

IN SECONDS, THE MESS HALL IS A BLOODY BATTLEGROUND! HOT FOOD FLIES THROUGH THE AIR...



SPARTACUS

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Illo from the Spartacus comic book, courtesy of Br'er Gary Brown. Watch out for flying lasagna.

As I prep this issue for press, news comes in that Antonin Scalia, Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States and its most prominent conservative, has died.

There's been some rejoicing at this event, which I find repulsive, even though Scalia was not what I would call a positive influence on the Court. Much of his career, in fact, was devoted to sarcastic dissents against decisions which advanced the idea of the Constitution as a living document whose ideas should be interpreted according to the truth of the times and for his holding that the II Amendment granted Americans the widest possible right to own guns, a monumentally stupid idea.

When Scalia was confirmed, the dream of the right wing was that his genuinely charming personality and strong intellect would create a lasting conservative perspective on American law. That proved to be ill-founded. Scalia did make lots of friends – he and “the G,” staunch liberal Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, were close pals – but his influence did not remake any consensus. The debate between “original intent” and the aforementioned “living Constitution” is as fervent as ever. One suspects it's a permanent conflict in American law.

My understanding is that Scalia did stand foursquare for freedom of political speech, which is of course a foundational rock of our democracy. That's a good memory to carry of a dedicated jurist, even one whose votes were often disastrous for our country. (One does wonder where Clarence Thomas, the Court's constant "me too" follower of Scalia's lead, will get his cues from now on.)

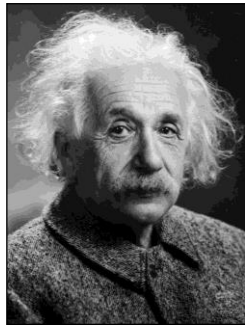
And as Republicans scramble to keep Obama from filling his third Supreme Court seat, mindful that he'll name a liberal and rebalance the SCOTUS, let's take care to elect a Democrat in November. With vital libertarian issues forming before the Court, it's now, more than ever, of importance that will last throughout this century.

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Seldom have I felt worse about my scientific illiteracy than that moment, announced in February, when gravitational waves were overheard from the depths of the universe for the first time.

Physicists and astronomers everywhere fell into rapturous swoons, space was set aside for Nobel Prizes, and liberal-arts dummies like me were reduced to smiling uncertainly at the edge of the celebration, not really sure why everyone was so damned happy.

Well, after scanning the *New York Times* article on the subject and watching a couple of videos, I've made some sense out of the breakthrough. Gravitational waves, as fundamental a physical event as light, were predicted by Einstein a century ago. Now, thanks to the astonishing instrumental arrays of LIGO, the Laser Interferometer Gravitational-wave Observatory, have at long last been detected. The phenomenon emitted from the merger of two black holes, a billion light-years distant, an event which released incalculable energy – waves of gravity – that spread through the universe. Last September, these waves reached the ears of two instrumental arrays here on Earth. A link in the *NYT* article provided the recorded sound on which the discovery depended: A galaxy-rending cataclysm at such a distance sounded like a drop of water hitting a pond. *Blup!*



On such humble noises, apparently, doth swivel revolutions in human thought. As a reasonably intelligent man, there's no excuse for my not understanding it. Joe Green, my father-in-law, published a story some years ago in which gravitational waves played a role; I'll have to gulp back the pitiful residue of my pride and ask him to interpret the science for this English major. In his poem "Science Fiction Water Letter to Guy Lillian" – yes, me – Fred Chappell criticized poets for ignoring physics: "those unfathomable reaches of space and time." For scientists, those reaches just became less unfathomable. We morons in the humanities owe it to ourselves to ante up our wits and join in.

Attaboy, Albert. Right again.

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As the presidential race enters its primary phase, advantage changes moment to moment. Hillary wins by a whisker in Iowa, loses badly – apparently thanks to non-Democrats – in New Hampshire. Bernie's youth crusade is ascendant, and Gloria Steinem aggravates millennials by saying the young ladies involved are just pursuing boys. (I would soften this observation. Let's say that I think there's a certain social element involved, the urge to belong and fit in, just as there was in the antiwar days with which I am familiar.) On the other hand, Hillary wins the *New York Times*, *Dallas Morning News* and Congressional Black Caucus endorsements, bound to help her in the AA-dominated Democratic South. An uneasy balance obtains. The debate has become an argument between inspiration and practicality, between a dream and a plan, between poetry and prose, between a grand irrational scheme and annoying details and specifics. Which matters most?

