

A zine of opinion by

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I

There was sickness and evil written all over the visage of the late Fred Phelps, founder of the Westboro Baptist Church. When he died in late March, the hypocrisy of alleged Man of God preaching hatred – especially divinely instigated hatred – stank literally to Heaven. There’s a commandment against taking the Lord’s name in vain, and I daresay many good Christians find uttering the words “Jesus” and “hate” in the same sentence to be just that strain of raw blasphemy.

Good Christians, by whom I mean people who sincerely try to live by Jesus’ example and commandments, did indeed condemn Phelps’ mania, and I emphasize that fact for a reason. One of the flaws in science fiction is how little regard our crowd has for believers. Of course, as devotees of science we are bound to question all dogma, and faith, at its harshest, is just that: dogma, a system of belief. But I maintain that the basic questions faith deals with have nothing to do with science. And vice versa.

There are some things that decent people simply consider self-evident: that every person is entitled to dignity, that political freedom is the natural state of humanity; that the kinder you are, the more human you are (thank you Phil Dick for that last sentiment, and for filling sixty novels with it). Such sentiments resist question, and therefore resist science. They still make sense, because our experience as a culture shows that living by Judeo-Christian tenets – true ones, not the foulness bellowed by sociopaths – is the healthiest way to live. “Love thy neighbor” is a dam- ... is a *very* good idea.

Still, SFers seem to think that religious sentiment begins and ends with the exhortations of the Old Testament and the delusions of fundamentalists – that the world is 6,000 years old, Joshua stopped the sun in its tracks, God sent forty bears to eat the children who made fun of Elijah, black people are the sinning sons of Ham, *ad nauseum*. Our impatience occasionally takes the ugly form of mockery, and alas, I have been as clumsy in this regard as anyone else. *Challenger* #30, for instance, was an issue themed on faith, and featured more than a few antagonistic statements towards religion. This very much upset a dear man to whom I sent the issue: Hungarian freedom fighter, dressage master and onetime GHLIII high school teacher Charles de Kunffy. This eminently civilized gentleman saw no reason to scorn people trying to answer life’s most basic and painful questions in a sincere way. Religion is culture, after all, and isn’t it so that one of SF’s inadequacies as literature that it doesn’t really deal with culture? That its focus is too narrow to admit light as well as project it?

Jesus said “Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and unto God the things that are God’s.” Why not? I look to the religious values of civilization to answer questions of ethics and morals, how we treat one another and how we behave in complex society. It tells us what is right. Science, of course, is the right approach to the why of things and empirical questions of every sort. It tells us what is so. We have brains and we have spirits and I don’t see the necessity of conflict. After all, it wasn’t science that established Reverend Phelps as a liar and psychopath. It was our societal faith that decency rules above all.

Speaking of public exhortations of religion, I note the Hobby Lobby “religious liberty” case recently argued before the SCOTUS. Basic facts, as unashamedly purloined from CBS’ website:

Two privately-held, for-profit companies -- Hobby Lobby Stores, Inc. and Conestoga Wood Specialties Corp. -- are suing the United States government over a provision in the Affordable Care Act that requires large employers to offer their workers comprehensive health coverage, including contraception, or pay a fine. Hobby Lobby's owners ... say they have strong objections based in their Christian faith to providing health care coverage for certain types of contraception. The Pennsylvania-based Hahn family, the Mennonite owners of Conestoga Wood Specialties have the same complaint.

Of course, this is nonsense; the case is just another backdoor attack on Obamacare, as the Republicans try to find some weakness in the law they can exploit. The tactic seems reminiscent of the scam argument that serving gays was a violation of religious liberty, and the repulsive old *Heart of Dixie* pitch that selling barbecue to black people ran counter to the rights of restaurants to choose their customers. Both arguments splattered against the wall of the XIV Amendment.

Though the liberal minority on this Court did its best to cast this present issue as one involving the equal protection rights of employees, I expect a very narrow ruling in Hobby Lobby’s favor, restricted to close-held family corporations. It’s a load of bushwah, but this is a desperately right-wing Supreme Court, anxious to embarrass Obama, and they are going to hew to the party line.

