



SPARTACUS no.62

GUY LILLIAN III + 1390 Holly Avenue Merritt Island FL 32952-5883

GHLIII@yahoo.com

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And so begins 2023. In its first short weeks we've witnessed the repulsive spectacle of the election of the **GOP Speaker**, showing that Kevin McCarthy hasn't sprouted a hair's breadth of character since the Capitol insurrection, the ridiculous **George Santos** "Great Imposter" brouhaha (did you know he won Hugos for *Dune* and *The Stars My Destination*?), an embarrassing **classified documents scandal** that further proves that Presidents and Veeps should take better care of America's secrets, and much more seriously, the continuing crime that is Russia's **Ukraine invasion**. Putin has severed Russia from the respect of civilization for the rest of our lives. Almost as wretched is the horrifying **border humanitarian crisis** that goes far beyond our slack immigrant/refugee policies to the question of whether America should tolerate any person, whatever their legal status, to freeze on our streets. For Christ's sake – literally – there are *children* out there ...

And so on. Like almost any other year, 2023 is a Gordian knot of problems snarled with outrage trivial and profound. Each challenge must be taken seriously; each must be dealt with – but can *Spartacus* be forgiven if I restrict my commentary to just a *few* questions for this one issue?

Like the horrible **Idaho College Murders**. Looking at the spark and bloom on the girls, the sullen gloom of the accused, it seems obvious that the student murders in Idaho was an **incel** crime. Beautiful, lively young women, a repressed guy likely lacking in confidence and patience ... Of course, the accused is innocent until proven guilty, but if this tragedy turns out to be the old, old story evoked in *Beauty and the Beast* and *Phantom of the Opera* and a million billion private lives, I would not be surprised. It's beyond regrettable that sexuality, the attraction most delightful, affirmative and *necessary* in human existence, should often be the most painful and the most dangerous.

What's the answer to sexual anger? Social indoctrination? Dream on – fighting the all but universal conviction that one has a right to love and be loved is beyond the capacity of any authority. Try teaching *understanding* – of ourselves, of each other, of how people behave and believe ... and most of all, of how we *change*. We can't teach doctrine deeply enough to make sure it will stick, but we can learn, recognize and embrace the truth about being human, to – as Edmond Dantes says – *wait* and *hope*.

Damar Hamlin injury – The hard hit-to-the-chest that provoked coronary arrest in this young football player was a horrid, one-of-a-kind accident, but the response has been a testament to sportsmanship and spirit. Sports is rough, but I'd deny it is *violent*: in modern competitive professional athletics there's no purposeful desire to cause permanent harm. Rather, at its best a mutual respect obtains, the like of which the Bills player enjoyed in full after his mishap. Getting shellacked in a tough game like football is regrettable – but the support behind the guy has reflected not only sports but our society at its best. *That's* what it's all about.

I note that the **Chengdu Worldcon** has at long last communicated with the outside world, announcing a change of date to October and that Hugo nominations would soon be accepted. I can't recall if Rosy and I qualify – if we were members of Chicon 8 and therefore eligible to nominate -- but if so, I could use some suggestions for the professional categories. I have my fan listings pretty well sussed, even if I haven't recognized more than one or two of the Fanzine, Fan Artist and Fan Writer *finalists* in years.

My health. I wrote last time about the MRI I recently endured, which showed that I haven't had a stroke and show no signs of brain atrophy. Who wants to hear all about my *gastrointestinal* test? No one? Aw, that's disappointing. If ever there was an experience I wanted to share, that was it. *BLUCH*. Anyway, every test they did came out "within normal limits," so hooray. It looks like I'm stuck with my hypertension, *hypothyroidism*, arthritis, flat feet, tooth decay (having crowns replaced costs more than some wars) and gustatory rhinitis **achoo**. And Parkinson's. A picture of health ... for a zombie.

On January 10 Rosy and I toodled up I-95 to Daytona Beach to meet friends **Corlis and Gary Robe** for lunch. It was a pretty, cool day, and indeed, a *pretty cool day*. Gary and Corlis had just returned from visiting their son, daughter-in-law, and granddaughter in the land downunder, and I'm proud to say that

though the Robes are trufans and Gary is a member of the mighty Southern Fandom Press Alliance, as am I, fannish gossip was at a minimum; most talk centered around the trip. Gary wore an Aussie bush hat. The barbecue bacon and brisket burger I crammed into my chops came with instructions on contacting one's next of kin and draining one's corpse of excess cholesterol, but as mine was sitting right there ...

Good to see them. Speaking of Gary ...

