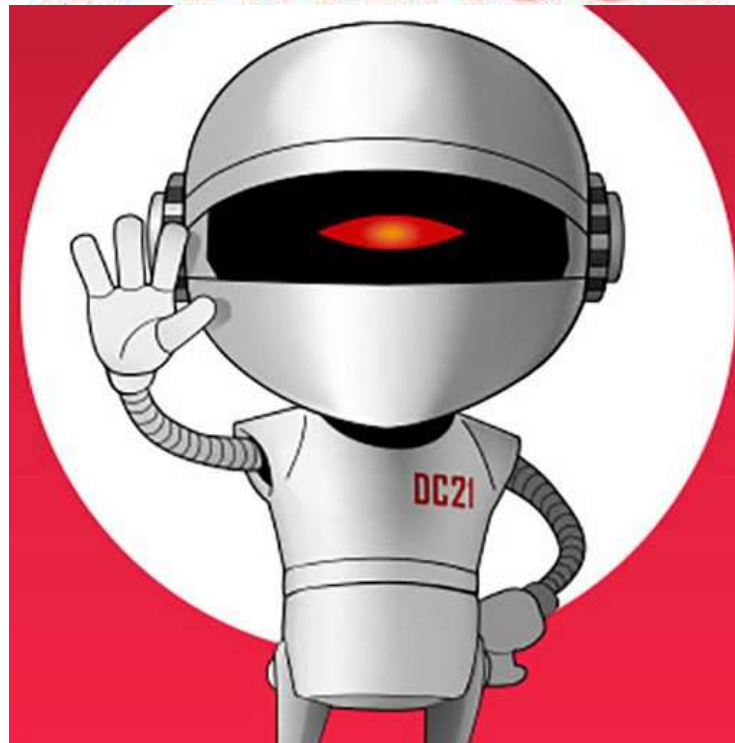


SPARTACUS



★ No. 53 JAN 2022 ★

GUY LILLIAN III

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And so at last the benighted DisCon III is past and gone. It has left a few tokens of its passage behind, controversies that have not faded. To wit:

The weird victory of the Chinese bid for the 2023 Worldcon – 2000 votes appearing out of thin air – reminds me of the Sasquan Hugo kerfuffle. As with that year, I'd love to know where those thousands of last-minute votes came from. Then, they had the immensely beneficial effect of elevating *The Three-Body Problem* to our Hugo pantheon (China's Guests of Honor include Cixin Liu) and effectively silencing the Puppy bloc. Here, by bringing fandom into a dictatorial state, the 2021 Worldcon may well have placed fandom's inadvertent stamp of approval on dictatorial actions, such as the country's stranglehold on personal expression. That is, of course, intolerable – but also of course, it's too late to do anything about it.

I suggest fandom keep a close eye on the Chengdu concon and see if there is any sign of government interference with the event or with communications to or from Chinese members. If there is ... well, what then?

A Facebook comment by **Pat Cadigan**, reprinted by permission: *[I'm] relieved that the [Natalie Luhr] tirade against George RR Martin did not win the Hugo. I am still baffled as to how a screed like that could have been nominated in a category that has included complex, book-length works of biography, scholarship, art, and other far more worthy examples of associated work.*

I don't care what you think of George RR Martin. I don't care if you think the author was right. That's not my point. A blog entry or single article is not in any way equivalent to the winner, which is a translation of Beowulf by Maria Dhavana Headley. Translating requires a lot more care, actual knowledge, and hard work than merely venting your spleen. That would-be polemic was the Donald Trump of Hugo nominations: unworthy.

Of course I (GHLIII) agree. It's both terrifying and disgusting to see how close – second place! – the *sluhr* against George RR Martin came to winning the Hugo for Related Work. The author of that piece, and the convention, are guilty of reprehensible rudeness to SF's most prominent and influential writer, just as Jeanette Ng's meandering insult to John W. Campbell Jr. was a calumny on an entire era in the evolution of the field. Terrible for the community. I suggest that the rules for the Related Work category be evaluated and tightened.

