



SPARTACUS

Guy Lillian III * July 2023 * Issue no. 67

THE WORLD FOREVER CHANGES

BARBENHEIMER

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Happy birthday to me!

Indeed, it is the penultimate week of July, 2023 in which this little perzine, *Spartacus no. 67*, is brought forth by me, *Guy Lillian III*, at 1390 Holly Avenue, Merritt island FL 32952, and wouldn't you know it, Thursday of this week is July 20, and *that* is the anniversary of my birth. The zine is GHLIII Press Publication #1349 and never mind how old I've turned.

Aside from the skin-shriveling heat, which I gather is a worldwide problem, what do we have to serve as topics for this publication? The illo on my cover gives a clue. I don't think a more unlikely pair of movies in memory have shared a release date than *Oppenheimer* and *Barbie*. It's been a hoot – and an act of accidental marketing genius – to see the public respond to the coincidence with such wacky fervor; promises have abounded to make a five-hour double feature from the two dissimilar tales and promotions like my cover illo have flourished. Rosy and I didn't go *that* far, but we did take in both flicks over my birthday weekend. Responses:

Oppenheimer tells two stories, both compelling: the physics behind the atomic bomb and the hysterical politics behind the repudiation of the physicist. If I have a complaint, it's that the stronger story involves the creation of the Trinity nuke. The only understanding I have of physics comes from hanging around Greg Benford, but I was wowed by the famous big-domes the movie throws at us: Einstein, Heisenberg, Bohr, Lawrence, Fermi, Edward Teller (I heard him talk at Berkeley, featured prominently here), even Klaus Fuchs, who really *was* a Russian spy. The development of the bomb has been dealt with in movies before (for instance, in the *meh* Paul Newman vehicle *Fat Man and Little Boy*) but never so well, and the climactic Trinity explosion makes for an incredible cinematic moment (as well as the loudest sound effect I've ever heard from a movie). I could have used more of that part of the story. Oppenheimer's horror at what he and his cadre have achieved is also beautifully presented. The McCarthyite aftertimes, though, go on and on, which I imagine was infinitely more tedious for Oppenheimer in real life than it is for the moviegoer. The man was a loyal soldier whose humanitarian qualms came up after his military duty. In any event, *Oppenheimer* is a stunning film, in which superb performances shine: Cillian Murphy, the great Emily Blunt and Robert Downey Jr.; all merit Oscar consideration, as do many of the flick's technical aspects and the director, the incandescent imagineer Christopher Nolan.)

Foe a film inextricably bound by fate and by the public imagination with *Oppenheimer*, *Barbie* couldn't be more different. It's a witty fantasy fable using the world-renowned doll as a stylistic and thematic launchpad, almost totally original in concept, reminiscent of *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?* but with a moral message behind it. I found it silly and funny and very effective. It sports a hilarious opening parodying *2001*, a righteous comic turn by that fearless, physically perfect actress, Margot Robbie, excellent supporting actors, sharp dialog, wild sets like those from *The 5,000 Fingers of Dr. T* (except, like the Warner Bros shield at the outset, Pepto=pink), good satiric music, and a *wicked* last line. The point is self-value, and so skillful is the film in getting it across that I actually sensed profundity. Different from *Oppenheimer* in almost every way – except quality. Both are extraordinary movies, and together they seem to have saved 2023 for the industry – and the public.

I flinch in guilt over being amused by the statement that both *Barbie* and *Oppenheimer* involve products that debuted in Japan.

Off the big screen – and I do mean “big”; *Oppenheimer* showed on an IMAX screen the size of several city blocks -- I recently watched *Bird Box Barcelona*, a semi-sequel to Sandra Bullock's very disturbing horror film (which continues to spook me); it has its moments but adds nothing to the supremely spooky original (I was hesitant to look out the window afterwards). More effective – and more confusing – is *Infinity Pool*, enthralling for Mia Goth, star of *X* and *Pearl* and the best new presence in movies since Anya Taylor-Joy, but baffling in terms of story. We enjoyed *The Lawyer*, a good crime drama from the excellent Scandinavian streaming service ViaPlay, and the *Walking Dead* mini-series *Dead City*. We look forward to the return of the Tony Hillermann series *Dark Winds*, the new – and final, alas – *Jack Ryan*,

Idris Elba's *Hijacked* and the next *Reacher*, coming up in December. And season 2 of *Silo*. *Alaska Daily* wasn't renewed, a bummer. Returning to the theaters, there's *Napoleon* in our near future, a new *Mission: Impossible* in a series I admit to liking, and Scorsese's *Flowers of the Killer Moon*. Or *Killers of the Flower Moon*. Or *Moon of the Killer Flowers*. Or ...

