

# SPARTAGUS

Opinions & bloviation by Guy Lillian III

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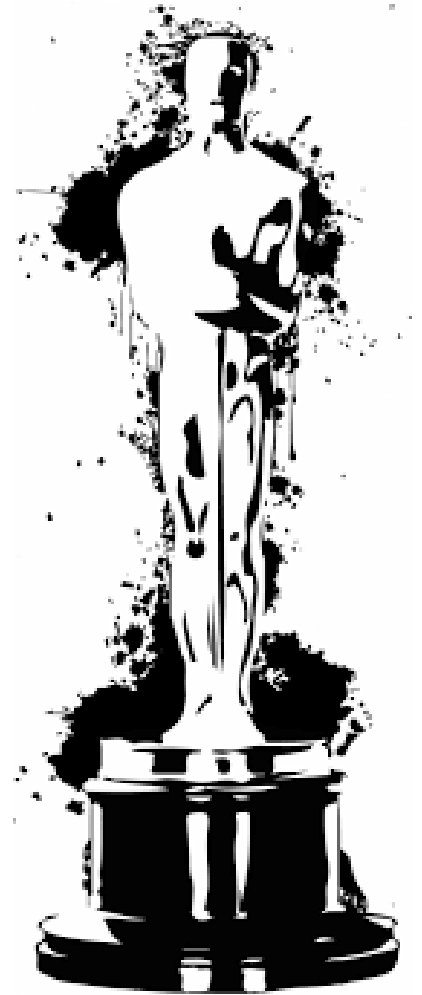
As I must have mentioned many many times before, my history with the **Oscars** goes *way* back – to 1957, when *Around the World in 80 Days*, a splattering mess of a Cinerama spectacle, won the Best Picture award for the previous year. Though I was but 7 ½, celebrating the birth of my kid brother, I immediately became an Academy Awards aficionado. I have yet since to miss an Oscar telecast.

I don't remember the award show for 1958, when the last trophies found themselves presented a full 20 minutes before the broadcast was to end, and host Jerry Lewis had to fill time by dragging that year's winners on stage. I did see the streaker in 1974 (and heard David Niven's classic zinger) and watched Anna Paquin nearly hyperventilate on stage when the tweener kid won *her* Oscar. ("Well," said hostess Whoopi Goldberg, "she won't have any problem getting a part in her *school play*.") It was fun when host Charlton Heston got stuck in traffic and the Academy shoved Clint Eastwood on stage to stammer through his lines. (The errant presentation to *La La Land*? I regretted that – I liked that movie more than *Moonlight*.)

I cheered madly when Gregory Peck won his award and flew into high puberty when Julie Andrews won hers, and with the rest of my krewe went completely berserk when Anthony Hopkins' took it away for *Silence of the Lambs*. The only Academy Awards show I liked as well as that year's came when *LotR: Return of the King* won everything in sight.

Over the decades I began to collect Oscar winners in the top 5 categories. I kept track in my copy of the *Information Please Almanac*. I was helped in my quest to see all of the acting winners and the Best Picture honorees by the advent of video – that's how I found *The Sin of Madelyn Claudet* and *The Broadway Melody*. It's been a gas to see how tastes change, how a lighthearted sentimental film like *Going My Way* could win Oscars for Picture and Actor and be succeeded by a grim masterwork like *The Lost Weekend*. As I said last time, this is the era of Quirk, and the goofy SF mess that dominated this year is probably the pinnacle of that trend. Things may change next year.

I make an effort each year to scan the pictures and performances nominated, but this year found it difficult due to my health. *The Whale* and *Living* were on screen a short drive from here, but the lethargy imposed by Parkinson's wouldn't allow me to move. My father-in-law's streaming services took up some of the slack. On the tube, we saw *Triangle of Sadness*, the year's most surprising Best Picture nominee, which turned out to be the year's most surprising bummer. A rowdy social comedy about class conflict, it was excellent at the outset, boring as it got going,



terrific on the cruise, ugly on the island – and it didn't help that in the real world, the lovely female lead died soon after the film was completed. We watched *Women Talking* the night before the Awards. A strong, intelligent feminist document, exquisitely written and performed (especially by Claire Foy; she's phenomenal in everything she does), it never had a chance at Best Picture, but we were thoroughly jazzed by its win for its adapted screenplay. (We saw *The Whale* a few days *after* the Oscars – and it was exquisite. I doubt if the name of Brendan Fraser will be automatically associated with *George of the Jungle* anymore. *WATCH OUT FOR THAT TREE!*)