Another rhubarb to come from DisCon III involves the sponsorship of the Hugo ceremony by Raytheon, a corporation with significant military ties. Corporate sponsorship has been no-go in Worldcon matters since Day One, and Raytheon's "defense" connections are anathema to a huge percentage of the genre. So egregious is this breach that Mary Robinette Kowal, the figurehead chairman of DisCon III, issued a fulsome apology after the fact, and pledged sizable donations to organizations promoting peace. My source for info on DisCon III says that poor Kowal had absolutely no idea of what she was doing; I'm afraid this seems obvious.

My contact also told me there was nothing about fan history on the DisCon program. I have to wonder why and ask the inevitable paranoid question: Was this a simple oversight, or was it a subtle declaration that the fandom that came before the woke era is being erased? I can only testify about the one panel I joined by ZOOM, Cheryl Morgan's "What do you expect from a fanzine?" which I enjoyed and which was entirely apolitical.

The same person averred that the Hugo toastmaster was cheered by DisCon's callow crowd for – again – disparaging John W. Campbell, but another trustworthy source says this was not so. My guy said there were but 11 masquerade entries – in the Drew and Kathy Sanders days the contest would have barely begun at that point – but featured good work. COVID was on everybody's mind and masks were required on everyone's face. I salute the con for its follow-up postings on positive COVID tests at the convention and its tough ,masking policy, though the actions against violators edged into the draconian – prominent Sfer Martin Wooster lost his membership for 3 mask violations – I trust he was refunded an appropriate portion of his fee. And though credit for the fine 2021 edition of the Worldcon apa, WOOF, should go to Official Editor Rich Lynch rather than the concom, fine it was.

Okay, so fandom is done with DisCon III. What now? Chicago? Rosy and I love Chicago, both as a city and as a Worldcon spot – after all, we became engaged at its Museum of Science and Industry in 2000. Let's see how its concom handles the normal hassles any Worldcon faces and the special challenges that will inevitably come up. Let's see if they treat their membership with trust and courtesy or fall back on the cheap power plays of the woke. Let's see if they regard SF fandom as strong enough to celebrate and welcome us all.

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LETTERS & FETTERS

Rich Lynch <rw_lynch@yahoo.com>

Here you go again, publishing new issues of *Spartacus* faster than I can comment on them. I'll start with your observation in issue #49 that: "The Republicans have attached themselves to the image and the ambition of Donald Trump." It's worse than that – the most ambitious Republicans seem to be in a contest for which one of them can jam his or her nose the farthest up Trump's ass. Commit sedition? No problem, if it curries Trump's favor. Subscribe to batshit crazy conspiracy theories? If it results in a shout-out from The Donald, the crazier the better. Echo every Trump lie about the 2020 election? Hey, it gets a Trump endorsement! I'm pretty well convinced that none of this insanity is going to end anytime soon. I think the only thing that will put a stop to it is if Trump becomes the Republican nominee in 2024 and then figuratively gets his head kicked in by the voting electorate even worse than what happened in 2020. And drags down the Republican undercard candidates with him. This looks to be another bumpy ride.

In issue #50 you note the 20-year anniversary of the nine-eleven attacks on New York and Washington. Unlike you, I didn't make the trip to Ground Zero in New York until years afterward. But I was in D.C. on the day of the attack. My workplace back then was in one of those big, ugly government office buildings near the National Mall and after it became obvious that something horrible was taking place, I went over to a westward-looking office and I could see large amounts of black smoke rising up just beyond the Potomac, only about two miles as the crow flies from where I was standing.

