

SPARTACUS NO. 20

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MANCHESTER, ENGLAND, ENGLAND ...

There is not much one can say about people who massacre children, except that they have forfeited their right to live. Today, the day after a maniac detonated a suicide bomb outside of a Manchester concert hall, shredding more than a hundred kids leaving a concert, the British nation and all of civilization quakes in anguish and disbelief. Such is the object of Terror.

But as Timothy McVeigh learned after he blew up the Murrah Building, and Osama bin Laden learned after he brought down the Twin Towers, anguish and disbelief give way to other feelings in people of the West. They give way to a tirelessness and a thirst for justice that is in itself, a Terror. And an inspiration to the world.

Such people as committed the atrocities above, and the atrocity in Manchester, have no place on this planet. They are about to learn that, yet again.

“THE BEGINNING OF THE END”

I've figured out Donald Trump's path to dictatorship: resistance exhaustion. How many times in how many ways can you condemn how many assaults on American society? It's impossible to keep current with the insanities and inanities of this administration. By the time one sentence is typed about one malfeasance, another screw-up equally as foul has come forth. So commentary had best be general – or at least start out that way.

The title quotation above is from Neil deGrasse Tyson on a rumored defunding, in the Trump budget, of the National Academy of



Sciences. Such, he said wisely, would mark the start of the downfall of America's primacy in world science and technology. One can hope, though, as spring 2017 trundles on, that it has other significance to our benighted and bewildered country. That these eye-popping days of spring betoken the beginning of the end for the presidency of Donald Trump.

One of the few nice things about being old is being able to find new things familiar. An atrocity explodes like a balloon full of ink onto the world, and there's a pretty good chance that you've seen it before – or something very like it.

These days, to a person my age, hearken of course to the spring and summer of 1973, when Richard Nixon's haunted soul finally caught up with him, and he was driven from office. Nixon should not have been vulnerable to the scandal: he had opened China, brought a seeming end – disgustingly, but an end – to the Vietnam War, imprinted his sanctimonious and hypocritical personality on the people, won pulverizingly lopsided re-election. Yet he fell, victim of dogged journalism and his own relentless paranoia. Trump has no such attributes, no such achievements to balance against his sloppy mouth and deranged ego. All he has is a cascade of stupid tweets, mindless asides, indefensible actions, and laughable stooges coming to his defense. It's not merely his reprehensible behavior – it's his clumsiness and childishness in trying to get it done that is bringing him down. Nixon killed our respect with disgust. Trump is committing political suicide with something worse: our contempt. He looks ridiculous.

He's left it to his hacks to attack Sally Yates over the Michael Flynn liaison with Russia, a woman who is the embodiment of professional integrity and competence. In firing FBI Director Comey – with the comically obvious motive of forestalling the "Russia investigation" – we actually heard Donald Trump call the man "a showboat and grandstander." Later, it was reported he described him as a "nut case." It's on record that he demanded a pledge of personal loyalty from the head of an independent federal police force and investigative agency – unheard of in the history of the republic.

There is the hypocritical cruelty of the so-called Trumpcare, which will rip health insurance from >24,000,000 Americans. There is the on-going clusterf--- of the Muslim Ban, and that most ludicrous of presidential projects since Nixon built a gold statue of Checkers on the White House lawn, the Mexican Wall. Trump's days in office have been replete with incipient illegality and obvious corruption.

Only once did he hit the right note to my ears – bombing that Syrian air base after that geek Assad nuked his own people with nerve gas. Everyone with a heart was all in favor of snuffing Assad – an act like that was intolerable. Hillary Clinton even said so.

Of course, everyone with a heart was also in favor of opening U.S. borders to Syrian refugees ... One is a necessary corollary to the other.

So Trump reads trite speeches to Arabs, drops a MOAB on a sand dune in Afghanistan, trades tongue-waggles with North Korea, and as his own Congress investigates Russia's corruption of the 2016 presidential campaign that somehow placed him in office, gives high fives to Russian poohbahs in the Oval Office, no American reporters allowed.

Russia ... always in the background, Russia ...

It's the beginning of the end of something. And it's either Trump's dreams of power or the American legacy of a government and society of law.

WE ROTTEN CAUCASIANS

And so the New Orleans statues of Confederate heroes come down. Never mind that while Mayor Mitch Landrieu – a pretty fair guy, as I remember him – was tearing *down* Confederate images, the already-horrendous murder rate in New Orleans was trending *up*. No matter:

though this action cannot possibly affect the real problems of real people – poverty, violence, corruption, decay – it will win Landrieu votes, which is the entire point.