Despite the one major injustice of the night, the denial of Cate Blanchett for *Tar*, it was a jolly show. Jimmy Kimmel was a smooth, accomplished host, scoring with enough zingers at Will Smith – banned from the proceedings – and his old nemesis Matt Damon to make up for his awkward interview with Malala Yousafzai. The young lady is a magnificent fighter for girls' education in Muslim countries but a lousy straight man. Only an overzealous band cutting off winners' speeches spoiled the good feeling, and nobody seemed too p.o.ed. Hugh Grant referred to himself as a *scrotum*. Jamie Lee Curtis praised her "genre" roots – that means *Halloween* – and saluted her mother and father ("nominated for Oscars in different categories" – well, *duh*). The crazy Indian dude who won Best Song for the hit "Naatu Naatu" sang a hilarious parody of the Carpenters' "Top of the World". Lady Gaga was more effective as a spare, no-frills performer than she ever was as a splashy Madonna imitator. I loved it when the short film winner had the crowd sing "Happy Birthday" to the co-star of *An Irish Goodbye*, a kid with Down's Syndrome who more than held his own with his comrades. Serious political passion was generated by the win of *Navalny* in the documentary category, especially when the jailed Russian dissident's wife took the mike with a call for his – and Russia's – freedom.

So that's it for this year. The Oscars are a guilty pleasure. Of course the world takes them much too seriously. The Academy has made infamous mistakes throughout its near-century – I mean, *How Green was My Valley* over *Citizen Kane*? – no cinephile can believe it the last word in movie quality. But I love awards – Oscars, Hugos, FAAns, Pulitzers – and hey, who hasn't daydreamed of what *they* would say up there at the podium?

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Speaking of awards, I haven't read a single finalist among this year's **Nebula nominations**. My latest reading has been an *Edgar* winner, Jess Walter's sharp, funny, moving *Citizen Vince*. Such wit and linguistic command is rare stuff in science fiction. One place to find it is Emily St. John Mandel's *Sea of Tranquility*, an involving time travel novel by the author of the exceptional *Station Eleven*, which George R.R. Martin praised as his favorite book of its year. I'm still collecting suggestions for my Hugo nomination ballot, hint hint hint, but this work will be on it. Being literary, with a tight emphasis on language and character, it hasn't much chance of making the ballot, but hey, gotta try.

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I've heard from and about **Greg Benford**, still in hospital after his monstrous stroke. Greg sounded tired and raspy, yet lucid and cheerful. Naomi Fisher promises updates, and I'm cautiously optimistic. Get well, big man.

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Recently I scoured YouTube for a relatively obscure Stephen Sondheim musical: ***Assassins***. It deals – obviously – with the murderers and attempted murderers of American Presidents, a grisly subject indeed ... but in Sondheim's hands, possible gold. (Look what he did with a psychopathic barber!) I couldn't find a worthy video of the entire

play but did listen to a few moments – “Ballads” of Booth, Guiteau, Czolgosz, plus songs by John Hinckley, Sarah Jane Moore, Squeaky Fromme, Giuseppe Zangara (from the electric chair) ... and at the end, who should appear but Lee Harvey Oswald, tee-shirted and rifle-toting, influenced and inspired by them all. I hear your thoughts: challenging but distasteful, distasteful but challenging.

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We celebrated Rosy’s birthday throughout the week of March 14, culminating on Friday with a visit to the ***Titanic exhibit*** in Orlando. That doomed ship is very important to us. The show in Chicago was our first mutual activity after we got engaged. We’ve seen several artifact exhibits, and yearn to visit Vegas for the display in the Luxor pyramid, and hit the renowned museum in Pigeon Forge, Tennessee. If we ever return to England, the Southampton Sea City Museum beckons.

