

SPARTACUS #46

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Prior to the middle of February of this year, Baen editor, publisher and part owner **Toni Weisskopf**, a close friend of mine since the 1980s, had been honored as the Editor Guest of Honor at the 2021 World Science Fiction Convention, DisCon III. On the 15th of February, author Jason Sanford posted a piece on his [Patreon](#) entitled “Baen Books Forum Being Used to Advocate for Political Violence”.

The article inspired a strong response addressed to the Worldcon committee. On February 16, DisCon posted a statement on Twitter “We acknowledge the community’s concerns regarding Baen Books’ forums. We are monitoring the ongoing situation.” You notice that the *entirety* of science fiction fandom is considered involved. That same day, Toni, who took *no* active role in the Baen forum, Baen’s Bar, **announced** that the site would be going on an indefinite hiatus.

Nevertheless, on February 19, the following post appeared on Facebook:

[DisCon III - The 79th Worldcon](#)



DisCon III absolutely condemns the violent and hostile content found within Baen Books’ forums. The behavior shown goes against our policies on inclusion.

Therefore, we have removed Toni Weisskopf as Editor Guest of Honor for [#Worldcon2021](#).



We want to thank our members for their feedback on the matter and their patience while we worked to take action. Read our full statement on our website 📌

http://bit.ly/GoH_Update

That same day, DisCon Chair Bill Lawhorn sent forth a press release:

DisCon III condemns the violent and hostile content found within Baen Books' forums. We also cannot condone the fact such content was enabled and allowed to ferment for so long. We want to make it clear abusive behavior is not, and will not be, tolerated at DisCon III. Such behavior goes entirely against our already established policies concerning inclusivity and creating a welcoming environment for our members, which can be found here: <https://discon3.org/about/inclusion/>.

We knew simply saying those words with no actions to back them up would be unacceptable. Too often, we have seen individuals and organizations say they are on the right side of issues yet do nothing to act on those words. We knew we had to take a hard look at our own position and take action based on our established policies.

As a result, after discussion with her, we have notified Toni Weisskopf we are removing her as a Guest of Honor for DisCon III.

We know this decision was not as quick as some of you would have wanted, and we understand your frustration. Our committee's leadership was always in full agreement that there was a fundamental difference between the values Worldcon strives to uphold and the values allowed to be espoused on the forums-in-question.

In the entire eighty-plus year history of our community, no Worldcon has ever removed someone as a Guest of Honor. To remove a Guest of Honor was an unprecedented decision that needed discussion, consideration, and consensus. Those mechanisms sometimes do not move as fast as some would want, and we thank the community for its patience.

We also want to let everyone know that we are not planning on adding additional individuals to our Guest of Honor list.

We wish to thank you all for taking the time and energy to send us your feedback. Many of you have strong opinions on this issue, and we want everyone to know all your voices were heard and considered when rendering our decision. We will always welcome your feedback, questions, suggestions, and concerns, and we will continue to listen, reflect and act to ensure our members feel welcome at DisCon III.

If you note DisCon's words towards those who provided "feedback," the implication is clear: the convention based its decision on outside "community" pressure.

Not that I expect it to make any difference, but I condemn DisCon's action so fervently that – even if COVID and our personal finances permit, and even though Rosy and I *yearn* for the in-person company of SF fandom, our people – I may avoid the event. Toni means that much to us, and especially to me.

