



# **Spartacus #68**

**A zine of opinions and blather by  
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Early in September, 2023, I received a notice in the mail. "Greetings," it began – and if I didn't know that there was no military draft these many years, I would've freaked and made tracks for Canada. No, this was a call to **jury duty**, to commence in mid-October. I was of several minds about it.

As I begin the second decade of my retirement from lawyering, I find I miss court more and more. Jury duty would at least get me into a courtroom again, where I could groove on the drama once more, if only from a distance. On the other digit, mid-October is when Rose-Marie and I plan to visit Louisiana again, dump a few tons of books on the New Orleans Symphony Book Fair and carouse with what remains of our krewe. Also, on that same tiger paw, let's not forget that I am ill. My Parkinson's is medicated to the status of a minor nuisance, but my gut problem, though under control, but is under *tenuous* control. I'd be jittery the whole trial. Besides, I'd never be allowed on a jury; the prosecution would suspect prejudice from a retired public defender and worry that because I worked in criminal law for years – due process, presumption of innocence, reasonable doubt, burden of proof, the right to remain silent, all that – I'd dominate deliberations. I'd never get past *voir dire*.

I elected to save time, the drive, and the trouble. Old farts past 70 in age – like me – are given an automatic excusal from jury responsibilities. I asked for such an exemption and got it. With regret. Significant matters regarding criminal courts have been in recent news, and they've whetted my thirst for *Action*.

Guess I'll have to work on my memoirs instead.

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When Rachel Maddow said, "Donald Trump is under arrest!" history crested like a wave. Decent Americans are so sick of that reprehensible swindler and pervert that the indictments that have crashed down upon him are generally regarded as old, and therefore boring, news. But they're not. They're a new and pivotal point in the American story.

The illo on the front of this *Spartacus* notwithstanding, I don't believe for an instant that the orange degenerate will end up in jail, but *convicted* – yes. Everyone should read the Jack Smith indictment regarding the January 6<sup>th</sup> attack on the Capitol. It's a model document. The facts of the case, at least as alleged by the prosecution, are spelled out with restraint, clarity and accuracy, qualities reflective of law at its finest. If the jury cannot find reasonable doubt as to those facts, and I don't see how sane people could, there's but one just verdict.

Trump has bawled incessantly that his real opposition in his political career is the "Deep State." It's true. The Deep State is what the basis of all legit government action. Another term for it is The Law.

The current yap from the talking heads, though, isn't about Trump's indictments, but Joe Biden's age and son. Everyone wants Uncle Joe to step aside for a younger man, and yes, I said *man*. No one, it seems, treasures the idea of Kamala Harris running in Biden's place. And that's no fault of the veep's. Her performance has been unexciting but exemplary. So it's obvious that the objections to her center around her cellular genetics. No "Y" chromosome apparently

means a fundamental untrustworthiness. Sexism, misogyny, helped doom Hillary. It denies us the chance to see the best of Democrats in the presidency – Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts. It could well spell disaster for Kamala.

We're stuck with Joe Biden, the most experienced and vetted President since -- \*urk\* -- Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon. Except for the age factor, I'd rejoice, because Biden's been a solidly good executive. Only the chaotic mess of our Afghanistan exit ranks against him. (The blunders of his witless son don't bother me in this regard; the GOP's mendacity in trying to link Joe to Hunter's screw-ups is too obvious. The Democratic response – "What about Jared Kushner?" blasts the Republican's feigned outrage to smithereens.) And age.

I have to wonder if the worry over the number of years Biden has behind him is a matter of aesthetics as much as anything else. He's shown no signs of dementia, forgetfulness or confusion, unlike the two aged senators the media has also noted for their longevity, Feinstein and McConnell. His stumbling speech has been a lifelong problem. No, the problem is that the President *looks* old, *looks* feeble – and though he may be perfectly healthy, appearance obviously matters when it comes to the confidence Americans put in their #1 guy. We value youth: Kennedy, Clinton – they had medical problems, but *projected* energy and – JFK's old term – vigor. Uncle Joe?

