

SPARTACUS

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A zine of opinion * bloviation by Guy Lillian
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This spring is the season of **non-fiction books** around here, for if there is one thing the ogre in the White House has been good for, it's been in provoking angry, articulate condemnation from good people of the Left. And book sales.

James Comey's *A Higher Loyalty* is the most accessible and enjoyable of those I've read and sampled. The former FBI director writes with easy humor and sincerity about his career as a federal prosecutor, with valuable insights into his prosecutions of Martha Stewart, various mobsters, and numerous crooked politicians. He tells of the Hillary e-mail investigations, which turned up no prosecutable misbehavior, and the clumsy decision to reopen her file which possibly torpedoed her presidential hopes. Nevertheless he passionately defends the FBI and the rule of law. Mostly Comey talks about character, and how it applies to leadership, contrasting the confident humility of Barack Obama with the snideness of W Bush and the bloated, self-focused pugnacity of the lout in office now. His disgust with Trump is obviously personal and obviously deep. The effortless readability of this book – and its undeniable sincerity – makes it all the more convincing: we have a disturbed, fundamentally truthless administration in command, a place run like *la cosa nostra* and corrupt to its core.

Russian Roulette is a study of the most significant and long-lasting of Trump's dishonesties: his desperate attempts to tie himself to the depthless pit of malignancy in Russia. Shady business deals, beginning with the Miss Universe Pageant and Trump Tower led Trump to a submissiveness towards Russia's dictator that was repaid with the 2016 election. It's a skillful, professional account by legitimate journalists, illuminating for the concerned, heartbreaking for patriots. It's drier than Comey's book, but its conclusions are just as inescapable. Americans now inhabit a servile state.

Fire and Fury – This book is a personal account of his first months in the White House. I haven't read it, but Rosy says it humanizes Trump nicely while honestly depicting him as unprepared, inattentive, easily distracted and arrogant to the point of megalomaniacal. Trump recently described undocumented aliens as animals, a disgusting lapse of decency and sanity, clearly reminiscent of Brown Shirt madness in 1930s Germany. No kidding. Volume 2 is undoubtedly in the works.



The Looming Tower has no relationship with Trump – thank God; I couldn't take much more of him – but the book by Lawrence Wright and the miniseries based on it have provided insight and outrage in their study of the creation of Muslim extremism and the work-up to 9/11. Their heroes – the FBI, their villains – the CIA, which apparently withheld info from the Bureau that might – *might*, have you – led them to Mohammed Atta and the other scrota prepping for months to take the Twin Towers – and American complacency – down. To say the least, it is an enlightening, gripping, but most discouraging story.

In the shared world, the loudest political noises have been the movement of the American embassy in Israel to Jerusalem and the idle insult made by a Trump bimbo and a Fox commentator against John McCain. The Jerusalem move had been sought by the Israelis for decades. To please them, Trump transferred our embassy there from Tel Aviv. This was seen as annexation of the whole city by the Israelis – and as wiser heads had foreseen, Palestinians erupted in fury, the Israelis put them down with fire and fury, and hundreds of people who should not have died did so. That's Trumpian diplomacy in action.

That same week, when White House staffers discussed McCain's refusal to back Trump's nominee for CIA director, a communications assistant – whatever that is – shrugged it off. McCain, she said is “dying anyway.” Callous to the point of heartless, considering that Senator McCain has terminal brain cancer, the remark was repulsive enough – but then a hare-brained retired general, on Fox Business News, had to top it. He declaimed that McCain had revealed secrets while a prisoner of the North Vietnamese. He called the senator “Songbird.” Even Republican senators, normally safely housed up Trump's *derriere*, cried foul. From the White House, nothing. As usual, the President of the United States and his staff decided to sit tight, wait out the brouhaha, then on to the next scandal.

We're assured – by the better angels of our nature and even by Samwise Gamgee – that bad times will pass and good times will return, that loathsomeness and callousness cannot win out in the long run. I've said so myself. But how can any but the lamest dreamer anticipate anything for today's America except the further triumph of vulgarity and evil? There is no positive noise from progressives to win over those bamboozled by Trump and give confidence to those who are disgusted by him? They – we – are hungry for a good message. A good message is all the hope we have of defeating Trump in the short run and of decency regaining authority in the long term. Where is it?

Hardly a movement, more like a single piercing whine, **Incel** entered its moment in the sun in the last few fortnights. Standing for Involuntary Celibacy, it's an online posture characterized by resentment, depression and loneliness, it can fester into neurosis, misogyny and sometimes outright violence.

I won't go into the colorful pharmacology – blue pill vs. red pill vs., God help us, the black pill – but as a frequent sufferer of the ill at the heart of this ... whatever it is, I can express sympathy. Involuntary celibacy such as these men describe is not merely a matter of being itchy and being reduced past the nitty-gritty. It's a matter of crushing loneliness, isolation, and depression – the feeling that the situation is impossible to change. In the obsessively distorted feminism of this mean and crazy time, masculine loneliness is too often greeted with non-generous laughter, often contempt. The hostility of embittered women seems to have thrown up an unscalable wall, and the only suggestion made as to breaching it is to adopt a desperate, false acquiescence. Far from being an understanding of women's hassles, it's an affected weakness, leading just as surely to anger and resentment and the impossibility of sincere contact.

