

# SPARTACUS

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Again – and again, and again, without end, without hope of an end – the poisons that lurk in American mud hatch out. And children die. Hope dies. The future dies. The center of life shrivels; there is nothing left but chancre. Our leaders are cowardly, mendacious brutes, spitting platitudes as real blood flows. We value the fantasy of power more than the lives of our future. The mad and the emptied seek vengeance on the living for sins they never knew. And we take it as our due.

Broward County is 159 miles south of here. I know no one personally affected by the February school massacre there. I have no children of my own. Even my nephews are grown college grads. The sickening familiar process doesn't touch me or mine: young man goes mad, buys a military weapon, plots its use in fervid secret, goes to a place of innocents, butchers them, the shock reverberates, the news stations interview addled survivors, the politicians send thoughts

and prayers, the progressives protest, the gun nuts fidget, the funerals come, the media push the story back and pare it down, something else rises to the fore of the public mind, comfort blankets America once more. Until the next time.

A few practical suggestions that hit home. Most involve the dangerous step of trusting government in an era where government is spastic, divided and at the top, corrupt. Effective and immediate interchange of information among agencies. Complete refusal of gun rights to the mentally ill. Raising the age for gun purchase to 21. Requiring safety training as a prerequisite for gun ownership. Banning private ownership of assault weapons. *Registering firearms*. In return, demanding responsible, sane, effective and utterly non-political enforcement.

One topic I've enjoyed discussing with my college students is the loss of generational innocence – that moment, that incident when a generation loses its sense of security and faces the fact that the life on this planet is fraught with peril. For our parents' generation that moment came with Pearl Harbor. For us, the assassination of JFK. Our kids over-brimmed with optimism and zeal; 9/11 soured that. And for millennials, it's this long, endless, psychotic schism in the simple mutual good will that marks a people.

And despite the outbursts of lunacy, we are not a bad people. We have goodness in us, goodness we saw powerful and strong in the folks who succored strangers after the hurricanes, goodness that can be great in promise, as Rosy and I saw rising from Cape Canaveral earlier in February. But we are so frightened, and so lazy, and so vulgar, and so erratic that we have accepted the lunacy reborn at Columbine as due course: our posturing is valued above our progeny, our greed above our generosity. The mope who murdered those kids and their noble teachers in Broward – and Columbine, and Sandy Hook, and Charleston, and Virginia Tech, and so on and so effing on – are the aberration; the good people are the reality. But that's become a statement of faith, and horror upon horror, faith is weak.

However – and the aftermath of this nightmare deserves a “however” -- we're not the only voices ... Young survivors of the Parkland massacre are speaking out. Kids who witnessed their friends gunned down in the hallways and classrooms are confronting weaselly politicians and demanding truth and action. Caught with NRA spittle on their lips. wingers slander them as phony “crisis actors,” demeaning their passion and their message, and Red trolls threaten their lives. But the kids stand tall and speak sense, passion and defiance ... fluently. Even though the sawdust politicians cringe and hide in the NRA's skirts.

I hope it's cynical to believe, as I do, that the kids will tire of the condescension and defeat and retire to their young lives. But these kids – media savvy thanks to their selfies, we're told -- aren't just eating Tide pods. They're trying to help their world. Beaten down and cynical, that's more than we've done. Maybe, just maybe, just in-a-million-years *maybe*, they'll remember.

And, shamed and shown how, maybe *we* will, too. Let's prove it, people. Let's save the next child.



A recent segment on *60 Minutes* featured a group of ordinary, decently-educated Americans gathered about a table discussing matters of common concern. They were decent folks, though many were completely offbase. Mostly they talked about sexual harassment and political correctness – and evinced, according to the commentator, next to no interest in Robert Mueller or Russian interference in the 2016 or 2018 elections.

The conservatives were more bothered by political correctness, as they see it, than by clear moral obscenity. They felt that they were being despised for not mouthing the proper phrases and affecting the proper public attitudes than for anything of substance. Since there is plenty of substance Americans need to resolve, we don't need such an insipid impediment; I've been saying for years that we need to work on how we speak to one another.

Listening louder might help –if the other side listens too.

But what about Russia? It's clear that they laid waste to the 2016 election and will do the same to this November's. The ruling party is intransigent: they will do nothing to keep this enemy from America's cyber-gates. And as seen from the polls – and from the example above – Trump's public doesn't seem too bothered by the prospect of a foreign foe manipulating their vote. I hate to sound elitist – first because it's ugly, second because a middlebrow like myself has little right – but I suspect it's because they don't understand how the Reds screwed with us – and are still doing so. It's something I try to tell my students: learn basic English and you'll learn to read *critically* – a free mind is more than a match for perverse propaganda.