2

A few months ago a judge ordered a public school to allow a male student to use the girl’s bathroom, based on a claim by the boy’s mother that he is transgender. The child was 6. I am rife with questions and concerns.

How does a prepubescent child identify as a girl or a boy? By clothes? By playthings? By idols – celebrity identification? Or by parental pressure? I’m horrified by the possibility that we have parents here using their kid to affect some silly political posture.

I’m reminded of a recent *New Yorker* cartoon: two yuppie parents lecturing their teen son at the dinner table: “If you don’t hurry you won’t get a chance to be the first openly gay anything.” More seriously, I’m reminded of Hemingway, whose neurotic mother was fond of dressing the child Ernest in girl’s clothing – because she always wanted a daughter. How that contributed to the obsessive machismo that tormented Hemingway throughout his life, God knows. But it makes sense that it did.

Further, if we decide that parental influence is not a factor and accept sexual identity as subject to a child’s personal awareness (I hesitate to call it a choice), then where’s the line as to what *isn’t* within a child’s judgment? Inoculations – because who wants to get shots? Cosmetic surgery? Parental custody? Frankly, I don’t believe that we can disregard the question of parental influence. Frankly, I think we could be dealing with child abuse of the most insidious nature, and that we’re letting it slide out of political concerns.

Someone who has lived through this – enlighten me, please.

3

And so 80-year-old Donald Sterling, owner of the Los Angeles Clippers basketball team, expresses vague racial ugliness in a private argument with his mistress. She releases a tape of his jealous rant on social media. Disgust is universal and extreme.

Apparently this isn’t the first time Sterling has run afoul of common good taste when it comes to racial matters. Yet he has been cited as a great friend to the local NAACP and was due for its Lifetime Achievement Award for his donations to the group. What was he up to? Buying the good will of people he detested? Was the NAACP chapter aware of his feelings, but just that blind and greedy?

It's good to see a society-wide revulsion against racist sentiments in general. It's good to see "We are One" adopted as a team and city-wide motto. It is *not* good to see a petulant bimbo strike out at her married and very possibly senile "boyfriend." Questions sneak through the uproar. What were the woman's motives? Was money involved? Is there any indication that sleazy business is behind the scandal, since the punishment applied by the NBA includes a forced sale of an invaluable sports franchise? Will this incident prompt searches through other owners' pasts for insensitive or stupid gibes or remarks? How far back will they go? How personal will the snooping get? With what motive or purpose? Will future thoughtcrimes require like draconian punishment? Or do we accept that people are imperfect and that old men in their dotage may say foolish things?

Reminiscent of the Sterling brouhaha, in a small way, is the scandal currently enthralling Southern fandom – my home krewe. Archon, the St. Louis-based media and cosplay con which invited me to be its Fan GoH some time back, recently dis-invited a guy who had been asked to serve in that capacity. Tim Bolgeo is founder of Chattanooga's LibertyCon and editor of a weekly e-zine of jokes and politics, *The Revenge of Hump Day*. A letter had been sent to the con committee – over a false name – which accused Tim of being a racist. It protested his choice as Fan Guest and demanded that he be replaced. The committee caved and withdrew his invitation.

The evidence for this statement was "cherry-picked" from *The Revenge*, and consisted of some bad jokes (they're all bad jokes) and some political natter the letter writer found objectionable. Reading them over, I can frankly see why. Some of the statements are cringe-worthy in their wretched ignorance. "Why can't I use racial epithets if racial epithets can be directed against me?" (Because they're ugly and stupid, that's why.) I recall a reprint of an infamous smear against Orleanians after hurricane Katrina that offended me in much the same way.