Here's another ancillary question: Do millennials *need* boomer criticism? The objection to their being challenged is reminiscent of the college demonstrations for "safe zones." By condemning even, the

idea of their being questioned, millennials are demanding to be spoiled. This is infantile behavior. If they want to survive in the real world of politics, and not simply dwell in the house of dreams forever, they must learn to handle criticism and opposition, just as they have to handle a world where their comfort and security is not of general paramount concern. Nobody plays for free. (They must also accept the fact that inevitably, the half-baked ideals they now embrace *will change* the more they see of the real world – just as Hillary’s did. Remember, in 1964 she was a Goldwater Girl!)

Of course I favor Hillary. Sanders rejects even the idea of appealing to the middle, where elections are won. Even if he wins, since he lacks all but the most ephemeral congressional support, his proposals could only be achieved through dictatorial edict. Such power, even if attainable, would curdle in the mouth of such an idealist. Hillary’s virtues wildly overwhelm her flaws: she is smarter, she is tougher, she is more electable (never forget the Center), she has the will and the backing to accomplish things. And she’s a woman, and it would be to this country’s inestimable credit to show we can smash that glass ceiling as well as other states. Even the most pointed failure of judgment on her record, her vote for W’s Iraq war, mostly shows the importance of the Presidency: after 9/11, what New York representative could possibly ignore a President’s call to arms? Especially when that President lies pledges his new war powers would be utilized only as a threat? Assured by the President of the United States that justice and peace depended on her vote, who should condemn her failure to see beyond Bush’s façade to the weakness and dishonesty within? No – Hillary for President. Bernie for Conscience.

All this said, I must issue a reminder to myself and to every Democrat concerned with this election: *Eyes on the prize!* While I fervently maintain that Clinton is by far the best candidate – the brightest, best-experienced, toughest and most electable, not to mention the most historic – the final goal is to elect a Democrat in November. Bitterness will be natural for supporters of the candidate who ends up second. (I already feel rancor’s nasty tendrils snarling through my wits as I read Sanders’ people’s enthusiasm over his rise.) But it must be set aside. It **MUST** be set aside.

Hold me to this.



I should comment on the *faux* race controversy about this year’s Oscars.

Two years ago, *12 Years a Slave* won Oscars as Best Picture and Supporting Actress, for a fine young thespian, Lupita Nyong’o, in one of her first pictures.

In the history of AMPAS, the following black performers have won Academy Awards: Sidney Poitier, Hattie McDaniel, Jamie Foxx, Denzel Washington (two!), Forest Whitaker, Morgan Freeman, Whoopi Goldberg, Halle Berry, Mo’Nique, Octavia Spencer, Jennifer Hudson and the aforementioned Ms. Nyong’o.

These African-Americans have been nominated: Beah Richards, Terrence Howard, Don Cheadle, Gabourney Sidibe, Eddie Murphy, Juanita Moore, James Earl Jones, Cicely Tyson, Oprah Winfrey, Adolph Caesar, Howard Rollins, Will Smith, Dorothy Dandridge, Dexter Gordon, Alfre Woodard, Tarenji Housou, Jaye Davidson, Barkhad Abdi, Michael Clarke Duncan, Keisha Castle-Hughes, Chiwetel Ejiofer, Quvenzhané Wallis, Viola Davis (twice), Djimon Hounsou (at least twice), Sophie Okonedo, plus some of the winners mentioned above, Poitier, Foxx, Washington (three times), Freeman, and Goldberg. Several of these performers were tapped for their first times on screen.

What am I missing? Where’s the racism that has the AMPAS of today in a panic to change its rules? Is the great liberal motion picture industry simply posturing in a fervent desire to satisfy a few noisy grippers?

