

SPARTAGUS

NO. 56 / GUY LILLIAN III / 1390 HOLLY AVENUE MERRITT ISLAND FL 32952 /
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Satan walks.

So I wrote on Facebook after the story came in from Uvalde, Texas. Some people understood. Lafferty once wrote something to the effect of, *Imagine a grown man too ignorant to believe in the Devil.* After Buffalo, and Uvalde – especially Uvalde – do you blame me if I do?

In one fortnight in May, 2022, two huge massacres of innocents took place in the United States. Both killers were 18-year-old boys armed with AR-15 semi-automatic rifles they were able to procure legally and easily. The second atrocity, in Uvalde, was almost undoubtedly influenced and inspired by the first, though only the Buffalo obscenity had an articulated motive. The second event had none.

My nephew Steve, now 29, used to live around the corner from the Tops Supermarket the first killer attacked. The shooter posted racist reasons for his act, which left ten people dead.

Americans are capable of miracles – my wife and I watch rockets rise to orbit from our back yard several times a month, and some of our fellow countrymen produce amazing works of art. Our government is founded on self-evident ideals towards which we have never stopped striving – our true distinction as a nation. But it is clear that our society is currently sick to its core, and resistant to the point of paranoia to any serious attempt to cure itself.

So many national cancers are revealed by these incidents – racism, the perverse allure of social media, family neglect, our criminal lack of gun control, police incompetence and the unknowable depths of human depravity. Outrage flames over any and all of them. *What should our society do about hate speech and paranoid political conspiracy media? What is proper police conduct when a citizen is endangered? Can we control the distribution of firearms? Why can you buy an assault rifle as easily as a can of beans? How old is too young to buy a weapon? Why in God's name – a phrase Joe Biden uses over and over in this matter – is this nightmare happening almost exclusively here? We're killing each other. We're killing the innocent. Why? What will stop us? How?*

On and on go the issues, underscoring a fundamental weakness in the American character. The problems are many, and are serious. But no one seriously believes that our public officials will do anything about any of them. Congress is a laughable klatsch of NRA whores. The administration is helpless in the face of Republican greed and intransigency. The people – *we* – have the attention span of goldfish and will move our attention to the next noisy story all too soon. Cynicism and outright despair rule. After all, we say, we could do nothing before. What can we do now?

We feel helpless because this latter event, the massacre in Uvalde, is incomprehensible. The Tops attacks had a motive we can understand, no matter how repulsive. But this – the murder of children, as well as two teachers – is, like Sandy Hook before it, beyond explanation. Beyond motive. A maniac entered that school and slaughtered innocents *and we cannot imagine why.*

Maybe his mother's sickening statement bears some truth. "He had his reasons." They were hidden, inchoate reasons, lost in the fracture of his mind – but we need to understand them. To fight evil, to turn Satan back in his walk, you have to comprehend where he's going.

What would I do? Impossibilities. Pass gun control legislation, keep military weaponry out of the hands of children, the unstable, the known violent. Reform the worthless police who shy from their duties, who cower outside a killer's nest instead of confronting him and putting an end to his rampage. Don't allow to stay silent those in responsibility to protect the public. In any way possible, lessen the influence of the National Rifle Association, because it has proven itself an enemy of society, and its stooges in the Republican Party. Answer, at every turn, the lies, misunderstandings and craziness voiced by those who oppose sane policy on firearms. America, it's been said, refuses to know itself. Let's self-examine. Let's be honest about our history and our flaws. Let's convince ourselves that although we are desperately imperfect, *we can be better*.

As a nation, and as individual souls. Let's grant the truth of the mental health argument, the most challenging question of all – how to uncover, and if possible salve, the impulses and feelings that rip humanity from people and release the demon inside.

Can any of it happen? Or are we helpless? For God's sakes, let's stop Satan in his tracks.