And speaking of crazy conspiracy theories, I remember hearing people claim (falsely, as it thankfully turned out) that there had been car bombs up on Capitol Hill, at the State Department, and at the Old Executive Office Building. There was also a report that the subway was not running, but that was also false. If it had shut down, I'm not sure how I would have gotten home. It wasn't until I was able to finally watch the news coverage, once I did get back home, that the utter enormity of the disaster finally sank it – until then I had been running on internal automatic pilot from the shock of it all. And the next day it was back down to D.C. for another workday, in a world that had changed around us all.

Lloyd & Yvonne Penney <penneys@bell.net>

The story of Gabby Petito and Brian Laundrie didn't get much coverage up here, mostly because we don't really lionize our online stars. We should be concerned about the possibility of domestic abuse, but we should also be concerned about making the assumption that the boyfriend was abusive. The facts will tell us all, but they don't seem to be available. I hope those facts can still be found.

Bill Shatner got to do the ultimate Captain Kirk cosplay. Yes, a waste of money and resources, but also yes, a fantastic trip none of us would pass up if it was ever offered to us. I will never see *The Eyes of Tammy Faye*, for I felt both Bakkers were completely slimy and self-righteous. Yet, Jim Bakker is still around, spewing Christian religious hatred, as do many others, including Billy Graham's son, to our astonishment and disgust.

I think Joe Biden is doing a good job, as best as he can, given the romance too much of America has with the Rethuglicans. Some are also looking at Joe Biden as carrying on too many of Trump's policies, and Joe seems unwilling to work with allies on some industries on the rise, like trying to replace gas guzzlers with electric cars. I hope Joe will turn things around, but I also kinda hope that Kamala Harris will be the candidate next time ... we need dedicated women to kick some butt, seeing the old white men in charge seem unable or unwilling.

This is yet another time when the journalist in me: just wants to turn the boobtube off, and forget the news for a little while. Concentrate on writing, reading and making stuff, getting ready for our next show.

[On *Spartacus* no. 52:] I have some real reservations on the quality of American justice, certainly different from the rule of law and what seems right, and those reservations come from the result of the Kyle Rittenhouse case. If only he could be tried again...ah, but that's double jeopardy. No matter what he did, the fact that he travelled through two states to do it says something about his intents. The fact his mother drove him to that state to do it shows her as an accessory. None of this would have happened if some form of gun control could be instituted. Just madness all around. A Congressional medal? Gimme a break. The kid saw what he wanted to do as doing what patriotic Americans should do, and once he did it, he cried and vomited. We all put such enormous stresses on our children to grow up too soon, and for the boys, Be A Man.

Recent events might mitigate my opinions...your attorney-general bolstering the January 6th investigations, Mike Pence and his team have all pledged cooperation with those investigators, and the father and son team who killed Ahmaud Arbery were today (possibly yesterday) sentenced to life in prison. Some justice after all

The judge sentenced the Arbery defendants by the book, but his statements showed that he also spoke with outrage and passion. I'm still very uncertain about condemning the third defendant in that case, but at least he has the possibility of parole.

What am I grateful for? A loving wife, and warm place to live, food on the table, a calm country, the opportunity to direct my editorial career into SF&F for the last three years now, a good constitution, the ability to get fully vaccinated, friends to communicate with if not actually meet...all that's off the top of my head. I suspect much of Canadian fandom hasn't made it through this pandemic... as conventions rise again in the US and UK, already any major conventions in Canada, what few are left, are mostly cancelled or postponed. Ad Astra, Toronto's own SF litcon, is once again postponed to 2023. Vancouver's VCON may never be held again. What few cons are left are either professionally staged, or are major anime cons. Canfandom may be on its last legs, and I hope I am wrong. Maybe that's as good a reason as any to look further into becoming a science fiction editor.

Ray Palm <raypalmx@gmail.com>

I agree with you that billionaires launching their rockets into space isn't a sane use of resources. They should be taxed to provide the funds to help society at large, the people that don't fall into the privileged category of the 1%. One must note that Jeff Bezos won the Heinlein Prize. RAH predicted that private industry would one day lead the way into space.