I suspect that the whole brouhaha followed Jada Pinkett Smith’s annoyance that her husband Will wasn’t nominated for his prestige movie of the year, *Concussion* – which tanked. It’s that financial failure that was responsible for Smith being passed up, not only institutional racism, but still, the Academy has instituted rules adding spots in categories and worse, disenfranchising retired actors from voting, all in the name of diversity. On FaceBook, a familiar SFnal name spoke out:

To Whom It May Concern,

I started working as an actor at the age of five in 1959. I made my debut in a major studio feature film when I was six. I worked prolifically in both features and television and was accepted into the prestigious voting ranks of the actors' branch of the Academy in 1975.

Some of the producers, directors and fellow actors I've had the privilege of working for and with include: Walt Disney, Alfred Hitchcock, Steven Spielberg, Jimmy Stewart, Shirley Jones, Gene Kelly, Rod Serling, Lucille Ball, Steve McQueen, Dustin Hoffman, Stanley Kramer, John Cassavetes, Judy Garland, Martha Coolidge, Jack Palance, Burt Lancaster, Jack Klugman, Ed Wynn, Brigitte Bardot, Cloris Leachman, Claude Rains, Franklin Shaffer, Irwin Allen... The list goes on and on and on. My point is: I learned my trade from Masters and I strongly feel that I'm still qualified to view films and share my opinions on them via an Academy ballot. Sadly, the Academy no longer feels that is true.

I've continued to work as an actor onscreen and as a voice over artist, but it's been increasingly difficult finding A-level representation. Many agencies have told me they feel my having been a child star so long ago is more of a detriment than a benefit. I simply haven't been interested in working in films I've felt had weak scripts or were of an exploitative, negative nature. Nor do I choose to audition for bit parts or work for basically no money. Like so many other Academy members who have a long history in the film industry, you are now punishing me for a lack of consistent employment, when it is beyond my own ability to cast myself or even find representation who can get me into the meetings and auditions these days for quality roles and films in the first place.

I have careers in music and writing and I chose to stay home for several years when my two children, who have both worked as actors in major studio feature films, were young. I don't see why that should now render my vote unworthy.

I'm deeply saddened and disappointed by the actions the Academy has taken, without any discussion first amongst the members, to capitulate to a handful of whiners who threaten to "boycott" by not dressing up, walk the red carpet and sit in the audience because they feel the actors branch didn't do our jobs of nominating candidates for Oscars this year to their personal satisfaction.

The nomination process is not racist. Surely you realize that members of the Academy don't get together in clandestine meetings to discuss who they're going to nominate or not nominate. Personally, I was shocked that neither Michael Caine or Harvey Keitel received a nomination for their excellent work in "Youth", but I certainly don't consider it a deliberate slight because they're senior citizen Caucasians.

Academy awards are not about the television broadcast, the dresses, jewelry or the paparazzi and publicity regardless of how much the public and industry folks enjoy that part of it. They are about recognizing outstanding achievements in filmmaking over a year's time, regardless of age, gender or color of skin.

Now, I, like so many others, have been relegated to a lesser status by the current administration of the Academy. Booted down to a level where our opinions no longer matter, insulted by the organization that once considered us exceptional. Some, punished for enjoying semi-retirement after working, like myself, for well over half a century. It's ageism pure and simple.

Pretty sad.

In the name of progress?

Peace,
Bill Mummy

Off to the cornfield with them, Bill.

&

Lurking on YouTube is one of the most effective horror stories I have ever seen, the *Night Gallery* adaptation of Fritz Leiber's "The Dead Man". It was the first tale the show ever broadcast, and it set a standard that Rod Serling's secondary fantasy show never came close to equaling. In my mind "The Dead Man" approaches the best *Twilight Zones*, "Nightmare at 20,000 Feet" and "The After Hours", in quality. The premise is brilliant, the acting superb, the direction and pacing excellent, the chills real, and the climax terrifying.

How rare and how delicious a horror story that really delivers. Watch it now. No, go ahead. You're not so blasé that you can deny Fritz Leiber his chance to spook you stupid. It's wonderful to see mastery at work.