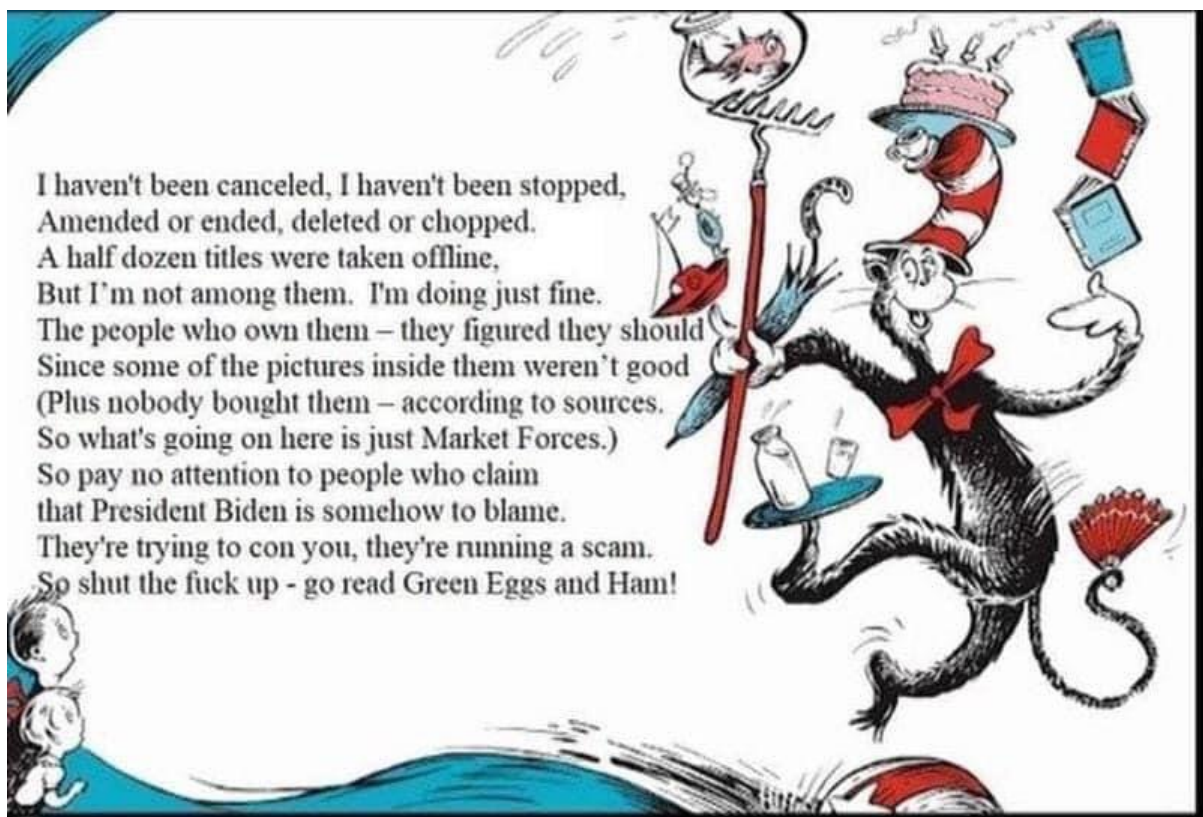
Toni and I have never talked politics because we disagree on the topic so absolutely. Who cares? We're *family*. That's the major reason DisCon's actions offend me so profoundly. I cannot remember when I met Toni, but I do remember her as she was: 17, wearing blue jeans a hobo would trash, intelligent, ambitious, adorable. Years later, Rosy and I were guests at Toni's home, and I've been a guest in the Baen offices. When Hurricane Andrew threatened New Orleans, Toni let my special neighbor and myself crash overnight at her Birmingham home when we fled the city. I was and am proud that Toni trusted me enough to pen an article for *Challenger*. I know her daughter Katie. Toni and I explored Jackson, Mississippi together during a DeepSouthCon in search of a suitable Rubble trophy to (tease) honor her husband Hank Reinhardt's return to fandom, and when Hank passed, she graciously allowed me to speak

at his funeral. She served as Official Editor of the Southern Fandom Press Alliance. She is one of two Southern fans to be hailed with all three of the DeepSouthCon awards: the Rebel for distinguished contribution to our regional fandom, the Phoenix for her professional work, and the Rubble – so she wouldn't get a swelled head about it.

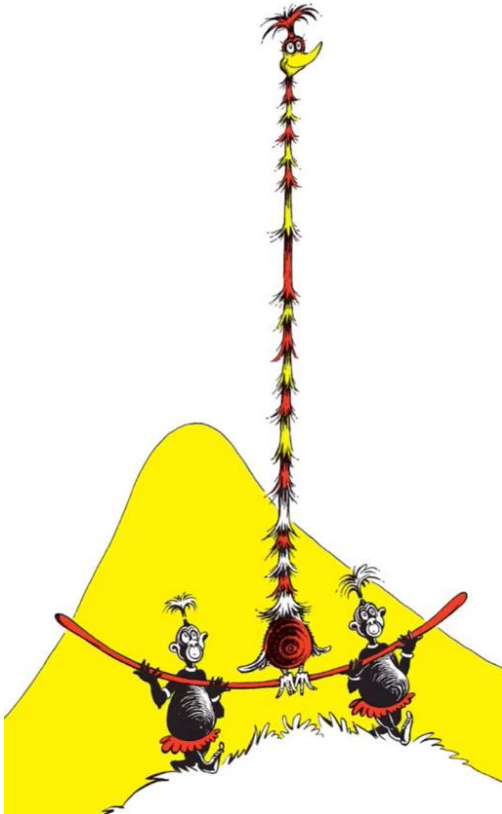
So: what about the offending posts on Baen's Bar? Conspiracy nuts and schizoid fools talk armed rebellion, and the last remnants of Trump's metastasized psychosis erupts in fantasies of Democratic pizza-parlor pedophilia. After January 6th of this year – a date which will, like 9/11, resonate forever in the nation's conscience – all decent people are rightfully disgusted by right-wing hyperbole and wary of its repulsive bravado. We don't censor such palaver in the United States, but we certainly counter it and yes, DisCon, condemn it – but a just society targets that condemnation narrowly, and keeps its counteractions focused and fair.

It is *not* fair to hold Toni Weisskopf responsible for drivel expressed on Baen's forum. A forum is a vehicle for *audience* opinion, not the sponsor's; you don't punish a person for words she didn't express and probably wasn't even aware of, especially since she silenced the forum when informed that brutes had taken it over. DisCon was both reckless and feckless. The Worldcon handled this situation very badly.