But none of Bolgeo's *faux faux* – is that right? I don't know French – sank to a level of racial thuggishness. Granted such would blemish Archon if it continued an association with him – but it isn't for *The Revenge* that Tim was tapped as Fan GoH, but for his remarkable success as a con-giver and for the ebullience of his personality. As one who loves Archon's Michelle Zellich, the angel responsible for Tim's invitation (as well as my own), I know that she has no patience or tolerance for racism. She invited Tim because she likes the guy – and now she's infuriated by this contretemps and humiliated.

There is no way out of this mess without embarrassment. So be embarrassed and be rid of it. Archon should issue an apology to Bolgeo and re-invite him. If he refuses, and who could blame him, the convention should choose no replacement. And in the future, concoms should vet their Guest choices thoroughly and stand by them once they are made.

4

Fanzines can be a rough hobby, and it's fatuous for any of us to stroll into it expecting anything else. A thick skin is, next to a full copy card at Kinko's, the fan-ed's best friend. But there are some insults no one should bear, and I feel compelled to answer one such publically. This is a perp's assertion – born of God knows what cerebral misfire – that were the opportunity to arise *I would vote for Richard Nixon*.

I don't know what our late and unlamented President has to do with fanzines, but for those who haven't paid attention to my fan writing over the years, I have news. *I was there*. I'm a Berkeley boy who was at People's Park on May 15, 1969, was gassed and shot at – yeah, *shot* at; they meant business in those days – on the streets after Kent State on May 5, 1970, canvassed the 'burbs for the McGovern-Hatfield bill to end the Vietnam war, and RSN I'll write up the million-man peace march I was part of. Not only that, but a few months later – *I looked Nixon in the face*.

Truth. T'was at the New Orleans airport. I was in a fence-side crowd, surrounded by supporters and cops, but I still did my best to brace him. I asked him "Four more?" and after Kent State, I wasn't talking about his reelection. The tormented bastard looked paranoid and exhausted – he'd had a hard day mollifying segregationists – ... and ignored me. So when some sockless doofus in science fiction fandom tries to tickle his readership by saying I'd support that pitiful creature, using his "bemusement" with one of my *little fanzines* as an excuse, that *irks*.

I should *also* write up my encounters with Nixon – there were several before that one, including the time in 1962 I saw him in his underwear – but I’ll just let you chew on that image.

5

“LOC Be a Lady Tonight ...”

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Lovely issue of opinion, as usual. Of course that doesn’t mean I completely agree with you.

For example, you assert that the malfeasance Edward Snowden has uncovered isn’t that terrible, that absent proof of actual harm, intelligence gathering trumps privacy in a situation of national peril. “Assuming there is such a threat,” you write, “I’d give the NSA broad latitude in counter-terrorism.”

But that assumes one fact that we can’t prove, and one which is demonstrably false. I can’t prove actual harm when the NSA not only asserts its right to spy domestically, violating its charter and the law, but asserts that who it is spying on must be kept secret. I can’t prove harm if I can’t get proof they’re spying on me. Joseph Heller would be proud of the circular logic. More importantly, our threat of national peril is manufactured, like the weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. Even the NSA admits that their massive violation of the law and our rights has prevented no attacks. Yes, there are bad people in the world, but by inflating their importance, by imagining them to be more powerful than they are, by fearing the bogeyman under the bed, we only harm ourselves.

The cost is more than just our inchoate desire to be left alone. As you quote William Douglas it’s a natural right of human beings to enjoy privacy in their personal business. We *need* to be left alone. We cannot act freely and independently when we fear someone is looking over our shoulder all the time. Winston Smith valued the small alcove in his apartment where he could write in his journal out of view of Big Brother: the NSA has put cameras in all our alcoves.

It’s also become part of the narrative that Snowden skipped the country without trying to put things right from within the system. Alas, that it the farthest thing from the truth. He tried at least half a dozen times to go through channels at the NSA, and was rebuffed each time. Because he was not an employee, but merely a contractor, he was not protected in his reporting, nor by whistleblower laws when he went outside channels. The NSA and the CIA have been brutal in the last several years about prosecuting anyone who uses the whistleblower rules to take them to task from inside the system, so even by reporting through channels he was risking retaliation.