I insist, as I always have (cf. *Spartacus* no. 8), that we acknowledge and respect the times. To call Robert E. Lee a traitor when considering the era makes as much sense as calling him a *cis-male* because transgender surgery would have horrified him. Read his life story. Read his words. *Understand* these people you condemn so easily from your stance in your insipid safety zones.

Consider the times: loyalty to the Union was practically unknown in the 1850s and 1860, when the War began. It took Lincoln's vision and the War to instill it into the nation's spirit. Before, it went like this: "The United States are ..." Afterwards, it was "The United States IS ..." That understanding, that sea-change in how we saw ourselves, took a war to make it happen. Understand the points of view, before and after. Lee himself said after Appomattox, "We must now teach our children to be Americans." He got it; he understood the change, even if the spoiled slack-jawed mall rats cheering the lowering of his statue don't.

History is complex – ever-changing ... opposed to p.c. propaganda from the arrogant and ignorant. Before you take the stupid way out and dismiss Confederates as traitors, remember Gettysburg and consider, for what cause would *you* go up that slope?

So what's the answer this argument can expect to hear? Slavery. The Confederacy was evil because it was based on an atrocity. This idea ignores the fact that Virginians identified more as Virginians than Americans and that this was generally true throughout the country, but the obscenity of slavery is an undeniable truth. Read Lincoln's second inaugural. Before he got to that stirring close – the best lines ever spoken by an American – Lincoln said the War and its carnage was divine retribution on the States for tolerating slavery for two hundred years.

The best novel I've read since – well, you name the year – is *The Underground Railroad*, an account, touched by fantasy, of a slave woman's escape from bondage and passage through a number of paternalistic environments, some brutal, some condescending, all in their way confining and painful. If you flashed on Dante in that simplified description, you're not the only one. America as Hell. This ambitious construct is only part of the work's genius: the language is simple yet eloquent, the message bitter yet uplifting. Do these contradictions lessen the novel's punch? Not at all. Colson Whitehead won the Pulitzer Prize for his achievement, which is every bit as exciting as a literary accomplishment as a sociological one.

Resembling it in some ways is *Get Out*, the superb horror film you have undoubtedly seen. Another perspective on white/black relations, it's unique, very original, intelligent and probing – just what *do* noisy liberals want with black people, anyhow? The answer is, without surrendering to spoilers, to *use* them. That the film makes a strong social point while entertaining and scaring the purple poop out of its audience is a sign of its spectacular quality.

So what is the final word on the uniquely American dilemma of race? We don't know. *It is too soon to tell*. We are still not at peace with our past or ourselves. As this book and this film show, we keep trying – but as the election showed last November, we also run from our truth, and as New Orleans shows, we seek easy, throw-away solutions. I guess the answer is to keep slugging away.

CUL-CHUH

Get Out isn't the only film of note to appear of recent. The two top films in America as of this writing are SF, parts of series, and while both are effective, couldn't be more different ...

Alien: Covenant – Here's where I part company with many, because both Rose-Marie and I liked the film a good deal. It's a sequel to *Prometheus*, or rather a bridge between that perplexing film and *Alien*, providing background and some startling revelations about the

menace *Newsweek* called “as complex as a computer, as simple as drool.” Michael Fassbinder has never been better. Complaints have come in from those hoping for a shoot’em-up like *Aliens*, and those who found confusion in the complex narration – but I advise patience, attention, and seeing the previous film again, despite its flaws.

The Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2 – Now here’s SF entertainment, broad and bawdy and laugh aloud. I am Groot. I am Groot. *He* is Kurt Russell, and damned funny. I am Groot. The first scene and the second-to-the-last credits Easter Egg are worth the entire day in the theatre. “*sigh* I am Groot.”

The Lost City of Z – A perfectly respectable movie, on an excellent subject, exploration of the Amazon. Alas, it lacks pizzazz and punch, and seems as slow as an eddying current. One suspects that the early spring is when studios release high quality, expensive movies that don’t quite cut it – like *The Zookeeper’s Wife* or this one.

I have just learned that “The Monster of Dread End”, a *Ghost Stories* comic story by *Little Lulu’s* creator John Stanley, *might* be made into a movie. As that tale is one of the creepiest graphic pieces I’ve ever read – it’s the one about the giant arm coming out of the sewer to snatch babies – I just say, “Don’t blow it!”