Check out Eric Flint's comment on this matter at **EricFlint.net**. As one can expect from an articulate professional, it devastates DisCon's insult and plucks the arms, legs and wings off Sanford's article. I can only add a final word of advice. *The concom should reinstate Toni Weisskopf now.*



"Dr. Seuss Enterprises, the organization that owns the rights to the books, films, TV shows, stage productions, exhibitions, digital media, licensed merchandise, and other strategic partnerships, announced on March 2,



2021, that it will stop publishing and licensing six books. The publications include *And to Think That I Saw It on Mulberry Street* (1937), *If I Ran the Zoo* (1950), *McElligot's Pool* (1947), *On Beyond Zebra!* (1955), *Scrambled Eggs Super!* (1953) and *The Cat's Quizzer* (1976). According to the organization, the books 'portray people in ways that are hurtful and wrong' and are no longer being published due to racist and insensitive imagery."

To repeat: six books for children written and illustrated by Dr. Seuss (**Theodor Seuss Geisel**) decades ago have been withdrawn from sale by his estate. The reason given was the alleged racism of some of his drawings. (This ← one, for instance.)

I sincerely doubt the artist's intent in any of the instances cited was to degrade any ethnicity. Geisel was simply using artistic tropes of his time. It is in the present day, a day in which touchiness and offense are accepted and common, and the so-called "cancel culture" is dominant, when this illo is said to depict blacks as "monkey-like." Those who will call Dr. Seuss racist dishonor a life devoted to delighting and educating children, and should be countered, strongly.

Several things to notice. There's been no suggestion that the protested antique images affected or offended anyone. The Seuss estate is taking its action out of its own sense of propriety. I think it's extreme. Entire books priceless value are being

"erased" due to one or two insignificant parts. Even though the company took its action voluntarily, fairness and sense demand we object to having artistry removed from the shelves which has and could still heartily benefit the children of the world.

But, say the publishers, a black kid *might* see the caricatures of Africans and be hurt. The "Chinese man" with chopsticks in *And to Think That I Saw It on Mulberry Street* might, just *might* make some child of Oriental background feel alien. Of course that's intolerable – especially in these days.

The solution seems obvious to me: *revise* those images. *Reissue* the books. Disney did this with potentially tricky depictions in some early Carl Barks comics. The Seuss people can do the same now. No kid should be denied these works, especially *Mulberry Street*, Dr. Seuss's first book (1937), a celebration of a child's imagination and joy as far from the bitterness of racial bias as this keyboard is from the Moon. We need to acknowledge the good in works from the past, not just the objectionable bits from our current point of view. There *is* good there, tremendous, irreplaceable good, and it needs to be cherished and rescued.

Or as a friend, [Lew Wolkoff](#), wrote on Facebook

I read the research paper that supposedly was the reason for dropping those Dr. Seuss titles. It's an absurd bit of writing, the sort that Heinlein railed against in *TO SAIL INTO THE SUNSET*. The authors state their conclusions, derive their premises from them, and then use these premises to prove their conclusion.

Here are some examples.

Dr. Seuss was anti-Japanese. He called for the bombing of the country and the killing of thousands. Of course he did this during World War II, when such actions were the expressed policy of the U.S. and its Allied Governments. He also worked on one of Frank Capra's "Why We Fight" films about the necessity to occupy Japan at the end of the War. He said that it was to teach the Japanese about

democracy, something the authors seem to oppose. No one seems to have worried about the occupation in 1945-1946, and going in to teach the Japanese that a democratic government, rather than a military fascist regime seems a lot better than going in to beat the shit out of those slimy yellow bastards, as some people at the time thought at the time.

Horton, of course, the authors say, was Japanese. Of course, at the same time they say he was a "Great Whiter Father" figure. He forced those poor Whos in Whoville to make all that noise to be recognized. I guess it would have been better for them not to assert themselves and allowed themselves to, thus, be exterminated by beings who didn't believe that the Whos existed.

In AND TO THINK THAT I SAW IT ON MULBERRY STREET, a boy conjures a fantastical circus parade out of his own imagination. Too bad that two of the figures were a Chinese man eating with chopsticks and an Arab man wearing a turban and riding a camel. Seuss originally wrote "a Chinaman who eats with sticks." Some years later he changed this to "A Chinese man who eats with sticks." That, however, isn't enough. Both figure are stereotypes and, thus, evil. The context of the figures is a circus parade, so they are naturally costumed, and one is riding a camel. I don't see either as denigrating. And I wouldn't if another figure was wearing a yarmulke and tallis. IT'S A CIRCUS PARADE!

They also come out against THE CAT IN THE HAT who is somehow a human in blackface doing the evil deed of invading a house to play with two bored children.

The authors claim to have a good motive for their vitriol. They want to downgrade Seuss and all other white authors of children's books in order to find a place for black, brown, and yellow authors of such books.

That authors exist is a given. There were several reviews of black authors of kids' books in my local paper -- and in the *NY Times* during Black History Month. And these included at least a couple brown and indigenous authors.

And good authors should always be praised and their works recommended. Kids are also likely to read books with stories about people like themselves, and ANYTHING that gets kids to read more is a good thing.

But nitpicking white authors to build up writers who are other than white is NOT a good thing. It denies good work to ALL kids, and, more important, it alienates white adults who remember Seuss as a fun read.