While Orlando featured a nice guide and several clever costumed actors, the artifacts were mostly bits of the ship itself, radio gear and the like. The Memphis show I attended many years ago – before our marriage – displayed more personal items from the passengers, humanizing the disaster more than any museum or movie has before or since. (I particularly recall a pair of specs – a pince-nez – I managed to look through. The dude had better eyesight than I, but not for as long.) I preferred that one. Nevertheless, Rosy enjoyed Orlando a great deal, as did I. The good times continued the next day with a trip to Cocoa Beach’s Ron Jon Surf Shop – surfboards, keychains, tees, chotch-kas, and bikinis – and a specially-made Banana Banshee on the Cocoa Beach Pier for *la belle*. Happy birthday!

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## ***Zine Dump Supplemental***

I won’t be publishing another *Zine Dump* until summer, so I feel I should address some of the fanzines to appear of recent while they’re still fresh. Among these is ***Portable Storage Nine***, the latest – and last – production from William Breiding ([portablezine@gmail.com](mailto:portablezine@gmail.com)). It’s available at eFanzines.com and on Amazon, and like any of the previous eight issues, is eminently worth the read. Space permits me only to mention a few of the many highlights in this professionally bound treasure: carl juarez’ weird, evocative cityscape cover, two powerful memorials, on Roger Weddall by Bruce Gillespie and Robert Lichtman (and his *Trap Door*) by Andy Hooper, melancholy but evocative snapshots of the world by Chris Sherman, John Benson’s spiffy linoleum block mini-portraits, and a tremendous, wide-ranging lettercol – what a shame that, according to Breiding, this is *Storage*’s last issue. Perhaps the expense of a professionally-bound publication and the time sink of editing a first-tier genzine is to blame. William credits his wife, AC Kolthoff, for inspiring the “4-year roller coaster ride” of this “example of a late-stage dying subculture.” If dying fanzines are, they’re are going out with style.

I’m sure that Fred Lerner (81 Worcester Ave., White River Junction VT 05001, [fred@fredlerner.org](mailto:fred@fredlerner.org)) will be publishing another issue of his combination FAPA/perzine ***Lofgeornost*** before I do another *Zine Dump*, and #150 is something of a special number, so I note it here ... with congratulations. Herein Fred celebrates his 60<sup>th</sup> year in active SF fandom. He tells a familiar but happy story of discovering the madness in college. Says he: “I have found in fandom an ethos that prizes both intelligence and creativity and rejoices in the infinite variety of creation.” A later essay revolves around prehistoric voyaging – you know: did South Americans settle Easter Island? – and the migrations of the Albans walrus (and Norsemen). The lettercol is varied and no less erudite.

James DeVona recently sent me a postcard and two tiny zines yclept **Portraits**. The pc read: “Hi! I recently discovered *The Zine Dump* and have been enjoying recent issues. / The enclosed *Portraits* zines aren’t very conventional fanzines, but I thought I’d share with you anyway. / As a portrait artist, I’m always practicing, and as a reader, I’m always curious to learn about authors, so this is basically a way to work on my art portfolio while reading the genre.” Judging by the picture of Fred Pohl on the postcard and the zines, DeVona is spectacularly talented, and the zines – “a monthly micro fanzine of haiku reviews” in one instance and “a wee zine of weird reviews of short stories” in the other – are sharp and well-written, once you bring a magnifying glass to bear. Ever draw Sturgeon, Jim? Or Karloff? Keep in touch!

**Scientifiction** is the official publication of First Fandom, soon to be known as the First Fandom Foundation, edited by John W. Coker. I’m as Associate member. Central to this issue are the results of Coker’s poll of the Associates as to the future of the organization, all of the original krewe having passed on. Unsurprisingly, the verdict is affirmative: First Fandom will change its name slightly but continue celebrating the earliest days of the genre and the folk who followed it.

Declaring that “The Phoenix has risen!”, **Graeme Cameron** has brought forth *BCSFazine* #551, the semi-official clubzine of British Columbia’s SF Associa- ... Excuse me, the *West Coast Science Fiction Association*. So why does the zine keep its original title? Well, because Graeme is the self-dubbed “God-Editor,” and *he* says “tradition” so declares. Also traditional is his call for contributions on any subject the donor wishes, though his promise to weed out nasty responses in the lettercol sounds new to me. Vaughn Fraser’s ‘toon from a 1985 issue takes us “Behind the Scenes at *BCSFazine*” – hey, that almost rhymes – is hilarious, despite a hideous caricature of a pretty female editor in one panel. I envy *BCSFazine* its Igor. The God-Editor opines on how to revive the club and announces a food court sit-down to promote same, adds news about the Canadian Unity Fan Fund, the Aurora Awards, a look-back at defunct local cons and a good letter column, including notes from Spider Robinson and Robert Sawyer. Rise, Phoenix, rise.

