



# SPARTACUS NO. 66

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The list of famous people who left us in May and June is long. Novelist Cormac McCarthy, comic artist John Romita, actress Glenda Jackson, actors Treat Williams and Frederic Forrest, patriot and whistleblower Daniel Ellsberg, and Theodore Kaczynski, mathematical genius, environmental crusader, and mad killer: the Unabomber.



During the spring of 1969 Kaczynski was an assistant professor of mathematics at the University of California at Berkeley. Here he is by the Doe Library, where I spent many hours as an undergraduate. I *think* I set eyes on him, but I could easily be imagining it. In those first months of 1969: SF writer Greg Benford was a graduate student there and the entire city was traumatized by the battle for People's Park.

In *Spartacus* #63 I mentioned the story Greg recounted, that the FBI had brought him

terrifying information. I'll repeat it: the Feds told Benford that Kaczynski had apparently attended a lecture or a talk he'd given on campus where Greg, as he's always done, waxed enthusiastically about creative technology. We all know what K thought of tech, and what he did to people involved in it. The FBI revealed they'd found a list in Kaczynski's forest cabin – the same shack where he'd made his bombs -- that had *Benford's name* on it.

Greg shuddered when he recounted this conversation to us. I know he was imagining getting a thick, flat package in the mail – a review copy from his publisher perhaps. Only *not*.

Greg was still in rehab from his December stroke when, in a manner not divulged to the public, Ted Kaczynski committed suicide in his cell. I spoke to Benford via Facetime in June, teasing him a bit about the shave a nurse's aide had given him by accident. He was doing well; I didn't mention the death of his evil contemporary.

If I had ever met Ted K I would have asked him if he remembered the events of May 1969. I doubt he could have forgotten the horrors of the day. Cops came into People's Park before dawn on May 15. Shotgun-wielding deputies firing buckshot wounded some 35 people in and around Telegraph Avenue, killing one guy and blinding another. A National Guard "pork chopper" dive-bombed the Berkeley campus dispensing tear gas. The city was locked down under martial law. No one around Cal in those days could have ignored it. (Kaczynski lived on Regent Street, within short blocks of the Park – and my dorm!) I wonder what effect the gentle anarchy of the Park's creation and/or the brutal repression of its conquest had on him. If May 1969 helped drive him to that cabin in the woods, to insanity and damnation.

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There are people we can truly mourn this issue. **Daniel Ellsberg** became America's sacrificial lamb for truth when he revealed the Pentagon papers and the sordid verity of the Vietnam War. Unlike the cowardly turncoat Edward Snowden, he faced the public for his actions, and won vindication and even praise. **Cormac McCarthy** wrote bitter, brilliant novels of the modern west and modern America, of which one – *No Country for Old Men* – was made into a deeply disturbing, ferociously skillful film that won the Oscar. He also wrote a rather derivative science fiction novel called *The Road* which won a Pulitzer Prize. **Glenda Jackson** was the evocative and ingenious actress who burned through the screen in *Marat/Sade* and *Women in Love*, then

left the profession for liberal British politics. An unforgettable performer. Actors **Treat Williams** and **Frederic Forrest** likewise excelled on screen, see, respectively and for example, *Hair* and *Apocalypse Now*. **John Romita** – whom I never met despite my contacts in comics – was a reliable penciller for *Spider-man* who successfully took over the character from the creator, Steve Ditko, no easy feat. He drew the famous panel to right, introducing Mary Jane – though I’d point out that her dialog as a conceited twerp wasn’t his doing. For these souls, we can truly say *Vale*.

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R.M.S. *Titanic* sank in 1912, 111 years ago. But its tragedy continues. In late June, the deep-diving submersible with the portentous name of *Titan* disappeared while on a commercial – a.k.a. tourism – descent two miles plus to the great ship’s wreck. Five men were on board, four paying passengers seeking thrills and the CEO of the submarine company. Within a third of a mile of the derelict steamship, the *Titan* disappeared.

The nations in the region swarmed to search. The mystery claimed the whole world’s attention. Banging noises came through the murk that teased notions that the little sub could be found and its occupants rescued. Then one of the robotic search vessels found the *Titan*, very close to *Titanic*. It was in pieces, the obvious victim of “a catastrophic implosion,” according to the U.S. Coast Guard. The ocean pressure at that depth exceeds 5,500 pounds per square inch; there was no chance for the crew. The only comfort the facts allow us is that the fatal crush had to be instantaneous. There was death, but probably no suffering.