I'm not saying that we should say that these black, brown, etc. authors are as good as white writers. What needs to be said is that here is a list of good writers, some are white, some are black, some are brown, etc. Their works are fun to read. Take a look, You might not like the first one you pick, but they're all worth a try.

It will gratify all to know that I have no opinion *vis-à-vis* the former **Mr. Potato Head**. I do have one in regards to another victim of the cancel culture, Warner Bros.' amorous cartoon skunk, **Pepe le Pew**.

My comment is bifurcated between my affection for the silly 'toon and my horror at hideous reality. To that reality first.

My first solo trial as a defense attorney was a heavy one – an aggravated rape case. So was my last one. I lost the first, won the latter, and in between handled one serial rapist (the story will appear in my memoir, *P.D.*, RSN) and many – as they say on *Law and Order: SVU* – “sexually based offenses.” I’m no psychologist, but I came to understand the crime, a little. Rapists are violent sociopaths. They’re the enemy of all women – and of the concept of society itself. I defended those so accused out of duty, but I *hate* the crime.



I number rape victims among my friends. Their suffering fills me with rage. One lady, whom I love like life, decided not to prosecute her case even though she knew who the offender was. She just wanted to forget it. Stirred to my guts, I offered to kill the guy, and at the moment, I meant it. She smiled. “Guy” she said, “you could never kill anyone.” She wasn’t mocking me as weak – she just knew me.

Despite my court experience and knowing victims, I have never been able to accept the idea of ours being a “rape culture.” It reminds me of those ridiculous and insulting rants from the ‘90s that declared that all men were rapists and male children were taught to disrespect and use women and other reprehensible lies that poisoned a vital and challenging conversation. Rapists are aberrations. Men who love and enjoy women are the reality. True, we make nuisances and fool out of ourselves in pursuit of women’s *luv*. And we get informed of it and razzed for it by characters like Pepe le Pew.

To lump our man Pepe in as part of “the rape culture” is stupid. It trivializes the crime. It demeans its victims. It insults the innocent. It smears the very concepts of satire and laughter. Because *that* is what Pepe is: a satire. He directs laughs onto idiots. *Us*. And that’s OK with me.

And now, a very special guest columnist ...

Meghan and Harry by Rose-Marie Lillian

Since the Oprah Winfrey interview with Meghan Markle and Prince Harry I’ve had the uncomfortable feeling that something is missing from the conversation.

Specifically Meghan noted that their son Archie didn’t qualify for “protection.” Let’s tackle this question in two stages: First, what exactly comprises “protection” for a royal and how much does it cost? Second, why doesn’t Archie qualify? And why does it matter since Meghan and Harry both qualified for protection until recently? Let’s do a bit of research, shall we?

Protection for a royal varies. One example is Princesses Eugenie and Beatrice, whose protection a few years ago cost £500,000 annually (about \$250,000 each). Now they provide their own. The expense may help explain why Princess Eugenie now lives in Frogmore Cottage on the grounds of Windsor, which is otherwise well-protected.

The total cost for protecting qualifying royals is estimated by the Home Office at £50 million a year (about \$69 and a half million). That includes royals without ongoing protection, who generally do get on-the-job protection when on official engagements.

So what does the cost include? It funds a police task force, the Royal and VIP Executive Committee (RAVEC), that includes public figures other than royals. In Eugenie’s case, the cost of guarding her when she attended Newcastle University included “salaries, accommodation and living and travel expenses of two full-time bodyguards,” according to the May 7, 2011 issue of the *Daily Mail*. Clearly a family of three would cost more.

So why doesn’t Archie qualify? It’s a question of line of succession. Harry, once third in line to the throne, is now sixth, and Archie is seventh. Harry and Meghan’s next baby will be eighth.

Wait a minute! I can hear you say, doesn’t Princess Anne, the hardest working royal, get protection? And is she, like, not even in the top 20? Yes, she is actually. When she was born she was second in line, displaced with the births of Andrew and Edward. Now she stands at 15, soon to be 16, because she was born in 1950, before the Succession to the Crown Act of 2013 eliminated gender bias. Thus her grandniece Princess Charlotte, is fourth, while Archie is seventh.

Okay, you may wonder, what does all of this have to do with Archie’s protection? Well, the Home Office pays for security depending on the line of succession and what the royals do. Princess Anne has spent her entire life as a working royal (what that means is a whole different discussion), and so is

entitled to protection even though she stands at 15. Beatrice and Eugenie, on the other hand, have never been particularly good at their royal roles, have stepped back entirely as senior royals, and so no longer receive protection from RAVEC, even though they stand at nine and ten.

Now that we've cleared that up, what about Archie's title? Why isn't he a little prince, like George and Louis? Especially since he stands at seven, while Beatrice and Eugenie are nine and ten, yet they have them?

Ah, this is a thornier thicket.