It's not like the bloated fraud that preceded him is in any better shape. Trump is only three years younger than Biden and is wretchedly overweight. His addled mind is nowhere near as sharp as Joe's. But he has the screen of worship around him; to his people, he is perfect no matter what he says, does or looks like. He is their anger incarnate, a symbol, and emblems are immune to criticisms for mere human frailties. Like crime, like rampant sexual misconduct, like cruelty, stupidity, incompetence. arrogance.

I have faith in the Law. It may rescue us from ourselves. Or we just might luck out and do the deed ourselves. *Vote blue.*

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And so she is free. Leslie van Houten was released from prison in July. As you recall, I interviewed the erstwhile Manson girl at the women's prison in Frontera California in 1996, an encounter I wrote up for *Challenger's* fifth issue and reprinted several times in the years since. I learned a lot about crime, criminals, prison time, human nature – and myself.

I'll refer the interested to my *Chall* piece for details, but must admit that I found Leslie funny, flirty, delightful – I was absolutely wowed by the girl. (Haw! I *almost* wrote "absolutely gassed"! Her original sentence, y'see.) And when I say "girl," I'm not being sexist – she *acted* like a girl, though 46, like me, it was like she was still 19, like – as was the case – she hadn't been in the world since 1969. I left in something of a teenage haze myself. I didn't come down for two days.

I remember the moment. I was driving through Texas on my way back to New Orleans when I suddenly realized my shout to myself that I had been played like a harmonica. That I had enjoyed the concerto was beside the point. Later, I had to deal with my fellow attorneys, some

of whom concocted the fable that I visited van Houten all the time. I'm afraid my words of correction were not gentle. "Wannabe yuppie ciphers" was, I recall, the term I used.

Childishness aside, I've mentioned the lessons that afternoon brought me. Now there is another lesson to be learned. That lesson will deal with the possibility of criminal redemption. Anxious to belong, to be accepted, the 19-year-old van Houten took part in the murders of the LaBianca, stabbing Rosemary LaBianca 16 times – post-mortem. That's obviously the act of a desperately, dangerously disturbed person. Leslie told me she'd been turned down for parole so many times because the Board thought that though she was a model prisoner, they weren't sure she'd "internalized her externals." Now they think she has.

Has she? She's not about to join any more psychopathic cults. What *will* she do? How will she use the gift she's been given of the freedom you and I enjoy every minute? Has she been redeemed? Is redemption even possible for such as she?

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Reading lately: *The Devil Takes You Home*, winner of the 2023 Stoker Award for Best Horror Novel, something of a strange choice as the supernatural element in this *very brutal* novel of the drug cartels is definitely secondary. Very well written, with strong characters, Gabino Iglesias' novel erases the line between outrage and grossness on numerous pages, which makes for a challenging and occasionally unbearable read. Contrast with David Morrell's *Creepers*, another Stoker winner, slight on characterization and plot, reading more like a movie treatment than a psychological story. Unlike *Devil/Home*, it's effortless, unchallenging, and rather simplistic fun.

No one ever accused *Vertigo*, Alfred Hitchcock's 1958 masterpiece, with being unchallenging, simplistic or even fun, but *Vertigo: The Making of a Hitchcock Classic* definitely is. Fun, that is, as author Dan Auiler charts the creation of what many believe to be Hitch's greatest work from impulse to legendary status. It's a fascinating look at the cinematic creative process. Adding to the pleasure was seeing the film again shortly after the read; though I don't agree with the poll that acclaimed it the greatest movie ever made, *Vertigo* is indeed extraordinary: it's Jimmy Stewart's best performance, one of Kim Novak's (I'd rank *Picnic* as highly), has incredible production values and Bernard Herrmann music, and a strong, compelling theme of sexual obsession and control. My father-in-law faulted the improbable story, as did critics at the time, but the test of time rejects that criticism. For me, it stands with *Shadow of a Doubt* and *Psycho* as his best "serious" and thematic work. But hey, it's almost all splendid.