I agree: the staunch liberals are screwing things up especially in Congress acting like babies wanting to have everything their way or nothing. Well, they'll end up with nothing if they don't compromise and play the long game. Utopia wasn't built in a day. Baby steps you babies.

I can't believe they're still mucking around about investigating the January 6th cuckoo coup. It's now eleven months! I don't believe in a rush to judgment but this is the extreme opposite, molasses flowing in the dead of winter. It's freaking obvious what happened. Get on with it or Trump will be re-elected thanks to your bureaucratic dawdling. Bureaucracy will kill democracy.

As for Biden-Carter comparisons I hope he doesn't become another Ford and pardon Trump if the Don is finally nailed.

David Schlosser <schloss17@suddenlink.net> protests "[Fans] hostile to athletics? Certainly not all SF fen."

Touche. You and Howard Rosenblatt are avid golfers, I started an issue of this journal with the great and terrible Jimmy Connors, and elsewhere you list a busload of baseball aficionados

among our number. Even the greatest of men and fans, Julie Schwartz, cut out from the first Worldcon to see the Yankees play and Lou Gehrig retire.

Bill Plott <wjplott@aol.com>

I suppose I have a vague awareness of sports being something fans might view with disdain but it's not something that sticks out in either of my fannish incarnations. In fact, I seem to recall at Pittcon in 1960, there was a lot of enthusiasm expressed for the Pirates in the World Series.

See my reply to Dave Schlosser, above. As the author of books on baseball, including a great account of the Negro leagues, you know the fallacy of my statement better than most. I must have been on bad fentanyl when I said SF fans weren't sports nuts, too.

But back to the present, you wrote, "I enjoyed the hey out of the Tokyo Olympics." During the summer of 1976, my life was in a state of disintegration. I had been fired at The Tuscaloosa News and the only income I was pulling in was a pittance as a graduate assistant in 17 journalism at the University of Alabama. And while I was too naïve to realize it, there was an undercurrent that should have told me my marriage was becoming unstable. The summer Olympics were a happy bonding for daughter Mary and me that summer. We both continued to remain Olympics fans over the years.

I do not know how she feels about the Olympics now, but my interest nosedived in 1982. The admission of professional athletes was an affront to me. Amateurism (which was always a tenuous thing) was dead. The Olympics were no longer the same. I fervently hoped the Dream Team would get killed in basketball. Of course, their dominance was off the charts.

One positive did come from that, though. The Grateful Dead's outfitting of the cash-strapped Lithuanian basketball team was a helluva story. It made deadheads out of Nancy and me. We started listening to the music, and gratefully caught them in Birmingham in 1995. Sadly, Jerry Garcia died a few months afterward. Back to the Olympics. I really have no interest in them. I will watch some of the Winter Games occasionally. The skiers are kind of amazing. But the real draw for me is – wait for it – curling. I don't know why, but I am pulled to that sport. Watching the sweepers do their thing in a match one night, I said, "Hey, that might could be my Olympic sport." To which Nancy replied, "I don't know why you say that. You sure don't do any sweeping around here."

The music industry lost two great ones with Nancy Griffith and Charlie Watts.

DISTRACTIONS FROM THE HEAT DEATH OF THE UNIVERSE

MOVIES

Having followed the awards since 1957, **the Oscar season** is always a big deal for me. The 2021 nominations come up in mid-February and will undoubtedly include the following, viewed since my last issue.

The Power of the Dog has the same title as one of Don Winslow's terrific crime trilogy about the Mexican drug cartels, but Jane Campion's film is set in western times. But it is no simple genre piece. Adult themes of homosexuality and betrayal are strong, if subtle, and the performances are world-class. Look for the film, its director, Benedict Cumberbatch, Kirsten Dunst and Jodi Smit-McPhee to ride the Oscar lists. They've already been snatching up critics' awards left, right and behind. Deservedly so.