See? What did I tell you? How'd you like that final shot, as the flashlight beam moves from the face of the love-besotted wife, gibbering in madness, to the murdered husband, to ...

Pleasant dreams.

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My Hugo nomination ballot has gone forth. You'll notice I concentrated on fans who have not yet copped an award, and – I shamefacedly admit – friends and relations among the writers, at least where short stories are concerned. A partial listing:

Novel – *The Dark Forest*, Cixin Liu – a superb and surprising sequel to *The Three-Body Problem*. Tremendous space opera.

Aurora, Kim Stanley Robinson – challenging one of SF's most treasured tropes, generational colonization of other solar systems, with solid science and some decent characterization.

The Water Knife, Paolo Bacigalupi – a grim and powerful near-future of America under the pall of a water shortage.

Luna: New Moon, Ian McDonald – high family drama on the highest level possible.

Short Story – “Stolen Dreams”, Joseph Green, from *Perihelion*, on-line. Rosy collaborated on this story with her father, but didn't get credit.

“The Clean Limbs of Robots”, Joe Green, also *Perihelion*.

“A Walkabout Amongst the Stars”, Lezli Robyn.

“Aspects”, Greg Benford, from *Meeting Infinity*.

Long Drama – *Mad Max: Fury Road* – my favorite SF film of the year, Theron at her meanest and George Miller at his craziest and most telling.

The Martian – Of course.

Star Wars: The Force Awakens – Also of course.

Ex Machina – Flawed message but the most intelligent dialogue I heard in a film last year.

Terminator: Genesys – Can't help it. Arnold was a hoot and the FX were stunningly original.

Short Drama – “Here's Not Here” from *The Walking Dead* – the season's most powerful, touching and meaningful episode.

Fanzine – *Alexiad*, Joe Major – triumphing over adversity with a solid, readable publication that maintains a constant quality and a high, happy energy, *Alexiad* is one of the best two or three zines being produced in America.

Beam, Nic Farey – probably the most berserkedly joyous zine out there.

Reluctant Famulus, Tom Sadler – again, a model of quality and consistency with an excellent stable of regular contributors.

Trap Door, Robert Lichtman – the best American fannish fanzine, overdue by decades for Hugo recognition, keeping nostalgia strong.

SF Commentary, Bruce Gillespie – There is quality and there is quality, and there is Bruce's flagship fanzine, for decades the finest and most professional amateur magazine in the world, stronger for its sercon content than its fannish but derelict in neither.

Fan Writer – Joseph Major, Taral Wayne, John Purcell, Mark Plummer, John Hertz, Nic Farey, and multitudes more.

Fan Artist – Steve Stiles, so long denied, so long deserving. Allen White, the genius of Las Vegas. Marc Schirmeister. Taral Wayne. Ditmar. D West. Randy Cleary. Charlie Williams. The list goes on and on. No more *fan* awards to *paid* cover artists for semiprozines!

Editor, Long Form – Toni Weiskopf was unjustly denied this award last year, and should be given it by raw acclamation at MAC II. Her efforts on Baen Books for years and years have built that house into as vibrant and successful a publishing house as science fiction has.

Editor, Short Form – Resnick! Resnick! Resnick! Resnick! (Mike, that is.)

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Said Apollo 14 moonwalker, UFOloist and psychic researcher Edgar Mitchell: "We are not alone in the universe. We are just one grain of sand on a huge beach." The sixth man on the moon started his walk along that huge beach on February 4. In his honor, I watched on YouTube video of the *Antares*' landing, as Mitchell guided Alan Shepard to touchdown at Fra Mauro. In the years after his flight, Mitchell explored the psychic realm, in which he'd always had an interest – hardly the stuff of rocket science, but to which he was entitled. His death leaves seven men alive who have set foot on another world – and none who got more out of it.

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LOWE LY LETTERR BOOL MEETERR MAID

DAVID WILLIAMS

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Regarding *Spartacus* 11, John Purcell "fears for this country." He should lean back, take some deep breaths, and relax. I can answer his plaintive query, "What the fuck has happened to this country?" Nothing. It's just more of the same.

