



SPARTACUS NO. 70

Opinions and Blather by

Guy H. Lillian III

1390 Holly Avenue, Merritt Island FL 32952 // GHLIII@yahoo.com // GHLIII Press Pub No. 1359
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When you enter the main hall of the National Archives your eyes are drawn to the Declaration of Independence first, central, high on the wall facing front. It's disappointing. The document is so dim that only a few words can be made out – the heading, John Hancock's signature, a few other names. For a long time in America's history it was toted outdoors in the sunlight to be admired, and the light faded it. It's all right: we have copies. And we know what it says. I recited its marvelous second sentence – “We hold these truths to be self-evident ...” – near Thomas Jefferson's grave at Monticello.

In other cases about the room there are more legible documents. I once got snapped at by a guard for leaning on the glass protecting the Bill of Rights. I just wanted to get as close as possible to it, not that it isn't engrained in every American's fiber, whether he knows it or not. Next to it is a wider case holding four sheets of sheepskin, and these also are still readable. This year, it seems, we Americans will be deciding if their words, the words of the U.S. Constitution, still have meaning.

When I hear the talking heads of CNN and MSNBC make such noises I'm often tempted to say *pschaw*—for even though Trump (and we all know that is who I'm talking about) would state out loud his determination to pay back his enemies if he's ever put back into the Oval, or be a dictator for a single day, or aver that a President should be immune from criminal prosecution for crimes committed while he's in office, we know that he's probably just blathering. The man is not only a predator, a swindler, an habitual liar and something very close to a traitor, he's also a damned fool. He was an uneducated blowhard when he became President, and COVID may well have addled his brains further. Trump is at least reckless and vapid; best to disregard anything he says as oral racket. *But.*

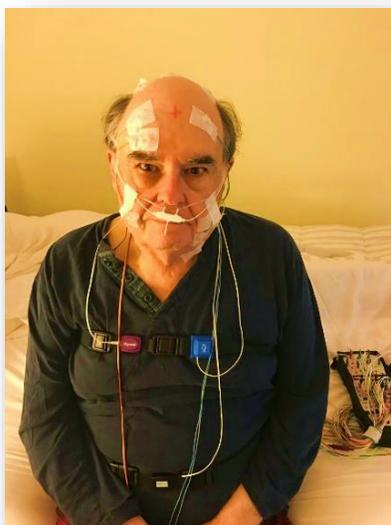
A person making such promises and statements *can't* be laughed off. Not if he seeks the power to make such horrors happen. And they would pose a definite fatal threat to the ideas and reality of the documents referred to above. Besides which, the President of the United States must always be taken seriously. His word – or her word, which is a possibility – is *our* word. America must always seek and speak truth.

As I write, the GOP race is underway on the glacial plains of Iowa. Trump's "victory" there is so foreordained as to be meaningless. If the Republicans had sense – a substantial "if" – they'd forget the orange idiot and seriously consider Nikki Haley. She has distinct and unique advantages this year. The first is youth – the only complaint against Joe Biden that sticks is his age, and people are smart enough to recognize that Trump is only three years his junior. Haley has vitality, decent looks, only minor baggage, and the most important quality a candidate needs: *charisma* – the ability to *excite the imagination*. Presidents are often chosen on the imagination they foster Carter, Clinton, Obama, Trump himself. Haley's opinions and policies are as neo-fascist as Trump's ever were, but she's got the Magic. A smart party would take heed.

So would I vote for her? *Christ no!*

The most serious legal question – of many – dealing with Trump is whether he engaged in insurrection on January 6 2021 and is therefore constitutionally forbidden from running for office. I'd say so, but my opinion isn't a mote of dust. The appellate courts will make this call – and then the Supreme Court. Their decision will define their legacy. Are they political stooges for radical authoritarians, loyal above all to the crook who appointed them, or are they proper heirs to the legacy of Holmes and Warren, Brandeis and Douglas?

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As for me ... See below. A picture is worth a thousand strangled words. Despite what you might think, this photo does not show injuries from a mangling train wreck but rather the electrode thingies slapped onto my head for a **sleep study**.

These first months of the New Year are crammed to the gunnels with doctors. January and February have no fewer than 10 medical and dental appointments, not counting my weekly sobfests with my shrink. I began the binge with a sleep study and will continue it with a double 'scope, a crown for a demolished molar and very possibly a nerve conduction test that will drive me insane with pain.

The sleep study was almost sabotaged by my foolishness – I quaffed a full glass of my digestive jolly-juice just before bedtime. My bladder didn't allow me sleep for almost three hours. When slumber at last came, I was very comfy, but it was a sorry beginning to this season's medical orgy.

And in April, my father-in-law wants to send Rosy and me to **Iceland**. It shouldn't be *too* cold ... not with all the volcanoes ...

