrenching story, well-illustrated by video – and people should be forgiven their special concern. But if her tale brings the stories of other missing women and children, no matter what ethnicity, more into public consciousness, and maybe solves some crimes or salves some worries, great.

An aspect of the story that hasn't been afforded much thought is the underlying matter of the poor kid's relationship with Brian Laundrie, her fiancé, her probable+ killer. Was it as abusive as the known facts indicate? From the *NYT* of 10-8-2021: *The popular understanding of domestic abuse sees it as a problem of physical violence. But in fact, experts say, the most crucial aspect of abusive relationships is not physical violence but coercive control – sometimes called intimate terrorism – a dangerous dynamic in which one partner tries to gain control over the other's life, stripping away their autonomy to prevent them from escaping or asserting their own independence.*

But is that what happened? Was that how it was between Gabby and Laundrie, why the golden girl walked no further than the Grand Tetons, why the boyfriend ended up as half a skull in the Florida wilderness? We don't know, but we mustn't assume based on our culture's current obsessions. Agenda always get in the way of the search for truth.

I don't know if the boyfriend's journal or his family will provide answers. Let's hope we can get the truth. The internal balance of sanity, fairness and truth that humans require in this life, the essence of the great term Justice, demands first and foremost that we know what we can, so that beautiful girl can rest in peace.



William Shatner's nudge into space aboard the *Blue Origin* capsule was, of course, a complete waste of resources, but also irresistible fun. My favorite moment wasn't the erstwhile Captain's garbled speech of gratitude to Jeff Bezos, the author of his adventure, though Shatner's metaphor of Earth to Life and space to Death showed that at 90 he's clearly thinking about the end of things. I preferred the simple moment from the apex of the suborbital journey, when the former Kirk turned from the view at his window and simply mouthed "Wow!"

Again, I don't think space tourism is a sane use of resources, but there is no arguing with the former Denny Crane. Wow! indeed.

A few days later I was out in Joe Green's backyard well before dawn, looking over the dark canal, listening to it pop with feeding fish. We've seen a manatee and dolphins there in the past. It was October 16, a perfect night. Above me, Orion and his dog, Sirius burning like an eye, stalked the zenith. At 5:34 there came a sudden flare to the north, and the rocket rose. I hoped for another high altitude art show, such as we often get with dawn launches, but it was too early for the sun to catch the rocket exhaust. No disappointment possible, though: this brilliant flame ascended like the morning star. Rumbling loudly enough to shake the glass in the windows, the Atlas drilled due east and disappeared. For a few seconds our canal frothed with freaking fish, but they soon settled back into their serene ichthyological lives.

From *The New York Times*: "The spacecraft is designed to study clusters of asteroids along Jupiter's orbital path, known as the Trojan swarms, as it seeks to answer questions about the origins of the solar system and how life might have emerged on Earth. The spacecraft is designed to study clusters of asteroids along Jupiter's orbital path, known as the Trojan swarms, as it seeks to answer questions about the origins of the solar system and how life might have emerged on Earth."

I returned to bed. Lucy, our robot delegate to the asteroids of Jupiter, had departed the Earth forever. I got to see her leave. Now we listen for her letters home.



DIVERSIONS:Books

The Cipher / Kathe Koja I completely lost patience with this horror novel about ¾ of the way through; nothing was happening besides the endless gabble of the hero's unconscious and I could find no relevance of his meanderings to the book's central presence: a "Funhole" in a slacker's slum down which madness lies. A novel without plot or resolution or a single comprehensible character. Why are drunks always considered interesting? Maybe it's because of works like

Devil's Peak / *13 Hours* / *7 Days* / Deon Meyer Perhaps in repayment for my recommendation of the works of T. Jefferson Parker, my father-in-law Joe Green loaned me these three suspenseers by a South African novelist. I'm grateful. They're excellent thrillers, steeped in their South African location, very reminiscent of Michael Connelly's Bosch. Both heroes are recovering soaks, and their struggle against the allure of the bottle adds personal drama to the crimes they solve.