The Huntsville Alabama DeepSouthCon of last summer was a welcome return to conventioning for Southern SF fandom. The highlight, to many, was Robe's Rubble Award speech. Gary established the Rubble some years ago as a parody of DSC's *Rebel* Award, given for distinguished fannish services *for* Southern fandom; the Rubble is meant to spear the schnook who has done the most *to* Southern fandom. Usually Gary presents the award in good-natured jest, but occasionally Robe – the guiding light behind Kentucky's Con*Cave – feels compelled to wax serious. So it was at the '22 DSC.



There's no transcript of Robe's speech, but in his November zine for SFGA Gary described the thoughts behind this year's "award." Here are some excerpts of this thoughtful and provocative account. Reactions sought.

As I prepared for the Rubble Award presentation, there really was only one choice for this year, the SARS co-V2 virus. In this year of fandom barely hanging on in so many places, it really wasn't appropriate to select a human target, even in fun. Plus, I'd been giving a lot of thought into what I wanted to say to the audience. I highlighted two big issues that are threatening to make SF conventions impossible.

The first of these is economic. The current cost of hotels has priced the venues the SF conventions rely on out of the market. Hotels have jacked up room rates in response to the pandemic. During 2020 and 2021 while people were only traveling when they absolutely had to hotels faced with 10% occupancy did the only thing they could do, they increased their rates to cover their fixed costs renting the few rooms they could sell. Now, as travel has come roaring back, hotels have discovered that many of their clientele will pay \$150-\$200 a night for a room in Elizabethtown KY and \$300 a night for a suite in Huntsville AL. If you are traveling with a vanload of soccer players, \$300 a night is a bargain for a room that can accommodate six occupants. For a SF convention where the average occupancy is 3 per room, it's not such a deal.

Hotels have also slashed their housekeeping staffs. Even the \$300 a night Embassy Suites do not provide daily room cleaning any more. They will bring you dry towels and shampoo bottles if you ask but forget about trash removal or clean linens. Rooms are now only cleaned once the occupants check out. This puts yet another stress on SF conventions because it complicates the already fraught relationship between hotel and convention over issues like room parties and removing furniture from rooms used for convention functions.

The second problem that threatens fandom is more insidious and intractable because it is our own failing. As we begin scaling up efforts to revive ConCave, I've had several conversations with fellow committee members about the dread we feel about facing the inevitable conflicts we're going to face over political divisions within fandom. We've already faced some criticism

over canceling the event in 2021 and 2022 over social distancing, masking requirements and vaccination. We really didn't have a choice because except for the summer Khancave in 2021, the state of Kentucky was not allowing public gatherings of over 100 people.

The next disturbing aspect of the whole public health and political debates we're now having is the utter immobility of belief on both sides of the issues. Each side in this debate that the government is trying to turn the citizenry into obedient sheep by forcing them to wear masks and take a dangerous untested vaccine based on genetic manipulation when there are effective drugs that have been used safely for years that cure COVID-19 and that massive voter fraud attacks the other with anger, arrogance and righteous indignation, but there is no significant movement in the beliefs of either side. Both sides seem to have lost the ability to honestly ask themselves a fundamental question, "What if I'm wrong?" That's the question I wake up with each morning and ask myself again as I'm getting in bed.

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James Lee Burke, Michael Connelly, Carl Hiaasen, Jefferson Parker, make way. Add to my list of favorite mystery/thriller writers the name of **Lou Berney**. I read his excellent *November Road* a couple of years ago and chanced on his *Long and Faraway Gone* while going through a box of my late mother-in-law's books. A superb novel – witty, tragic – I was sorry to bid its characters adieu, even as I enjoyed the realistic and satisfying catharsis of their stories' intertwined resolutions. Three other novels are listed by this Oklahoma-based writer, two of which are available and as of this very day, on their way here. (The third, possibly brand new, cannot yet be bought.)

By the way, I note that *Faraway Gone* won an Edgar Award as its year's *Best Paperback Original*. Why does such a category exist? I can see differentiating between a First Novel and one by an established writer, but what is the essential line between a hardback novel and one with soft covers?

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The **Oscar nominations** are out. As has been my wont since I was 7 and *Around the World in 80 Days* copped the Academy Award, I have unarguable opinions on the candidates. PLEASE NOTE: **SPOILERS ALERT**. *Viz.*:

Not up for Best Picture, but still demanding note, *Glass Onion* is great silly fun until the end, when a crime against mankind – the destruction of the *Mona Lisa* – is not only depicted but *applauded*. Sorry, but offenses against art, the most permanent and affirmative acts of our civilization, especially against the painting which sat atop my bucket list for many years, ruin even the kookiest films for me. Farah Mendelsohn's theory – that the Louvre foisted a copy onto the film's imbecilic villain – would make all the difference *were it mentioned in the movie*.

