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A ZINE OF OPINIONS AND
BLATHER

← FROM THE *SPARTACUS*
BALLET BY ARAM
KACHATURIAN

I

Je suis Charlie! Mostly.

*The West may not be at war with Islam,
but Islam is at war with the West, with
democracy, with women, with other
religions, with itself, and with modernity
in general.*

■ **Gregory Benford**

Once again, I'm lost with admiration for an ally of the United States. As one, the people of France demonstrates resilience and courage as they recoil from Islamist fanatics. I insist that Al Qaeda and minions such as the men who attacked Paris stand for no faith. They stand for laziness, cruelty, hypocrisy and sociopathy. Islam is for them only an enabler, a vehicle on which to hang their personal madness. They pervert their faith. Remembering the Muslim police officer they butchered on the streets, and listening to the protestations of his devout family, should tell us that. Should tell us a few other things, too.

The west, for all its clumsiness and venality, does not wish other peoples ill, but so often we fail to understand them. We should try. Which is why, though I support the rights of the satirical magazine attacked by the faux-Islamist lunatics, I also criticize its choices. It should not have run the cartoons depicting Mohammed and should not do it again – they cut too broad a swathe.

It's a clear standard in Islam not to depict their Prophet in images of any kind. Doing so offends not only the religion's wacko wing, but every Muslim – quite possibly including the man who died trying to protect the *Charlie* staff. As a gesture to decent Muslims, for plain politeness if nothing else, I would not run such material.

We stand for freedom of expression. It's the cornerstone of our western civilization; it's us. But it does no damage to that right to respect other ways of thought. Even those belonging to people among whom reside our enemies. A free voice is essential. An open ear is smart.

II

Speaking of *us*, the release of the U.S. Senate report on the Central Intelligence Agency's "enhanced interrogations" of suspected terrorists, which the real world calls "torture," called to mind one of the best lines I've ever heard voiced in a movie.

The movie was *Save the Tiger*, and Jack Lemmon was pillow-talking with a hippy girl –about America. She named her heroes – all rock stars – and he named his – all baseball players – which somehow led him to Vietnam. Which in turn led him to recall the ditch at My Lai. And that led him to wonder, to himself, “What *about* that ditch?”

Yeah, what about it? What does that ditch – where William Calley and other GIs slaughtered Vietnamese villagers, including old people and children – say about Americans as a people? And what does it have in common with CIA torture in Guantanamo, 45 years later? Or the public’s reaction to Kent State? Or the internment of *nisei* citizens after Pearl Harbor? All surge forward when we think of immoral public events in American history. What *about* that ditch?

We tend to explain away our mistakes and our sins in this country, and I’m just as guilty of this as anyone. There was a wave of support for Calley when the dum dum was courtmartialled, but I’ve always thought of that as revulsion against what people saw as scapegoating. There was a surge of approval for Richard Nixon after Kent State, too, but I hearkened that, even then, to class resentment against youth in general and privileged college kids in particular. The internments after Pearl Harbor were popularly cheered – even the Supreme Court backed them up. But the backing didn’t last for any of those ghastly American mistakes. After the fact – after the damage was done – Shame set in. Just as revulsion against CIA torture is setting in now. We’re saying, this ain’t us. This is not who we *really* are.

But like I say, these corrections come after the fact. Why – how – could these horrors happen in the first place? What in the makeup of the American self made it *possible* for Calley’s soldiers to fire into that ditch? For the National Guardsmen at Kent to gun down people with whom they might well have grown up? For a perfectly decent population to

Such evil did not come about as a matter of considered policy. Almost always, when we think things out, our policy – our decided pattern of behavior – is benign. We believe in law, in due process, in human rights. It’s the best thing about America: we were created based on standards we set down at our founding and adhere to, now. We know our course; we may veer off, but we correct it. But *what about that ditch?*

That ditch represents something we have to face, a truth about ourselves that we have to deal with. When frightened, threatened, frustrated, desperate, disgusted, or simply *really excited*, Americans has demonstrated time and time again that *we are capable of anything*.

So we Americans need conscious and consistent self-control. We need to stay true not only to the better angels of our nature, but to the promise and hope which were the foundation of our independence and, we hope, wish and try, our identity. Top to bottom, we need to obey the law.

