



SPARTACUS no. 24

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“Why are we having all these people from **shithole countries** come here?”

“Lightweight Senator Kirsten Gillibrand, a total flunky for Charles E. Schumer and someone who would come to my office 'begging' for campaign contributions not so long ago (**and would do anything for them**), is now in the ring fighting against Trump.”

That’s Donald J. Trump, the President of the United States, talking first about other countries and their immigrants, then about a sitting United States senator. The first quote was revealed on January 11, 2018, the tweet came forth December 12, 2017. The latter lines have been forgotten. It’s a good bet that as this zine reaches the public eye, in late January, the first quote will be, too. Short memories, dull wits -- I can think of no other reason why a brute like Trump is kept in public office.

Here's a *kind* answer. There’s a childishness about Trump. It could be affecting, were his intentions sincere and his awkwardness a sign of earnestness. But Trump is neither sincere not earnest; he is completely narcissistic and entirely governed by arrogance and prejudice and impulse. The gossipy *Fire & Fury* seems to be absolutely right on when it comes to his character or evident lack of same.

Administration flacks are trying desperately, as this zine is written, to cleanse and clarify Trump’s slur on Third World countries and their peoples. *What we actually want in our immigration policy*, they say, *is to restrict it to those who can help the United States*. Same song in a different octave. What Trump and his toadies want is to keep people and nationalities away who are different from themselves – in other words: black, brown, Hispanic, African. People in other countries, especially “shitholes,” aren’t fooled. The best among ourselves aren’t fooled either.

An intelligent and accomplished SF fan visited the Greenhouse recently, and when we talked of Trump stated her belief that the damage he's done America is irreversible. Our standing with our allies and with the world has been tragically lessened. Our adherence to immutable core beliefs established in our founding documents is increasingly seen as dubious and convenient. Our word is doubted. Our resolution and our ability to see beyond the immediate is crippled. Our respect for law has been made hypocritical. Trump has, in the year of his presidency and the year of campaigning before it, brought America down. Our friend doubted we'd ever pull out of his bog. I hope she's wrong.

A 1980 Trump interview showed recently on *Today*. Trump was a young real estate entrepreneur, calm, articulate, bright, a sensible dreamer with smart ambitions. Then he became a star. Then his craziness and crudity came forth. Then his senility blossomed. It's a disaster for America ... but you know, I can't help but add: for him, it was a real shame.

But the real shame, to return to the immigration issue, is how we Americans so blithely split families and expel people who have lived their lives here. It's the act of a frightened, petty, ugly people. How could a people who tolerate such atrocity produce a man like John Young (see below) and encourage his accomplishments?

Mary Ann van Hartesveldt reports on FB that Arkansas Senator Tom Cotton has sent forth "cease and desist" letters to constituents who have contacted his office. He threatens to sic the Capitol police onto them. That's our government these days.

Our frontispiece: *Guernica* as the Middle East was, pre-Trump. *Then* they thought they had troubles.

And in the midst of all this lunacy, we are asked, **Oprah** for President? The faddish groundswell began with her fist-pumping speech at the Golden Globes. I hope it fades quickly; as a cultural figure, Winfrey is invaluable, a popular voice for progressivism and truth, but the presidency would swamp her, as it has Trump and would any inexperienced, unqualified amateur. No, the American left does indeed need a candidate with charis' and pizzazz, but someone with substance – governmental and political swack. Enough with the figureheads.

Who else, upon hearing about the Hawaii "here-comes-a-nuke" false alarm, flashed on *Fail-Safe*?

#Metoo movement update. Larry Nassar, U.S. Olympic team doctor, whose "treatments" included digital penetration and – this *really* blasts my brain – masturbating on girls' feet, recently faced dozens of young women he'd molested prior to his court sentencing. The prisoners at whatever institution they send him – guys with *soft spots* for child molesters – will have little left to play with; the ladies reduced him to Play-Dough. But ... did vague rumors of messing up cost James Franco an Oscar nomination this year? Calm *down*, people. I want Kevin Spacey and Al Franken back!