*A Haunting in Venice* is Kenneth Branagh's third Hercule Poirot film, and though blest with great photography and good acting, I'd call it his least successful. Branagh concentrates on the grim side of Agatha Christie, ignoring her delights, and it shows. Despite many flaws I find Peter Ustinov's Poirot films more light-hearted and simply enjoyable. And there is no improving on David Suchet, who captures every facet of the great stories so perfectly.

And the polyglot fare on ViaPlay of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Season of *The Team* excels on the streaming tube. Everyone in Europe seems to speak 5 or 6 languages. In America, we can't speak any!

# A LOC OF HAIR

**Mark Nelson** <mnelson@uow.edu.au>

Over the last few months I've downloaded issues of *Spartacus* with the intention of writing a LOC. Each time I've failed to do so. The reason why this is so might be that I'm too busy with other things to find time to put electronic pen to electronic ink. Or it might be my natural procrastination in actively writing a loc. Or it might just be that you are so efficient in pumping out issues.

There was a period of time when I used to teach first-year engineering students every year. One of the positives in teaching such students is that, compared to students in other disciplines, a high fraction of them have seen SF movies. One year, early in session, a student asked me what they should do when they had no idea how to attempt a problem. Perhaps I'd seen *Galaxy Quest* over the weekend, but my response was to do to the arm movement and say "Never Surrender, Never Give Up". That became a running refrain for the rest of session. Whenever a student said that they did not know how to do something, I got the whole class, or at least those that were game, to stand up and shout out "Never Surrender, Never Give Up". What do you do in the exam when you come to a question you can't do? "Never Surrender, Never Give Up". (But also move on to the next question and circle back to this question later.)

I see that Lloyd Penney, or perhaps it was Yvonne or even the two of them, wrote that Biden and Trump are "too old for the job". According to an article in today's newspaper the median age of the (US) Senate is 65.3, which can be compared against the median age of the US which is estimated to be 38.8. (How many of the Senators would know what median means? I shudder to think.) That median age of 65.3 is the highest ever for the Senate. I wonder when it was the lowest?

Of children, the Victorians said that they should be "seen, but not heard." Of the British Royal Family, I say that after the passing of the late Queen Elizabeth II they, the whole collective, should neither be seen nor heard.

[As a P.S.] One hesitates to criticise someone who is actually producing a fanzine but I believe that printing your email address as well as your postal address is de rigueur these days. Unless you prefer locs to arrive through the actual post!

**Tom Feller** <tomfeller@aol.com>

If I could afford it, I would love to take a submarine excursion to the *Titanic*. The closest I got was a submarine ride during our cruise in the Hawaiian Islands. It was a 45-minute cruise that went down 107 feet off the coast of the big island.

*No way.*

I did not think Elizabeth Taylor was so bad in *Butterfield 8*, but how could the voters have preferred her over Jean Simmons in *Elmer Gantry*, Greer Garson in *Sunrise at Campobello*, Deborah Kerr in *The Sundowners*, Shirley Maclaine in *The Apartment*, Melina Mercouri in *Never on Sunday*, or even Hayley Mills in *Pollyanna*?

*The movie itself is lousy – unworthy of its superb stars. Liz only won that year because she'd been so very ill. I'd've voted for Mercouri – but then, what human male could ever resist Taylor's incredible purple eyes?*

**Bob Jennings** <fabficbks@aol.com>

Just took a quick read of the new *Spartacus* posted on the efanzines site. I was struck by your tale of woe about the novelty squeeze ball ordered from Austria thru a FaceBook ad.