Literally an immersive experience, miraculous and revolutionary in technique, *Avatar: The Way of Water* boasts a superior story and FX from James Cameron's first film. The story is obvious and simple, letting the brain-frying FX carry the movie, but those are so astonishing as to bear the burden. I literally didn't move throughout the 3 hour + run time, and no, it wasn't due to boredom or prickly heat. It was due to my astonishment at the heights theatrical technology has taken us to.

Everything Everywhere All at Once is everyone's favorite film of 2022 – or so it seems. It's wildly creative and funny, as a spunky heroine seeking only to reconcile with her estranged daughter and do her taxes careens chaotically about the multiverse. The movie is Philip K. Dick lite, confusing and slight, often slapstick and – did I mention? – sometimes incomprehensible. Well, who cares? Such craziness is its own reward, and quirkiness has ruled in cinema for the past few years.

The Banshees of Inisherin is also small, also quirky, but is a far stronger and stranger film. I'm tempted to say that if the movie wins, it'll be due to the charm of the scenery, the accents and the donkey, but the superb acting and the weird, emotionally mutable story are its true appeal. My father-in-law found it depressing. My own take is more complicated. This is a movie that begins with laughter, but like all Irish laughter, it floats on a well of deep pain, as spare as the landscape, isolated, solitary, but rich with hidden, deep and inexplicable feeling.

Steven Spielberg doesn't trust his audience. He has constantly scuttled his own films with insipid sentimentality, grabbing the viewer by the lapels and screaming "Be moved! Be moved!" into his face. To be fair, *The Fabelmans*, the story of Spielberg's young manhood and early movie experience, suffers only partly from this fault. When dealing with the lead character's family, the movie borders on mawkish, despite the incandescent presence of Michelle Williams. Its issues go unresolved, and the much-touted anti-Semitism the protagonist endures amounts to very little. But! the making of the kid's childhood films is hilarious and his meeting with John Ford (sublimely evoked by David Lynch) is simply wonderful.

Tar provoked quite a discussion in the Greenhouse; do the stunning acting, fine production, stimulating setting and involving story overcome the movie's pace, length, and resemblance to *The Black Swan*? I say yes. The universe of classical music in which the film takes place is self-referential to a fault, requiring a commitment from its adherents that borders on, and sometimes crosses into, the psychotic, but it's also fascinating, a realm of genius with its own language and severely demanding standards. The protagonist, played with perfect tone by Cate Blanchett, is a renowned orchestral conductor, pursuing the demands of her craft beyond the limits of humane behavior; she is a brilliant, manipulative, obsessive, sadistic, dedicated seeker of perfection. Blanchett pins the demanding role to the wall. True, the moral comeuppance she faces in the course of the story seems trivial – a world-famous talent would dismiss such a scandal without missing a beat of her baton – her collapse is overwrought, and her ultimate fate almost comic. But the film's look into the obsessiveness demanded by Art is profound. It's far stronger than the cliché-ridden *Black Swan*, and a key contender for top honors this year.

I've already given my opinion of *Elvis* and the new version of *All Quiet on the Western Front*, and have yet to see *Triangle of Sadness* or *Women Talking*. Nevertheless: I'll still let fly with my **Predictions** and **Preferences**.

BEST SUPPORTING ACTOR: **Ke Huy Quan** in *Everything Everywhere* has this trophy bagged. Only **Brendan Gleeson** in *Banshees* has received anywhere near as much praise, and as I prefer that movie, I would prefer him. But Ke's role required a wide, wild characterization, and he accomplished it so well I can't see him being denied.

SUPPORTING ACTRESS: Most attention has been lavished on **Kerry Condon** in *Banshees of Inisherin*. One of the ladies in *Everything Everywhere* might have a chance – they've each won a critics' award or two – but the *Better Call Saul* actress has the edge. Okay with me; she's charming as only an Irish lass can be, the only performer in that film who outshines the donkey playing the only character who has a donkey's worth of sense.

ACTOR: Two-horse race, according to talk, Brendan Fraser in *The Whale* and **Colin Farrell** in *Banshees*, though Austin Butler's evocation of the King in *Elvis* won a Golden Globe. I have yet to see *The Whale*, *Living* or *Aftersun*. Get to work, Guy.