Losing the mystery writer **Sue Grafton** was a multiple shame; her Kinsey Millhone mysteries were spirited and funny, and surely the last volume, to be entitled *Z is for Zero*, would have tied up Kinsey's loose family ends and been, like the previous 25 novels, a cool, classy thriller. Grafton and Millhone will be much missed. And speaking of reading ...

Robicheaux – Don't be fooled by the title, with its implications of finality or summing up. Typical Dave Robicheaux adventure, full of grand metaphor, haunting visions, bitter feminism, villains the detective has known all his life, alcoholic violence and sudden death. A very crazy sidekick, a humorless over-educated hero, a colorful psychopathic killer – and a book very tough to set aside. It's typical Robicheaux, all right.

Artemis is the second novel by the author of *The Martian*, and it's a serviceable hard-SF adventure, as a petty criminal deals with political corruption in and around a future lunar city. If it wasn't written by Andy Weir, I wouldn't be at all disappointed, but since his first novel was an instant classic, now I can only consider it a sophomore slump.

An annual whoop-de-doo around here are the **Oscar nominations** – here are my preferences (underlined) and picks (**boldface**).

Picture: *Call Me by Your Name*, *Darkest Hour*, *Dunkirk*, *Get Out*, *Lady Bird*, *Phantom Thread*, *The Post*, *The Shape of Water*, ***Three Billboards...*** The original and thrilling *Dunkirk* was the most unique war film I've seen in many: no insipid romances or corny backstories, just brave men surviving under fire. The arch dramedy *Three Billboards* is a surprise frontrunner, winning all the late awards, righteously funny, and beautifully acted. Ain't it cool that *Get Out*, a terrific horror film made for pocket lint, should get a nod?

Actress: A thousand phooies on the Academy for ignoring Jessica Chastain's splendid performance in *Molly's Game*. **Frances McDormand** will win her second Oscar for *Three Billboards*, as she's cleaned up the precursor honors. No preference: I'm p.o.ed about Chastain.

Actor: Is it **Gary Oldman** who is so convincing in *Darkest Hour* or is it the makeup? It's a fine performance – the actor disappears into his role – and a fascinating history, as Winston Churchill assumes his authority as Prime Minister. I'd rather Oldman win his Oscar for playing Smiley in *Smiley's People*, but this will do. Most likely threat is *thread* – Daniel Day-Lewis in *Phantom Thread*. DDL has announced his retirement, y'see. I've seen none of the others.

Supporting Actress: I suspect *Mom* herself, **Allison Janney**, will repeat her many wins for *I, Tonya*. I just hope the glory doesn't jure her away from her show, the best comedy on TV. I've only seen Octavia Spencer, in *The Shape of Water*, and it wasn't much of a role for her.

Supporting Actor: Possibly my favorite category. Great to see Willem Dafoe (*The Florida Project*) back at the top of the profession. I showed my literature class a film of *Oedipus the King* with Christopher Plummer, mentioning that he would probably be up for an Academy Award for *All the Money in the World*, in which he replaced the shunned Kevin Spacey; he is. Richard Jenkins, a member of the *Six Feet Under*, was flamboyant in *The Shape of Water*, but the movie disappointed. Of Woody Harrelson and **Sam Rockwell** in *Three Billboards* ... well, you can see what I think. No preference, but I do love this category.

And speaking of movies ...

Molly's Game. The star of this marvelous movie isn't the immaculate Chastain, but the rich and hysterical script, which *was* Oscar-nominated. Rosy commented that it had the best voiceover since *Goodfellas*. Kevin Costner is excellent and Chastain *beyond* excellent. Funny,

insightful – and terrifying, when Jessica’s title character, running a high-end poker game, runs afoul of the mob and one of their worst – unimpressed by her celestial beauty – beats her unmercifully. It’s an obscene moment. Fear not: Molly, Chastain, and the movie, overcome all.

The Post. A perfectly good movie about the Washington *Post*’s campaign to publish the second installment of the Pentagon Papers – but nothing to match *All the President’s Men* in suspense or *Spotlight* in passion or profundity. Tom Hanks’ Ben Bradlee is a terrific performance – I understood the character better than ever before – but Meryl Streep is just Meryl Streep, and her feminism seems after-the-fact, heavy-handed and at the last, typical Spielberg corn. Rosy, seven years with the Palm Beach *Post*, loved the newspaper minutiae. I wished they’d spent more time in the Supreme Court, and shown the multi-colored ceiling.