III

We see no shame as the Ferguson-born police protest cycles down, overwhelmed by other tragedies, other atrocities. Something akin to serious public conversation on the topic of rampant police killings of black people had begun, an *uber-serious* point to make about cop culture and race in America. A debate the country needed was beginning, borne by the horrible whitewash of the “I can’t breathe!” murder in New York, necessitated by a building sense that something was very wrong in America and had to be addressed.

At which point a maniac – wholly unconnected and probably completely unconscious of the Ferguson killing – lurched from the shadows and murdered two cops in their squad car in New York City, a psychopath armed with a hatchet attacked policemen simply standing on the street, and in Paris, an innocent cop fell victim to butchers hiding behind the religion they all claimed. A necessary national debate was deafened by the outcry at the acts, forgotten in mourning for the innocent patrolmen ...

And in the noisy posture of the New York police union, which – very typically – maintained that any criticism against any cop or any police force for any action whatsoever was tantamount to complicity in the murders, at the least an insult to every chest that ever bore a badge. It sounds damn close to a demand for *carte blanche* – the right to do anything they see fit. Judge Dredd lives.

If only! No one could mistake the incompetence and recklessness so often condemned in the recent controversy for the hyper-disciplined commitment of Dredd.

Need I say the self-evident? The whole point of a democratic society is that police *can't* do anything they want – that any action taken by any authority is subject to review in an impartial court of law. That whenever any government becomes destructive of the rights of its citizens it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new government as they believe shall be most likely to effect its future happiness. (Hmm ... pretty good! You'd think Thomas Jefferson wrote that!) That though we need police – God, do we ever! – we also need a check on their power, and a guarantee that when they screw up *they pay for it*.

My opinion of the immediate Ferguson matter is that the truth is unknowable. We know the victim had committed a violent and aggressive crime just before he and the officer met. We know he was shot more times than conceivably necessary. But we also know the law was on the cop's side.

We also know that the thug-with-a-badge who killed the man in the "I can't breathe!" case had no justification for his choke hold. We know that was an injustice that no civilized society should tolerate. That moron should have been *skinned*. But I wasn't surprised by the lack of an indictment; such injustice, such turning a blind eye, has happened many multiples of times in New York. The city is an epically great place and New Yorkers are a hilarious, brilliant, creative and resilient people – who are also scared to death. America's greatest bastion of culture and civilization is also a place replete with corruption and savagery. And of course it was by no means atypical.

Community police – cops drawn from the places they serve – it's an obvious solution. The cops in Ferguson weren't connected with the people. They were an occupying force, insulated in their squad cars from the lives around them. Common problem. A Jefferson Parish cop I once cross-examined nearly blew his case – he would have, in a less racist jurisdiction – when he referred to those living in the neighborhood he controlled as "*Them*." He wasn't talking about giant ants. He was talking about black people, poor people, the people he saw more as threats to be countered rather than constituents to be protected.

This attitude can change. I've known some great cops, too, people committed to their vicinities, *from* their venues, *of* their people. *Why not?* Community-based police, well-trained, professional, competently overseen, in whom paranoia, dishonesty and insularity are not tolerated. *Why not?* Where's the threat in finding police among the people? There is none.

IV

When I heard about the alleged chlorine attack on the Furry Convention in Chicago, I admit to the typical reaction. Forgetting that inside the supremely silly suits were human beings, I reacted with callous delight. "This is," I wrote, "one of the most wonderful things to happen in the history of mankind." I could not blame Mika Brzezinski on *Morning Joe*, who went into such hysterics while reporting the story that she had to flee the room.

But of course there were human beings inside those costumes and it's unacceptable that any were hurt or frightened. If it's shown that the chemical they found in a stairway was left there deliberately, the incident was obviously an atrocious crime, and should be investigated and prosecuted as such. Though I kind of doubt it – dumping pool chemical in a stairwell, even in a hotel which has no pool, strikes me as a pretty attenuated attempt at mayhem. Still, a furry con is attenuated by its very nature – and weird – so I admit that anything is possible and welcome updated information.

I've asked fandom's premiere anthropomorphizer, Taral Wayne, for his thoughts on the matter, and they follow.

And I admit that I must beg pardon, because crime, fannishness and all, I *can't look* at these photos with a straight face. I've attended a hundred cons and known a thousand SFers and enjoyed costumers of every sort for decades, just like you have. I count "Jenner," the brilliant Australian comic artist whose *Doc Rat* celebrates animals that walk and talk as we do, as a great friend. But this is the damndest thing I've ever seen in my life.