I always liked Billy Graham, the hugely famous preacher who passed – at 99 – last month. Certainly he seemed a friendlier and more rational presence than Oral Roberts or the other televangelists my grandmother used to watch all the time. It helped – as I grew older and more cynical – that I never heard of any outrageous moneymaking scams from him, as opposed to the outrageous nonsense Roberts would pull.

One time when I was in college Graham held a rally/service/whatever at the Oakland Coliseum, and a carful of my crowd headed down. Curiosity was our main goad, I think, although I'm sure some went to snicker. Wiseguy tweeners passing us on the highway shot us sarcastic peace signs. I wonder if they understood the *four* fingers I held up in reply.

I took Gail S---, my new girlfriend, who would take a fileting knife to my innards a year later in Chicago – another story. Tonight we watched Graham and his entourage perform from a stage set up at the Oakland A's second base. I was surprised that the main attraction was already in his chair when we went in and took seats among earnest folks who seemed more worried than anything else.

When Graham spoke he was calm, positive, even happy – no hellfire and damnation, no didactic holier-than-thou crap. The only absurdity came when he listed intoxicants he felt were infecting us, America's youth – and included "sunflower seeds." Huh? Who told him *that*?

Mostly he was affirmative, reasonable, and sincere. Gail liked him. For a few minutes, when Graham called for the faithful to come forward onto the field to signal their faith, I felt the impulse to go. Such is the mesmerism of the master showman.

One time during Kennedy's presidency, Graham and his staffers came to the White House for a prayer breakfast. His announcer, at the microphone, apologized publicly to JFK – he'd voted against him because he was Catholic. That always impressed me. Though gay people condemned Graham for his Leviticus-based prejudice against their "tribe," as one fella put it, I can't help but feel that a fault of Graham's era, not his heart. I'm still agnostic – the fundamental religious questions are still well above my pay grade – and his son impresses me as just another noisy winger blowhard. But my early impressions – and Gail's – survive. Put in a good word for all of us, Rev.



*Spartacus* being something of a perzine as well as a pub of opinion, some news of myself: I've had my second cataract operation, which leaves only three to go. The difference in colors is the most dramatic result so far; I expect more when I get my new refraction and scrip. I also need a couple more crowns. And to lose weight. My classes go well – I'm teaching basic composition and literature – and I've been offered a class to squire this summer and two more this fall. Rosy

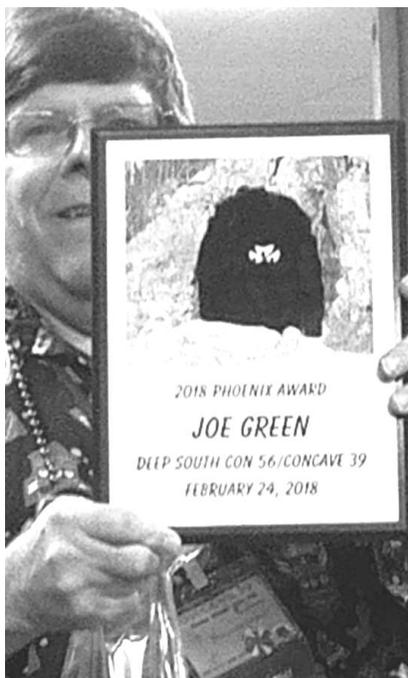
too. We had to miss DeepSouthCon in February, a painful lapse, so *la belle* is wrinkled-browed determined to get us to Worldcon. I'm planning on penning an appreciation of GoH Quinn Yarbrow for San Jose's program book, but getting us there *physically*? I have no idea how.



The most memorable American triumphs from the South Korean Olympics came at the expense of one of our best national buddies – I refer to our genial neighbor to the north – but deserve huzzahs anyway: the ladies' hockey team beat Canada in a dramatic shoot-out and our curling team won another set of auric ornaments. Yay us. USA! Curling baffles me; I watched several matches in complete confusion before realizing the game was simply a variant of darts. Rosy was engrossed by the figure skating, cheering on the German couple who eventually won – after a wait by the *fräulien* of 29 years and five competitive Olympiads!



A zillion thanks to Gary Robe and the 2018 DeepSouthCon committee for honoring my father-in-law **JOSEPH GREEN** with this year's **PHOENIX AWARD** for distinguished contributions to science fiction by a Southern SF pro. A zillion more for sending us the photo so I could astonish Joe with the news.