The following says it very well. [an learn more about](#)

BY THE LOS ANGELES *TIMES* EDITORIAL BOARD
MAY 24, 2022

Perhaps this is how it all ends — self-government, self-defense, self-control, liberty, unity, family. Perhaps the fate of the nation is to watch its soul die along with the at least 19 students and two adults shot to death Tuesday at an elementary school in Uvalde, Texas. This is us, the American people, on both sides of that gun — and countless other guns on countless playgrounds, shopping centers, streets and homes, killing our children, ourselves and each other. Killing our future.

This is who we are. This is what we have become. We can no longer send our children to school without pangs of anxiety that they will be in the line of fire in what ought to be havens of safety and learning. Nor can we find refuge in churches, mosques or synagogues, or in shopping centers, or at baby showers, picnics or parties. When we feel in danger, we get out our guns. Our guns put us in danger, so we get more.

Abraham Lincoln, in his earliest known public address, said that the still-young United States could never be brought down by a foreign enemy. It was 1838, he was only 28, and the Civil War was still nearly a quarter-century into the future. But he was correct when he told his Lyceum audience that “All the armies of Europe, Asia and Africa combined, with all the treasure of the earth (our own excepted) in their military chest; with a Buonaparte for a commander, could not by force, take a drink from the Ohio, or make a track on the Blue Ridge, in a trial of a thousand years.”

No, any danger to the U.S. comes from within. “If destruction be our lot, we must ourselves be its author and finisher,” he said. “As a nation of freemen, we must live through all time, or die by suicide.”

He was president by the time the nation had its most serious brush with suicide over the question of whether freedom means some people have the liberty to buy, own and exploit others, or whether it instead means all must be free. The Civil War was straightforward, with a clear enemy — even though it was ourselves — that wore different uniforms and could be defeated on the battlefield.

Now it's not so simple. We are again our own enemies, but what are we killing ourselves for? We don't even know. We just keep getting our guns, loading them and pulling the trigger. We elect political leaders who promise action, but we never hold them accountable. In any case, the killings continue. This may be the suicide of which Lincoln spoke. This may be why we die, not for a great cause but for a loss of love and respect for one another and the dream that bound our forebears together.

Is this where the American dream dies — not on a battlefield, but in our own homes and schools, by our own hands and the hands of our neighbors?

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I imagine it's a minor issue — certainly so compared with the mass murder of children — but the most intrusive controversy in our SF community of late is the brouhaha involving Mercedes Lackey and her onetime use of the term “colored.”

The day after the Science Fiction Writers of America acclaimed Mercedes Lackey as a Grand Master, its ultimate honor, a black lady she was on claimed she was offended by Lackey calling Samuel R. Delany “colored” on a panel they shared. This, she said, was a racial slur. Lackey was tossed out of the SFWA conference without a hearing.

Lackey issued an apology and explained that saying “colored” was a slip of her clumsy tongue. She pleaded that she had *bona fide* liberal cred for her support of gays and transsexuals and there, as far as I know, the matter rests.

I find the affair repulsive. It demonstrates the many problems with woke culture —and how the dust-up was handled stupidly by SFWA and almost everyone concerned. This incident demonstrates how sloppy and arbitrary judgments based on vague offensiveness is, not to mention punitive unto abusive. It also ignores a most important point in the common law: standing. The lady who complained to SFWA about Lackey's alleged racism was not the subject of her comment. That subject, Samuel R. Delany, always the calmest, kindest and most rational soul in the room, stated that *he* didn't regard the term “colored” as racist or insulting and said that his friend Mercedes could call him anything she wanted. Bottom line is that Lackey was exposed to public humiliation and reprobation by someone who had very little say in the matter.