The City and the City / China Mieville Mieville's novel was in an interesting place in the year of its publication – contending for awards with an equally historic work, Paolo Bacigalupi's *Windup Girl*. Each book copped an important honor before the Hugo voting: *Windup* the Nebula; *The City* (x2) the World Fantasy. At the Aussiecon Hugo ceremony, Greg Benford whispered to Rosy, "It'll be a tie!" and indeed it was, the third in Hugo history in the Best Novel category. I was a fan of *Windup Girl* and voted for it; just this month I was at last able to get into *The City and the City*. I found it diverting and enjoyable, even if the schism between the title burgs is never explained.

The Only Good Indians / Stephen Graham Jones Winner of the Bram Stoker horror award, it's also up for the World Fantasy, and is well worthy, rich with Native American lore and perspective, witty writing, and the great advantage other genres almost always have over science fiction: vibrant language. It transitions from goofy comedy to bloody violence without pause or without impediment, and throughout, it *works*.

Billy Summers / Stephen King Wordy and slow at the start, with some out-of-character dialog, but otherwise quite a good assassin-on-the run story, reminiscent of but better than the author's *The Girl who Loved Tom Gordon* and *Mr. Mercedes*. Nothing supernatural except for sly references to *The Shining* here and there. As there, as often in King's works, the protagonist wants to write. A non-assassin, I know how he feels.

Star Trek foto-novel *Amok Time* / Theodore Sturgeon I continue to research my Sturgeon *Challenger* with every writing of his that I can find. This little book contains the dialog from Sturgeon's better *Trek*, worthwhile for the photos of Adrienne Martel, whose T'Pring is one of the most beautiful characters ever put on screen, and for all of the Vulcan ethnology Sturgeon created for the show.

Piranesi / Susanna Clarke I really liked this little jewel, a fantasy about an alternate world and its unknowing captive. The *writing* is really fine, beautiful yet simple, pretty without pretension; it's a delight to read a work in our genre that isn't afraid of *style*. Reading *Piranesi* is like listening to a light classic symphony, uplifting and delightful.



DIVERSIONS:FLICKS & TUBE – WARNING: SPOILERS

Being a Jessica Chastain worshiper, I was anxious for *The Eyes of Tammy Faye*. She won an award at a film festival for the role, and talk of her years-overdue Oscar began immediately. Perhaps, I thought, the quality of her talent will at last overcome the outrage of my fellow liberals over *Zero Dark Thirty*, an uncompromising film which dared tell the truth about our ugly efforts to find Osama bin Laden.

Chastain does not disappoint. The film does. It's a rather lame retelling of the betrayal of Tammy Faye and her evangelical zeal by Jim Bakker, the slimebag she married and with whom she built an empire. Although Tammy Faye comes off as a vic who honestly tries to help people – in other words, a much truer Christian than the sewage about her – the movie is uninspired and dull. Chastain, though, gives it her all. As in *The Help*, her broad and brassy interpretation is well-suited to the role. She never mocks her subject, though; she shows the truth.

Then there's *Scenes from a Marriage* on HBO, a remake and rejuvenation of Ingmar Bergman's film of 1974. A marriage, close up, as it evolves and dissolves and resolves, a racking, painful, honest tale, without distraction or relief, updated, moved to our shores. A different generation, a different culture, a different sensibility – but a like quality in the story and certainly in the performances. My girl and her Julliard buddy Oscar Isaac act the pixels off the screen. In a year where Jess is getting buzz for another kind of Oscar for her paean to Tammy Faye, the contrasting breadth, depth and *subtlety* of her acting here is simply astonishing. Isaac is a fine match for her excellence: both should tote home Emmys; both should be hailed as the best of their generation. There's no one out there to match them.

The cable channels and streaming services offer original films and series of very mixed quality. I admired Michael Keaton's *Worth* and *The Guilty* with Jake Gyllenhall, but *Y the Last Man* had me heading for the rails – a good trick on dry land.

It isn't simply that the basic situation (every male on Earth dies except for one dude and his monkey) is handled badly, as it is. (The resulting chaos implies the surviving women aren't competent to handle society, pretty insulting and doubtless untrue.) It's the silliness of casting what the woke call a *cis-male* – *born* male – as a female-to-male transsexual. The actor walks like a male, is built like a halfback, and is about as convincing as Jason Momoa playing Pippi

Longstocking. Plus there's the last Y-chromosomed survivor. Not only is he the son of the female President of the United States – likely coincidence, right? – he's a complete *knucklehead*. I've never seen such a dope as a TV hero. If that's the last male, then the species – at least as we know it – is justly doomed.