What caused the disaster? A flaw in the vehicle, a worn seal, some microscopic wear in the carbon fiber? Undoubtedly, but like the death of the great ship they were hoping to visit, in part it was due to hubris. Though questions had been voiced about the reliability of the vessel after so many trips to the deep, the CEO of OceanGate, the company owning and operating *Titan*, pschawed away the very idea of caution: “The commercial sub industry is obscenely safe” he said, “because they have all these regulations. But it also hasn’t innovated or grown — because they have all these regulations.” In this way this disaster reminds me of the horrid day on Mount



Everest when 11 climbers died thanks to their underestimating the terrible power of the mountain, or the *Challenger* explosion where seven souls were lost because we didn’t understand that rubber cracks when it gets cold. Man can achieve great feats against nature, but he must take nature seriously. This CEO didn’t, and he and four others died in the sea.

So to a huge extent this awful event came about due to human foolishness. But the victims do not deserve the opprobrium they are getting from certain quarters – that they deserved their fate because they were rich, as in the Facebook post praising the accident for “killing billionaires.” Equally repugnant and cynical are those who maintain that the substantial attention brought to

the disaster by would-be rescuers and the media turned towards it because men of wealth were in danger – the implication being that the peril of five *poor* people would be ignored. Recalling 1987's species-wide concern over "the kid in the well," Jessica McClure, a poor child of poor parents, it's obvious how insulting and stupid such a sentiment is.

It was the uniqueness of the accident – and that it involved *Titanic* – that made newspeople and the public gravitate to the story. It's compassion and empathy that make it hurt.

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## LOT of AGES

Rich Lynch [rw\\_lynch@yahoo.com](mailto:rw_lynch@yahoo.com)

*On #63.* Concerning Greg Benford's stroke, you mention that: "Naomi Fisher called me soon after and kept in touch through the frightening days which followed." Same for Nicki and me. I briefly talked with Greg on the phone a few weeks after he was hospitalized and he was coherent and pretty much his usual self, so I hope he will recover fully. He's got a lot of friends, especially Naomi who's been there for him every day.

*On #64.* A nicely written essay about your thoughts on the Oscar nominees and winners. But, wow! You must have been *really* underwhelmed by *Everything, Everywhere, All at Once* because you didn't mention it and its Oscar winners even once. The closest you came was when you lamented the loss of Cate Blanchett in the Best Actress category, which went to the very deserving Michelle Yeoh.

On the topic of current fiction, you mention that: "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've read both of those, but haven't yet seen the miniseries adaptation of *Station Eleven*. *SoT* is slightly the better of the two in my opinion, and it will be a travesty if it's not one of the Hugo Award finalists this year.

*On #65.* Concerning next year's Presidential election, you state that: "It seems to me that the decisive question in 2024 will be more fundamental than the fact that one of the contenders is a sleazy swindler and petty crook." In the end, I think it will all come down to how the economy is doing. If we're still having high inflation or if the economy seems to be tanking, it will be hard for Biden to win, even if a multiply-indicted Trump is the opponent. If it's someone other than Trump, Biden would be certain to lose. On the other hand, if we're back to the boom times we enjoyed when Bubba Clinton was President, Biden should easily win.

Ray Palm [raypalmx@gmail.com](mailto:raypalmx@gmail.com)

*On #64.* Since you follow the Oscars so closely, what is your take on *Butterfield 8*? Some think Elizabeth Taylor won her best actress Oscar because she had been gravely ill. But besides that Taylor hated the movie. She and her then-husband Eddie Fisher shared their scorn. They called it Butterball 4, a turkey reference. [*I agree: the movie sucks.*]

Trump finally indicted. And more to come. A list of US presidents will have an asterisk next to his name. Not indicating a footnote but symbolizing a shit stain.

Speaking of stains, how far is Governor Ron DeSanity going to go? At war with Mickey Mouse, "Don't Say Gay," and doing away with permits for carrying a concealed gun. Let unreality reign.

The other day I was trying to remember an OTR (old time radio) program I had heard. It was a haunting story about a woman, a flying saucer, and loneliness. Some Googling revealed it



was broadcast on the *X Minus One* SF anthology series. I had forgotten an important detail about *Saucer of Loneliness*: it was based on a Theodore Sturgeon short story.