ACTRESS: Michelle Yeoh has won some critics' accolades for her central role in *Everything Everywhere*, but **Cate Blanchett**'s complex turn in *Tar* has attained a legendary status worthy of Brando in *On the Waterfront* or Anthony Hopkins in *The Father*. I'd be astonished and *vevy upset* if our Lady of the Galadhrim doesn't win.

PICTURE: **Everything Everywhere** has won more critics' honors than any other and has a great chance. In the last few years the Oscar has tended to go to smallish, quirky films with simple, sweet messages, cf.



Nomadland and *CODA. Everything* is the same breed of flick, only much more so. Second in line is probably *Banshees of Inisherin*, for the same reasons; emotionally confusing and all, I'd prefer it. But my choice is *Tar*, the arrogant intellectual's choice, since I certainly am arrogant and *wish* I was an intellectual, followed by the fine German remake of the *third* Oscar winner, *All Quiet on the Western Front*. We'll see on March 12.

Speaking of awards, I am pleased to announce that I haven't seen a single nominee for the **Razzies** – *Blonde*, *Pinocchio* (I assume the Tom Hanks version), *Good Mourning*, *The King's Daughter*, or *Morbius* – and except for *Blonde*, which copped an Oscar nomination for Ana de Armas, have no intention of doing so.

LOC AROUND THE CLOCK

Tom Feller tomfeller@aol.com
[on *Spartacus* nos. 58 & 59]

I met Nichelle Nichols once at a Creation Con at the Opryland Hotel here in Nashville. One of the extras was a "Breakfast with Sulu and Uhura". The food consisted of coffee or tea and pastries. Nichols and George Takei went from table to table chatting with us and were very friendly. It was the most expensive breakfast Anita and I have ever eaten, but we felt it was worth it.

With the exception of Shatner, the Trek actors all seemed at ease with their fannish duties, particularly Takei. I think that stemmed from the involvement of so many fans in the creation and resurrection of the franchise. Thank you Bjo!

I ran some of the early versions of my reviews of the [2021] Hugo finalists through SFPA and am attaching the final versions that ran in the N3F Review of Books. In some of them, the LGBTQ issues were central to the story, in others, they were part of the background, and in a few, they were completely absent. My interest was whether the stories themselves were any good.

I have been observing the conflict between consumers and participants in fandom for some time now. I think it depends on where you are looking. I would say consumerism is dominant in convention fandom these days, especially after the pandemic. However, if you go on-line and look at the reviews on sites such as Good Reads, Amazon, and Barnes & Noble, you can see active and intelligent discussions of books. These fans are definitely participants.

Bob Jennings fabficbks@aol.com
29 Whiting Rd., Oxford MA 01540-2035

I share your joy that the anticipated GOP Red Wave did not change the halls of Congress that much. I was not so pessimistic as you, considering all the good stuff Biden and the Dems have actually accomplished, plus the double bonus gift the Trumpers unwittingly donated, namely the seizure of classified documents from Trump's Florida palace and the utterly ridiculous stream of explanations/excuses he came up with afterward. Then there was not just the fact that the Roe abortion decision was struck down by the Trump Court, (to widespread discontent), but also the speed with which the GOP started talking about codifying anti-abortion legislation into federal law after decades of screaming that the whole abortion matter is entirely local and should be settled at the state. Hypocrisy has seldom been more blatant.

I was certain that the Dems would hold the Senate, and altho the Trumpers would grab the House I was pleasantly surprised when the margin was much thinner than I anticipated. On the other hand---as you noted, the margins of triumph in a lot of the elections was razor thin, and if you look at the

Red/Blue map of the House Election that both CNN and NBC have been posting on-line, you can't help but notice the waving sea of red and what seems like only a smattering of blue spots here and there.

There are a lot of people who happily voted for the Republican bluster this election, and two years from now when Ron DeSantis is the GOP presidential candidate the mouse manure will really hit the fan.

In regards to the Chengdu Worldcon, I note a certain amount of hypocrisy in your writing here as well. After screaming and shouting at the top of your voice for months on end about the recent DisCon III Worldcon daring to un-invite Toni Weisskopf due to perceived "violent and hostile content found in Baen Books forums" and how unfair it was, especially after she had been officially invited to be a Guest of Honor, you now advocate that Chengdu GOH Sergei Lukianenko should be dis-invited because he is an adamant support of Russia's invasion of Ukraine and seems to fully support Putin's reasoning that Ukraine is a nation seeped in Nazi style fascism.