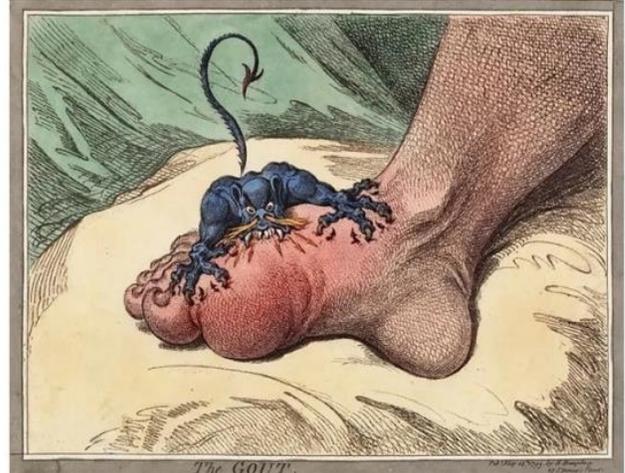
If the woman was truly offended by Lackey's slip of the tongue, she should have brought it up then and there. The fact that she didn't, the manner in which she took her problem to SFWA, indicates to me that she was more interested in exercising personal power than in striking a blow against racism. The fact that SFWA kowtowed to her complaint without investigating the incident further and/or checking with Delany shows again how cowardly the field has become. Such hypersensitivity and over-reaction makes progressive causes look touchy and childish and runs contrary to American standards of fairness and good sense.

Miss Lackey shouldn't have apologized. She should have fought back. In fact, she should consider action against SFWA, as this drivel is bound to affect her reputation. If the organization had integrity, SFWA should apologize to her, publicly, and forswear such recklessness in the future. Otherwise they risk ceding members' most precious right as free people, the right to fair judgment, to intolerance, rashness, trendiness and plain cowardice.

Not that it will mean anything to anyone, but I'll hesitate to attend any convention where such nonsense is policy, and I can be booted at any moment for any reason because anyone can say so.

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The disintegration of the Guy H. Lillian III corpus continues apace. Shortly before our April trip to France and the U.K., To supplement the thyroid, intestinal and blood pressure problems I had before, I was diagnosed with early Parkinson's. The pain in my left foot that I brought home with me took me to an orthopedist – she seemed to be oh, 14 years old – who looked at my X-ray and said I had flat feet. She prescribed a brace – tough to get on and off with my Parkinson's – and physical therapy. My g.p. saw the same X-ray and added his own opinion.
Possible gout.



GOUT?!? What kind of disease is that? That's 18th century stuff – a plot device out of *Captain Blood*. My doctor calmed me down. Gout is 21st century stuff, too.

Gout, "the disease of kings," is "a disease in which defective metabolism of uric acid causes arthritis, especially in the smaller bones of the feet, deposition of chalkstones, and episodes of acute pain." Most sufferers are affected around the big toe, and I ache around the heel and ball of the foot, but no matter, says my doctor. Gout is gout. He ordered a blood test. Pending.

Also – as if I need an "also" – my shoulder joints are showing signs of arthritic degeneration. He didn't say it, but I fear it: cortisone injections. Rich Lynch tells me the cortisone stab he endured in one of his shoulders was the worst pain of his life. As a devout and practicing coward, I am racked with fear.

(What are "chalkstones"?)

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On Monday, May 30, 2022, 09:38:33 AM EDT, redactia@galaxia42.ro <redactia@galaxia42.ro> wrote:

Hello Mr. Guy Lillian,

We are the editing crew of Galaxia42 Romanian online magazine dedicated to Science-Fiction and Fantasy, and we hereby wish to joyfully inform you that your short story: „The candlestick maker” was translated into Romanian (as „Lumânărarul”) and published in our May issue.

Here is the link to the translation:

<https://galaxia42.ro/fictiune/traduceri/lumanararul-13106.html>

This story got to us via Mr. Darius Hupov, who received it from you, by mail.

We thank you very much for a great piece of literature!

Best regards,

Galaxia42 editing cred.

Well look at that – I’m a published SF author! What’s most amazing to me is, I’ve never submitted “The Candlestick Maker” to any professional outlet, in fact have only sent it in for an N3F contest, don’t remember Darius Hupov (whoever he is), and received no payment (in dollars or *leu*). The story *is* translated (I see several proper names) and I *am* pleased – if slightly confused. Hmm. Maybe I should try “Candlestick Maker” on a few outlets in English, see if *they* have room for my “great piece of literature.”