That said, I am coming around to agreeing with you that Snowden fleeing the country was a bad idea. Even though I see no evidence that he’s sharing his information with his Russian hosts, he would have been more effective, and taken questions about loyalty off the table, if he’d made his disclosures to Glenn Greenwald from inside the United States, or even from inside the United Kingdom. To be sure, Snowden would have been ruined, financially, physically, emotionally, if he’d stayed in the US and the government inevitably brought its full weight down on him.

On other fronts, you invite us to go see Dealey Plaza in Dallas for ourselves. You observe that from the sixth floor of the School Book Depository it was clear Kennedy was a sitting duck the moment his car turned on to Elm Street. In one of the many screw ups and tragedies leading up to that horrible day, the Secret Service agents who reviewed the route apparently hadn’t realized that getting from Main Street onto the Stemmons Freeway required that odd dogleg onto Elm. It wasn’t obvious from the maps they had on hand. (I seem to remember reading that in Manchester’s *The Death of a President*, but can’t put my hands on the passage at the moment.)

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I know it's been a while, but thanks for *Spartacus 2*. I read it with interest.

The first thought I have is that the Snowden case reminds me of *The Falcon and the Snowman*, which was, you may recall a book and movie about a young man in government employ who discovered the CIA was influencing Australian elections for its own nefarious purposes (to prevent some listening stations from being removed by a more liberal Aussie government) and decided to express his disapproval by selling classified information to the Russians. True story. His name was Christopher Boyce. He was played by Timothy Hutton in the movie. As this was the 1970s, there was no Wiki-leaks, so the secrets were leaked to the Soviet embassy in Mexico City. In 1980 he escaped from jail and idealistically carried out 17 bank robberies.

As for the Kennedy Assassination, I am with you on this. I have not seen any convincing or compelling evidence to suggest a conspiracy. There were people with the motive to do it (notably the Mafia), but there is no need to involve any of them to explain the actual facts. Of course the Oliver Stone film *JFK* latched onto the most grotesque and least plausible of all the conspiracy theories, and should be regarded as a fantasy. I find the *X-Files* version more believable. The Smoking Man did it. You know that people who smoke constantly are capable of any wickedness.

What I find of interest in all this is the psychology of belief. Why do people believe in conspiracy theories, alternate authorship of Shakespeare, flying saucers, the Bermuda Triangle, alien abductions, etc. It isn't merely that they are stupid because, undeniably, some very intelligent people get sucked down these rabbit holes. I think for *JFK* it is a matter of mythologizing, something that was begun by the Kennedy family themselves. If *JFK* is seen as a Great Man, then it is quite unacceptable to the public that some lone neurotic twit just shot him down one day. Imagine if an epic novel went on for hundreds of pages, and suddenly ended when the hero stepped outside one day and a passing lunatic shot him dead. No one would ever accept that. Remember the howls of protest when Thomas Disch tried something like that in *On Wings of Song*. We expect a more satisfying, dramatic ending (though I think it actually worked in the Disch book [*I agree*]), and so, in the interests of balance, the great hero can only die tragically at the hands of a great villain. This is why Conan Doyle had to invent Moriarty to kill off Sherlock Holmes. Of course real life is not as well written. In real life, Sherlock Holmes could have slipped on a pavement and been run over by a carriage. In real life, a president can be assassinated by a nobody.

I think what terrifies people more than anything else is precisely this possibility, of meaningless, sudden violence and death. If it can happen to great men, it can happen to anyone. If we believe that it takes a great deal of teamwork on the part of legions of conspirators to bring about such a result, then we, the little folks, can feel safer, knowing we are probably not worth that sort of effort. It also implies that even the bad things in life happen for a purpose and that someone is in control. This is much less scary than waking up on a speeding bus to the realization that *no one is driving*. Conspiracy belief becomes a kind of comfort belief.