On #65. Good to hear your health situation has stabilized and you're doing OK.

*It's been better, it's been worse.*

Ron DeSanity. Need I say more? Armageddon is approaching and may the sane prevail over the MAGA crazies. Throwing out *Roe v. Wade* will really help the GOP gain extra votes.

*It will cost them more than they will gain. No woman with an iota of self-worth will tolerate having her rights to decide her own health issues taken away.*

Justice Clarence Thomas is corrupt? How can this be? During the Anita Hill scandal he and his wife posed in *People* magazine reading a Bible together. Like I say religion is the first refuge of a scoundrel. If Clarence wants to review previous Supreme Court decisions how about *Loving Vs. Virginia*?

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But not all hope is lost thanks to the Oddbods:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cne-9np8SNA>

We all need a good laugh. Anyway I'd rather see the Oddbods run the US: they couldn't do worse.

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**Tom Feller** tomfeller@aol.com

In response to Joe Major, yes, I think the consumers are going to cons and the participants are on the Internet.

Someone connected with Weaponscon, not Irv Koch himself, told me that if someone did not have a weapon with them, the con would provide a cheap toy one free of charge.

*Still an idiotic idea.*

When my family and I visited the *Titanic* exhibit in Orlando, my father noticed the marriage picture of a couple from Switzerland who perished on the ship. They were in steerage, of course, and were the parents of a good friend of our family. Hopefully, it's still there.

**Lloyd Penney** penneys@bell.net

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Yeah, it's me again...well you're the one writin' all these zines, so you got no one but yourself to blame. With that in mind, thanks for issues 63 and 64 of *Spartacus*, and I will roll out a loc as soon as inspiration strikes.

\*crickets\*

63... Ah! Start at the beginning, that usually works. I had to shake my head over the shooting down of a spy balloon. I hope the contents were salvaged. Of course, after that happened, all Goodyear blimps needed to say DON'T SHOOT! On both sides... It's news like this that truly brings out the braindead, with nothing to think with, but still with lots to say, usually nonsense.

It is good to read that Greg Benford is healing and doing better. I've never met him, but I am sure local boy Rob Sawyer could tell me much about him. Based on what Rob writes, he's close friends with Benford and Brin, and many others. Too many of us have too many medical problems, you included, so the whole bunch of ya, stop it!

My letter...Taral Wayne has left *The Balooobius* behind, and returning to an old title, *Dark Toys*. I hope this will mean he gets more letters for the locol. I appear by myself in far too many locols.

64... I haven't seen an Oscar ceremony in decades. I don't see the movies, and really don't care. Still, to see Brendon Fraser win Best Actor for *The Whale* and Sarah Polley's *Women Talking* win for Best Adapted Screenplay was confirmatiOon for me that Canadian actors and writers, and film crews can compete with the best out there, and succeed, and win. I hope you've been enjoying *Scientifiction* from John Coker...with my work at *Amazing*, one of those issues was the best dollop of egoboo I've had in ages.

My letter...I now have a team of about a dozen readers helping with the stories we print on the *Amazing* website, so the stories continue to flow, and we are hoping that people are reading them, and they are enjoyed. I continue to look for any other websites/apps that could do a better job of detecting AI-generated stories.

**R. Graeme Cameron** the.graeme.bcsfazine@gmail.com

Hi Guy! Thank you for your kind words re: *BCSFazine* #551. No doubt a bit confusing for casual readers that I call myself the “God-Editor” of a zine named “BCSFazine” which functions as the “new” newsletter for WCSFA hoping to restore a defunct convention called VCON. Here are a few facts and an explanation:

BCSFA = British Columbia Science Fiction Association founded in 1970, but not active till March 1971 (long story).

WCSFA = West Coast Science Fiction Association (a registered society) founded by BCSFans in 1993.

VCON = Vancouver’s annual SF convention founded by BCSFans in 1971. Technically, all three of the above are separate organizations that were run by pretty much the same bunch of people, the BCSFans. However:

BCSFA has been basically dormant for twenty years or so and is now dead.

VCON is now dead for a wide variety of hideous reasons.

WCSFA at least managed to recently elect an 8-member Board of directors with a couple of volunteers like me hanging around but basically has zero active members.

FACT: There are not enough active fen locally to maintain one organization let alone three.

FACT: Technically, BCSFA owns the VCON trademark.