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Speaking of literature, *books read* of late include Don Winslow’s *City on Fire*, a rather thin comedown from the four novels immediately preceding. *City on Fire*, which begins a new trilogy, deals wittily with an ethnic gang war in Providence, Rhode Island, but without the savage conviction of his best work, his masterwork *Cartel* trilogy and the excellent cop novel, *The Force*. Winslow has announced his retirement from writing, a rotten loss, but apparently the trilogy and *The Force* are being filmed.

I’m a devotee of James Lee Burke, whose *Every Cloak Rolled in Blood* is new – and quite different. Oh, the characters are familiar in tone, the conflicts are moral, absolute, and violent, the usual Burke fare – but there is a tasty fantasy undercurrent front & center here that has been struggling to surface in Burke’s last few novels. So instead of sociopathic *live* villains we have sociopathic *ghosts*. It’s a minor complaint: Burke’s command over English language metaphor is supreme among American popular writers, his moral vision is strong and unique, and it is a pleasure to absorb every page.

It required me to buy a second, Kindle edition of the book while in France, but I finished Greg Benford’s *Shadows of Eternity*, fully justifying my support for the novel as among the year’s best, and possibly Greg’s best work since *Timescape*. *Shadows* has a space-scanning scope reminiscent of the galactic visions of Arthur C. Clarke (whose energy still charges this house, 53 years after he left it). Good characters, imaginative aliens (borrowed and expanded upon from Poul Anderson), and a surprising denouement. Epic.

Always a rewarding read, two books by FBI profiler John Douglas came my way shortly before Europe, detailing the investigation into one criminal’s mind, and how that corrals him. A previous book about the supremely sickening BTK case had turned me off true crime for a while, so I’m happy to have Douglas and his writing partner back on my shelves. This book is *The Killer’s Shadow*, dealing with a murder by a white supremacist, and as usual, Douglas’ real-life detective work is fascinating to follow. The second book, *When a Killer Calls*, awaits.

We went to three films while overseas, two of which enjoyed mild success with me – the *Romancing the Stone* rip with Sandra Bullock, *The Lost City*, and the redo of the story behind

The Man who Never Was, *Operation Mincemeat*. Since Bullock is such an attractive comedienne, *The Lost City* enjoyed an advantage coming in – good supporting cast, too, including Daniel Radcliffe and Channing Tatum. But it's Bullock and her widening eyes that make this cookie delicious.

The Man who Never Was is a true story about a hush-hush effort by the British navy to bamboozle Germany into believing the Allies *weren't* going to invade Sicily. The idea was to find an anonymous dead man, dress him up as a courier, load him down with misinformation and leave him at sea. The Germans would eventually find him, read his letters, and move their defenses away from Sicily. The Nazis send a spy to investigate the dead man – and therefore his information. Great suspense, fine performances by all-business Clifton Webb and Stephen Boyd as the slimy German spy (“Polar Bear ... Polar ... Bear ...”) *Operation Mincemeat* tells the same story, but throws in personal drama for the Brits (Colin Firth, professional as ever) and eliminates Boyd's character altogether. So it isn't as taut, meaningful, or effective as the earlier film. But it does entertain. Rosy especially liked that we saw it in London, very near the buildings where much of the action takes place.

Because J.K. Rowling is a Scot and wrote much of the Harry Potter saga in Edinburgh, Rosy wanted to see *Fantastic Beasts: The Secrets of Dumbledore* while we were there. Indeed, it was a beautiful multiplex where we saw the film – only the road construction hiding the Sherlock Holmes statue on the street spoiled the scene. I didn't like the flick – the plot was hard to follow, we both missed Johnny Depp (Mads Mikkelsen is a great actor, but lacks the looney dimension his role demands), and I suffered a hideous sudden gut attack 4/5 of the way in. I barely made the jakes. Had I not, I'd've cleared the theatre.

Once home, this great-grandson of Swedish immigrants couldn't pass up *The Northman*. Anya Taylor-Joy is so spookily alluring I doubt a statue of the Dalai Lama could resist her, and the story – the basis for *Hamlet* – is strong, solid stuff. A *loud* film – Vikings apparently did everything at top volume, apparently bellowing their lullabies and screaming their prayers. Scrupulously accurate and well played by Alexander Skarsgaard, Nicole Kidman, Taylor-Joy and the rest, so far the most interesting and unique movie I've seen this year.