Further Thoughts on a Fur Fest

Taral Wayne

The gas attack on MidWest FurFest, early

this December, is probably just one of those things ... things such as the downing of Malaysia Airlines flight MH17 over Ukraine, or the explosion of a 74-car freight train carrying crude oil through Lac-Mégantic, Quebec, in July 2013. Bad Karma. Fortunately, the furry incident really didn't amount to anything that important.

There was a report of a mysterious white powder spilled in one of the stairwells of the Hyatt Regency O'Hare in Chicago, from which chlorine gas had been released. The hotel was quickly evacuated of all guests – not just the fur-suited conventioners, and a number were treated in hospital for minor injuries. After a few hours, the guests were allowed back in. Police were treating it as a criminal investigation.

Beyond that, there is just speculation. The chemical was a hypochlorate, I think, to which the addition of a chemical, or perhaps merely water, begins the reaction that releases the toxic chlorine. Hypochlorate is commonly found among swimming pool supplies, for cleaning. This led to an early guess that the smoking gun pointed to a disgruntled hotel employee who had just had enough of watching dopey fans wandering around in fluorescent blue or pink doggie suits. (It's almost understandable.)

However, it was soon common knowledge that the Hyatt had no pool. A hotel employee with the knowledge of pool cleaning might still be responsible, but the smoking gun no longer pointed exclusively in that direction. The hypochlorate had to be brought in from outside, and could have been brought in by anyone.



Let me now astonish the reader with an actual photograph (taken on someone's cell phone and posted online) of the powder in the stairwell...

Keen, huh? The invisible poison gas is, of course, invisible. The detail about the stairwell is itself interesting, but not helpful. That the powder was spilled in a stairwell could argue that the perpetrator

never intended to harm anyone, since the fire doors would effectively seal the gas away from the hotel guests. In that case, the perpetrator was *not* a fan, because every fan knows that fans use the stairwells in preference to long waits at the elevator. But then, if the perpetrator *did* want to cause injury, then he must have known that fans would use the stairwells, and *was* therefore a fan himself. As I said, this line of speculation isn't very helpful.



Apparently, there have been minor incidents at furry cons before this. Someone would trip the fire alarms, forcing everyone into the street until the fire trucks came ... in particular, the transvestites in the foxy costumes. Almost anyone might be to blame. Hotel staff. Other guests. Or furies with some sort of chip on their shoulder.

Years ago, there were the “burned furs.” These were fans who had taken a dim view of the direction furry fandom had taken, and become highly critical of the doofuses in their fursuits and annoying “fursonnas.” Perhaps they just didn't have a sense of humour, and didn't see the fun of staged

events where one fan went through a marriage ceremony with another fan (both male), one of whom was costumed as Minerva Mink, then a well-known TV cartoon character. But that was in fun. The only people who took it seriously were the grumblers, who took to taping up mean-spirited cartoons in washroom stalls...



Of course, maybe the grumblers had a point. Dig the later photo of the unfaithful hubby.

The fan who coined the expression “burned fur” had nothing to do with the aforementioned shenanigans, however. I knew him well enough to comment on his intelligence and generally sound judgment, so I have no reason to suspect him of being involved in gassing furry conventions, either. But the dislike of furry fandom certainly exists *within* furry fandom.

With our enemies within us, the last thing we need is enemies *around* us as well. But furry fandom certainly has them. The reaction of the outside world to the gas attack at the Chicago Hyatt is instructive. While most news reports appear to have been models of propriety, one local TV broadcast went viral. The anchor team began their report soberly enough, but within a couple of minutes, the young woman on the left began to lose control, started to giggle, and soon fled the stage, laughing her head off at the idea of an army of geeks in doggy costumes standing out on the street in the freezing cold.



Would she have laughed if they had been the B'nai Brith or Greenpeace instead of furies? It's reassuring to see such professionalism in television journalism.

So far, the investigation has turned up nothing of note. No one has any more idea who was responsible now than they did on

the night of the attack. One wonders whether it might happen again ... or, worse, spread to other types of fandom. Might George R.R. Martin someday soon be driven from a stage by a sword-wielding maenad demanding equal time for her gender? Or will a San Diego Comic Con be turned into a massacre by a Sith Warrior with a hidden belt-bomb?

The real world with all its horrors is no place for a furry. All I know is that I would hate to be out on the street while costumed as a top-heavy skunk girl. I might encounter a nervous cop. "Paws Up, Don't Shoot!"