Especially Benedict Cumberbatch. His character ranges from brutality and cynicism to wistful hope and naïve longing. This extraordinary actor has never been better. And if you don't believe this guy is versatile, check out the incandescent *Electrical Life of Louis Wain*, in which he portrays the great and crazy cat artist with humor, sensitivity and respect. Back when the

Academy Awards were first presented, actors could be nominated for more than one performance in a year. Janet Gaynor won Best Actress for *three* movies – *Seventh Heaven*, *Street Angel*, and the magnificent *Sunrise*. If that were still true. Cumberbatch would have the '22 Oscar bagged. He might anyway.

I was heartily entertained by *House of Gucci*, which accomplishes something I never thought could happen – it made me *like* Lady Gaga. She's excellent in this film about the family that revolutionized fashion. (I used to walk past Gucci's Manhattan store and gawk at the men's shoes in the window.) I enjoyed her and the classy cast so much that I didn't realize until later that each of the actors *seem to be performing in a different movie*. Adam Driver plays it straight. Jeremy Irons – among the greatest performers in the language – is subtle. Al Pacino and the unrecognizable Jared Leto go over the top and are hilarious. Such a mess should make for an incomprehensible movie. Somehow, though, it all congeals into an entertaining package – a mix of metaphors for a mix of styles. Still fun.

Being the Ricardos is also fun, even though it shows Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz at crucial and dangerous moments in their careers and relationship. As usual in this time, the cast is excellent – Nicole Kidman, Javier Bardem, J.K. Simmons, Nina Arianda – and utterly convincing. Suggestion. Since one of the crises hitting *I Love Lucy* and its creators is Lucille Ball's pregnancy, go to YouTube and look up the classic scene where Lucy Ricardo drops the baby bomb on Ricky. When you realize that scene could stand in for a zillion Greatest Generation wives telling their WWII vet husbands that *we Boomers* were on the way ... well, good flick on a great and revolutionary show.

Winner of both the Dragoncon and Hugo Awards in 2021 is *The Old Guard*, a Netflix shoot'em-up starring an unrecognizable Charlize Theron as the leader of a squad of immortal soldiers. They slaughter trainloads of anonymous bad guys in the service of ... something, but also save innocent lives because they somehow know that some people they save will do medical miracles in the future. Or do I have that right? The villains of this tale are medical researchers who might use their immortal genes to help mankind. Of course such swine must die. Anyway, of all the movies that have won Hugos, this is the least dependent on FX and the least ... well, the least.

Don't Look Up is the most debated SF movie of late, a sly, funny yet glum satire on modern society. A magnificent cast crowded with Oscar winners – DiCaprio, Jennifer Lawrence, Mark Rylance, *Streep* – and a hysterical premise borne of SF cliché. An ELE asteroid is plunging towards Earth. *The Big Eye*, *When Worlds Collide*, *Meteor*, *Lucifer's Hammer*, *Shiva Descending*, *Armageddon*. *Deep Impact*, *Melancholia*, "Panic in the Sky", that great *Superman* episode from 1953 ... we've seen this before. It's funny how many of these works use the imminent catastrophe as a MacGuffin for the story they really want to tell. For instance, *Don't Look Up* real purpose is to mock modern society for its insistent triviality and inability to face reality. And though the film goes on too long, this parody – resembling in many ways *Dr. Strangelove* – works extremely well. I predict a Hugo nomination.

The true reason I've been slaking off on *P.D.*, my memoir of my cases as a public defender, is an important plot point in *Goliath*. The streaming miniseries, in its 4th and last season, stars Billy Bob Thornton as a brilliant but screwed-up trial lawyer taking on the monsters of our time – in the most recent season, Big Pharma. It's good stuff, burdened only by occasional meaningless action sequences, but it raises a question about the most sacred aspect of lawyering: *client confidentiality*. In my book, I've changed all the names and revealed nothing told to me in confidence. Still, after watching the best attorney show of the last many years, I can't help but wonder: even as a retiree, even with no actual names in print, would I be violating a vital canon? I've asked the Louisiana Bar for an opinion and received, in answer, confusion: it's not a

question they often handle. Anyway, *Goliath* is a fine show, great for the profession and the viewer.