FACT: Long ago BCSFA voted to become the social Branch of WCSFA and WCSFA voted to agree to this, but absolutely nothing was ever done about it. Yet, technically, this makes them one organization.

FACT: I was the last editor of *BCSFazine*, from issue #538 Mar 2020 to #550 Oct 2021, before I gave up (and was not replaced). I used to be the “God-Editor” (a persona I had a lot of fun with) for *BCSFazine* from #193 Jun 1989 till #269 in Oct 1995, for which I was nominated for Aurora awards 6 times but never won. I was also editor of *WCSFazine* from #01 Sep 2007 till #22 in Apr 2011, for which I did win an Aurora award in 2010, namely in the category “Best Fan Achievement– Fanzine” category.

FACT: I first joined the BCSFA at their second meeting on Sunday, 21 March 1971. All in all, you could say I have a vested interest in BCSFA and everything it does or doesn’t.

CONSEQUENCE: It is to ARRGH! As follows:

I have decided to revive *BCSFazine* in order to shill for BCSFA, WCSFA and VCON.

I have decided to revive my God-Editor persona in order to render myself immune to criticism since who the heck can be bothered to critique an obviously egomaniacal narcissist?

*It’s never stopped them with me.*

I have decided to censor negativity since that’s partly what killed all three outfits in the first place.

I have decided to continue the title *BCSFazine* (even though it is functioning as the newsletter for WCSFA) because I want to maintain the numbering (551 issues “sounds” impressive) and also, because it was given that name by William Gibson, then a member of BCSFA, on the 13<sup>th</sup> of March 1976, Bill wrote to Fran Skene, editor of what had gone by the nifty title of “The British Columbia Science Fiction Association Newsletter,” putting forward the suggestion: “I suggest we call it *BCSFazine*, in the old fannish tradition of forcing people to roll phonetically-unlikely acronyms around in their mouths like so many marbles.” This proud tradition began with issue #34 in April of 1976. I don’t want to end it.

I have decided I want fan to contribute creative articles about their fannish interests, hoping this will trigger readers to want to get involved with WCSFA. So far, apart from Garth Spencer, who just won the CUFF (Canadian Unity Fan Fund) contest and will be wafted to NASFiC in Winnipeg this July, who sent me convention and event info, there has been no response.

I have decided, given that I am constantly busy with my two semi-professional fiction magazines *Polar Borealis* (winner of three Aurora Awards) and *Polar Starlight*, plus the weekly review columns I write for *Amazing Stories* (online), plus trying to find the time working on the second draft of my latest attempt at a science fiction novel (I used to get rejection comments like "We don't like your main character and don't think anyone else will either"), that I don't have the time to write fresh material for *BCSFazine*. So, I'm loading it up with stuff I and other people wrote years ago. I figure the people who read it then have forgotten it, but mainly, the gosh-wow-oh-boy spirit evident in the selected material will hopefully amuse and entertain young people (I still can't believe that all young people today were born in the 21st century!) to the point of convincing people to get involved with WCSFA.

I have decided a lot, haven't I? That's what God-Editors do.

Bit of a quixotic crusade? You betcha! Tilting at windmills has nothing on this. It's going to be fun! At least for a while. I'll stop when it stops being fun. If, by the end of the year, all I've aroused is fannish apathy and made it burrow deeper into its coma, then I'll call it quits. Until then, I'm charging ahead as if I know what I'm doing.

Meanwhile, about *Spartacus* #64. On the subject of Chengdu. Relatives offered to pay my way there and back, but I refused. (Instead, they've paid my airfare to and from the NASFiC, which is fantastic!) I rejected going to Chengdu I suppose because I feel that at 71-years-of-age I'm not as adventurous as I was in 1970 when I traveled around Europe by whim courtesy of a Euro-rail pass, but mainly because I see China, despite being full of wonderful people, as an incarnation of Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia combined, a technocratic totalitarian state consciously and deliberately exploring the practical uses of high tech to oppress and suppress its own citizens in a manner that would make Himmler blush with envy. I fear they are setting the standard for civilization as a whole, and that China represents our future. Fortunately, by the time the Canadian Gov't adopts their methods (hopefully never) I'll already be dead. I'm lucky that way.

However, I'm not the type to sign petitions or man barricades in the streets. That is the playground of demagogues and political tricksters masquerading as saints. I believe democracy depends on the ballot box, and my political activism consists of voting in every election I'm entitled to participate in. Another futile, quixotic gesture, I know, but there's that famous Churchill quote: "Democracy is the worst form of government, except for *all* the others." I agree.