John's letter could have been written during any decade of the past two centuries. Remember the burning cities and assassinations of the 1960s? Or the McCarthy Era? Or FDR's internment of American citizens in concentration camps behind barbed wire and gun towers? How about the thousands of white-robed Klansmen who paraded through our nation's capital in the 1920s with their crosses and Confederate battle flags? Or Woodrow Wilson's abrogation of the First Amendment when he made speaking against American entry in World War I a crime of sedition? I could go on and on, but you get the point. Things have always been terrible, but our nation has managed to stagger on and even make a little progress (remember slavery? remember women who couldn't vote or even sign contracts?).

Too much politics in this issue, but while we're on that subject, Guy will be gratified to learn that, after 40 years of voting the straight Republican ticket, I have voted straight Democratic in the last two election cycles. Have I come to my senses? No, my political thinking is about the same as always. I have done it just to punish the Republicans for all the embarrassment they have caused me.

So I clearly have no intention of voting for Trump. It's Hillary all the way for me. Do I trust Hillary? No, but I didn't trust Nixon and I voted for him twice. In each case, she and he seemed more credible as potential presidents than their opponents.

Oh well, maybe our absurd electoral process will solve these problems before we actually have to vote. But if not and Trump goes all the way, I would like to observe that he may not prove to be as bad as he seems. I'm not saying good, just not as bad. Trump is a businessman. He knows how to make deals, and he knows how to cut his losses when things go south. Those are useful skills in a chief executive. In addition, he has one quality shared with good old Tricky Dick. They each seem a little crazy (turns out Nixon really was a little crazy), and that can cause our international rivals to hesitate before they decide to provoke us. They can't be sure how the US President might respond.

I am David B. Williams and I approved this message.

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I have been quiet about the presidential election because I don't know who I will vote for yet. I keep hoping that one of the centrist Republican candidates will close the gap with Trump. I have followed his career for 30 years and read his books, but I have never liked him. He always struck me as someone who never stops talking about himself, except to denigrate others. Tennessee's presidential primary takes place on March 1, and I may not even make a decision until I go to vote.

My initial thought as soon as I heard about the Hugo asterisk was Roger Maris.

He belongs in Cooperstown. It's a disgrace that he hasn't been there since he first became eligible.

In Harry Turtledove's *Guns of the South* and in his American Empire series in which the South wins the Civil War, Robert E. Lee becomes president of the Confederate States of America.

*Also in MacKinlay Kantor's **If the South Had Won the Civil War**. Had Lee taken on command of the Army of the Potomac – or so the popular feeling goes – the Civil War would have lasted a month and he could well have been elected President of the **United States** ... but he couldn't have lived with himself.*

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Thanks kindly for issue 11 of *Spartacus*. Interest in social media fades from time to time, but fanzines? In some ways, they are the ultimate social media. And, we can participate in it at our own speed. Like this...

Yvonne and I are looking forward to going to England this coming August, probably our last overseas trip. I have friends in the US who cannot understand why we don't go to their convention any more, or come down to visit. When I see what happens in the news, the wholesale killings by police, the toxic politics, the number of Canadians who are killed at random in the US, I have lost any desire to even visit.

In some ways politics in Canada isn't much better. After nine years in power, the Conservative Party is now back in opposition where it belongs, and Prime Minister Trudeau (flashback) is trying his best to repair the damage left for him. Our Conservatives are Republican Lite, but they are still as repellant as your Republicans are. We are being welcoming to as many Syrian refugees as we can accommodate, but the right wing seems determined to stop them, and they blame them for societal problems, too. They have nothing positive to add, and it was Trudeau's positive outlook that was one factor in his election. The family of that dead child found drowned now lives in Vancouver. The discovery that his family was trying to get to Canada where they have relatives, and the fact that our previous government made it difficult for them to come here, was a factor in the Conservative defeat.