The Last Jedi. Yes, the story seems cribbed at times from the best bits of the first three movies. But that makes *Last Jedi* an homage, with compelling bits that will carry the franchise on into the next film and the ancillary flicks (like *Rogue One*) alongside it. I like the agonized love/loathing between Ray and Ben. I like the new girl brought in as friend and foil for Fin. I like the bad-boy played by cinema’s best bad boy, Benicio del Toro. And I *love* this movie, paced well, acted splendidly, full of respect and affection for the life-changing, genre-enriching series to which it belongs. Forty years a fanboy! May the Force be with *you*!

The Shape of Water. Like the reviewer on NPR, I really wanted to love this movie, but ... I couldn’t. It’s a fairy tale of a mute cleaning woman who falls in love with the *Creature from the Black Lagoon* – literally – is sweet but very slight, and the clichés mount up. Still, look for it to win Best Director for Guillermo del Toro.

Men like **John Young** have always represented something good and fundamental about the United States. These are rational dreamers, unafraid explorers, *doers* – engineers from a country of engineers. Give them a task – even a deadline for landing on the Moon and returning safely – and they would figure out a way to do it. Young was the ninth man of 12 to do so. He came to MagiCon and delighted our Worldcon crowd with a spiffy speech; my father-in-law knew him at Cape Canaveral and admired him greatly.

They are passing from us now, the dreamers with a hard edge, the guys who *made it happen*, the tail end of that phenomenal generation who awoke in a time of poverty and despair and brought us victory in World War II, the middle-class society that outpaced and eventually erased communism, began the Civil Rights movement and the Space Age. And using technology now considered primitive, and a spirit that’s invested in us since we first found these shores, took us to the Moon. Which is to say, anywhere mankind wants to go.



In 1970, while I was a student at Cal and the grossest of neofans, Chelsea Quinn Yarbro asked me to serve as official photographer at the Berkeley meeting of the Science Fiction Writers of America. There the Nebula Awards for the previous year would be presented. Quinn clued me in – under sentence of death should I talk – on the winners, and I was told to snap as many candid shots of the authors as I could. Those curious about my efforts can view many at www.challzine.net, *Challenger* no. 20, “Photoing the Nubble-Bubble”.

As you’ll observe there, I had no problem photoing winners Harlan Ellison (“A Boy and His Dog”) and Chip “Samuel R.” Delany (“Time Considered as a Helix of Semi-Precious Stones”). But the author of *The Left Hand of Darkness* – the novel even then revolutionizing science fiction’s relationship to literature, and which won the Nebula that night was definitely camera-shy. I felt like a stalker taking her picture. When friends Mary Donahoe and Helen Kelley came up from my co-op dorm, though, I felt like a big deal pointing out Ms. LeGuin to their awed gaze.

Ursula had no choice but to submit to photography after the awards – as you see. She autographed my copy of *Left Hand* “To a Fellow Berkeleyan”. (Her father was the great Berkeley anthropologist Theodore Kroeber.) As for the minor brouhaha that followed Harlan’s “Nebula switch” gag that night, reported in *Again, Dangerous Visions*, I saw the whole thing. It happened just as he describes it in the intro to “The Word for World is Forest”, down to Ms. LeGuin saving a tense situation with a soothing smile.

Ms. LeGuin was on the brink of a career that would bring high respect and prestige to the fields of science fiction and fantasy. She collected our genre’s awards by the lot and won a National Book Award in recognition of the overwhelming excellence of her work. She achieved an importance not only with us but with literature in which SF/fantasy shared, a debt we can never repay. And tonight, January 23, 2018, we mourn the end of a life, but not the extinction of its light. Light is the left hand of darkness, and it goes on.



Light is the left hand
of darkness
Darkness the right hand
of light

Two are one
Life and death
tying together
like lovers in summer
like hands joined together
like the end
and the way

—Tormer's Lay