Plenty of people disagree with me, but I don't care. As a life-long liberal in favor of continuous social progress I hate to see society sliding backwards, but I do not believe confrontation and/or violence is the answer. Get the best people in power and good things will happen. The ballot box is key. I can't abide people who want to circumvent the ballot box. After all, what did the French revolution ultimately produce? Napoleon. We don't need more Napoleons.

Let's see, what other comment hooks were in *Spartacus* #64? Oscars. Movies. You have a passion for seeing all the nominated films. As a result, you are able to keep track of the evolution of Hollywood tastes over the years. Like being an active-participant observer in a nation-wide sociology experiment. Cool.

Me, I have a passion for old SF and monster movies I imprinted on as a kid. So of course I have DVD and Blu-ray copies of movies like John Agar's *Hand of Death* (1961) and the notoriously



unfunny *Invasion of the Star Creatures* (1962), as well as slightly more sophisticated films like *Vampyr* (1932) and *Stalker* (1979). I collect just about anything with Bela Lugosi, Boris Karloff, Lon Chaney Jr., Vincent Price, Peter Cushing and Christopher Lee in it. I have more than 200 such films.

*So write something ASAP about **The Bride of Frankenstein!***

Garth Spencer hrothgarweems@gmail.com

I can't comment on your remarks about the Oscar awards. Since I lost regular access to



television I have found myself more detached than ever from popular culture. In fact I find myself channeling my radical socialist father's outlook. Let me spare you the resulting fulminations.

Great to hear that Greg Benford is lucid and recovering after his stroke!

Sad to read that *Portable Storage* is going out of publication after its latest issue. And I hadn't gotten to trade with the editor yet. *Waaah.*

The more I hear about the conflicts besetting American politics,

or the interpersonal politics besetting fan communities ... and the more I look back on the fan-historical materials I have collected ... the more I think we could profitably hold boffer fights at conventions, organized between different fannish cliques or political factions. Maybe this could even be a fundraiser for charity, or for fan funds, or for the mythical Home for Indignant Cats. Just a thought to kick around.

Interesting to read about the adventures of Lloyd Penney and the *Amazing*, well, website. I guess electronic rather than paper publishing is the Wave of the Future. Also interesting to read his opinions about future conventions – my correspondent R. Graeme Cameron found hotels were increasingly unaffordable and demanding venues here in Vancouver, before he moved away. More and more, I suspect, municipal fan groups will have to hold reduced events in community centers and ethnic meeting halls, unless they organize to hold Westercons and Worldcons.

Just one parting thought – why is the Roman soldier in your closing illo left-handed?

*Emulation of the magnificence of Jimmy Connors, who wielded his tennis racket like a Roman gladius! Eat steel, McEnroe!*

Bill Plott [wjplott@aol.com](mailto:wjplott@aol.com)

Re *Spartacus* no 64. I had no idea there were so many *Titanic* museums scattered around in such diverse locations. Las Vegas, for heaven's sake. That was my first job out of college. Not the museum, but the afternoon newspaper.

A puzzlement. Why is going to Cocoa Beach's Ron Jon Surf Shop a notable outing? I recall nothing to suggest that either of you is a surfer. They just sell a lot of damn clothes, don't they?

*Ah, but you didn't know me in my bippy hodad days, when I'd go into the soup after charging the bomb till grubbing! Ron Jon's sells all kinds of sticks and gear and junque! And the ambience is utterly akaw!*

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A few reviews ... The epic discovery in our television watching of recent has been ViaPlay, a Scandinavian streaming service specializing in thrillers. Generally, these programs are vastly superior to similar fare on American TV. They avoid the cloying emphasis on cute smart-mouthed cops and cliched and hurried storylines on which our shows rely. Programs from Europe's far north come in the form of mini-series ranging over eight or ten episodes, allowing for more complex stories and more complex characters instead of the usual memes.

High in our admiration has been *The Lawyer*, an increasingly involved story of revenge featuring a morally ambiguous protagonist and scurrilous villains – including the scum of the Earth, a successful lawyer. It's a good show, but it pales before *Furia*. Made in Norway, it's a polyglot journey through right-wing Europe and its criminal reaction to the continent's immigration debacle, ranging in scope from a tiny village in the far north to the halls of government power in Berlin. The characters are rich, the politics real, the stakes high, the tension at the conclusion of its 10 episodes intense, the reward satisfying. And nary a gooey double entendre from a cute cop in sight. (As a fun exercise, count the languages. The characters are fluent in all of the high north tongues, plus German, plus English. *Our* characters are lucky if they can form any coherent sentences at all.)