More notices in future zines.

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## A col for letters

**Rich Lynch** <rw\_lynch@yahoo.com>

The centerpiece of the issue is Gary Robe’s impassioned speech at the 2022 DeepSouthCon, so I’ll comment on that. Gary stated that: “*I’ve had several conversations with fellow [Concave] committee members about the dread we feel about facing the inevitable conflicts we’re going to face over political divisions within fandom.*” It would not be the first time that’s ever occurred. We’re probably all aware of the nasty politically-inspired feud, back in the 1930s, between Don Wollheim and the Futurians Fan Club vs. Sam Moskowitz and the so-called New Fandom group which ended up running the very first Worldcon.

Also, in the 1960s, the science fiction world was as much divided as mundania about the Vietnam War. The June 1968 issue of *Galaxy* magazine has become famous and a true collector’s item because on page 4 there was an ad that read: “*We the undersigned believe the United States must remain in Vietnam to fulfill its responsibilities to the people of that country.*” Listed as signatories were an impressive list of 72 authors and notables including Poul Anderson, Harry Bates, Lloyd Biggle, Leigh Brackett, Marion Zimmer Bradley, Fredric Brown, Doris Pitkin Buck, F.M. and Elinor Busby, John W. Campbell Jr., L. Sprague de Camp, Hal Clement, Compton Crook, Richard Eney, Raymond Z. Gallun, Daniel Galouye, Edmond Hamilton, Robert A. Heinlein, Joe L. Hensley, Jay Kay Klein, David A. Kyle, R.A. Lafferty, P.

Schuyler Miller, Sam Moskowitz, Larry Niven, Alan Nourse, Gerald Page, Jerry Pournelle, Fred Saberhagen, George O. Smith, Thomas Burnett Swann, Jack Vance, and Jack Williamson.

And right across from that, on page 5, there was another ad, this one reading: “*We oppose the participation of the United States in the war in Vietnam.*” Signatories were an equally impressive list of 82 science fiction authors and notables including Forrest J Ackerman, Isaac Asimov, Jerome Bixby, James Blish, Anthony Boucher, Ray Bradbury, Terry Carr, Samuel R. Delany, Lester del Rey, Philip K. Dick, Thomas Disch, Harlan Ellison, Philip José Farmer, Ron Goulart, Joseph Green, Harry Harrison, Virginia Kidd, Damon Knight, Ursula K. LeGuin, Fritz Leiber, Robert Lowndes, Judith Merrill, Robert P. Mills, Alexei Panshin, Mack Reynolds, Gene Roddenberry, Joanna Russ, Larry Shaw, Robert Silverberg, Norman Spinrad, Kate Wilhelm, Richard Wilson, and Donald A. Wollheim.

Apologies for the extended history lesson, but there’s a point to all this: both times science fiction and its fandom survived and thrived. We’ll survive this time as well. And afterwards, we’ll continue to thrive. Wait and see.

*I remember those ads and that era, and **can’t** remember any angry encounters amongst SFers over Vietnam – just some righteous arguments. I had a couple with that wonderful man Dan Galouye myself. Indeed, camaraderie and the communal spirit of fandom ruled. Does it still? One hopes.*

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American politics seems so extreme compared to politics here, or just about anywhere else. Not only the weak McCarthy, but the lyn’ Santos, and the greasy Gaetz, who looks just soooooo face-punchable. Plus the screaming ladies of the GOP Boebert and Taylor, still topped by the \*ick!\* Trump, who is advocating for reduced child labor laws and public executions, shown live on TV. Seeing as it’s Trump, he’s more concerned about the ratings than anything else.

I still wonder about the Chengdu Worldcon, and seeing I have friends who are guesting, I will say little, but think a lot. I am concerned about the committee’s performance, and who knows what the unpredictable Chinese government would do to any given member of that Worldcon? Not going to Chengdu, not going to Pemmi-Con, the Winnipeg NASFiC (mostly because we can’t afford the trip), but we are making a few preliminary plans for the Buffalo NASFiC in 2024, mostly because we can drive there.