V

STRANGLERS IN THE NIGHT ...

(COMMENTS ON *SPARTACUSES* 4 & 5)

My comment last issue on the hostility I see brewing in America mentioned that I also sensed general anger before "Dallas," by which I meant the Kennedy assassination. Seeing as I was 14 at the time, my assessment of the national mood could well have been hampered by adolescent/pubescent projection, but more to the point, it sounds like I was blaming society for JFK's murder – a tendency I decried in the previous issue. To make myself clear, I blame Lee Harvey Oswald for that specific atrocity; he needed no prompting from a general malaise to do his harm.

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Democracy by itself is not to be doubted. It is a concept that benefits us all. It is how we treat it, or flout it, that deserves the criticism. I have been a critic of the way my country's right-wing government is eating away at democracy here. I have to ask your own opinion at the revelations of yesterday's report on the activities of the CIA. The phrase 'crimes against humanity' has risen on social media several times, and the United Nations would like to see those responsible for this taken to the World Court. Unfortunately, the US is not a signatory to the World Court, and I doubt a court in the US would ever take on the case of prosecuting those responsible. (I believe those who are responsible are Bush, Cheney and Rumsfeld, among others.)

I think Hilary Clinton would make a great president. Elizabeth Warren sounds pretty good, too. Together they might start making the repairs to democracy that the US sorely needs.

The Gamergate situation is beyond ridiculous. It's turned so many lives upside down, not the least of which are those of Frank and Brianna Wu, but the whole thing stems from childish young men with a grossly large idea of their own self-importance, and they complete disregard for the law in their death threats. I sincerely hope these children are caught and prosecuted.

I hadn't known that Nalini Haynes had produced another zine version of *Dark Matter*. Just found it, downloaded it, and will respond to it.

Malal Yousafzai received her Nobel Prize today. A dominant spirit indeed, and defiant to the last. Her father must receive some credit, for he wanted the best and a full education for his daughter, and has continuously supported her in all she has said and done. That gold medal is the proof of her (and his) efforts.

Thank you for your words on the shooting in Ottawa. I know the War Memorial well. And, I am surprised that you were able to see some of Rex Murphy's televised commentary. Rex is no pretty-boy, and he sometimes sounds like he had a thesaurus for lunch, but he will often tell it as it is.

Tim Bolgeo got raked over the coals over the accusation of one person, and disinvited from a convention. People who don't know him may have been offended by what he wrote, but those who know him aren't offended, know what he meant, and probably said, "Well, that's Uncle Timmy." Much the same thing happened with Rene Walling a couple of years ago now. Some were offended with things Rene did, but his friends in Montreal can't and don't believe those past accusations. Rene has not been tried, but others have found him guilty without benefit of self-defense or explanation. We are too eager to try and sentence others; let's ask a few questions before we (over)react.

Society is angry ... prices continue to rise, jobs are lost at a whim, the news is always bad, politicians are corrupt and found with our tax money in their bank accounts, they are in bed with the top 1%, the law has nothing to do with justice, etc., etc., etc. Add in what we've done to this planet, and it's now too late to save it...I can see the reasons for anger. Those we placed in positions of trust, our politicians, our judiciary, our police...we all wonder why that trust was betrayed, and it's happening more and more often. No wonder barely one-third of the potential voting public actually votes.

A very pessimistic letter, but when it looks like society as a whole is going straight to hell in that proverbial handbasket, it is tough to smile, at least in the long run. If only this planet had a Reset button...

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I saw the movie *Ender's Game* and thought it was pretty good SF – it would not occur to me to boycott a movie because of the political antics of the author of the novel it was based on. A movie is an art form requiring the efforts of hundreds of people, some of whom may be even less PC than Orson Scott Card. Card is apparently xenophobic about gays, while the adults in the movie are xenophobic about a bug-like hive mind alien race. But Ender, the protagonist, sees the evil in xenophobia and, at the end, sets out to make amends.

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I normally wouldn't comment on fanzine content that isn't related to either SF or fandom – that's not fanac, it's just amateur journalism. But I must bestir myself in defense of American democracy, which you excoriated in *Spart 5*.

Athenian democracy was a disaster, just read your Thucydides. But our system, in which the majority rules, the minority has rights and protections, and there are plenty of roadblocks to precipitate action, is the best available. The Founding Fathers knew what they were doing.