La Brea has an absurd premise: a time warp in the form of a giant sinkhole has opened in downtown L.A., dropping a slew of passers-by into a *Lost Lite* world of 12,000 years ago. But it has appeal. Decent FX bring critters from that past to life – dire wolves, saber-toothed tigers, an impressive ground sloth evoking Yogi Bear. The characters aren't particularly affecting, but the situation, however derivative, is rather cool. I'll keep watching.

And it's astonishing to see myself write this, but I can't watch *The Squid Game*. The South Korean *Hunger Games* takeoff is just too brutal for me right now. That first episode was hard to get through – not for quality reasons, but because of the sadism. I may try again, but ... why?

Some weeks after seeing *Malignant*, I remember little about it except the skill of the contortionist monster during her dance of death in the police station, the irritating phoniness of the puppet monster before it morphs into the dancer, and the coolness of the hair-hidden face. Reviewing the film on IMDB, I see Stephen King loved it. I'm not that enthusiastic, but I'm still on its side.

No Time to Die. Daniel Craig bids an epic farewell to his James Bond role, with conclusions brought to multiple classic 007 narratives and characters, not so much resolved as done with. Extremely entertaining film, though, with a refreshingly human 007, and I look forward to what producers do with Bond in the future.

And of course there's the new *Dune*, probably the SF event of the year, when completed almost undoubtedly the definitive media version of the novel. I approve. It's not the life-changing soul blast of the first *Star Wars*, but it's very damned promising. I look forward to Part 2, where we'll meet the Guild Navigators. They were the one thing I found utterly magnificent in poor David Lynch's 1984 abortion.

Speaking of that agonizing experience, comparisons with Dennis Villanueve's new version are inevitable. The new show stands up well in terms of FX and costume design, although I prefer what Lynch did with the Bene Gesserit. The acting is fine in the new movie, but 1984's Jurgen Prochnow made a much stronger Duke Leto than today's Oscar Isaac, whose flat voice and short stature convey none of the character's defiant nobility. Likewise, the contemporary Chani is no match for Sean Young – I admit with shame that I find Young prettier – but Rebecca Ferguson, the new Lady Jessica, is hotter than the sunburnt sands of Arrakis. I thought her a stunner when I saw *Doctor Sleep*; that has *not* changed.

But these are secondary qualities. The new film succeeds because it's taking its time, it isn't balling everything up into a noisy incomprehensible spectacle like Lynch's film, and the FX, the performances, the *outré* costuming, the epic setting all come forth in support of *story*.

Say ... here's a question that has nipped at me for years: why do y'all think *Dune* had to take its Hugo in a tie?



The Lost Review ... This Here. As readers of eFanzines should know, I publish an irregular “zine about zines” called, elegantly enough, *The Zine Dump*, devoted to mini-reviews of *Spartacus*' fellow publications. Issue #53 came out the week before Halloween, touching on every zine appearing on eFanzines.com, in my e-mail, or in my mailbox since the previous issue, last summer. Or so I thought.

The response I most anticipated – and feared – for *TZD* was from Nic Farey, whose *Beam* is a fine genzine and whose *This Here* shines among the current crop of personal zines. For those who don't know Nic, he has a laser wit and an eagle eye for errors. He always manages to find several screw-ups in every *Zine Dump* and zing me senseless for them. So I made a special effort to avoid goofs in this issue, and what happens but that I hit the wrong key while correcting a typo and *erased Farey's fanzine from my reviews*.

Naturally I didn't notice anything before shipping the zine into the ether and placing it on eFanzines. Nic's comment was laconic, but still threw me into a panic: "So I take it I'm no longer publishing?"