Ridiculous physics in *Gravity* ...? Well what I wondered about is how all these space stations and such happened to be at precisely the same altitude. If that Chinese station were, say, 100 miles higher or lower, it probably would have been completely out of the way of the debris. On the plus side, it was a very gripping film, and perhaps the first I've ever seen that actually worked in 3-D. I even found it convincing that our heroine almost got herself killed at the end through a moment of stupidity. That close to salvation, someone could indeed rush things and stop thinking, with fatal results. Seeing her situation, she should have carefully removed her spacesuit *before* opening that hatch and made ready to swim for it. Removing a spacesuit underwater before you drown may be more possible in the movies than in real life. [*As Gus Grissom could have testified.*]

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Before I get into a proper LOC on a couple points that strike my interest in this, the second issue of your personalzine, I am wondering if you ever got the LOC I wrote on the first issue? I didn't see my name in the WAHF column, so perhaps it got dumped in the shuffle from Louisiana to Florida. 'Tis curious. Then again, maybe I sent that after you had put the second issue to bed. That's a possibility, too. So saying, I'd better get this one off to you before you decide to rattle off another ensmallled zine before your focus shifts completely to finishing the next *Challenger*.

Or maybe I went wandering off in a stupor and neglected to check my in-box. See below.

I am still unsure how I feel about Edward Snowden and what he has done. Part of me strongly thinks that he has done a great service to America by revealing what government agencies are doing in spying on their own constituents and citizens like thee and me. Then again, I kind of figure this has been going on since the IRS, FBI, CIA, and the NSA were first established. It is not as if this is suddenly a paranoid country constantly looking over its own shoulder, afraid to see men in dark glasses and fedoras lurking in shadowy corners everywhere we go. Constant surveillance is a necessary evil in a democracy, I doth believe, since a properly functioning government should be carefully scrutinized and monitored to ensure all gears and cogs are working properly. More than anything, Snowden is simply stating the obvious. Still, as you suggest, what is he afraid of? After all, he did skedaddle over to Moscow – of all places – to "hide" from American government agencies. As if Russian agencies are safer... I say he should voluntarily come back and face the court of public opinion. Odds are he'll be given a major slap on the wrist or kick in the ass, serve a half dozen years in jail simply as an example of "punishment must be meted out" whenever a citizen commits what is essentially a breach of security. How big of a deal this is depends on the interpretation of the law and the verdict in said court of law. It's a mess, definitely, but I think it's not as major of a problem as people make it out to be. We are all being watched - have been for many years - so having that Big Brother is Watching mentality is simply a way of life in 21st century America. You are free to do, see, think, and say what you wish in this country, but remember that someone somewhere is watching. Nobody is completely "safe" anymore.

I agree with you completely about bullying. We cannot condone it in any form. When I was a kid I was a victim of what could probably be called typical taunting and bullying by tough kids in school, and it didn't happen all the time. Maybe once a year in junior high, but it stopped by the time I got to high school. Nothing ever really resulted from them, either: I was never physically hurt, so I pretty much sailed through my schooldays as a relatively popular, decent kid who was athletic, funny and intelligent, basically blending into the crowd. I was also in the marching band, enjoyed sports, and never tried to act superior to my classmates. I just did my thing and have basically kept the same attitude throughout my life. Even so, bullying is on the rise in this country, and we parents – now grand-parents, mind you – need to step up and demonstrate to our children and grandchildren attending public schools that it is not right to bully someone in any way, shape or form. We can't let the schools or local law enforcement agencies do this for us: it begins in the home. Parents need to be With Their Children much more than they have been. Kids bullying other kids are doing it because they have had no positive role models to follow. Once again, it is my generation – the Baby Boomers – that has created a monster for which they have no idea how to bring under control. All I can say is that we better start being better parents while there is still time to affect positive changes in the lives of our children. The Baby Boomers have certainly mucked this country up big time, in my humble opinion.