Gary Robe is quite correct when it comes to the cost of running a con in a hotel, and with food, even from a supermarket. Almost all Canadian fannish SF literary conventions in Canada are gone. I would say it’s safe to double the room rate, double the cost of food and drink, and double the price of memberships, and all of that will double the pre-reg price at the at-the-door price. Will anybody buy that? I doubt it. In spite of what the public wants to have happen, we may still have to mask up. This pandemic is NOT done, in spite of public opinion. We’ve had far too many cattle bleating about mah RIGHTS! and FREEDOM! I almost enjoy telling these people that yes, you have your rights, but you also have your responsibilities, so mask up! You are responsible for not catching it or passing it on. I want to be wrong! I want this pandemic to be done! It’s been almost three years! But the science presented to us by respected scientists I see all the time on television say the disease is still there. Yvonne and I have had five shots each, and we are talking with our pharmacist about a sixth shot.

The local ... Yvonne and I have met George Takei a few times, often at a con, but after some talks at one convention, George was passing through Toronto, and took the time to call Yvonne and ask her out for lunch. She even brought him to the office, where he was mobbed by the workers. The nicest man you will ever meet.

My thanks to Bob Jennings re *Amazing Stories*. The learning curve is as steep as I thought it might be, but I am trying my best to gather up the best SF we can get and learn how to

use the websites. We are swamped with submissions, to our credit and relief. I wish we were working on a magazine, but money doesn't allow for that (our Kickstarter failed), so the website is the center of things, and we run news, opinion, and SF, the best we can find. I am working to enlarge our team of slush readers, and we are getting a few good words from our readers about the SF we are publishing. Come have a look, Bob, we do have books and back issues for sale, and some AS merchandise. That goes for everyone reading this, too.

John Purcell hints at the best scenario for 2024. There will be three candidates for present...Biden, the Republican candidate, and Trump, whose ego wouldn't let him do anything less. I'd like to see a Green Party candidate, too...we have several Green members of parliament in Ottawa, and there is one Green member of the provincial parliament at Queen's Park here. I think Biden has been a good prez for you, but with the increased WTF?ness of the Republicans, you might need someone who is younger and more vital. Could Kamala Harris be that candidate, or would they have to look elsewhere?

Just had a discussion with Kermit Woodall and James Nicoll on the insidious ChatGPT AI system that might be more creative than we are. Kermit directed to me a good website, **AI Content Detector | GPT-3 | ChatGPT - Writer**, and I will feed all our submissions through that. I gather the stories that ChatGPT can produce are good, but the fact that they are AI-created is quite detectable. That may not be so in the future...

*Someone must have programmed an AI to produce a fanzine. Let's see it!*

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Obviously enough, this *Spartacus* is a lightweight number, focusing on business that – with the exception of Greg Benford's health, of course – doesn't particularly matter in the great scheme of things. Oscars, old plays, birthdays, fanzines ... Nations don't rise or fall, social culture doesn't quake, lives don't change because of such things; they're just fun stuff that make life worth living. I needed such an issue, I suppose, with my health slowing me to a crawl.

Some real-world events, however, can't be ignored. The other evening saw the launch of **the Terran rocket**, a 3-D printed upstart designed to compete with the incredibly successful and reliable Falcon 9. After several scrubs, they finally got it off the ground, a beautiful blue flame arching into the east. The first stage worked nominally. Alas, there was a glitch with the second stage, and poor Terran failed to make orbit, but the announcers evinced glee anyway, and no denying that it was a good show.

Apparently, a **Trump indictment** in the Stormy Daniels payoff case is imminent. Frankly, I put more store in the other investigations into the depthless treasury of The Donald's sleaze. It seems to me that slipping hush money to a whore to keep mum about a decade-old frolic is only slightly more repugnant than lying about a fling with a White House groupie. Both are reflections of stupidity more than criminality. I await the results of the more serious investigations, the January 6<sup>th</sup> sedition case and the hoarded documents scandal, which will, I hope, land the orange-utan in ADX Florence Supermax next to El Chapo.

All our best to our inundated slopes and valleys of California and the twister-savaged plains of Texas and points east ...

**GHLIII**