*Furia* would stand as the season's most remarkable televised entertainment ... if it wasn't for *Silo*. To SF at last we turn. *Silo* is based on the novels of Hugh Howey about a subterranean society extending deep into the Earth, its origin and purpose a forbidden mystery to the 10,000 inhabitants. Superior sets, dialog, pace, characterizations, casting – Rebecca Ferguson has my permission to stomp my face in on her slightest whim, and while Tim Robbins enjoys no such privilege, he too is excellent in the series. I find the show superior to the books, superior in fact to all of the other SF packing TV. In the past weeks, only a movie has bested it in enjoyability.

And it's only appropriate that *The Flash* should be the best superhero movie I have ever seen. It was better than *sixty-two* years ago that I found a copy of an early Silver Age *Flash* in a stack of old magazines in my grandmother's house and set on the path that took me to my first job, to fandom, to my marriage with Rose-Marie, to the here and now. Julius Schwartz, the genius behind the character, a revival and rejuvenation of the Golden Age speedster, became a fast friend, as well as one of the most important people in my life: the first adult to pay attention to my thoughts, even though they were simply about comic books.

So here is a movie with irreverent humor, effective pathos, strong respect for the DCEU, a convoluted but still comprehensible story, great FX and action – a last scene for the ages and an Easter egg almost as cool. A movie with respect for its genre unafraid to poke fun at it and itself, *The Flash* justifies a lifetime of joy in superhero comics. Run, Barry, run.

Coming up, the world's oddest double feature – *Barbie* and *Oppenheimer*.

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SKETI



For a while as the last week of June sluiced past (it's been storming here), it seemed as if I'd be opining on a Russian *coup d'etat*, as a rogue element in their forces marched on Moscow, but the world's most toxic nation seems to have calmed its internal problem ... for the moment. But Vlad Putin's weakness as a leader is again exposed. This has been a sorry season for dictators ... and their stooges.

Supreme among Russia's UIs ("useful idiots") is Donald Trump, an outspoken admirer of Putin and other tyrants, a fraud not only ignorant of the law but contemptuous of the very idea of the law, elevated to the Presidency through an obsolete system in the most foolish and sexist electoral cycle this country has seen since the days of Jim Crow. In the last few weeks

before the solstice Trump was found responsible for a squalid sexual attack on a woman and indicted for multiple violations of federal law involving government documents, a misappropriation he tries to justify through the absurd claim that a President can do whatever he wants with government papers, and Donald Trump can do whatever he wants whenever he wants, period.

There are plenty of Americans who buy into these repulsive precepts, so I dare not guess as to the eventual outcome of the 37 charges Trump faces. But going by the facts as reported and the law as generally understood, I can say that no fair and reasonably astute jury could do anything but fry the bloated son of a beach. I *will* predict that he'll never be incarcerated, but judging by the support flaking away from him day by day, this time the disgrace may stick. The civil conviction in the Jean Carroll sexual assault case should have driven him from public life – no decent society should tolerate such behavior – but Trump's sleaziness has oozed through America's conscience without condemnation for years. His people just don't care.

But our people do. It just could be that – even without the inevitable prosecution for inciting the January 6<sup>th</sup> riot – the Great Orange Goombah has reached his limit ... *our* limit.

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I'd hoped to chat about the Hugo nominations this time, but even with able administrators in charge, Chengdu's listing has been a challenge to finalize. I just know I won't know more than one or two names, and those only if I'm lucky. Bound to ride the Best Novel shortlist is *Babel*, a philological fantasy by Rebecca Huang which won the Nebula and *Locus* Awards. Long, scholarly, but quite well-written and -plotted. *Oxford – the Final Frontier* – it's like a combination of Harry Potter and *Jonathan Strange*, with contemporary/eternal issues of race, class, nationalism and family wound in. I'm 2/3 through and hooked. Anyway, next time. Or the time after.

***Congrats to Bill Ritch and John Hartness for winning the Rebel (fan) and Phoenix (pro) Awards at the 2023 DeepSouthCon. 2025 – back to New Orleans!***

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