The problem is that we don't have majority rule. Something like 30 percent of the electorate turned out for the recent election that so crotled your greeps. That means 15 percent of extremists and cranks in the two parties decided the issues.

Say what you like about extremists and cranks, but they turn out for elections. If we had 80-90 percent turnout, moderates and sensible people would rule and we would have moderate and collaborative government. You've heard it before, but I'll say it again: People get the government they deserve.

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It "should" be US policy never to tolerate violence against our citizens in foreign lands, but as a matter of fact this policy, a thin echo of the Roman Citizen Rights doctrine from ancient days, has been spottily enacted, at best. Yeah, beheadings on camera posted on world-wide news reports are awful, and I think the Islamic State racketeers ought to be all hunted down and executed. But please, the official government righteous indignation is selective and thinly applied in these cases. There is no uniform policy and very likely never will be unless the government wants to vastly expand overseas military intervention and risk alienating a large number of economic and military partners.

How is this current situation worse than the North Korean capturing of the USS *Pueblo* and murdering crew members and torturing the rest? Or the Iran hostage-taking crisis? Or the regular torture and murder of US citizens in Columbia, Peru, Mexico, and Brazil? Two years ago a man from my local area was a tourist in Brazil when he saw an auxiliary police officer about to gun down a small boy accused of stealing something. When he tried to intervene the officer immediately turned and shot him down in cold blood. Brazil wasn't even going to investigate, but after enormous pressure from the family, our regional newspaper and a committee of college and community leaders the US govt (or duly elected officials), belatedly asked Brazil to make an effort to investigate. They did. After a mock trial that lasted less than two days the auxiliary police officer was cleared completely. Read the back pages of the newspapers where all the real news is and you'll find dozens of instances where US citizens are routinely murdered or tortured or held without charge, and the US government generally does nothing about it.

ISIS' hostages du jour are a pair of Japanese journalists, and in the past their executioner has laid his sword on Brits and Australians, which would indicate our "partnership" with these nations would extend to exacting justice against ISIS psychotics.

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"The silliest controversy to cross the public view in recent months [was] the efforts to force ... the Washington Redskins ... to change the name of the franchise."

Not going to happen, of course. But here's a thought experiment for you: Suppose the reincarnation of the great Native American football player, Jim Thorpe, was playing for Washington, and on a wet and nasty day he was tackled into a big mud slick in the middle of the playing field. As he gets to his feet, one of the opposing players calls him a "Dirty Redskin." Does the NFL force that player to get some sensitivity training?

More likely the NFL pays for his dental work after Thorpe pounds out his chops.

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I don't understand. I *am* Spartacus, so why are you and others pretending to be me?

Can't agree with you on the Washington Redskins name. It's outright demeaning and should be changed. It was coined by thoughtless men who used it to downgrade and dehumanize those different from them. Some professional sports teams have positive American Indian names, meant to portray

strong and brave people. (The one exception being the Chief Wahoo symbol of my beloved Cleveland Indians, something the team is beginning to push in the background – and hopefully the team name, also.) But “redskins” doesn’t fit into that category – not even in the most liberal definition of the word. It should be changed. Time to move on.

The best quote in the immigration debate that I’ve heard came from (I think) Steven Colbert, who said “My ancestors didn’t come to this country to be overrun by foreigners.”

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“WisCon’s actions against editor Jim Frenkel is a fascinating and frustrating study in current fannish mores ... One young lady accused Frenkel of encouraging an inappropriate conversation ... while standing too close, another that the former Tor editor ogled her breasts.”

How do you “encourage an inappropriate conversation”? Is nobody capable of saying “I’m sorry, that’s none of your business” or “I don’t want to talk about that” and walking away? And what’s the difference between ogling and looking? I’m sure, but there are some of our brothers out there who ate – not to put too fine a point on it – flaming assholes, who think that shooting up a college town because “sorority bitches” won’t sleep with them is justified, who think that being a football player or lacrosse player gives them a free pass to rape co-eds. Crap like this at WisCon just makes it easy for that type of man to dismiss women, as a class, as being fools and whiners. That in no way intended to excuse actual, destructive, domineering sexual harassment, but let’s reserve our outrage and reprisals for that, not for looking at a woman’s breasts.

“When a guy does that, it just means his eyes are open.” – from Buffy the Vampire Slayer.

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You guys can’t be Spartacus when I’m Spartacus. The reason is I eat the right candy – *Spartakisses*. Bbbbaaaadd!!!