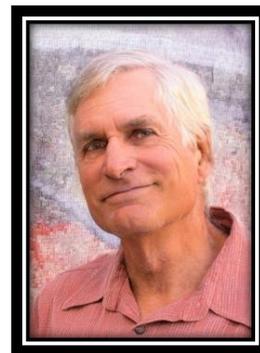
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Some streaming recommendations ... Gary Oldman's *Slow Horses* returned with a great story about internal turmoil within the U.K.'s MI-5, very different, very taut, very good. I wish they'd hasten Oldman's return to MI-6, their foreign secret service, for the next LeCarre thriller, *Smiley's People*. // *Fargo* surpassed itself this season, with Jon Hamm's performance as an insane MAGA sheriff frying the screen, ably matched by Juno Temple as his surprisingly capable ex. Darker than dark humor has always been a *Fargo* quality, along with a strong sense of incipient violence and a resilient morality. All are on full display here. // Scandinavia has been coming through with choice cop shows for several years, and the second season of its weird mini-series *Third Eye* continues to fulfill its promise. Trust ViaPlay. //

Australia has a new entry airing, an even darker comedy, *Boy Swallows Universe*, following a disturbed, drug-ravaged family; its off-center humor may throw some folks for a loop, but its uniqueness is winning. // Finally, Jodie Foster is riding *True Detective* to a weird Arctic destination, an inviting spooky ride. I remember seeing Foster in a *Kung Fu* when she was ten years old, when she was already a seasoned performer. She's gotten tougher ... and better.

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DeepSouthCon is Southern SF fandom's oldest continuing convention. It presents two awards for positive achievement reflecting well on the region and its people – the **Rebel Award** for fannish accomplishment and the **Phoenix** for outstanding work by a professional residing in the erstwhile Dixie. I won my Rebel in 1984, at the DSC in Chattanooga – the same convention as the Phoenix Award went to **David Drake**.



(David and I agreed that though the honors were great, the *real* honor was winning them while Theodore Sturgeon was in the room. Which he was.)

David had two fortes in his writing: historical military fantasy and contemporary military horror. He was informed in these sub-genres by extensive research and his own experiences in Vietnam. That generational and personal nightmare found taut expression in such stories as “Something Had to be Done”, “Best of Luck”, “Arc Light” and the exquisite “Dancer in the Flames.” Along with many of his other works, they're in the comprehensive Baen collection from 2012, *Night & Demons*. He collaborated with Karl Edward Wagner on the novel *Killer* and was a prolific editor of anthologies and collections.

He was also an accomplished member of the legal profession, a graduate of Duke Law School and a former Town Attorney in North Carolina, a position he held until he became a full-time writer in 1981. Basically, David Drake was a fine guy. He crossed over in December 2023, “peacefully,” aged 78, leaving much good behind. *Vale*.

Terry Bisson was also a Phoenix winner, also a Nebula and Hugo recipient for “Bears Discover Fire,” and also – in Poul Anderson's wonderful term – a “fine fellow.” I only met him twice, once at the DSC where he picked up his Phoenix and once at Confrancisco, where I turned around on my nosebleed seat at the Hugos to find him sitting right behind me. I never met **Howard Waldrop**, whose name always evokes “The Ugly Chickens” to me, but the reaction to his January demise spoke very well of him. What sad losses SF has endured in the last few.

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When mourning the terrific action actor **David Soul**, who died this month, please forget about *Starsky and Hutch*. Its “cute cops” shtick was a repulsive cliché even before the show debuted. Think instead of his portrayal of a decidedly *uncute* cop in *Magnum Force* or the psychotic human Terminator Michael Platt in the true crime thriller *In the Line of Duty*. Soul was apparently a violent man himself; those gigs let him reveal himself honestly and candidly, to the benefit of his art.



And while we're at it, when you think of the lovely **Glynis Johns**, who made three figures in age before passing in January, ignore her silly suffragette in *Mary Poppins* and recall her anguished bar girl in *Shake Hands with the Devil*. Her beach scene with Cagney is seared into memory, as is her exceptional and uniquely beautiful face.

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Still with us, thank God, is **Rusty Burke**, an old friend from Knoxville, member of the K'ville Crazies, and possibly the foremost fan of Robert E. Howard on the planet. Rusty was central to the creation of Robert E. Howard Days in REH's hometown of Cross Plains TX, and the establishment of a Howard Museum in the great fantasist's lifelong home. He was also a crucial member of the Southern Fandom Press Alliance, setting up our 1981 celebration of our 100th mailing (we believe its 1,750 pages are a world apa record); and a tremendous *bon vivant*. (You should have seen the 8-foot 14-inch Burke bopping toward the music on Bourbon Street with Beth Flokstra once upon a Mardi Gras.) Rusty had lived in D.C. for the past many years, and there, on December 16, suffered a catastrophic fall and head injury. He was unconscious for two full weeks, but as of mid-January was showing signs of improvement and recovery, no doubt being filled with the spirit of Conan. Keep it up, Irish.