Department Q – three superb Danish cop movies, available on Netflix, discovered by accident by Joe Green. Imagine the snarky clichéd horror Americans would make of them. Of course, there are still clichés here, mainly in the character of the dour, neurotic lead character – but the scripts are original, the acting fine, the settings exotic and enticing, and it’s nice to hear the name “Poul” again.

THE MANIAC RESPONSIBLE



I approve mightily of Robert Edwards’ *Naming Jack the Ripper*, because the dastard it names is the one I believe guilty of the deeds: the pitiable Polish schizophrenic, Aaron Kosminski.

Scotland Yard, apparently, is convinced – and always has been -- that this was the guy who sliced up five wretched prostitutes in ghastly Whitechapel in late summer, 1888. They had an eyewitness who IDed him at one of the murder scenes, but the man refused to repeat his identification in court. They couldn’t arrest Kosminski. Instead the bobbies gave him over to his brother and effectively sat on him until they could pitch him into the wacko ward, where he died.

Edwards comes at his conclusion in another fashion.

Discovering a shawl for sale that reportedly belonged to Catherine Eddowes, one of the victims, this amateur Ripperologist bought the fabric and had it tested for stains. Amazingly, after nearly 130 years he found some – blood and semen. A new and remarkable test was done to bring forth, duplicate, and test the DNA. The blood was Eddowes’ – so proven by matching it with one of her descendants – and the semen ...

I’ve always thought the Ripper was – contrary to popular thought – nobody special, no prince or artist or psychotic poet. His profile – and I generally believe in profiles – silhouetted a rather dull man with a rudimentary knowledge of female anatomy who may have been a Mason (thus the chalk message someone left on the wall above a victim), probably lived close to Whitechapel, who definitely hated women and who was definitely, positively, absolutely out of his *fucking mind*. In other words, just another psychopath. Jack was remarkable mostly for the panicky attention he attracted, more than any other murderer before him, and the fact that he’s never been convincingly named.

Now I think he has.

TAFF, GUFF, HUGOS 2017

With greatest joy I salute **John Purcell** and **Donna Hanson**, winners of the Trans-Atlantic Fan Fund and the Get-Up-(and-Over) Fan Fund for 2017! They will attend the 75th Worldcon in Helsinki as representatives of North American and Australian fandoms, respectively. As both are great friends and fine SFers, John as a fan-ed and Donna as a budding author, Helsinki is lucky to have them.

But please, one of you, see if you can schlep our program books to us. We *still* haven't received MAC II's ...

Congrats also to David Levine, whose *Arabella of Mars* was acclaimed as the year's finest YA at this month's Nebula Awards. The *Bento* fanzine he edited with his late wife Kate Yule was always delightful, and this original, funny volume is well worthy of the honor.

As for the Hugos, now that Steve Stiles has his – and is fortuitously nominated for another – I admit to no favorites. Which is a polite way of saying I've read practically nothing this past year. The Puppy influence over the ballot seems to be down, some – I hope No Award's popularity is also in eclipse. Babies float in that bathwater, you know.

A few of my votes ... Best Novel: Cixin Liu's *Death's End*. Best Long Drama: *Arrival*. Short Drama: "The Battle of the Bastards", *GoT*. Familiar names – and prior winners – for the Fan awards.

And can somebody, anybody, tell me where the 3,000 fresh votes came from in the Sasquan Hugo race? I'm grateful but I still want to know who roused them up.

And of course the whole of SFdom noticed when the sheriff in this season of *Fargo* picked up an award from her late stepfather's desk that closely resembled a Hugo. I rewound the show to watch the scene several times.

Turned out, as everyone knows, that the award was *based* on the Hugo (very similar rocket design). It was awarded to the stepfather when he was a young SF writer for a sweet novel about an immortal robot who wanders about mankind's waning years saying "I can help!" Being a science fiction writer and therefore naïve to the point of idiocy, the writer is finagled into financing a movie based on his book which turns out to be a scam.

I wonder ... will the episode, "The Law of Non-Contradiction", qualify as a Short Form Dramatic Presentation for next year's *real* Hugos? Could the Worldcon possibly put that prop on display?

A DOZEN NEW FLASHMANS

When the great author George Macdonald Fraser died, I mourned not only for him, but for his great creation – actually, he borrowed him – Harry Flashman, Victorian soldier, decorated hero, hopeless philanderer, reprobate and coward. We had 12 books, accounts of Flashman's adventures in various wars and scandals throughout the XIX Century, but never the story I craved the most: his involvement on both sides of the American Civil War. Fraser joined Harry in Valhalla before it could be written.