No, he should not be dis-invited. His political opinions may be contrary to your own, and to mine, and to those held by a lot of other people, but he was invited because he has been and remains a strong voice of imaginative science fiction material. His political views are his own, and did not enter into his selection process. It is to be hoped that he will confine his speeches and activities at the upcoming convention to science fiction and fantasy literature and related media and leave partisan politics outside the forum. But if he does not you may be sure there will be many people present who will press him strongly concerning his opinions about this ongoing war.

The World Science Fiction Convention should be above politics. It should be about the mutual affection fans have for science fiction/fantasy in all its forms, a meeting place where we fans of all varieties can celebrate our enjoyment of the stuff, no matter where we live, or what our political persuasions may be.

Trying to demand that guests echo a particular popular political viewpoint would be a serious mistake. If someone like Lukianenko, or Weisskopf is allowed to be kicked out of the convention because of currently unpopular political viewpoints, then how long will it be before the entire convention is nothing but a rubber stamp of whatever the prevailing political wave happens to be? How soon before everyone who does not happen to parrot the currently approved political viewpoint is denied participation? How long before the same type of restrictions could demand that people who happen to be of the wrong religion, or happen to be the wrong gender alignment, or happen to come from an unpopular nation be automatically excluded? Let's not go down that twisted rocky road. Keep science fiction/ fantasy as the theme of the convention and let us not allow any outside mundane agenda to mold it.

*Having the "wrong" religion or disagreeing with a currently popular opinion is hardly the same as supporting a vicious, proto-imperialist war against an innocent people. It's an invidious – a **ridiculous** – comparison.*

Huh! For some reason I hadn't realized that Lloyd Penney had become the new editor-in-chief of *Amazing Stories* until I read his letter in this issue. I dunno how I missed that, but it does rekindle my interest in the magazine. I had pretty much decided to write *Amazing* off my list since it was clear after four issues that the editor's taste of stf literature and mine were not even close to aligning, but with a new hand at the helm, especially a longtime fan like Lloyd, then I guess I'll have to take another look at *Amazing*. [Amen – congrats to Lloyd!]

Evelyn Leeper eeeper@optonline.net

You talk about the latest version of *All Quiet on the Western Front* (which I believe is the first German version), and say, "World War I is the standard for pointless military misery and massacre, even in a century like the XXth – Archibald MacLeish told my Berkeley student body that it topped even Vietnam in that regard."

Kim Stanley Robinson wrote (in "A History of the Twentieth Century, with Illustrations"): "For a long time the numbers alone staggered him. To overwhelm trench defenses, artillery bombardments of the most astonishing size were brought to bear: on the Somme the British put a gun every twenty yards along a fourteen-mile front, and fired a million and a half shells. In April 1917 the French fired six million shells. The Germans' Big Bertha shot shells seventy-five miles high, essentially into space. Verdun was a 'battle' that lasted ten months, and killed almost a million men.

"The British section of the front was ninety miles long. Every day of the war, about seven thousand men along that front were killed or wounded - not in any battle in particular, but just as the result of incidental sniper fire or bombardment. It was called 'wastage.'

"Frank stopped reading, his mind suddenly filled with the image of the Vietnam Memorial. He had visited it right after leaving the Lincoln Memorial, and the sight of all those names engraved on the black granite plates had powerfully affected him. For a moment it had seemed possible to imagine all those people, a little white line for each.

"But at the end of every month or two of the Great War, the British had had a whole Vietnam Memorial's worth of dead. Every month or two, for fifty-one months."

["A History of the Twentieth Century, with Illustrations" is a story I used to read every New Year's Eve.]

John Purcell askance73@gmail.com
3744 Marielene Circle, College Station, TX 77845

My feelings about this year's midterm election cycle are similar to yours in that the USofA has temporarily dodged a MAGA-bullet, but now this country faces two years of congressional gridlock thanks to the House having the slimmest GOP margin of control over the Democratic party, which maintained a surprising control of the Senate, possibly to increase by another seat should Senator Warnock defeat that multi-concussed former football player, Herschel Walker, in the December 6th runoff for this last Georgia senate seat. That will help, but not by much. As a result, nothing of any real consequence will be accomplished, and the odds of Florida Governor Ron DeSantis becoming the next President increase. However, before your blood pressure explodes off the chart at this prospect, consider that the Previous Guy in Charge might, just might, implode the Republican party's chances by following his vanity and running against that party's nominee should it be someone other than the Previous Guy in Charge, thereby splitting that party's vote substantially enough to carry the Democratic nominee to win the White House in 2024.