*We boomers had our youthful virtues – we were idealistic and compassionate – but we were also selfish and lazy and, as Lillian Hellman lamented at the time (see my article in *Challenger* no. 37), tired. All Nixon had to do was murder a few of us and we gave up. And we were rewarded for it: our silence was met with the great American goodie: a fat, easy life. It's hard to maintain anger and social drive in a society that piles privilege at your feet.*

Oh, well. I think that should do it for this issue. I look forward to your next issue, Guy, and would appreciate it if you would let me know when you get this e-loc. Makes me wonder what happened to my LOC on your first issue. *sigh* So it goes.

*You mean this one? Here's what John wrote in response to *Spartacus*' premiere.*

Hello, Guy. Welcome to the world of ensmallled fanzines. What I like about producing a small more frequent zine is that it allows me a bit of freedom to write more personal kinds of things and to comment on events both fannish and mundane in a timely fashion. It is not as timely as blogs, tweets or Facebook entries, but it's very much a reminder of a time when we were much younger and new to SF fandom and fanzines. Small fanzines are good, I doth believe, and much easier to knock one out when the urge strikes. In any event, it is good to see you entering the ensmallled zine field.

Your commentary on gays and how your attitude has evolved over the years certainly gives me a better understanding of how you think about this particular topic. Like you, I have never had a bad perception of gays. Sure, I knew they existed when I was a kid even though I never met anyone who proclaimed themselves as being homosexual. Then again, that was back in the 1960s and 1970s when a lot of sexual exploration was going on in American society. My little world was focused around music and sports – besides school, too, of course – and I was fortunate enough to grow up in a fairly liberal household in suburban Minneapolis. Once I actually started meeting people who weren't afraid of their sexuality it didn't really phase me; I did think it was a bit out of what I considered "normal" behavior, but then again, what really is "normal" anyway? The way that I looked at it then is much the way I still do: their life-style is of their choice and doesn't bother me at all. After all, why should it? They have done nothing to me personally, so I see no reason to tell them that their choices are wrong just because they're different from mine. Besides, I am completely supportive of gay rights in this country. People in America need to accept the fact that we all are in this together, and little things like sexual preferences don't mean a hill of beans in the greater scheme.

You also reminded me of the time when I was seriously propositioned by a gay man. It happened in the mid-80s when I was involved in a community theater production of *Guys and Dolls* up in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Matthew Tepper, whom you probably know from LA fandom [*LASFAPA, actually*], was living in Minneapolis then and was the musical director of this production, and he invited Ed Eastman and myself from the local SF club (Minn-stf) – recruited us is more like it – to audition. So we did, got accepted and given minor roles. It was a lot fun, I admit, but at one of the cast parties the director propositioned me.

I was shocked. I didn't know what to think, so I stood there for a moment collecting my wits and finally said, "No, thank you," adding something along the lines of not being interested. Since then I have worked with people who were openly gay, had students who were, and have never seen any of these people as threats. In fact, two years ago a gay student of mine (I'll call him R for sake of anonymity) had decided to write a paper on gay marriage, and while researching the subject started reconsidering, then approached me about changing his research topic. I asked him why he chose gay marriage for the paper in the first place, and R responded with "Well, I consider it an important issue." So I said, "Then say that. Make that part of your thesis and find supporting information for your stance." Long story short, R finished the paper, and it was good enough for a B grade. The following semester R came to my office and told me that he was glad I had him write that paper because "through it I found my voice." He's a good man, and for as long as I continue to teach, I will always remember him and what he said.

At any rate, I think your thoughts about gay rights are valuable, and I thank you for sharing them. To heck with what others think of your position. It is your belief system, so be proud of it and stick to it. I would not expect anything less from you or anybody else.

Hey, before I sign off, I have always liked Kubrick's *Spartacus*. It may be romanticized and all, but I think it makes a strong point about human spirit and the desire for freedom. It had a great cast, too. If I remember correctly, the movie was made a couple years after Kirk Douglas, Tony Curtis and Ernest

Borgnine starred in another epic, *The Vikings*. Highly romanticized too, but another favorite movie of mine.

Haven't seen it in decades, and remember only Douglas' death scene – doesn't Curtis stab him with a broken sword? – and Viking funeral.