Assuming the various creators' strikes don't put the kibosh on everything, of course. That's up to the studios. *Pay the people*, schmucks.

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Highlighting my summer are my guest appearances in Rosy's public speaking classes at Eastern Florida State College, wherein I gas about my hairiest court appearances and the oral arguments I presented. I usually hit them with my speech in the penalty phase of my first degree murder case, but as that crime included elements of drugs, rape, torture and necrophilia – no kidding – *la belle* has argued that the subject matter may be a bit much for high school kids seeking advanced placement credit. So this summer I'll be spelling out my projected declamations in a slightly less disturbing matter, a woman accused of murdering her newborn infant – even though the cops found no body. (The D.A. gave up once we pointed out the chasm-like holes in his case, and let the lady plead out to a misdemeanor, time served.)

But this semester's first performances before Rosy's kids didn't deal with law or persuasion. Tasked to show the Gen Z nubilees how to make an *informative* speech, I loosened my golden pipes and laid on a subject we'd dealt with in Shreveport and at Aussiecon IV: *how SF films reflected changing social concerns in the XXth Century*. I threw my talk together more-or-less off the top of my head, copied some posters onto a power-point presentation, and let fly. For 90 minutes each class.

Turn of the last century optimism – Melies' *Voyage to the Moon*. (We – or least he – imagined our joy in the future through Luna. Not the last time we'd see this.)

The class revolution – Lang's *Metropolis*. (I got to drop my encounter with Lang when he came to Berkeley in 1970 or so.)

The dream of Utopia – Alex Korda's movie, H. G. Wells' dream: *Things to Come*. (Beyond the corny overblown rhetoric, the dream of Science leading mankind to the grand future, as exemplified by a trip to – where else? – the Moon.)

The Capitalist response – Enter Heinlein, libertarianism, and *Destination Moon*. (More name-dropping; Heinlein was a guest in this house at a party the night before the first moon launch.) The students didn't know *Stranger in a Strange Land*, but perked up when I mentioned *Starship Troopers*. (The moon as man's dream, again.)

The Red Scare – *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*. We're all being turned into zombies. And from that same year ...

Turning inward: psychology – my favorite SF movie, and “Monsters from the Id!": *Forbidden Planet*.

The future – and beyond the infinite: *2001: A Space Odyssey*. The Boomer dream of humanity perfected – as imagined through the Star Child. I had to tread carefully here, trying to explain how some dreamers imagined “freeing their minds” before drugs became nothing more than goofy social recreation.

Conquering the Moon – coming up as *2001* is made – is the gateway to the conquest of man's base violent nature. Nobody reacted when I told them that their teacher's father was a good friend of the *2001* arthur ... *author*, I mean.)

Stepping back, taking stock, having fun – Of course, that meant *Star Wars*. Joy for the sake of Joy.

Living – I finished with the best science fiction film of the last 20 years, a human story of an incalculably difficult and vital decision. Knowing the future holds joy, followed by incalculable agony, do we still choose it? Is the happiness worth the pain? *Arrival*.

So where are *Blade Runner* and *Alien/Aliens* in this progression? You tell me.

Of course, my readings of SF film history *and* the XXth Century were shallow and my conclusions obvious, but hey, it got the kids talking. And me out of the house. I used the opportunity to encourage the assembled ankle-biters not only to see these movies but to discover the past, to *read* something more significant than their cellphones. Reading is, after all, about the only advantage we Boomers have over them. That and dementia. As the great George Wells assures us, senility is wasted on the old.

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So there was this toy advertised on Facebook, see, a squeezeball which, when squeezed, exploded into dozens of multicolored bubbles which receded back into the ball when the squeeze relaxed. I had one last year and found it cool – addictive, in fact. Eventually my first squeezeball went blooie, but since I liked the silly thing, I was primed to buy another when FB ran new ads therefor. \$20. From *Austria*.

The company was kind enough to provide a tracking number for the package – as soon as it was mailed, which took a while. I waited and waited, and finally, on a June day anticipating the molten heat of July, it arrived – hot and gooey and *flat*. Uh-oh.

Voila! Burst apart, the oil and mini-balls within out and about. Had it popped from the heat? The thing was hot as a fresh boiled egg. Was it crushed? The package was flimsy Tyvek, and the p.o. could have set a piano on top of it while in transit. Who knew? All I knew was that my squeezeball was busted. I found an e-mail address on a receipt and wrote to the company. *How about a refund or a replacement?* was the gist of my message.

They requested photos showing the damage. I sent them photos showing the damage. They wrote me back. We'll send you a refund, they said. *Three dollars*.

Of course I squawked, and soon they capitulated. *Four dollars*. That was as high as they would go.