Did I drag my wife to see *Top Gun: Maverick* as soon as it opened here? Of course! And it didn't take much effort. She liked the original film – more than I did, actually. Anyway, the sequel is the #1 movie in the world as I write, a huge swooping paean to motion, motion, motion in the form of zooming jets. Tom Cruise grins boyishly and disobeys uptight superiors and charms old girlfriends – or one, anyway, Jennifer Connally, who is incandescent – and American flyboys act like 3rd graders and blast unnamed faceless bad guys out of the sky and *damn*, everybody has a good time. So did we. By the way, the Mojave Desert locale of much of the movie's ground drama is familiar to me: I was born there.

Okay, I get *Top Gun*, Rosy gets *Downton Abbey: A New Era*, the second film following up on the super-civilized television series about the aristocratic Crawley family in Merry Olde England in the first decades of the XX Century. Almost all of the familiar upstairs, downstairs characters are back, which makes for a somewhat crowded story, but the cast handles the basic tales of Dowager Countess Violet's ancient luv affair and the intrusion of a film crew into the venerable house with their usual wit and care. Occasionally too much seems to be happening at once, but hey, it's fun to watch Maggie Smith strut her stuff as only that living icon of English theatre can.

On the small screen, the History Channel's biodoc on the life of Theodore Roosevelt earns a rating of excellent. T.R. was a driven but consistent man who brought energy, creativity, and audacity to his every public duty, as this program shows. He had enormous, unshakable faith in himself and America, and knew no fear. One wonders where such men are now.

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One of the great things about fanzine fandom is how it allows an editor to relive conventions and vacations and other neat events by writing about them. As June gets rolling, I'm writing up the English part of our April expedition to Paris, London and Edinburgh; the French chapter of the trip is already up on eFanzines. The zines have a lot of photos and shouldn't bore the reader more than any other old uncle's vacay pictures. "And here I am asleep on the Underground ..."

As soon as *The Iconic Route* is done and posted I'll turn my fannish wit to *Challenger* #43, overdue for > a year, and my public defender memoir. Rosy went through the trash I called a manuscript and cleaned up the formatting; it's ready for me now. I haven't forgotten my Sturgeon *Challenger*, but I have a lot to read before setting fingertips to keyboard. Anyway, contributions to *Challenger* on any SFnal subject are welcome, so limber up them e-mails ... I have a loose deadline of 7-20-22.

Con plans: For sure, DeepSouthCon October 22-24 in Huntsville. Because it all but conflicts with Contraflow in New Orleans, we'll have to skip that one, which hurts. Worldcon is Chicago remains a remote possibility.

And if anyone wants a few thousand old SF and mystery paperbacks, Rosy and I are *desperate* to clear out our storage locker ...

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I must return to the massacres of May for a few final comments. So great is the general despair over those horrors, and the accepted inaction by those in power, that some commentators – like the *L.A. Times* editorialist quote earlier – evince the fear that America is headed for a complete breakdown of society, and a new civil war. Taking a look not only at these last two mass murders and the impasse that's followed, but at the facts in the ghastly Kyle Rittenhouse case and the riots in Charlottesville, one can see why those talking heads feel that way. No one seems willing to talk. Everyone seems primed for battle.

I'm not equating our side with the wingers. No libtards chanted "Blood and soil!" or "Jews will not replace us!" or ran a woman down the street, nor did lefties bring assault rifles to Charlottesville or Kenosha; liberals don't embrace whack-a-doodle "replacement" theories and slaughter grocery shoppers because they're of a different ethnicity. However, a good jury found that his victims accosted Rittenhouse, not the other way around, and video of the Charlottesville melee shows violence from both sides. Both sides were itching to mix it. I can see why some see a general bloodletting beginning to build.

The solution, of course, is to listen to one another, to *talk*, to understand the grievances of the other guy – but who believes that talking will do any good? who is willing to listen?

Well, me, among others.