And though it's rather old news by now, chops to **Greg Benford**, who showed up at Loscon, wheelchair-bound but active, communicative and in grand spirits. Keep *that* up, Alabama!

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“L” is for “Letters”, “O” is for “of ...

Rich Lynch / rw_lynch@yahoo.com

You mention that: “Rosy and I busily plan a book-dumping expedition to the New Orleans Symphony Book Fair.” You appear to have come to the same conclusion as Nicki and I – we have way too many books, far more that we'll ever read. So Nicki has been gradually thinning the herd and whenever we go to a 12 convention we usually bring along a box or two of books for the freebie table. It seems to be a popular idea because at both Balticon and Capclave this year there were already piles of books for giveaway by the time we arrived. Anyway, we've been doing this for a couple of years and we've barely made any noticeable progress in terms of how full the bookcases still are. This is going to take a while.

Gary Brown / garyfbrown@bellsouth.com

The cover is great, but it should have Secret Service agents on either side of [Trump]. Yeah, the knock against Biden from the right is that he's old — just three years older than their candidate of choice. Trump rarely knows what city he's in, promises he'll keep us out of World War II, thinks he defeated Barrack Obama in 2016 and testified in court he was not able to concentrate on his business because he was too busy running the country in 2021. Of course, he was not president in 2021.

Rich Dengrove / richd22426@aol.com

We'd love to see Trump in a secured institution at government expense. However, he may very well be the next president. A politician said that nobody has a chance in the Republican primaries against Trump because he's not a politician. My answer to that is that he's a politician, a rabble-rouser.

The same thing happened to me when I was 70. Namely, I was excused from jury duty. In all my years being called for jury duty, the closest I got was being nixed by a lawyer. So I decided to give others a better shot at being on a jury. That's still going to be hard. The area I am in has overflowed with qualified jurors. A friend of mine had better luck. He was a pioneer in establishing a house in what were the DC slums. Vis-a-vis the populace, his qualifications were so high he once got to be the jury foreman, or foreperson.

In one Saint movie, a policeman says that Simon Templar bends the law but doesn't break it. I suspect Trump periodically breaks it. However, Trump doesn't break it at all for his supporters. It's all a matter of politics. ...Still, that doesn't necessarily mean Presidency here he comes. At least, not yet.

Conservative Republicans want to get Biden by what his son has done. They are hoping for a new Watergate. The dream hasn't died. They would be better off just claiming Biden is too old and leave it at that. In 2016, Trump beat Hillary because he was the first person to suggest that America needed projects to build its infrastructure. That got him the election. He didn't win by the popular vote but he won by the electors. However, first chance, he went with the old-time Republicans who wanted to cut taxes and spend more on defense. For that reason, the electoral advantage wasn't there to elect him a second time.

Lloyd Penney / penneys@bell.net

When we were in Rochester, New York for Astronomicon earlier this year, we got a chance to congratulate Chris Barkley personally on his Hugo win.

We get regular reminders of our age when important names from our past pass away. *Ansible's* monthly RIP column is a killer, so to speak...

Richard Dengrove...I humbly thank you for your confidence in me. I hope to succeed with *Amazing Stories*, too. Believe me, I am no Carr or Hartwell, I'm trying to learn this business as best as I can. I've been the e-in-c for *Amazing* for just over one year and connected with it for 5. I hope to learn much more over time, and I want to be around long enough to take part in the *AS* centennial celebrations coming up in 2026. We hope to have the cash assembled to make *AS* a paper magazine again.

Fandom as a family...we are finally getting to see some of those family members again. I hope they will forgive me if I hug them a little too hard, or a little too long. Some of them, I have missed terribly. We lost friends to COVID, and some to anti-vaccine opinions. Those we wish well and hope they will realize how dangerous COVID is yet, and the importance of keeping up with all available shots.

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My time and energy have been too cramped in the last few weeks to allow me to publish a *Zine Dump*, much to my chagrin; *TZD* receives far more attention and comment than *Spartacus* or even *Challenger* and has for years been my major contact with fandom. But I can't handle it now. A binge of reading and responding such as *Zine Dump* requires is simply too much for me. As I don't know when that will change, I may have to put *TZD* on sabbatical.

This would hurt, because I still love receiving and reading zines. As evidence, I voted in this year's FAAn Awards for my favorite fan-wrought work, a pleasure, especially when they're prizes like Geri Sullivan's **Idea**. The 13th *Idea* recently appeared on eFanzines.com, the first issue in 23 years. What could have been a detriment becomes a positive quality in Geri's hands. Noting – with touching dismay – friends and family passed on in those years, Geri fills her zine with tributes to and articles and art by the departed, A pleasing timeless feel results. (Look at all those Rotsler illos!)