I am surprised that your imagination is so limited when it comes to options to deal with the problem. You might write them a nice polite letter, specifically saying that as a FaceBook advertiser, they automatically guarantee both the quality and the delivery of their products (No, I dunno if that is true or not, but mention it anyway, that sort of thing helps).

Suggest that they need to replace the product you paid for, and they need to send it this time in a sturdier box. If they do not fulfill their part of the bargain and replaced the defective product, you will be forced to make a direct complaint to Facebook, which may well result in their product being banned from the site, and you will also file a complaint with the USPostal Service, indicating deliberate fraud on their part, which will likely result in their products being banned from being carried by the postal service to customers in the USA.

In addition, say that you are considering registering a complaint with the United States Consumer Protection Agency, which will open a case into the quality of their products and could, at a minimum, result on a restrictive ban against their product(s) being imported into the USA until the matter is fully investigated and resolved, which will take many months, perhaps even two years to resolve. Say you are also planning to initiate a small claims court case against the company in the state of Florida which will result in financial damages against their company and will likely result their product being banned in the state of Florida.

Say that you don't want to do all of this stuff, but the deliberately obtuse and non-co-operative attitude on the part of someone in their company is forcing you to take these actions. Instead, ask them to please send the replacement ball (in a sturdier package this time), so the matter can be amicably resolved and you can leave appropriate glowing feedback about the quality of their product and their customer service. Say you really like their product, and you are sure this is just some kind of minor bottle neck/problem which can be easily resolved by the replacement of the defective product.

Many of these actions will, of course, not result in the dire problems you warn about, but the company is located in Austria, and I'm willing to bet that they don't know crap about US laws or what can happen. You need to be calm and courteous, but very firm, and suggest that they should simply replace the defective product (stress the word defective over damaged), so this problem can go away as soon as possible.

When you send the email, use the business abbreviations on the bottom of the letter indicating copies of the message are being sent to a law firm (pick one out of the local business directory), and a copy to the Postmaster General United States Postal Service, just as a friendly reminder that you really mean what you say.

This kind of veiled threat usually gets results. Most businesses want to stay in business, not worry about having irate customers cause trouble or post nasty comments about their products or service. Give it a try anyway. You have the time, and the \$20 is worth fighting for.

*Great advice! I've tried what you suggested, but so far, zippo. Too bad – the squeezeball itself is **tres** cool.*

*[And on another GHLIII masterpiece...]*

**Garth Spencer** <garth.van.spencer@gmail.com>

Someday, you and I have to compare notes with Joe Siclari and Edie Stern, and see what all the current year's active English-language fanzines are.

Tara's point in *Dark Toys* is well taken. It's about time fanzine fandom actually started finding out and talking about other fandoms. However ... I did reach out to local fandoms in 2021, with no result. Probably I should try again this fall, when the various university and college clubs I contacted are actually active.

A teeny-tiny correction: in your capsule review of *The Obdurate Eye*, you misspelled my secondary email address; it's actually **hrothgarweems @ gmail.com** – named after one of my faanfic characters, Hrothgar Weems. But you wouldn't know that. (Also, somehow, you gave Dale Speirs' email server as "hotmail.coes," and I don't think that "coes" exists.)

*Well ... then it **should**. Seriously, blame Parkinson's. It's made me 1000% more prone to typos.*

A thought sparked by the resistance to Gary Brown's suggestion, that SFPA go digital: I know a senior man who prevails on me to handle word processing and Web surfing for him, and who is dismayed when he can't contact some organizations by phone, only by email or online. Apparently it isn't that he *won't* use a computer, he simply *can't*, even those available to patrons in libraries. If enough SFPA members are in the same position ... well, then.