Yet here it is on Amazon: *Flashman and the War Between the States*. It's been renamed *Sir Thomas Armstrong and the War Between the States*, quite possibly because the author is Barry Tighe, *not* George Macdonald Fraser. Neither author nor title are alone on the digital shelves. I counted seven other new Flashmans written by people new to the series.

Well? Has anyone sampled them? Do they compare? Let you know about *this* one next issue.

LETTERCOLISSEUM

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I'm glad you had some space in the issue to pay homage to the late Chuck Berry. He was one of America's great songwriters, right up there with the likes of Dylan, Springsteen, A.P. Carter, and Stephen Foster. You mention that you "think it appropriate to the level of glorious" that Berry's recording of "Johnny B. Goode" is on a tour of the universe as part of the Voyager spacecraft. A great honor, yes, but I don't think that's nearly his best composition – for me it's "Rock and Roll Music", covered by many, many groups including The Beatles. If ever there was a song that's an anthem for the pop music era, that one is it.

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First off, we have lost so many dear and wonderful friends already this year. Of all the ones you mentioned in this issue, I didn't know any of them personally, but back when I collected comic books *Swamp Thing* was one of my favorites. Bernie Wrightson's artwork never ceased to amaze me. So doggoned good! And now he's gone at too young an age. Godspeed to Bernie, and all the others mentioned here.

Like Chuck Berry. He was a true rock and roll pioneer, influencing innumerable guitarists for the past sixty years! Think of that, Berry's career basically spanned the entirety of rock history. Hell of a career and legacy.

I am getting tired of 45. Let's just call him an ignoramus and pray for an asteroid hit. I simply cannot stand what he and the GOP have done to this country. If I win TAFF and go to Europe, I really may not come back. Heck, I do need to update my CV anyway.

Finally, I do envy your living so close to Kennedy Space Center and being able to watch rockets leaping into space. It never does get tiring to see that, does it?

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After reading your comments on campus free speech in *Spartacus* #19, it occurred to me that I never thought about free speech when I was in college. In fact, college was the place where I learned to keep my mouth shut. In high school, I was an argumentative wiseass who enjoyed arguing for the sake of arguing. I figured they couldn't very well put me in front of a wall and shoot me, so what did I have to worry about.

It was different in college. Cal State Northridge was a commuter college. Most students had jobs as well as going to school. If they had any leftover energy, they would have used it for sex rather than politics. Politics wasn't of much interest. You had to watch what you said rather than risk contradicting some screwball professor's pet theory. I made that sort of a mistake just once. An English professor read a poem by Tennyson and asked for comments. I made some sort of a mildly positive comment. I saw from some of the looks I got that I had probably made a mistake. I soon learned, that the professor had made a career of bashing Tennyson. Oh dear. He also had a giggle that sounded unbalanced. I got through that course, but it reaffirmed my intention to say little and mumble a when I spoke.

Some people in academia really don't deal with disagreement well. At Northridge, one psychology professor published a paper disagreeing with a paper another professor in the

department had published. The second professor's reaction was to confront the first professor, knock him to the ground, and stomp on him for a while. You know what they say about people in psych departments. Sometimes it's true.

Recently, there was an incident which would have even made me protest if I was a student. The state raised tuitions in the state college system by \$175 a semester. The students pointed to a big tax measure which had been passed to support higher education in 2012. The lieutenant governor admitted the tax measure had raised five billion dollars but they had decided to spend the money on other things. If I was still a student, I think I'd be trying to organize a march on the governor's mansion with torches and pitchforks. I can see how things might become downright unpleasant.

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Time for another of your zines, this time, *Spartacus* 19. I am having a busy Good Friday with catching up with correspondence, and just finished up a LOC to Chris Garcia's *Claims Department* 19, mostly comics.

I had to tell Chris I am not a comics fan at all, and I was never a collector, so while I recognize *Swamp Thing* here, I have never read any of the comics. [*My God! Do so now!*] It's tough to get to know anything like this when it was impossible for me to buy any of them, as a kid, and never any time after that.