It has to do with the number of generations, apparently, and what is considered a "working royal." Beatrice and Eugenie are Queen Elizabeth's grandchildren, whereas Archie is a great-grandchild. But wait! I can hear you say, aren't George, Charlotte and Louis also great-grandchildren? Well yes, yes they are. So this is the thorny part: it's also a matter of choice, to a good extent, by the royals themselves, particularly the Queen and Prince Charles. William is second in line, so apparently it wouldn't be seemly for his children not to be titled royals. Also, titles are passed down only through male heirs, thus neither Anne or Eugenie have titled children, neither do those children qualify for RAVEC protection.

What Meghan (aka the Duchess of Sussex, aka Princess Henry) was getting at in the interview with Oprah is that if they had remained working royals they would still be getting Home Office protection. It was their decision to "step back" that caused them to lose official protection. But that decision came after they were informed that little Archie wouldn't receive protection anyway. Even though they (and probably him) have been the recipients of death threats, probably caused in part by their brutal treatment from the British tabloid press, which both the royal family and the Home Office have tended to ignore. Which, again, is a discussion for another time.

When Queen Elizabeth dies, or should she renounce the crown in favor of Charles (unlikely unless her health really goes south), then everyone moves up a notch. And Archie automatically gets a title, because the grandchildren of the sons of the monarch all become titled royals if they weren't before. (The monarch is the exception to the title-by-gender tradition.) And he automatically will be entitled to Home Office protection, as will his sister.

So what is the uncomfortable feeling I've had about all this? It's that protecting Harry, Meghan and their growing family should be something the UK takes seriously, as they currently don't seem inclined to do. The royals are threatened on a regular basis, and members of the family have been either murdered (Lord Mountbatten) or had close calls (Princess Anne and the Queen herself at least twice).

I think it's going to be pretty interesting to see how things play out when the time comes. A fantasy writer with a monarchy in their world-building, should stay tuned. Just sayin'.

Let's segue into less teeth-gnashing topics now ... unless you are, like me, *religiously* devoted to ***THE OSCARS***. The weird year just passed had a strange effect on cinema, but not a bad one. Because films are being made for both widescreen and TV broadcast, close-ups seem more plentiful, the films therefore more intimate, the stories therefore more personal. Seen mostly on the tube through streaming services, the 2020 nominees number nary a *Lawrence of Arabia* or *Ben-Hur* among them. This year's Academy Awards reflect that tendency, and perhaps that is a relief.



Nomadland is probably the winner of two of the six “big” Oscars (to be presented April 25), having won accolades for Best director and Best Picture in all but a thimbleful of the critics’ competitions and preliminary awards shows. It’s a strange, unique, deserving film, treating the community that lives on the road, place to place, job to job, season to season with respect, compassion, empathy. There’s little plot to the film, little drama, and few professional actors – Frances McDormand and David Strathairn are the only recognizable faces; the rest are real folks. It’s a melancholy film: Fern, the central character, spends a lot of time listening to sad life stories and waving goodbye. But the movie is profound and humane and stirring. After I saw it, I had to withdraw and study the sky for a while.

The contender with the best chance of upending *Nomadland* is *Mank*, David Fincher’s excellent story of Herman Mankiewicz and the writing of *Citizen Kane*. I teach *Kane* to all of my English Comp classes – the kids would probably never see it otherwise – and consider it one of the great works of western art. Gary Oldman is magnificent and the guy playing Orson Welles is almost the equal of Christian McKay in *Me and Orson Welles* and Vincent D’Onofrio in *Ed Wood*. The scenes at Hearst Castle – which we’ve visited – are particularly excellent. I wish they’d shown more backstage *Kane*, however the bits of dialog I recognize spouting from “Mank’s” creative voice are thrilling to hear.

As a ‘60s brat who has met some of the particulars, I loved *Trial of the Chicago 7*, but *The Sound of Metal* didn’t cut it for me. Of the flicks I have yet to see, *Minari* is getting great ink for its tale of immigrants setting up a homestead in Arkansas, and might benefit from (1) the new appreciation for Korean language films from *Parasite* last year and (2) revulsion over recent anti-Asian attacks ... *Promising Young Woman* is the thriller of the year and again, drawing great response ... *Judas and the Black Messiah*, like *Chicago 7*, carries the strength of the sixties and the BLM movement ... and *The Father* is said to be such a demonstration of impeccable acting and tragic theatricality that it would be mailed Oscars in advance any other time. Still, all seem overwhelmed by the tale of the voluntarily homeless. Prediction and Preference: *Nomadland*.

Speaking of *Nomadland*, Frances McDormand won a slew of critics’ awards for *her* powerful, quiet performance, one rich with *unstated* feeling – brilliant stuff. I’d call her a lock if it wasn’t for Andra Day’s loudly passionate turn in *U.S. vs. Billie Holiday*. Again, superb. She copped the Golden Globe in an upset, and I suspect that signaled a trend. Ordinarily I’d advise bettors to look to the Screen Actors Guild Award – it’s the best predictor for the Oscars – or the U.K.’s BAFTAs. Day, however, is nominated in neither. Oddsmakers online like Carey Mulligan for *Promising Young Woman*. Remember her in *Dr. Who*’s “Blink”? Prediction: WTFK. Preference: Day, for the moment.