He should not have been surprised. Author of 7 published SF novels and two volumes of short stories, host for every Apollo launch during the moon landing days (Clarke and Heinlein attended the first), founder of Greenhouse Scribes and father to Rose-Marie, *still writing* every day, he more than deserves it! THANKS DSC! WAY TO GO JOE!



Two movie notes:

*Annihilation* – Among the influences or references Rosy and I spotted: *Avatar*, *Rogue Moon*, *2001* (mainly the music), that dreary Soviet clunker *Solaris* ... and even *Picnic at Hanging Rock*. The movie it tries to emulate in tone, mood and significance is *Arrival*, but though pretty, mysterious, exciting in spots and promising, it cannot match the 2017

Hugo winner in human connection or resolution. It's just baffling. It goes nowhere. Nice house, no furniture.

On the other hand, I liked *Black Panther* very much – on a level with *Wonder Woman* as a superhero origin tale. The heroes are quite similar in some ways – a royal hero from a mysterious hidden paradise. Darned if I didn't like the supporting characters here – especially the Panther's snarky genius sister and beautiful regal mother – better. Only when Stan made his usual annoying cameo was I at all put off. (At least he allowed the filmmakers to credit Kirby with the creation of the character, too.) *Black Panther* is a fun message of racial brilliance and good will – convincing for once – in a cool superhero setting.



Speaking of panthers, the other night I was droning on to my basic English composition class about the most tedious subject imaginable – grammar – when one of my high schoolers taking advanced placement raised his hand. Something I'd said reminded him of an event in his young life that almost meant the *end* of that young life. He'd been stalked by a panther. A *real* one.

In this very county, he was in a tree near a lure of corn – hunting with bow & arrow for deer. It was night, pitch black in the woods, but he could see motion by the corn. He jumped down and went over to check for tracks. *Cats* – small ones. Some yards away, in the tall wet grasses, he saw a still, quiet shape, large – its eyes studying him. He had no idea what it was, so he turned on his flashlight. Usually, he said, the light spooks any critter he'd run into in the woods, but tonight there were no splashes to indicate a flight through the swamp.

My pupil turned and left. At his father's hunting camp he looked through some pictures trying to scope out what he'd faced. When he realized what it had been, he felt a chill out of outer space. *A female panther with kittens*. Panthers around here kill to eat, of course, but they also kill for sport – and *to protect their young*.

He said he still got that chill, thinking about it. We did too. I nervously joked, "You came close to being a pile of panther poop!" And that I'd be damned careful walking to my car that night.

A little lesson – from the peanut gallery, this time – about the power of language. Which constitutes another segue ...

## ***EVIDENCE MOUNTING*** *(letters from our Chorus)*

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On your comments about sexual harassment at cons, I'm more-or-less in agreement with you, that there is a spectrum of behavior that's involved here. Alas, we're in a phase where every nuance of interaction is viewed through the same lens. In mid-December, Matt Damon made the mistake of saying in public that there's "a difference between patting someone on the butt and rape or child molestation. Both of those behaviors need to be confronted and eradicated without question, but they shouldn't be conflated." He had a ton of bricks fall on him, because he's a man and can't have an opinion, even if it includes wanting to beat the crap out of anyone who threatens his daughters.

However, he's right. There's a huge difference between saying "hey, I like your dress" and hugging a woman without her consent and barging into a woman's dressing room without knocking because you're sponsoring the beauty pageant and being thrown out of the mall because you're stalking [fourteen-year-olds and cheating on your wife with a consensual encounter with an intern and threatening to ruin an actress's career if she doesn't let you fuck her.

And anyone who can't tell the difference is returning us to the bullshit blanket accusation that every man is a rapist, which trivializes the actual crime of rape.

*And insults us, our fathers, our brothers, and all men of good will.*

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Many tanks for these issues of *Spartacus* ... issues 23 and 24. {*"Tanks"?!? Is Rommel attacking?*}

23... The cartoon on the cover reminds me of the news so much... Dolt 45 has given the world's utter slime of the species cause to rise up and express their assorted prejudices and hatreds. Only now do we really need barf bags when we watch the news. And now, as the news shows us, just another school shooting. And, new policies that will make the rich much richer, and the poor desperate. The US will soon become the biggest debtor's prison. Larry Nasser will never see the light of day again. And, the former

president of the American Nazi Party will represent the Re-thug-licans in the mid-term elections. Pass another barf bag...