The Real Charlie Chaplin aired on HBO around year's end, a documentary about the great comedian's life and art. It's a terrific look at his bio, creative process and the lonely torments of genius ... and both heartbreaking and funny as blue bejasus. It's the best thing we've seen as the year changes ...

BOOKS

The Greenhouse and its subsidiaries – like me – subscribe to an app called Giftster, which allows one to list the items they want for Christmas. My list, this year, was short – I wanted my 20x40 inch print of *Guernica* framed. I discovered this to be unlikely when we priced the job and found the most discounted cost surpassed two hundred bucks. So much for that.

So I threw a haul of books onto the list. After all, as the meme says, *What do we want? More books. Where will we put them? We don't know.*

I added seven books to my list, ranging from the complete short stories of H.G. Wells to Greg Benford's latest (*Shadows of Eternity*) to the newest winner of the World Fantasy Award (*Trouble the Saints*) to my third bio of Robert E. Lee to a book on horse dressage by one of my high school teachers, renowned in that field. I got the lot.

I have, as of this writing, read one, *Alien3*, the novelization (by Pat Cadigan) of an unfilmed screenplay (by Bill Gibson) for the third *Alien* flick.

Alien/Aliens star Sigourney Weaver didn't want to do the movie, having graduated in her mind from science fiction into more mainstream, respectable roles. Therefore, the producers planned a film *without Ripley* – and Gibson wrote one. His script leaves Ripley in a coma, sends Newt to Oregon to her grandparents, and has Hicks and Bishop of the colonial Marines step into starring roles fighting Xenomorphs on two mutually hostile space stations.

And then Weaver signed on and the producers had to cobble together a different scenario in which Weaver's Ripley was again the star. Flailing like lunatics off their meds, they pitched an afterbirth of a movie to the feet of fans. The film of *Alien3* is one of the biggest insults ever visited onto our genre. Nihilistic, ugly, contemptuous of its audience – I have yet to forgive director David Fincher, despite the brilliance of his later work (particularly *Seven*, an all-time classic.) Anyway, SF wondered what might have been. Here it is. And it isn't very good.

The book is weak and slow, with a confusing scenario and no distinctive characters. The action is dull and saddled with too much interior musing by the characters. There's much too much reliance to lines from *Aliens*. It's boring. It does perform its most important task: it cancels out Newt's movie death. Not much is done with the best character in *Aliens* but her cameo is at least living and breathing. For that reason I cannot entirely condemn *Alien3*. And as the possibility of a sequel involving Newt is left open here, I have to hope it has better action, a better sense of its characters and a better respect for the fandom that loved the first two films in the franchise. (As you may know, *Alien Resurrection* was originally supposed to star Newt. Wonder how that would have gone...)

And after scoring all those books for Christmas, what do I do but immediately order from eBay three novels by the brutally brilliant crime writer, Shane Stevens. (I'm now missing but one of the mysterious author's books: *Way Uptown in Another World*. Only \$168.00 on eBay!) I'm in the midst of *Go Down Dead*, Stevens' first novel, a grim piece written from the point of view and in the vernacular of a Harlem street thug – violent, utterly realistic, as romantic as a kick in the throat, insistently true to its subject. Stephen King did genre readers a great service when, in an afterword to *The Dark Half*, he gave serious chops to Stevens' uncompromising perspective and literary courage.

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Thanks to the Los Angeles *Lambs*, who couldn't hold a lead if it were stapled to their effing hands, my New Orleans **Saints** are out of the NFL playoffs. They – we – can carry moral victories a'plenty from the 2021 season: recovery from a catastrophic 5-game losing spasm, weathering COVID, maintaining a team after having to field a dozen different quarterbacks, twice teaching the league how to get to, and beat, the Greatest of All Time, handing the godlike Tom Brady his godlike head ... But do any of these count as those La-La Land *gusanos* stumble to a L against SanFran, after leading them *twice*? Time again for the eternal Saints mantra: *Just wait till next year*.