6

I recently found a YouTube post on the JFK assassination that struck me powerfully. The guy had taken the Zapruder film and produced a panoramic version that was “stabilized and computer interpolated.” Eminently clear and valuable. In comments to the video, I said so, mentioning my own frequent visits to Dealey Plaza and my fundamental conviction about the event: Oswald. No conspiracy.

The response I drew could have come straight out of some fulgiant corners of fanzine fandom. Said “jacobjii555”:

You stupid turd. This panorama shows the film is a complete fraud. The guy on the lawn separates his body. Not to mention the shadows of the people and light poles are different directions. And include cops disappear riding down the street. So many other defects and the film frames are cut off top & bottom.

Now go back to your mommy's bed and help her create more hillbillies before your 7 year old brother beats you to her.

Now *that's* KTF! “jacobjii555” would fit right into the lower depths of our hobby. He's borderline sociopathic, he's completely without discipline, he revels in extreme invective far beyond the tone of the discussion and completely alien to its subject ... the only things he lacks are a zine and a mailing list to impress. Those who think such bi-polar jackasses belong in SF fandom are free to contact him.

7

Catching up on personal matters, Rosy and I are still dealing with family caregiving in south Florida. Our personal and professional lives are on hold. I don't mind this – family matters prime all – but I admit to disappointment and a little shame that a convention we looked forward to, DeepSouthCon in Bristol, Virginia – had to do without our presence. DSC is our home convention. I feel like Southern fandom let our home con down, and that I did too.

I also missed Corflu, which I wanted to hit this year – support Nic Farey (his *Beam* is excellent fun) and mend fences that need the attention. Perhaps “mend” is the wrong term. *Tearing down* fences is more like it. But Richmond is even further away than Bristol, and no mon, no fun, your son.

And of course, we must forego London. Rosy's always wanted to see the U.K. and a full third of my personal Bucket List involves a visit to Stonehenge, and that *was* going to be a life's gesture to my wife and my 65th birthday gift to myself. But then the jobs ended and our savings go to maintaining our Shreveport house until someday, somehow, someone is smart enough to buy it. So much for England.

Rosy is disappointed, and that is intolerable. She *will* get her British trip.

Although I've broken down and applied for my Social Security – a pitiful sum -- the numbers seem *ridiculous* to me. Sixty-five. *scoff* Why, I barely feel forty! I could walk into any state courtroom this very moment and defend any miscreant of any crime short of murder – and do a good job of it. Give me a glass of water and six or seven shield-shaped blue pills and look out, ladies!

But that's not what I hear here in the Sunshine state – here I encounter the *assumption* that longevity is debilitating. My new doctor says I'm “in transition,” apparently into senility. There are some advantages to this age – I never have to endure another Continuing Legal Education class to stay a Louisiana lawyer, for instance – but the sense of dom and stagnation goes on and on. And it's catching.

When I took my house plants to a nursery to be repotted, I was told to accept that 13-year-old flora may be reaching the end of its days. (Bushwah – a bit of fresh soil and they're thriving.)

We take a break from West Palm Beach every month or 6 weeks and head to Merritt Island. If our house in Shreveport sells, we'll go there and finish packing up. I may go to my nephew's high school graduation on Grand Island NY in late June. Aside from that, my plants aren't all that is taking root ...

8

In this idle period, I have time to myself – time to read, to see movies, to do fanzines. Taking the last item first, in recent weeks I've published *Challenger* no. 37, *The Zine Dump* #31 (both up on eFanzines), and a SFPazine, *Spiritus Mundi* 261. By the way, the mighty Southern Fandom Press Alliance will produce its 300th mailing at the end of July; be ye a former member of SFPA or interested in producing a bimonthly printzine for a righteous krewe, please feel free to join in. Contact me for info necessities.