And as far *as that* goes, I really do not want President Biden running for re-election. Sorry, Guy. I know you like him - and so do I, to a certain extent - but my leanings for the last decade have shifted more toward the Green Party's stance on many issues. Ever since the 2000 general election, I have been a registered Independent voter and find myself very much against the oligarchs running both the DNC and RNC. I firmly believe this country needs a strong third party if only for the reason that if more independents or Greens or Bullmooses or Whatever were elected to state and federal offices then everybody on Capitol Hill just might have to begin to work together again. **sigh** Of such musings are my dreams made. *[After Biden's testy response to the documents dust-up, I kind of agree. A younger, charismatic candidate would better serve our progressive cause. Biden should retire, satisfied with the excellent job he's done in restoring America's reputation. But ... if not "Uncle Joe," who?]*

Earlier today I was perusing old issues of Bruce Gillespie's fanzine *Steam Engine Time* on **efanzines.com**, and every single time I ran across a letter from Martin Morse Wooster my eyes misted a bit. That happened with other names, too, such as Robert Lichtman, Milt Stevens, and others, but Martin's death was totally unexpected and tragic. I'm still in shock over that, and all day today I've been mourning the loss of Greg Bear. Never met him, but I knew his wife Astrid when her last name was

Anderson; she accompanied her parents Poul and Karen Anderson to Minicons back in the mid-70s a few times, and that's when I met Astrid. My heart breaks for her and their children.

Rich Lynch rw_lynch@yahoo.com

[on *Spartacus* no. 60]

You describe some of your health-related issues by writing that: "I've completed physical therapy for my aching left foot and am begging my G.P. to prescribe therapy for my arthritic shoulders." I've had back issues, on and off, for just about all of my adult life so I can commiserate with you on all the aches and pains. And it's not getting any better as time goes on – you could point at almost any joint in my body and I could probably tell you about a painful issue I've had with it at some point in my life.

And on the topic of health issues, condolences on the loss of your Yorkie, Ginger. Advanced kidney failure is what probably contributed to the loss of our Maine Coon Cat, Mosa, back in 2007 but she made it past age 20 so there were probably other health issues (all lumped under the heading of Old Age) that led to her demise. But she had a great life, as did Ginger from how you describe her. Thanks for sharing memories of her with us.

[And on no. 61] Concerning artificial satellites launched in the 1960s, you write that: "I remember watching the whistling dot of Sputnik I crossing the sky above Buffalo ... [And later], Echo, the vast aluminum balloon." Hadn't even thought about it until now, but I think that Echo I was the first artificial satellite I'd ever observed. I remember that it was very easy to see from its brightness, and that it wasn't up there for very long – as large as it was, it must have been subject to huge amounts of drag which quickly decayed its orbit. There are so many satellites up there now that one or more will be visible using binoculars (and an iPad app which shows you where to look) every clear night. But it's now such a non-unique experience that it's hardly worth even bothering with.

I strongly disagree! Gimme them satellites! My favorite such experiences, after Sputnik, were watching a Gemini capsule pass over, and much later, the ISS. Something special about knowing people ride that moving dot of light ...

Not all my memories of seeing artificial satellites are good ones. A few decades ago, when Nicki and I were still living in Tennessee, I owned a pretty good astronomical telescope and sometimes used it with a camera piggybacked atop it to take what turned out to be fairly good astrophotos. But what would have been the best of the lot – Orion's belt and the Orion Nebula below it – was ruined by a satellite track which ran right through the middle of it. Nowadays I'd have spotted the problem immediately and taken another photo, but back then there were no digital cameras and the defect wasn't noticed until weeks later, after I had the film canister developed. The lesson learned from all that is to *always* take more than one photo of any subject, and that applies to mundane subjects as well as astrophotos. I'd like to think that experience helped make me a better photographer, but all these years later I still consider myself a work in progress.

Lloyd & Yvonne Penney <penneys@bell.net>

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

I think Joe Biden is doing a fine job...sitting on his thumbs, he'd still be doing a far better job than his predecessor. But, along came the mid-terms, and the House of Representatives has gone right-wing. This means, especially after 15 ballots...not much will get done, they will try to impeach Biden, they will put Hunter Biden and many of Joe's other relatives through the wringer, and they will treat Ukraine as the bad guys, and try to defund any support for Volodymir Zelenskyy's beleaguered country. In short, the return of Trumpian madness, and the absence of anything resembling intelligence. The ReThugs have embraced the ultimate liar George Santos, although they will keep him at arm's length

from anything with any resemblance of responsibility and the need for truth. If the public was tired of lying politicians, Santos will make them sick to death.