Chadwick Boseman had one tremendous and terrifying speech in the film of August Wilson’s play, *Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom*, and, having died tragically in 2020, has sentiment on his side. The gamblers cited above consider him a sure bet, and as with many great theatrical moments, that speech won me over. Certainly I prefer it to Riz Ahmed’s turn in *The Sound of Metal*, which I found kind of one-note (hahaha). I would prefer a more sustained turn to win the award, Gary Oldman in *Mank* for instance. I have yet to see Steven Yuen in *Minari* – he’s not fighting “walkers” – or Anthony Hopkins in *The Father*, a performance many are calling legendary. So: Prediction: Boseman. Preference: dunno.

The supporting categories? I predict Daniel Kalmya, winning lots of praise for *Judas and the Black Messiah*, over a non-actor, Paul Raci in *The Sound of Metal*, and Sasha Baron Cohen in *The Trial of the Chicago 7*. Raci’s previous critics’ wins I don’t understand, and Borat – excuse me, Cohen – was less impressive than other members of that cast. Supporting actress is a strong field this year, but with trepidation I believe that Glenn Close will win both Oscar and Razzie this year for her role in *Hillbilly Elegy*. I think AMPAS feels guilty about passing her over for *The Wife* a year or so ago, and will tap her, even though the present film is getting shit reviews. These predictions, no preferences.

Skunked this year were two of the year’s funkiest films: *First Cow*, a poetic paean to the everlastingness of true friendship, and *Da 5 Bloods* and its cast, which I found to be the best of the BLM-themed movies of 2020. I wonder if the Oscars will be awarded by ZOOM this year; find out April 25.

Oscars, royals, cartoon skunks ... I know, I know. In these first months of 2021 issues of heavy importance have landed on we the people, and this issue of *Spartacus* has, except for the Weisskopf insult, spent its pages on matters any adult would consider minor. Fentanyl-laced counterfeit pills are poisoning naïve college and high school kids. The border is busy with “unaccompanied minors.” Rand Paul and other psychotic Republicans are attacking Dr. Fauci for encouraging mask-wearing despite the downtrend in COVID infections, calling it “theater.” New York Governor Cuomo is excoriated for being a grab-ass with subordinates. More mass shootings. And the FBI is hot on the trail of more January 6th scumbags. Important business, the usual stuff of *Spartacus*. But this time, just for a rest, I’m going to pass on these terrible things.

No I won’t! I need to write about one hideous current event and what it means, in my judgment (and that of my shrink, if that matters). This is the atrocious massacre in Atlanta massage parlors of mid-March. Because six of the eight victims were Asian, media commentary has tied the killings in to the racial violence inflicted on Asians because of the pandemic, known to Trumpys and other mental defectives as “Kung Flu” or “the Chinese virus.” Truly detestable – but not, methinks, the cause behind the “spa murders.”

Seems here that the oaf responsible for the Atlanta crimes didn’t act out of racial hatred or Trump influence. He acted out of psychotic sexual guilt. We know the killer was a member of a fundamentalist sect, without significant human contact. Ten bucks says he’d been a customer at those parlors, had bought sex there, had tormented himself with the conflict between the teachings of his cult and the delights of his sin – and had struck out against the objects of the need, whom, as a sociopath and psychotic, he could not see as human beings.

It’s the Jack the Ripper mentality, the conviction that sexual need is shameful, that sex itself is shameful, and that violence is an acceptable way to cleanse oneself of sinful, shameful feelings and actions. In other words, I think it far more likely that the POS who attacked the spa workers was motivated by lust and guilt and a complete lack of human empathy, not by racial animus. Psychosis of that sort is well-known but, as it lacks a political dimension, isn’t much discussed in the media. Methinks this is wrong: mental illness is a pandemic as broad as COVID and, as we see, every bit as tragic and deadly. It is something real and horrible that society needs to deal with as surely as it does ethnic hysteria. Yet we hide from it.

LETTERS, LETTERS OF COMMENT ... SOMETIMES WHEN I READ YOU I GET A HUGE PAIN IN MY NECK ...

John Purcell

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Well, well. At long last I finally have the inclination to compose a letter of comment on one of your issues of *Spartacus*, which have been coming out on a much more regular basis than my personalzine *Askew*. This does not really bother me, but I am reasonably close to finally completing the 33rd issue by the end of the upcoming weekend. Other things like teaching online courses, dealing with a monster polar vortex settling over Texas, and generally dealing with life have kept me busy, yet I still find time to occasionally write LOCs, start a short story (yet another new idea that has potential), play guitar, and work on fanzines.

Since you cranked this issue out within days of Joe Biden's inauguration as the 46th President of the United States of America, I naturally have some thoughts on that, especially now that we are one month into his term. Like you and millions of other American citizens I expelled a great breath of relief when that day finally ended. Sadly, the fallout is not over, and will not be over at all, I am afraid. The Republican party, as you well know, is infighting like crazy, practically splintering before our very eyes

into its Trumpnistas and moderate Republicans. If that divisiveness continues that will not bode well for any possible GOP recovery in the 2022 congressional and state elections. At the present time Vegas prognosticators are laying odds on the creation of a third major party, this one being moderate republicans. Personally, I would not be surprised if moderate democrats joined them as well. I foresee the Democrats eventually splitting, too, into a Progressive wing and a moderate wing, only not as rapidly as the GOP. My political leanings are progressive independent and align much more with the Green Party than the democrats.