*All SFPAnS are computer-savvy enough to provide our Official Editor, Jeff Copeland, with PDFs of our apazines, in addition to a small number of printed copies. I've surrendered to the future and get my SFPA mailings digitally now. It means Texas will have to survive with an incomplete SFPA collection, but I know of at least two universities maintaining complete printed sets.*

I didn't know there was a Guy Lillian Collection at Texas A&M University. For an instant I thought you were pulling our legs. Then I kept reading. All I can suggest, to keep the collection of SFPA mailings current, is to print out the PDF mailings. (For that matter I really ought to complete my project of scanning paper issues of *BCSFazine* and *The Maple Leaf Rag* to complete the records at eFanzines.com ... some day.)

Silly thought: If there's a fanzine named *DASFAX*, shouldn't there be fanzines titled *DISFAX*, *DESEFAX*, and *DOSEFAX*? I started thinking this way when I first heard of Discon: where are there conventions names Datcon, Dosecon ... OK, OK, I'll let myself out.

**Heath Row** <kalel@well.com>

Thank you for the kind words! I'll see if I can send you some information about the clubs I've been exchanging with on behalf of the LASFS.

Attached are several recent issues of a new bundlezine I've launched, primarily so Bill Burns will continue posting my stuff to eFanzines. Turns out I publish too many apazines too frequently for him to rationalize the overhead of posting them -- they accounted for more labor than all of the other fanzines he hosts combined. So I'm combining them into a monthly bundlezine that's probably a step in the direction of the genzine or perzine I'm moving toward anyway. I might consider sending this to my distribution list instead of all the standalone snapzines, but we'll see. (I just learned the term snapzine; I'm not sure mine qualify, but so it goes.)

*"Snapzine" ... I never heard that term before. Whazzit mean?*



Thank you for picking up on my general interest content -- and including T&T. Though I do include mailing comments in my apazines, I also try to write about sf and include actual content, too. The apae just give me deadlines to hit that I might flake on otherwise. Nothing is repurposed across my apazines, so each standalone is original rather than duplication for different audiences. (The N3F clubzines do, however, reprint my other fanzine content at this point. I'm not providing original material there, necessarily.)

I appreciate you doing what you do -- and thank you for including me in your distribution.

*And I greatly appreciate your appreciation. Creds to Donald Franson for giving me the idea for **The Zine Dump** ... and the best review of **Challenger** my genzine ever received.*

Say, at a recent LASFS meeting, at which we recognized your birthday, I believe, members discussed whether calling you Guy Lillian vs. Guy H. Lillian III was correct. I'd called you Guy Lillian but switched to the full tamale for the minutes. Which do you prefer?

*"Your Holy Magnificence" will do nicely. (I go by "Guy" in person, "GHLIII" or part of or all of the whole name in fannish print. I signed all of my letters to comics with the "full tamale," as you call it. Memorable, anyway.)*

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It was a trip to see that Spanish kid Carlos Alcaez win Wimbledon while his King was in the stands. Better still was seeing youngster Coco Gauff win the US Open while her idol *Serena Williams* was watching.

With the approach of October, the Saints are back in bizness along with the rest of the NFL; it's far too early to gauge success or make predictions, but I can say that Taysom Hill is one helluva football player. *Geaux Saints!*

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I should close by discussing our AI semi-crisis as brought forth by Lex Fridman and many others, but that nightmare isn't going anywhere; in fact, its effects are expanding precipitously. A future *Spar* will have to do. In the meantime, Rosy and I busily plan a book-dumping expedition to the New Orleans Symphony Book Fair, culling through the Mother (-In-Law) lode of books in our storage locker to try to thin out the expensive unit. Most of the many boxes contain the late Nita Green's collections, and most of those are of little interest to her heir. Excess literature from our own trove of books will also fill the Book Fair's coffers. Check it out next June!

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And a note of sincere sympathy to Rosy and all of the other Parrotheads out there, mourning the greatest Floridian of them all. Jimmy Buffet's music is a reminder of the joy this state has represented in the past, and prayerfully will represent in the future. *Wastin' away in Margaritaville* ... sounds like a spiffy way to live a life.

**GHLIII**