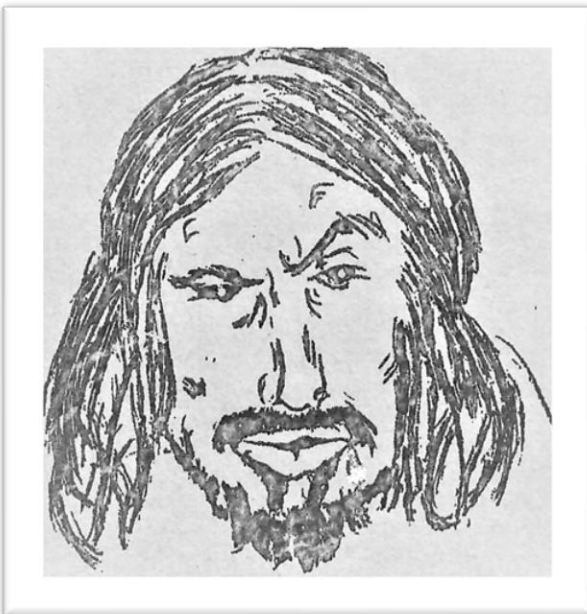
My LOC ...the January 6th committee has completed their report, all 800+ pages...and, now what? What can the Department of Justice do to put the whole Trump family in orange jumpsuits? Alex Jones has been fined more than a billion dollars, and all his appeals have been for naught. He declared bankruptcy, but is still doing his radio broadcasts. Is he as Teflon-coated as Trump? Further on my LOC... The Kickstarter campaign we had going failed, so instead of a magazine in production, we will be publishing short fiction on the *Amazing* website. I am reading submitted stories as fast as I can ...

Conventions have nearly completely dried up here, so we are looking for other activities to occupy ourselves. There's a couple of steampunk events we will enjoy, but two other events we'd go to every year have folded up. Either tired of doing all the work, or can't get the community's support, both are done, and we will have to look for something else. We might see if we can persuade the Ad Astra committee to get moving again, but it's pretty quiet in that direction. We will not speak here of the Chengdu Worldcon, but I am sure the Scottish Worldcon the year after will have lots of discussing to do. In place of those Worldcons are NASFiC in Winnipeg and Buffalo. Winnipeg is financially out of reach for us, even calculating with Canadian dollars, but Buffalo is just down the highway, literally, and we should be able to get there, and have some fun, and publicize *Amazing*.

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Mardi Gras is coming up as this *Spartacus* hits the silks, and if you happen to be on French Quarter streets on February 21, spare a pitying thought for us Nawlins expatriates, stuck anywhere else.

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Remember this guy? If you were around the Southern Fandom Press Alliance when I joined, a mere 52 years ago, you should recall a member from Rome, Georgia, a guy with a beard and huge eyes who liked to affect this sardonic, one-eyebrow-raised expression (because otherwise he felt he looked stupid). He did a zine called *Gimboate*, in which he spent page upon page writing about a digital watch he was making. He never explained his title.

His name was **Gary Steele**, and his old friend Cliff Biggers – who drew this caricature many years ago – recently had the terrible duty of informing fandom of his death. Their relationship had cooled over time; Gary had pulled away from family, friends and fandom. But the memory of his presence survived.

I remember when I met Steele, at a DeepSouthCon in 1972. He didn't speak, just stood around and smiled at me until I read his nametag. Later, I speared him back, starring him as *the Linda Blair character* in a fannish parody of *The Exorcist*. And I'll never forget his hilarious look of dawning horror when John Guidry cornered him on *The Belle of Louisville* to do an issue of Guidry's atrocious handwrought *Ignite*.

We had fun in those days. **Gary Steele** was an integral part of it. *Vale*, old friend.

A remembrance of Gary Steele by Cliff Biggers.

Editor's note: Cliff was closer to Gary Steele than any other fan. His account of their friendship follows.

January 18th, 2023 would have been Gary Steele's 70th birthday; Gary was my closest friend through junior high and high school, and we remained friends for years before he suddenly cut off contact with all his prior friends in the early 1980s. However, I just discovered today that Gary apparently passed away on February 14th, 2022. I only discovered this when I attempted to leave a voicemail birthday greeting for him (something I have done every year in hopes that he might someday respond) and got a message that the number was no longer in service. This news saddens me tremendously; I had always hoped that Gary and I would reconnect at some point, but it never happened.

I first met Gary in the 4th grade; we got along well because we were both comic book fans (it sometimes seems like comics fans have an innate radar sense that enables them to immediately recognize fellow fans), and we enjoyed talking about our favorite comics, writers, and artists. We were not in the same classes in the fifth or sixth grade, but we renewed our friendship in the 7th grade when we both attended West Rome Junior High. From there on, we pretty much grew up together; we alternated spending one weekend night at his house, then the next at my house, since we lived a short walk from one another.