Older Republican Party members must wonder how much lower will his party sink. Every Republican candidate for the US presidency makes me recoil. Trump, Cruz, Rubio, Fiorina, Carson...they all are slime, based on the contents of their speeches. Our two countries' politics sometimes run in parallel... we have our own Trump. He's on US television. Kevin O'Leary is one of the Sharks in *The Shark Tank*, and was a Dragon on the CBC series *Dragon's Den*. O'Leary has been referred to as Trump Lite. In Trumpish fashion, he floated the idea of running for the Conservative race for its new leader, and he is already in second place. The idea of Prime Minister O'Leary should be as disturbing as the idea of President Trump.

I think "Ruth the Trekkie" Milt Stephens refers to is Ruth Berman. I freely admit that my own involvement with *Star Trek* fandom got me into the *Star Trek* Welcomittee, where I provided the Welcomittee Directory with a long list of *ST* books regularly, and IIRC, Ruth was involved there, too. I'd like to see the next *Trek* series go back to the *TNG* timeline, and forget J.J. Abrams ever existed. It's got to be a little harder around the edges, though, to keep the interest of the many fans that still exist, and still attract newer fans.

After 9/11, the number of Americans who emigrated to Canada and took out citizenship tripled, IIRC. Should Trump become president ... well, you can imagine what might happen. John Purcell, you are most welcome. Keep in mind ... University of Toronto, York University, Ryerson University, George Brown College, Seneca College, Humber College, and dozens more.

Fandom ... well, I still consider myself one, even though there are few activities left here, other than conventions. Harsh feelings and nasty sentiments have made sure our numbers are decimated, not to mention those who leave or pass away. So, while still staying in fandom, other fannish interests have come up. For example, we recently went to a Yule Ball, staged by the Harry Potter group at one of the above-mentioned local universities, York U. Such a good time, and we now have a large number of new friends, all about 40 years younger than we are. New fans? Probably not, but they know what they like, and are willing to socialize and make new friends. Found another HP event coming up in April, and told them all about it, and we will go for another fun time. Same goes for anything to do with steampunk.

RICH LYNCH

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On recent movies: “The best SF movie I saw this year was *Mad Max: Fury Road*, but the Hugo will almost undoubtedly go to *The Martian*.” I hope you’re right – it took a couple of years, but *The Martian* has finally succeeded in washing the foul taste of *Gravity* out of my system. As for *Mad Max*, I’m surprised that you think it’s better than anything else (and I note you’ve written this before the new *Star Wars* movie began its run). I was actually disappointed by the *Mad Max* reboot movie – I don’t think it’s as good as any of the three with Mel Gibson as the star. I believe that the most likely finalists in the “BDP – Long Form” category, besides *The Martian*, are *Ant-Man*, *Star Wars – The Force Awakens*, *Jurassic World*, and *The Avengers – Age of Ultron*. But I wouldn’t be shocked if *Ex Machina* or the *Childhood’s End* miniseries makes it in. As for me, I’m nominating the first season of SyFy’s *12 Monkeys* series. It’s better than the movie.

Childhood’s End bored me – I think the demonic makeup job on the Overlord struck me as too silly to take seriously, and that feeling projected out onto the whole overlong show.

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The concern I have about the Kim Davis thing is that, when she was elected to her position as Clerk of Court, she had no reasonable expectation that she would be required to issue licenses for same-sex marriages. The Constitution of Kentucky, in fact, based on a vote of the people of that state, prohibited such marriages. Along comes SCOTUS, and everything changes in a day. To say that she should now be punished for declining to do so – jailed, fined, whatever – raises a chilling question: with the advance of progressive values in this country, are we now at a point where a serious, believing Christian must either compromise his or her faith or step aside from public service? Are we ready to say that believing Christians have no place in public life? That seems to be the clear implication. I never imagined that this country could come to such a point in my lifetime, and would have thought that the outcomes of the anti-religious regimes of the 20th Century would have stood as a warning against moving too far in that direction. There was a time in this country when religious freedom was paramount; unfortunately, it seems those days are gone.

Those days never existed. The United States has never allowed religious belief to trump – heh! – civil law.

The decisions of the Supreme Court are definitive when it comes to the law of the United States and one person’s contrary religious belief cannot counter it. That’s always been true. Segregationists tried to invoke religious doctrine to evade legal strictures, too – and of course, failed. As for the popular vote that made same-sex matrimony illegal in Kentucky, that too is primed by constitutional stricture – as again, exemplified by Jim Crow and its fall.