Contemporary fandom isn't neglected. Besides being fronted by a beautiful Sue Mason cover, the zine delivers TAFF winner Sandra Bond's brilliantly devastating report on Pemmi-Con, the Winnipeg NASFiC. The barbs Bond delivers seem well-deserved as well as well-put. The other material here is just as choice. Bottom line: a really good *Idea*. It's inspiring. Maybe it's time to think about *Challenger* again.

An additional shout-out to the return of Greg Bridges' **Memphen**, once the clubzine for an active Memphis group, now the perzine of this personable lad I've known since 1972 or '73. Welcome back to the madhouse, both of you.

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There's a lousy happening! I open my e-mail just now and spot a post from someone named Jodie Sargent. The subject matter? “Mr. Guy H Lillian III, Esq., Accept Your 2024 Nomination.” *Nomination?* Lights go on inside my head. A 2024 nomination?! With the Glasgow Worldcon looming, and Hugo nominations either open or about to be ... It's been a very long time since the last of my 14 Hugo nominations, *Challenger* isn't eligible – the last issue appeared in 2021, But maybe *The Zine Dump* ...

Or maybe the Louisiana “Lawyers of Distinction” fraternity is just trying to sell me a membership. Never mind that I've been retired for almost 11 years ...

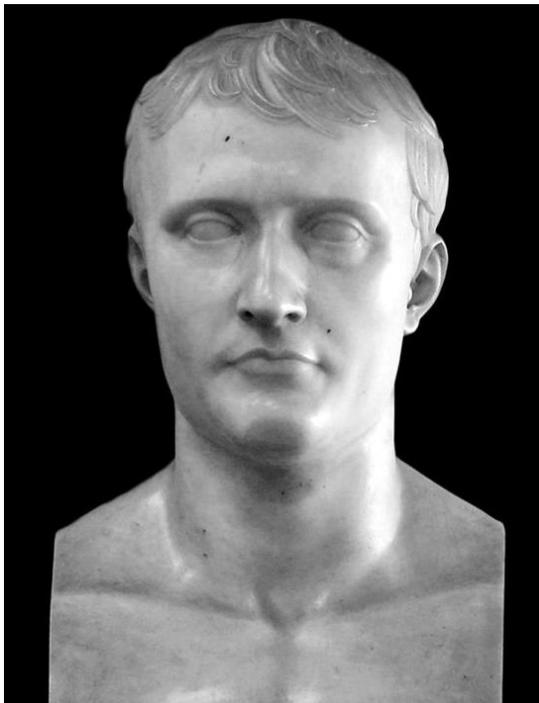
Pass.

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January 16, 2024. The busy week goes on. This morning father-in-law Joe Green commandeered this computer to rehearse his ZOOM interview next weekend with Edie Stern of Fanac.org. Edie's series of on-line panels and convos is marvelous, and Joe – still publishing through Greenhouse Scribes (Rosy designs his book covers) – deserves the exposure. He turned 93 this week. I've never known a man his age in better mental or physical shape. It's the discipline he built over a long life and a 30-year career at NASA.

Me, I'm prepping for the next chapter in my medical month – a double-scope this Thursday. I've had four previously and the last found a clean gut, and the only traumatic part of the experience was the repulsive gunk they make you guzzle the night before. That's bad enough, but to complicate matters, the Greenhouse has guests coming, and this office has to be cleared. More boxes of more books to haul ...

Yesterday was the Iowa Republican caucus, and to avoid watching it the household, and one of Rosy's BFFs, devoted its attention to the truncated version of Joaquin Phoenix's *Napoleon*. Although the battle scenes were splendid, the film as a whole was a major disappointment, even a bore. Rosy says that I fell asleep twice in its 2½ hours. I can just imagine how much worse the four-hour version would be. Too much Josephine, not enough Waterloo, and nothing at all about Bonaparte's brilliant instincts of



government. The film didn't even mention the Napoleonic Civil Code, one of the great landmarks of human legal history, which the Corsican cannoneer ordered redacted so as to be comprehensible to the common man—meaning himself. Yeah, Napoleon a “common man” ... it is to laugh. Ridley Scott and Phoenix show him as an unpleasant and frustrated posturer. But I remember the superb exhibit on his life I toured in Memphis some years back. Napoleon was driven and ruthless, but he was neither common nor phony. He had genuine greatness.

To see a man based in pretense and falsehood, all we had to do was change channels and watch Donald Trump take his bows. I know that his legal woes have not ended, and that the charges he faces are serious and seem well-proven. A just and wise society would have nothing to do with such a man – predator, swindler, insurrectionist, and possible traitor. But is that us?

//// **GHLIII** ////