Again, our **Paris – London – Edinburgh** trip looms closer and closer, and again, we would love to see some fans in those venues. C'mon, folks – *I* may be as likable as COVID, but *la belle* is the Queen of Charm. We'll be in Western Europe on April 4 for three weeks. Let us hear from you!

I've obtained a copy of *The Realist* #50 through the kindness of a seller on eBay – and the website which offers many issues for free. Why mention it? The parodic magazine of the sixties contains a short, sharp satire by **Theodore Sturgeon**, and my interest in **Challenger #43** – my special issue on the great SF spirit – is revived. I've established a new deadline – my birthday, **July 20**. I have ideas for articles I am anxious to share, and I would *love* to hear yours. C'mon, people; don't make me write the whole thing by myself!

They were SPARTACUS ...



Funny, caring lady. *Vale*, **Betty White**, friend to all critters everywhere. This last century wouldn't have been the same without you.



Also noting with regret the passage of **Sidney Poitier**, actor and advocate. I thought his films suffered after he became a symbol of "the good black man," much preferring *The Defiant Ones*, *The Blackboard Jungle*, *Raisin in the Sun*, *Porgy and Bess* and *Lilies of the Field* to preachy (and treacly) fare like – gack – *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner?* Still, when he became a symbol, he handled the role well: a gentleman and a professional and a champion.

A SUPPLEMENT

I add these lines to *Spartacus* #53 as I blunder through the worst cold of the last twenty years. No kidding; this is miserable, so miserable I let my sister-in-law give me a COVID test – just in case. Negative, but I’m bugging Uncle Joe Biden for one of his freebie kits. I fear breakthrough – my chest literally aches from coughing, my eyelashes stuck together with gooey gunk, and I feel like 65 miles of I-95 on a sudden blizzard day. Bleah.

Naturally, I haven’t gone anywhere of note during this phlegm-happy misery, simply slouched in front of the idiot box. Saw the season close of exasperating *Yellowjacket* – seems they could have found some young actress who *somewhat* resembles Juliette Lewis to play her as a teenager. No flies on Juliette, but it’s impossible to imagine her *ever* being a hot voluptuous blonde. And it might not have hurt to find a coherent story, too. Also saw the saga of *Dexter* come to its end, a shuddering exercise in (in)human nature and free will. I liked the hey out of the way Deborah was depicted – we’d’ve missed her – and son Harrison’s ambiguous fate.

All well and good, but what can compare to some hearty Shakespeare. *The Tragedy of Mac- ...* The Scottish play, as interpreted by Joel Coen, has been drawing lots of literal and figurative ink of late, with the emphasis on Coen’s sets and lighting, and appropriate praise being leveled upon Denzel Washington and Frances McDormand in the title parts. Alas, on these matters do my criticisms focus.

The film’s b&w footage, stark lighting, minimalist sets are effective, all right, an obvious *homage* to the Orson Welles version of the play and Gregg Toland, genius cinematographer. The look of the film is brilliant, but overwhelming. With the exception of McDormand, I found the cast all but lackadaisical in the delivery of its lines. To my astonishment and disappointment, Denzel is the worst such example. The guilt, passion, greed and hypocrisy of the Thane of Cawdor are so muted that he barely seems interested. Likewise the actor portraying Macduff. Their climactic encounter should rage with -- here it comes – sound and fury, but instead, signifies nothing.



Finally, a farewell to **Yvette Mimieux**, Weena in the boomers’ *The Time Machine* and in my judgment, the prettiest face in all of movies. If she is what the year 800.000 holds for us, then bring on the morlocks; she’s worth it. Till we meet again, fair lady.



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