Babbling with guilt and terror, I searched my hard drive for the lost review, and after much effort, found it. I promised to publish the same in my next generally-distributed fanzine, and here it is:

This Here ... nos. 45-46 | Nic Farey, 2657 Rungsted St., Las Vegas NV 89142 | fareynic@gmail.com | Moving backwards in time, let's open the last issues of Nic's energetic perzine and see what we shall see. #46, the September number, strikes a chord with me on the very first page, dealing with the events of September 11 this year (the passing of Judith Hanna) and where he was on 9/11/2001 (D.C., within sight of smoke from the Pentagon, yoiks). It also holds a photo of Farey's parents in their youth. The juxtaposition hits home: *my* parents were married on September 11, 1947. His usual "Radio Winston" piece discusses Those Darlins, a group I was unaware of. I should seek out their recordings, since it was Nic's comment that turned me on to Delta Rae and "Bottom of the River". After reviewing an Aussie dystopian series and discoursing on the nature of fanzines – when he finds out, I hope he tells me – he passes the proverbial pen to David Hodson for his regular column on British football, the like of which no American normally sees. Back we go to #45, with front-page emphasis on fanzines – he even mentions my pathetically infrequent *Challenger*. The emphasis here is, however, on music, particularly Aussie music, as surveyed by that epic gent Bruce Gillespie, but there is "Footy" and there are taxi driving stories and LOCS from all over.

There's been another *This Here* since I published *TZD*, but it will have to wait for *its* review. But it need not wait for your eyetracks; it's on eFanzines.



I knew it, I just knew it. My brother liberals are screwing up our best chance in a decade to bring goodness back to America. We can see it happening, in the revolting Virginia gubernatorial race and the hard time being given Joe Biden. I can see it, I can feel it. America is once more heading into the skids.

Liberalism's worst enemy is its advocates. We libtards rely on the justice of our societal ambitions for electoral wins. The corrupt and cynical right wing that opposes us relies on our impatience, greed, intolerance and arrogance for theirs. It's happening again. 2020's victory of decency and sanity over madness is being frittered away by internecine sniping and progressives' insistence that good is only good if it's absolute.

In many ways, large and small, we're goading the American nation into irritation and rejection. Old sins from other lifetimes destroy current careers. On Bill Maher's show we hear the threat from black voters to stay home unless they get 110% of what they demanded in 2020, *now*. The lessons of 2016? Forgotten. More trivially, a statue of Thomas Jefferson is banished by the NY City Council because he owned slaves. Forget the Declaration of Independence, the University of Virginia, the Virginia Statute on Religious Liberty, the Lewis & Clark Expedition, the Library of Congress, a lifetime of curiosity and inquiry and genius, the great sin of his times is all that matters.

I can understand the council members' discomfort, but I also see their myopia. Jefferson lived at a time when there was no significant abolitionist movement in America. Slavery was accepted throughout the whole of western civilization. But Jefferson voiced – better than anyone, before or since -- dream behind the quintessential American dictum: *All men are created equal ... with certain unalienable rights*. It was the idea that eventually banished slavery from our shores, that inspired Thaddeus Stevens and Abraham Lincoln, that gave meaning to the Civil War. What was being honored by that statue? The flawed times in which the human man lived? Or his vision, which invigorated and changed and *still motivates* our society?

These acts by alleged progressives are not pleas for justice. They're narrow-minded power trips. And they do infinitely more harm than good.

In the meantime, though good people in Congress still try to strain justice from the muck of January 6, there is a strong sense that the American public is tired of it, that the quirky moods of the media, so anxious to declare Biden another Jimmy Carter, are more significant than the good which he is attempting to perform, primarily the return to stability and sanity and progress in American government? Oh, we are a lazy, whining people, so unwilling to live up to our promise, so determined to claim unfairness and use that as an excuse to fail.



My SFPA brother and longtime friend **Joe Moudry** passed from the planet on 10-16-2021, a few weeks after a terrific party celebrating his 74th birthday. The culprit was cancer. Earlier this year his son died of heart disease, an ailment which dogged Joe as well. Joe's loss has earned a slew of attention from the Southern Fandom family and from his fellow Chums on fm. Many of us expressed horror at the drain of time, costing us friend after friend. I echo that. This photo is by Catherine Leigh Moudry, Joe's daughter.

Charlotte (Charlie) Williams was a schoolteacher, a con chairman, a onetime member of the singing group Up with People, a consistent member of the Southern fan family, a beautiful if reserved woman; I liked her much. She succumbed to a rare form of lung cancer on October 26, taking with her memories of a rainy Mardi Gras (during which she climbed atop a bus stop shelter for a better view of a parade) and her quiet, sweet, secret smile.