In early 1966, we both discovered the world of fandom and fanzines, and our lives changed. We began writing for other fanzines, and later on we began doing our own fanzines and apazines. Gary cajoled his parents into buying him a brand new IBM Selectric at the time when that typewriter cost almost as much as a car, and he made use of it to produce zines for Myriad, SFPA, Galaxy (an apa he started in the early 70s), CAPA-Alpha, and Apa-5, among others. Our interests expanded to include Doc Savage, then Conan, then SF and fantasy in general; our tastes coincided more often than not, which meant that it was pretty easy for each of us to predict what the other would like.

The first bit of friction between us came soon after I met Susan Hendrix, whose letter of comment I had seen in the pages of Batman #198. Soon after Susan and I began corresponding and talking over the phone, Gary did the same; it was clear he was interested in Susan as more than a fellow fan... but so was I. Once Susan and I began dating and got serious with one another, Gary pulled back on our friendship. In fact, he refused to be a part of or even attend our wedding. Once Susan and I were married, however, Gary re-established his friendship with both of us--and if anything, he became an even closer friend, often spending the weekend at our house in Cedartown, GA, about a half-hour from his house.

We travelled everywhere together--excursions to Atlanta, shopping trip, used-bookstore runs, out-of-town visits with friends, and conventions--and eventually hosted a couple of small conventions together. Gary chose to study electronics repair at Coosa Valley Tech at the same time Susan enrolled there to get certified data processing/programming. Their friendship flourished. In 1977, Susan got a job offer from MSA, an Atlanta software company, so she and I moved to Marietta. A month later, Gary got an offer from an electronics repair shop in Atlanta and he moved to Marietta as well; Gary lived with us for a few weeks until he found an apartment just a couple of miles from us. It seemed like we were destined to be friends for life.

Things changed radically in the early 1980s, when Gary suddenly and inexplicably cut off all contact with former fan friends. He drifted away from apas, failed to return calls, and avoided all efforts from his friends to find out what was going on. Even his serious girlfriend at the time found herself cut out of his life; I recall her tearful phone call asking if I knew what had gone wrong. As far as I know, he never made any effort to re-establish any of those former contacts; I have spoken to many of his friends in the week since I learned of his death, and every one of them says they lost contact with him at the same time.

I continued to see Gary at my comic shop, Dr. No's Comics & Games. Gary had quit buying almost everything other than the Shadow and Doc Savage, and he would periodically come in to the store to pick up the latest book or comic releases featuring those characters. Even then, he seemed surly and

unhappy; he expressed resentment that he had to keep buying "this stuff," as he called it, and never seemed to enjoy it. I'd try to talk with him a little bit when he came by, but his tone was always gruff and uncommunicative.

The last time I saw him at the store was in 1997. Three years later, I had a near-fatal heart attack; when I thought back on things that I wished I had done before my near-death experience, re-establishing that friendship with Gary was at the top of the list. I made numerous calls to him, leaving voicemail messages, but never heard back from him. I sent him emails, but he ignored those as well. At that point, I made my habit of calling him every year on his birthday to wish him a well; I always held hope that someday he would either answer or return the call, but he never did.

I maintained contact with his parents, who I would see whenever I went to Rome to visit my own family. Mrs. Steele was absolutely despondent that her only child had cut off all contact with them, and kept asking if I knew what happened. His father was a taciturn man, but he also was obviously hurt and confused by Gary's actions. I saw Gary's mother's health decline, and made a special trip to Rome to see Mr. Steele when Gary's mother died. He was sad at her death, but was equally sad that Gary had not come home for his mother's funeral. Mr. Steele continued to live in the family house, his health declining a bit more every year. Just a year before he died, he told me that Gary had unexpectedly come up to visit the weekend before, wanting to show off his new pickup truck. "He wanted me to make a bit fuss over it, but I didn't say a word," Mr. Steele said. Apparently by this time the barrier between them was insurmountable. That was the last time Mr. Steele saw Gary, as far as I know.

I have no idea what happened with Gary to cause such a radical change in the direction of his life. I wish I did. I continued to love him and miss him, since he was such an unforgettable part of my childhood, adolescence, and early adult life. I can only hope that he was happy and satisfied with the life that he built for himself, and I certainly hope he knew that he was missed and never forgotten.

Below: Cliff and Susan Biggers, Gary Steele, Mike Weber, sometime long ago.