I'm also planning the next *Challenger* – does anyone reading this recall Meade Frierson's epic HPL fanzine of the early '70s? If so, e-mail me please – and continuing to supervise publications for Sasquan, next year's Worldcon. Warren Buff, appointed to edit the event's first progress report, handled his duties splendidly without any interference from me. He'll also take on #2 this summer. Take a look at the next page – and forget what you're thinking about Tom Sawyer whitewashing a fence.

Movies of recent: two fun blockbusters, *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* and *The X-Men: Days of Future Passed*, one torpid turd of a flick, *Godzilla* (the surprise Hugo nominee *Pacific Rim* is far better) and one worthy drama.

A Christmas or two ago Rosy gifted me with *Unbroken*, a terrific non-fiction volume by Laura Hillenbrand. Part of it tells the tale of a POW recovering from the abuse of a brutal Japanese guard. *The Railway Man* reminded me of that story and of the tale told by the survivor of the Bataan Death March I heard speak last year. No illusions should remain about the Imperial Army's obscene cruelty, and America's vengeance was terrible beyond the imagination of all but the tiniest percentage of men. Yet Japan is now a staunch ally and one of the most successful and amenable societies on Earth. That transformation is part of the message of this film.

The aspect of *The Railway Man* that most moved me was the part of the story that I most dreaded: the reconciliation of old enemies. Much less insipid than I feared. Although the film isn't overt about it, the strong sense comes through that the hero's good will, and that of the west towards Japan as a whole, was a *responsibility* born of our absolute victory. And our victory was total. Hiroshima and Nagasaki were the least of it. We didn't just beat the Japanese. We *transformed* them. Discarding wartime hatred was not only good for the movie protagonist's soul, it was good for the west, too – because it helped make a hostile enemy a great and supportive friend. An excellent, if minor film.

Anticipating: *Interstellar* – and the film version of the aforementioned *Unbroken*.

Read: *Ancillary Justice*, Ann Leckie. A challenge finding the story, worthwhile once discovered. As research for a possible *Challenger* article, I also scanned "The Call of Cthulhu" again, finding – as I'm sure you've seen yourself – no story in Lovecraft's opus but a marvelous evocation of *mood*. Before me now, *The Martian* by Andy Weir, around which awards buzz already builds. Seems almost as thin as the Martian atmosphere a third of the way in, but we'll give it a chance.

9

Last-minute note: Nic Farey reports on FB that I got Ro Nagey's gender wrong in the latest *Zine Dump*. She's a "she," not ... the other thing. I replied, "Oh, a mere typo. A slip of the finger. I meant to type 'she'. Or was it 'her'? A gesture to gender equity. Acknowledgment of the sex-role subtext in *Ancillary Justice*. Insight into the dual male-&-female nature of the human personality. Subtle approbation of her skill in avoiding gender roles. (Have never met her.)" Thanks, Nic. Sorry, Ro. Later, everyone.



SASQUAN ALERT

After Rose-Marie and I finished editing the progress reports and program book for Chicon 7, we swore, “Never again!” Which explains why I signed up on Publications Chair for **Sasquan**, the 2015 World Science Fiction Convention, in Spokane.

I am in search of experienced fan editors who would be interested in working with me and the con committee on the following convention publications.

Progress Reports (these need to be in a format that can also be posted to the website). I believe we’re pretty well off here. Warren Buff – who has been working with Fan Guest and Cover Artist Brad Foster (that’s his work above) – has PR1 ready to release, is planning issue #2, and says he’s found a potential editor for #s 3 and 4.

The **Restaurant Guide** should undoubtedly be handled by a local who loves both food and fanzines. Does such a creature exist?

The **Pocket Program** will be the publication most often consulted during the con, and will require the quickest and most accurate fan hand. Expect grief.

The convention **Newsletter** will run twice a day. I’m looking for energy, clarity, whimsy, and a light tone.

The **Program Book** I will probably reserve for Rosy (design) and myself (general editing). Between us we’ve done three Worldcon souvenir tomes and one for a NASFiC – so I dare suggest we’re qualified.

And of course, we’ll need proofreaders – every correction found will be made! – and ad salespeople (this is high priority). *Help!*