Therefore, while I am pleased that a seemingly well-reasoned, intelligent man with compassion now resides at 1600 Pennsylvania Ave NE in Washington, DC, I do not really trust President Biden because he is a career politician, and I am very much in favor of term limits across the board: executive, legislative, and judicial branches at the federal and state levels. One of the next issues of *Askew* may touch on that very topic and why I am not totally happy with Biden and Harris, so be forewarned: in general, I do not trust **any** politician, without exception. They all have agendas, and some are decent, some are middle-of-the-road, while others are evil-hearted, despicable despots with delusions of grandeur.

Speaking of Donald Trump, he is and always has been a vile, disgusting, narcissistic egomaniac with no moral compass whatsoever - and those are his good points. Sadly, his one term presidency has revealed the underlying problems that have always bubbled beneath the surface of American society: the xenophobia, bigotry, and racism; the love of power and money no matter the cost; the fear of otherness. This nation has long been described as a melting pot of cultural differences, but it seems to me that we need to put the pot back on the fire to cook a lot longer, uncovering it from time to time to stir things up a bit in order to cook out the impurities. I doubt we shall ever rid ourselves of them, either.

Anyway, I shall stop there on that topic and leave it for my own zine.

You mention football, in particular your beloved New Orleans Saints. All I can say is that is your prerogative. Professional football doesn't appeal to me, preferring college football over it, especially a handful of teams I closely identify with, notably my alma mater of Iowa State University. But pro football? Nah. I can do without it. My three favorite sports (in order) are ice hockey, baseball, and soccer; a runner up sport I like to watch is rugby, and I still enjoy actually doing bowling when I get a chance. But the NFL? Fuggheadaboutit.

I know you like movies a lot, and of all the ones you mention here the only one that I really want to see is *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*. Besides boasting a great cast, its subject matter greatly appeals to me. I do look forward to seeing that movie. Books? Lately I have been catching up on magazines, and right now I am halfway through the current issue of *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*. Reading a handful of stories before bedtime is my go-to way to relax at night.

And finally you discuss Covid-19. I am glad you and Rosie have been vaccinated, but Valerie and I have not been able to get ours, and probably won't until late spring, or most likely summer, because the idiotic leadership of the state of Texas has not approved teachers for getting any of the approved vaccines yet. Once they are, we will be doing so, and hope that by then the vaccines will have some proven positive results to support their application, especially when we see that recipients of these vaccines have not grown hands out of their foreheads or some other orifice. One can only hope.

Lloyd Penney

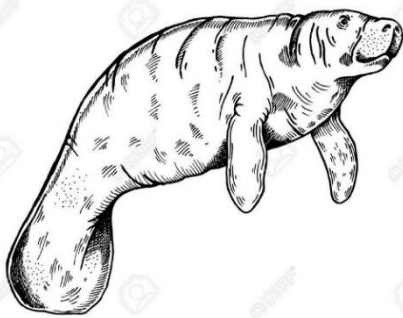
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Thank you for *Spartacus* 45. Yvonne and I are finally getting our lives on the go again...we were diagnosed with COVID-19 near the beginning of the month, and we have been spending a lot of time sleeping, and not much time eating, with nearly no appetites. We each have lost 12 pounds so far. I think Yvonne has fully recovered, but I am still experiencing feverish periods, and food doesn't quiet

taste right yet. As I have said online, it's not a diet I recommend. We have felt pretty wretched, but we are both feeling better, and I am feeling good enough to try to get caught up with fanzines.

Our sincere thanks and good wishes go to Joseph Robinette Biden Jr. and Kamala Devi Harris, both a great breath of fresh air after four years of the stench of the Trump regime. Are there any plans to prosecute Trump for the money he made in violations of the Emoluments Act? His daughter and son-in-law are suddenly \$650 million richer; that can't be legal. Or has the whole Trump crime family and all of their toadies been given a legal free pass?

I will try to be more positive, even as the death toll from COVID-19 hits 500,000 in the US. I have read that Biden has done more good for the US and the world in his first month in office than Trump ever did in four years. Tomorrow, Biden will have a virtual, yet first official foreign leader meeting with our Justin Trudeau. It is good to see things getting back to normal. Trudeau worked with Biden when Biden was Obama's VP, so I am sure good relations will resume, and some trade problems Trudeau had with Trump will be simply and quietly resolved.



I look positively, yet, can't help think of January 6 (we watched on CNN), and saw Trump's attempted coup in action. Of course he lied to all of his supporters, and Q-Anon is slowly splintering as the lies they were told are finally realized. Trump has been impeached twice, and cleared twice, and that's a shame. Trump's supporters are shocked to see Biden using Air Force One, but they still expect Trump to be inaugurated in March?