There matters rest – for now. I am p.o.ed, but I am also educated and have the right to append more than a “III” after my name. And I seem to recall a class from my first semester of law school, Contracts. It says that a sale is a contract between the parties, and if one party doesn't fulfill his half of the bargain ... the other party can go to court to enforce it/ Yes! I could sue – get my Jackson back. Or make them give me a new squeezeball. Shouldn't cost me more than two or three grand in court costs. What do you think?

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Facebook entry: “I've just finished BABEL, the Nebula winner, a stunning and somewhat magnificent fantasy of language and revolution. My mind spins with the humane complexities of its resolution, my annoyance at its occasional anachronisms -- glaring in a brilliant book about language and translation -- fades. I have no idea why it wasn't Hugo-nominated, but at least the SFWA recognized an important, original, ferociously erudite novel. Bravo, Rebecca Kuang!”

So why isn't *Babel* among this year's Hugo nominees? Could be that the length of the volume, over 500 pages, and its solemn pace turned some voters off, and the lack of any SFnal elements besides its assurance that silver is magic. That sounds like fantasy to me. Someone suggested that the author may have withdrawn the novel from consideration out of disgust with the Chinese government, like S.B. Divya. I hope this is so.

I've begun perusing the novels that *did* make Chengdu's final ballot; so far, *The Spare Man* has failed to impress – it's ill-served by Ms. Kowal's artless style, and the story seems hackneyed – but *The Daughter*

of *Dr. Moreau* shows literacy and promise. Reports on Scalzi's *Locus* Award winner *Kaiju Preservation Society* and the other nominees in due course.

But that course must wait until I read a couple of books in prep for my next *Challenger* – Mike Bishop's *Brittle Innings* and a little tome called *Frankenstein*. I won't bore you with the reasons why.

A single loc ... from guess who?

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[*Spartacus* 65...] The Indictment of Donald Trump... I know it is all taking forever, but he will be found guilty of something. There are many other crimes he could be tried for, like all the money he and his family made while he was president, in direct contravention of a law I am sure you could detail. I like Joe Biden, but I think both he and Trump are too old for the job. If a smart-looking Democrat with sterling credentials could step forward, he or she could save the world from four more years of Orange Monster. I cannot believe that even if he is convicted, Trump stands a good chance of winning the presidency. Common sense is not just uncommon, it simply doesn't exist anymore.

Brazil got rid of their own version of Trump, Jair Bolsonaro, and one of their highest courts banned him from seeking further elected office for 8 years. I wish something similar could happen to Trump, but seeing how much of the American state has become politicized and polarized, not even your highest court would consider that.

The word "woke"...the meaning of the word seems to change by the day, and with the Republican politician who rages against it. Woke seems to mean to care for others, care about the environment, to be aware of the world around you, and to act in its best interest. I can see where Republicans would be against some of these ideas. There is a mass shooting at least once a day...the new normal.

King Charles III of Great Britain. That sounds odd to me, having grown up with Queen Elizabeth II, but it does show that Elizabeth reigned for just over 70 years. A lot of people do not like Charles, I don't mind him, and if there is a job to do, I hope he does it well. Right now, the coin collectors I know are looking forward to coin of the realm with his face on it.

[*Spartacus* 66...] I never knew the connection between Ted Kaczynski and Greg Benford. I remember the Dead People Server that had fannish connections, cannot think of who ran it, but we sure could use it right now. The best we have after that is Dave Langford's comprehensive month of passings in *Ansible*.

I have had people ask me about the future of *Amazing*, and that magazines are a thing of the past, and you'd BETTER have a paper magazine! The plan is to continue with news items on the website, and to try to be current with it, and my job is to provide Kermit, the website manager, with the best SF we can find. Once we get more about *Amazing* out there, we plan to try another Kickstarter, and see if we can raise enough money to get another volume of magazines going. We are also starting to get the word out about SF's upcoming 100th anniversary in 2026.

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So my birthday weekend ends and with it, this little *Spartacus*. Health is wretched but stable. Plans range from a trip to Louisiana in August to see pals and ~~dump~~ donate a dozen tons of books to the New Orleans Symphony Book Fair. That will entail many days of work in our storage unit here, and in this heat and with my health, I dread it. It will be nice to see the Easy and the krewe again, though, decimated though it may be.

I must look to the future. The vote has come down from the NASFiC, and 2024's North American SF convention will be held in Buffalo. I rejoice: perhaps this means I'll be able to see my bro and his family again. My oldest nephew, Steve, turns 31 in September. I haven't seen him or his brother or his parents since ... God knows when. *Gawd!* Time is passing. I must scramble to keep up.