The local... The hurtful actions leading to the #TimesUp and #MeToo campaigns, for lack of a better word, lead us to reflect on our own behaviours. In my own time in fandom, we all learned to greet each other with hugs, and as time goes on, newer fans may not be all that comfortable with such a greeting. I am usually pretty savvy about who I could hug, and those I'd just say hello to, but given what's been happening, I have thought about how I greet those friends new and old, and wonder if I have crossed a line now that maybe didn't exist before. I am not here to make anyone uncomfortable, and have cause to continue to examine behaviour in the future. We all do. I have friends that go back decades, and some of them, I love dearly, and not in the romantic sense. I would hate to think some of them might flee because of a quick hug.

24... Someone take away his Twitter account, please. I know someone tried. Dolt45's continued slurs on shithole countries are really slurs against America. Foreign presidents and prime ministers are suitably diplomatic when it comes to the Dolt, but I imagine they talk to their consultants as they wash their hands after dealing with him.

No Oprah for president...enough of pop culture heroes trying to run it all. There are very qualified people who had made a life of public service, and they are the people we all need. And, a shame about Ursula K. Le Guin's passing. We are of that age where our heroes are passing. Remembering them is the best we can do in their absence.

I wanted to end on a positive note, but... Thank you for these two issues, and see you with whatever next you edit.

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You mention that you found Andy Weir's novel *Artemis* to be "a serviceable hard-SF adventure" and that: "If it wasn't written by Andy Weir I wouldn't be disappointed, but since his first novel was an instant classic, now I can only consider it a sophomore slump." I think *Artemis* is better than just "serviceable" – I found it pretty entertaining. I'll agree that it's not quite as good as *The Martian*, but how many science fiction novels are? I wouldn't at all be surprised if *Artemis* gets enough nominating votes to be a Hugo Award finalist.

Thank you for that nice remembrance of Milt Stevens. As you say, he was a prodigious writer of letters of comment to fanzines, and most if not all of us fan publishers have been blessed by having a Milt Stevens LoC in one or more of our issues. Nicki and I published several in *Mimosa*, the first of which was more than 30 years ago. I didn't cross paths with him very often – usually at Worldcons – but free-ranging conversations on many topics we had in quieter corners of room parties were what I looked forward to and what I'll now miss.

*So say we all.*

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Well, here's hoping that the tide hasn't yet crested in the blowback against the GOP. After coming damn close to winning races in various Southern states the Dems pulled one out in Alabama – even if it was one with the national party mostly disavowing the candidate. But it is discouraging that even this time it was a fairly close race. I cross my fingers that the retiring GOP lawmakers might even consider endorsing the Democrat if the primary produces an extreme candidate.

*They have a Holocaust denier running – we'll see.*

I agree that there is, in fact, a large difference between say, an Al Franken or a Harvey Weinstein or a Roy Moore. Crass is one thing, illegal or immoral is another. That's not to say that it's all acceptable but they aren't the same and don't require the same response. I am curious (mainly in regard to Franken) about why the woman didn't bring [her complaint] to him directly, as that was an instance when a straight-up apology would seem to be a simple and appropriate response.

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Excellent cartoon on the despicable Roy Moore. It occurs to me that there is something nefarious at large, though. Do you realize that while all the rest of us are suffering from the daily antics of the madman in the White House, cartoonists around the world are flourishing. Not only have they been given one of the all-time best targets, but it has been supplemented by Roy Moore and Jeff Sessions. Has this fraternity of pen-and-inkers signed a pact with the devil to have so much creative material at hand?



On a day when Trump almost simultaneously blunders America into a trade war and agrees to meet the manic leader of North Korea – great news, but Kim is up to something! – this *Spartacus* closes, exhausted and broken-hearted. The next page will deal with why. I've been trying to teach my students an appreciation of poetry. They stare at me in stupor. In frustration, I scribble, and with my scribble, I say good night ...

*Always keep  
A woman's breast in your pocket  
The smile of a teenager  
Admitting she's a virgin  
The fire from menopause  
The knowledge from a thirty-something  
And from a granny, peace  
Forgiveness  
The leap of finally acceptance  
The hope of every little thing remade  
Button it up  
Tear the seams from your shroud  
Dance naked on the Moon*

Lost to us and to the world late one recent night, Paprika, our beloved yorkie terrier. She got away from me after a spectacular launch from Canaveral and wandered into the canal behind my father-in-law's house. Paprika, though born blind, led we believe a happy life, always enjoying an ecstatic wallow in the short grass, a full food plate, a tasty treatsie, a bouncing run. Such joy she brought. So little she asked. They say God sees the sparrows fall. Pray note and welcome then, Lord of life, this sweet innocent among your creatures.