Nonetheless, my commiserations on the passing of Berni Wrightson and Robert Neagle. We are definitely of the age where we may lose our friends ... or be the friend that others lose. As you may have seen elsewhere, we're dealing with our own loss ... Yvonne's mother Gabrielle passed away a few weeks ago now. Gabrielle Robert-Klein was a pillar of the French-Canadian community in Toronto, and died at the age of 94. The funeral is yet to come, and that will bring together a lot of French-Canadian relatives. Yvonne is looking after their accommodations with a local hotel, plus a nearby restaurant might get a lot of sudden business. [*Our deepest sympathies – and congratulations on such a splendid life!*]

DT45 ... ugh. He is quickly pushing the world to the edge of thermo-nuclear war with Russia, China and North Korea, which is playing right into Putin's hands. I suspect he is tired of looking like the bad guy, so with DT45 being a complete idiot, let's make Trump look bad so we can be the good guy for a change. If the US intelligence community is gathering enough dirt on DT45 to make his impeachment easy to do, I wish they'd hurry up. It looks like many in the cabinet may be involved as well, so I expect impeachment, plus charges of treason to go around. I hope you are due another election after this mess is cleaned up, and I hope someone with more than one working brain cell gets in.

As has Al Bouchard, I have seen Robert Reich's videos. I hope some senior representatives can gather together a level of support that will protect them as they strive for impeachment. It's not just America's problem now, it is the world's problem. For Christ's sake, someone fix it NOW! The future of the world is in the hands of an incompetent.

I fully agree with Taral re Canadian politics. Some of our politicians are self-important blowhards, and others, Like Kevin O'Leary and Kellie Leitch, are truly dangerous in the DT45 mold. One is even trying to claw back that gem of Canadian life, universal health care. And they want to public to vote for that? They are dumber than they look. Soon, NAFTA will be renegotiated, and DT45 promises hardball with his closest trading partner, for what reason, I cannot fathom.

If this is an alternate timeline, could someone flick the switch to the main one? The one where we're all a lot safer and happier, and nuclear weapons pose no threat? This one isn't any fun anymore. May we find the strength and smarts to dispose of this dictator, and try to regain a

little world-wide harmony. It shouldn't be this difficult. Many thanks for this issue; may the next one be much happier.

THE WHINER OF OUR DISCONTENT

Some corrections ...

A couple of issues ago I compared Donald Trump to the infamous and detested King Richard III. I recant. I have since learned that Richard III may well have been a competent administrator, a generous and thoughtful monarch, indeed a good King. He very probably did not kill or have killed the princes in the Tower. Slaughtered detestably at Bosworth Field, Richard III is a martyr to politics and the repellent idea that beauty is as beauty looks.

Thanks to Rose-Marie, I have at long last read Josephine Tey's *The Daughter of Time*, a clever analysis of the case against Richard given the form of researches conducted by a hospital-bound detective. It turns out that the historical view of the Hog King – and the artistic one – has been prejudiced by the ascension of a tyrant – Henry VII – who thoughtfully slaughtered anyone who disagreed with his acquisition of the throne. (You will recall that this came about through his victory over Richard, through treachery, as the Battle of Bosworth Field.)

Yet the poor martyred truth is already doomed, doomed by the genius of Shakespeare and the Almighty power of Language. History is truth examined, but Art *creates* truth, so what can poor History do when confronted by words such as these ...



But I, that am not shaped for sportive tricks,
Nor made to court an amorous looking glass;
I, that am rudely stamped and want love's majesty
To strut before a wanton ambling nymph;
I, that am curtailed of this fair proportion,
Cheated of feature by dissembling nature,
Deformed, unfinished, sent before my time
Into this breathing world, scarce half made up,
And that so lamely and unfashionable
That dogs bark at me as I halt by them—
Why, I, in this weak piping time of peace,
Have no delight to pass away the time,
Unless to see my shadow in the sun
And descant on mine own deformity.
And therefore, since I cannot prove a lover
To entertain these fair well-spoken days,
I am determinèd to prove a villain
And hate the idle pleasures of these days.

So in my mind there will always be two Richards: the historical King, a worthy and dishonored man, and Shakespeare's fabulous monster, a chewsome villain for all time. I will in future do my best to differentiate the two.

AND ...

I blitheringly identified the "Michael" forced to resign from the Trump White House as Michael *Steele* instead of Michael *Flynn*. Michael Steele, though a Republican, is a savvy and cool commentator on MSNBC, often seen on *Hardball*. Flynn is of course the bag-man for Trump, carrying tribute and orders to and from Vladimir Putin.

BUT NO ERROR HERE ...

Bon Voyage with thanks, to Sir Roger Moore, and Vive la France!