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I’m throwing my support in the primaries to Bernie. But will go all in for whoever wins the Democratic nomination. This is, however, another case of like vs. really like since either Bernie or Hillary strikes me as a really good person to hold the office. Aside from the tone of the rhetoric, I constantly note that the GOP (again) spends a lot of time harping on fears while the Democrats seem to aim more at hope (or at least a different sort of fear – that of what we’ve done to ourselves vs. that of what others have supposedly done to us).

A trope, now that you mention it, that sort of repeats itself in the candidates’ responses to the debate moderators. Bernie may point out that “we’re sick and tired of hearing about Hillary’s e-mails,” but none of the Democrats have whined or moaned that the questions were unfair or the moderators biased. Just more of the “blame them over there.”

[Regarding Kim Davis and her alleged meeting with Pope Francis:] From what I hear (per *The New York Times*), “The Vatican spokesman emphasized that the meeting with Ms. Davis was arranged by the office of the Vatican’s ambassador to Washington, not by anyone in Rome – including the Pope. ‘The Pope did not

enter into the details of the situation of Mrs. Davis, and his meeting with her should not be considered a form of support for her position in all of its particular and complex aspects.” I’d guess that, while rather harder to get, a brief greeting would be sort-of, kind-of akin to arranging a birthday greeting from a President. I’d agree and suggest that the most honorable thing she could have done would have been to resign her position since she couldn’t in good conscience perform the duties of the office.

Re the letter from Jeff Copeland: Maybe he should spend a part of his time writing OpEd pieces for major newspapers. He certainly expresses the problems better than most of us.

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You were right about Ben Carson. He flamed out in November and won’t be around by the end of March. His campaign was more to get higher speaker’s fees than any real interest in governing anyhow. I do think you nailed the underlying problem as Despair. Look at the Middle East. So many young men are flicking to ISIS to join the jihad because their home countries offer them no opportunities at all. Why is that? Because all of the wealth in those countries is soaked out in the elites and it ain’t tickling down, folks!

That’s just what’s happening here, but we had a much higher cliff to fall from. We went through such unprecedented surge of the middle class for most of the 20th Century that we got used to it. Then came Reagan and the whole idiotic trickle-down economic theory. The basic idea is that the rich will want to get richer so they’ll invest their billions in doing New Things and it’s gonna be gravy for everyone. It didn’t work out that way! Now the 1% are draining all of the wealth out of the system and investing in nothing riskier than US bonds. They did spend their money on moving the manufacturing base to China and that worked out well for them – for a while. Now China’s slowing down and there’s nothing to do with tons of money except to stash it in anonymous amounts in Barbados and hope that something more attractive comes along. The mentality of the wealthy is that there’s nothing the underclasses can do to them, so they can spend on getaway homes in Montana and a nicer yacht and not even spend the interest in their safe investments.

There’s a problem with that and you don’t have to look any farther than Saudi Arabia or Brazil to see what it is. When most of the people are impoverished they are going to start getting jealous and take some back. What does that look like? Have you looked at what’s going on in Venezuela lately? To misquote *Archer*, “Do you want to get riots, because that’s how you get riots!”

Need I cite more evidence than the Black Lives Matter movement, Occupy Wall Street and most of the city and burbs of Chicago? The Oppressed Masses are beginning to learn that the Internet can work for them too, and the madder they can make the Fox News Jabberwockracy, the more their message of Enough Already gets out.

After it was all over, I don’t think Kim Davis ever got the nod from Pope Francis that she claimed. I think her 15-minute “private audience” was waiting in a reception line, and the most reassurance she got from him was a robo-“Bless you my child” in passing. The Pope’s calendar shows no meeting scheduled with Davis, and he seemed baffled about what was going on when her name came up.