I was surprised to find out how many off-duty police officers and soldiers, and how many of each who were retired, involved in the Washington coup. So many of them there never expected to be caught, but they were among the first.

More politics...there's so much fanish politics just turning my stomach. George Phillies seems a decent sort [*Very much so*] ... but [sought new] N3F members [on] Gab and Parler, two chat sites long-associated with extreme right-wing causes. This eventually lost George one of his oldest friends, David Speakman, a member who had just celebrated 40 years of work and membership with the N3F, who when he saw references to those two afore-mentioned sites announced his resignation. Then comes the dis-invite as Discon III editor GoH of Toni Weisskopf, because (I had read) she could not or would not actually edit the harsh comments of Baen's Bar, Baen Books online chat group. Back when I had money to spend, I thought of myself as an international fan, and could go to Worldcon to have some fun. The politics started with the various Puppies groups, and continues onwards. We haven't been to Worldcon in a decade now, and we have no inclination to ever go back. I now think of myself as a local fan outside of fanzines, and even that is being soured by some mouths who sass at me for being the only name in the local of some fanzines. [*Fan politics is as old as fandom, as Julie Schwartz informed me when I wrote an article about him, and as all saw at the first Worldcon, with the Breendoggle, and so on and so on...*]

My last letter... the election result was so much a relief, topped by the Democrats getting the Senate. With the pandemic still raging, Biden is using the Executive Order to make things happen, but I expect that will change once the pandemic is under control. I expect that the CBC will name one of its broadcast buildings after Alex Trebek, probably the one in Sudbury, but I also hope his name will be seen in the main building in Toronto. His last years were so professional and courageous.

Jerry Kaufman
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Somehow 45 issues of *Spartacus* have come, and nearly all gone, without me commenting (so far as I can recall). Considering the number 45's association with our recent President, I'm surprised you didn't skip it altogether.

Of course I'm glad that the Biden and Harris ticket won, but we'll still have to keep a critical eye on the new administration. I'm disturbed that they chose our Commissioner of the Employment Security Department, Suzy Levine, to run the federal agency. Our state's department has had really bad problems this past year – the state was scammed out of hundreds of millions of dollars, of which about half was not recovered. To make things worse, the department pivoted from being too quick to approve claims, to being so careful that thousands of legitimate claims were delayed for week or months as they were investigate (or possibly ignored).

It seems possible, or even probable, that Levine got the federal position because she and her husband are major Democratic donors. This is not uncommon, of course, but it's still a potential problem just as it was in the Trump administration.

Some of the movies you praise are ones I mean to watch someday. I like Frances McDormand, for example, so *Nomadland* is on my list. I've known about Ma Rainey and August Wilson's Pittsburgh Cycle for years, and want to see what Chadwick Boseman is like in a straight dramatic role, so *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* is near the top of my mental list. (You're welcome to make jokes about me being mental.) [Boseman has one magnificent moment in *Ma Rainey* and has industry regret on his side. I'll bet he wins. See my comments *supra*.]

Your remembrance of the *Challenger*'s fatal flight included the first mention I saw of the new commemorative coin for Christa McAuliffe and the flight itself. Thanks for featuring that, and I look forward to holding one of those coins in the near future. [Proof editions are running \$79@ from the U.S. Mint, uncirculated coins for \$74. I'll get one – someday.]

Rich Lynch
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I'll pass by all the apt descriptions and opinions you provide about the election aftermath, including the insurrection, and instead zero in on your comment that: "I could use some Hugo nomination advice. Looming over the ballot are Stan Robinson's *The Ministry for the Future* and the much-anticipated *Ready Player Two*. Any films to compete with *The Invisible Man*?" The deadline for submitting Hugo Award nominations is looming as I write this, so all I can do is tell you about things I voted for. First of all, I rarely nominate in the fiction categories as I don't subscribe to any science fiction periodical. But this year I did read (and like) one novel and the beginning of another which are eligible, so I'm nominating both: William Gibson's *Agency* and Stan Robinson's *The Ministry of the Future*. I'm looking forward to completing Stan's novel later this year. As you'd probably expect, most of my nominations were in the fan categories including yourself for Fan Writer. [Many thanks!] But I'd also like to point out one really good TV show which has not, as yet, gotten a lot of press in the science fiction community. It's *Zoey's Extraordinary Playlist*, and especially its season-ending episode "Zoey's Extraordinary Dad". I'll let you IMDB it for details. Suffice it to say that it was the best new TV show of 2020. By far.

*Who wants to bet that the "Snyder Cut" of **Justice League** gets Hugo-shortlisted next year? And that there will be controversy over whether it's an **original** 2021 release?*

To close, I have this day (March 23) endured a colonoscopy. The scopery was a painless procedure (they clobbered me with anesthesia) and the doctor observed no problems aside from a single diverticulum. At age 71½, that's normal, and absent catastrophe, I may never need another such scope. Hooray for age.

And to *finally* close, best of recoveries to *Faruk von Turk*, a.k.a. *Justin Winston* of New Orleans, after an Event in early March, and all praise to *Annie Winston* for getting our boy through it intact. No more scares like that, guys!