I don’t know about the campaign against the Redskins’ name. However, a lot of political correctness is encouraged by bigots so that sleeping dogs will lie. The psychology behind political correctness is that if we don’t say certain words, we won’t be prejudiced. Of course, for many, the idea is that if we don’t use certain words, dissatisfied minorities will remain placid.

Lettercol ct. Lloyd Penney. I suspect that current Conservatism is intent on fighting the future. The emerging demographics indicate that the young and minorities will replace the old and White. In this Obama is a symbol far more than he is substance.

When those demographics are realized, I suspect marijuana will be legal and gay marriage will be enshrined. More important for the average person, the captains of industry and commerce will be forced to retreat, and we may see actual increases in jobs and wages.

The sayings of Christ actually practiced? Are you mad?

I tend to agree with Lloyd on Edward Snowden. As Lord Acton said, “all power corrupts.” I have noticed that in action. I am sure that the National Security Agency, the CIA and the FBI believe that their eavesdropping will only be used to haul criminals away. However the temptation is there to silence critics and carry out petty vendettas.

Ct. John Purcell. Anything creative is new and different. It takes a perspective differing from the average to arrive at the creative. I am sure Hemingway’s heredity and environment differed greatly from the average with his out libidoing masculinity. Also, Newton, Einstein and Tesla must have stood out for many like sore thumbs.

A bipolar personality fits the bill in just having highs and lows, several different perspectives within themselves. In addition, at a certain stage, he or she gets massive amounts of work done. Robin Williams, among many others, proved that.

I imagine Officer Wilson is going to scot free in the killing of Michael Brown. However, over the long run, the ... militarized police ... [will] lose. What will happen in Ferguson only needs to repeat what has been happening elsewhere in the St. Louis area. In fact, it happened to Officer Wilson. He belonged to another lily White police force in another St. Louis suburb with a Black majority and a White government.

Ultimately, it elected a Black government, and decided to disband the suburb's police force and henceforth, be policed by the St. Louis County police force, which is more community oriented. With a population over 80% Black, I imagine the same thing will occur in Ferguson. If not in the next election, eventually.

VI

Enough of such nonsense. Let's talk *football*. As this issue goes to 'rox the NFL Conference Championships are fresh in our minds. The divots haven't even tamped down on the soggy fields of Seattle and Foxboro. Fans are reeling from the Seahawks' unbelievable comeback – and the game is reeling from the petty and repulsive cheating scandal the press is calling “Deflate-gate.”

Apparently the New England Patriots under-inflated the footballs they used in their title game against the Indianapolis Colts. (Each team supplies its own balls – an egregious and easily-corrected stupidity, right there.) That gave Quarterback Tom Brady a bit surer grip on the ball, made his throws a bit easier to catch. Such an advantage is against the rules of the game. Making it happen was cheating.

What gets me is that it was, like the Watergate burglaries, wholly unnecessary. Nixon had his election won. The Pats had their game, their championship, their ticket to the Super Bowl pocketed. The 45-7 score wasn't due to a softer football. It was because the team was just that superior.

Athletically, anyway. If it's shown that the Patriots knew about the under-inflated pigskins – and how could they not? – then ethically, they've done damage to the integrity of the sport. Rules won't let them be disqualified from the Super Bowl, which would be the only appropriate punishment, but they should be fined, their reputations as cheaters underscored, and booed off the field. Go Hawks!

VII

And speaking of guilt trips, there's got to be a ridiculous controversy discussed in every issue of *Spartacus*, and here's the stupidest dust-up to erupt in the New Year – the whiteness of the Oscar nominations. A year after a strong film about slavery won the Academy Award, along with a terrific young black actress from that film, some complain because “performers of color” got crowded out of the 2015 Oscar listings.

I call “Phooey.” It's true that this is a screwy year – I'm enraged past the point of mayhem that Jessica Chastain wasn't nominated, *Interstellar* was ignored, *The LEGO Movie* didn't make the short list for Animated Film, and indeed, they say the lead in *Selma* was terrific. But the last couple of months of 2014 thronged with excellent films, and as I've had to learn myself vis-à-vis the Hugos, there's only so much room on the ballot. My favorites? *The Grand Budapest Hotel* and Michael Keaton, in *Birdman*. Watch out for *American Sniper* – we've seen the story before, in *The Hurt Locker*, but being based on the life of a real man gives Clint Eastwood's film poignancy and heft.

We'll see you again after the snows melt. Stay warm.