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To clarify Allan Maurer’s notion about NyCon I, it wasn’t a conflict between “conservatives” and “lefties,” a.k.a. Futurians. The Futurians were anti-Communist Stalinists who wanted to use NyCon I as a recruiting platform. New Fandom wanted it to be for the enjoyment of science fiction fans. Apparently the Futurians weren’t aware that William S. Sykora, member of the NyCon I committee, was a member of the U.S. Communist Party but belonged to a different cell, which wasn’t interested in making science fiction fandom into a Stalinist front.

*Good Lord. The Puppies should have gotten a load of **that!***



I spent much of the last two months of 2015 in a private room at the local library, lost in pen and paper – and a story I was writing, “Cross Cypress”. I began the first draft on October 29 and finished it on January 2. Except for the *Thing from Another World* fan fiction I nervily published in *Challenger* no. 39, it’s the first story I have completed in more than 35 years.

In a way I’ve been working on “Cross Cypress” for over 40 years. I first wrote a version of it for my Masters of Fine Arts in Greensboro NC back in 1973. It was called “Tracks” then, and my MFA advisor, Fred Chappell – once a fan, somewhat later Poet Laureate of North Carolina – astonished me by calling it “terrific.” I was emboldened to try to expand it into a novel, a few chapters of which I presented as my thesis. That version, however, was completely without merit, and so discouraged was I that I abandoned the ambition to write it or much of anything else. (I did pen a story called “Turista” some years later, which confused everyone who read it.)

Anyway, I was drawn to the fundamental story of “Tracks” for a simple reason: it was based on truth. When I was in my late teens my folks, brother and I visited my mama’s family in the tiny desert town of Rosamond, California, about 70 miles NE of Los Angeles and hard by Edwards Air Force Base, where the shuttle originally landed and where I, apropos of nothing, learned to drive. My grandparents had moved there during WWII from the cotton country of Arkansas, and an article in a local newspaper from that locale had taken the notice of my grandfather, the great L.E. King. It told the story of an Arkansas neighbor in the early years of the XXth Century, an old man named Crockett. Colonel Crockett, said the article, was suspected of being one of William Quantrill’s raiders. (If that name is unfamiliar, hit that Google.)



Old L.E. remembered Crockett vividly. His phrase, repeated constantly, was “By God sir!” My grandfather’s best friend as a child, a black kid named Muley Mitchell, worked for him, and one time went into the Colonel’s house and was presented with three old men. “One of these men is Jesse James,” said the Colonel. “Pick him out!” (That’s Jesse ←, at a somewhat earlier point in life. If one believes that Jesse was murdered by Bob Ford long before the era of my grandfather, then it must have been *Frank* James that the Colonel was talking about.) There was a sad part of the story involving the Colonel’s loneliness – my grandfather remembered that he asked my great-grandfather if he could raise Alce, my grandfather’s kid brother, and was turned away. “It’d be like selling my son,” my great-grandfather said. (Every other story I heard about my great-grandfather was unpleasant, to say the least – he was, in addition to being a Mason, a Klansman, and mean to my mother, so I’m glad to have this tale as counterweight.) Alce himself came to a sad end in an accident, aged 19.

To this raw material, when I wrote “Tracks” I added a theme of betrayal, and later, when I grew reckless in my ambition, an overlay of gay alienation. That survives in the present telling, with a contemporary narrator I based on a late friend and an astronomical metaphor interwoven into the structure. I doubt Colonel Crockett or Alce would much appreciate it. Their story, being real, has a poignancy and a power an amateur writer could never match and which would challenge the most seasoned professional. But their tale only inspired the violent and disturbing account of alienation, liberation and reconciliation that came out of my head, and when I meet those guys in Eternity, I will endeavor to make that clear. (Jesse, above, comes off sympathetically – at that time of his life, deservedly so. If I meet *him* in the afterlife, his reaction to “Cross Cypress” will be the least of my worries.)

But it’s a fair question. Do I owe these people out of the past strict accuracy to what was – or did I have the right to apply a different skin to the skeleton they provided? Lillian Hellman told my Berkeley seminar that a writer has the right to steal what he will. Does that apply to an amateur? A family member?

Anyway, I tweak and I fiddle with “Cross Cypress” – that first chapter is a mess – and God knows what I’ll do with it. Surely these and other matters will be resolved by *Spartacus* the next.