But say you're among the sane incels who *don't* blame women for their troubles (or at least are trying to work yourself out of the condition). I see two contrary solutions. The first is an immediate band aid, fraught with legal, therapeutic and emotional peril: pay for it. The pressure will be off – at least for a

bit – but I can't overemphasize the dangers. Legally you can be arrested and your weakness exposed; medically you can catch everything from crabs to HIV; emotionally you run the desperate risk of assuming that every woman's heart beats to the hooker's worn and fraying string, that Iago was right when that fiend advised a sad-sack that to win a woman, "Fill thy purse with money." That's true for some – but not for anyone you'd be well off to know.

So here's another idea. To change the way the world treats you, change the way you treat the world. Seek therapy. Don't think of the outside world as simply a reflection of yourself. Look at your life objectively, and the world objectively. Try to understand the people around you, and people in general, with sympathy, empathy and with the simple – but challenging – idea that *everyone has his or her own reasons*. This is a massive change in point of view, but it is not sublimation of yourself into PC or any other trivial social authority. It's simply a recognition that other people are important.

And it's the most liberating idea of which people are capable.

Will it work right away? Will that terrible pressure of loneliness and need immediately dissipate? Will ladies flock to you as to Hugh Hefner? Of course not. Sanity and patience are synonymous. But *the worm will turn*.

In the meantime, at the very least, *wrap that rascal*.

The first days of June, this year, contain the 50th anniversary of the assassination of **Robert F. Kennedy**. It wasn't a day anyone alive could ever forget.

I wasn't a fan. A student at Berkeley, I'd seen Eugene McCarthy several times – including the day Martin Luther King, Jr. died – and his diffidence and courage wowed me. I thought RFK's late entry into the presidential race – he waited until *after* McCarthy had exposed Lyndon Johnson's weakness in the New Hampshire primary – was sneaky, his supporters' hero-worshippers, and his guards goombah thugs, rougher than even Nixon's protectors. But then Bobby – everyone called him Bobby – announced he was coming to Oakland. I took a bus to the Scottish Rite Temple to see him there.

Below are two photos from the event, taken after I'd maintained my spot in the center of the front stairs for several hours among Kennedy



aficionados. I took the one on your right as RFK came up the stairs. The words are from my diary entry that night. (I was on page 1837. I'm now approaching page 17,000.) The other was taken a couple of seconds later by a photographer from the San Francisco *Examiner*. (Damn, I was a weird-looking kid.) In between, I said the only words I would ever say to Bobby Kennedy. The crush around us was awful. You can see the reaching hands. I said, "You poor devil!" He looked at me, puzzled, and said, "Hello."



I'll forego of the details of how I followed Kennedy into the Scottish Rite Temple, saw Rosemary Clooney shaking her moneymaker and punched a security dude and so had to run for my life instead of listening to RFK's speech – it's embarrassing. A week later Bobby won the California primary and encountered Sirhan Sirhan in the kitchen of L.A.'s Ambassador Hotel.

I wasn't a fan. There was too much rabid hero worship, too much adoration, too much arrogance. JFK wasn't a god; RFK wasn't Christ. Both were mean, savvy politicians. I know I'm not giving them credit for the brilliant handling of the Cuban Missile Crisis or the revolutionary commitment to civil rights. My anguish at Bobby's death was real. But I can't help but join his candidacy in my mind with his baby brother's run for the roses 12 years later, when the name of Kennedy became laden with privilege, and his people treated Jimmy Carter with rich man's scorn. But ...

But what might have happened? Followers insist that Bobby had changed, that the pugnacious alley-fighter of 1960 had been changed by his brother's presidency and his brother's death, that the revulsion against Vietnam was more than antipathy towards Lyndon Johnson, that their hero had substance and wasn't just another Nixon in leftish garb. What if?

Another anniversary. I begin this issue of *Spartacus* on May 14, 2018. Thirty years to the day from the death of Guy H. Lillian, Jr., **my father**.

May 14, 1988 was an extraordinary day to begin with. That noontime I went to the French Quarter, literally following a pillar of cloud – a terrible fire in the roof of the Cabildo, the famous edifice flanking St. Louis Cathedral on Jackson Square. (The roof, two hundred years old and built of cedar, fooshed up like a matchhead, but the magnificent building beneath was more-or-less unharmed.) For lunch I stopped at Felix' and scarfed a dozen raw oysters, a delicacy my father had introduced me to years before. Afterwards I went by the Nolacon II office on Canal Street and picked up a huge parcel delivered there; it was the original of Ned Dameron's magnificent cover to *Let the Good Times Roll*, the Nolacon II program book, of which Peggy Ranson and I were editors. I remember how awkward it was toting the large painting down the street to the Marriott, where I displayed it proudly to the concom, meeting there.

Then I went home and checked my messages. My brother's increasingly anguished calls were waiting.

I liked Dad, and I miss him. He was only 62, but the heart attack that carried him away during a nap was his third. Same old culprit: smokes. The Navy got him started in 1944 and he never let up, through 40 years of marriage, two brats, 7 homes and engineering for Union Carbide throughout the western world. He was a quiet man in a lot of ways, with a good sense of humor, and generous beyond description. He was in some ways typical of his generation – smart, a professional man from a working class family, head like a brick but extraordinarily competent and tough. I only wish he could have known my nephews, who could have been there when I took my oath. And that I'd found the card he'd kept from when I was 4 or 5, reading in my handwriting, *The finest father in the world*. I would have copied it, then sent it with him.

Rose-Marie arose at 4:30 to watch, with her stepmother, the latest **Royal Wedding**. I slept till ten and caught it on DVR. I liked the dress, cheered the sermon, loved the choir and "Stand By Me", enjoyed Harry's nervousness, fell in with the crowd's holiday spirit. The Brits, they do put on a show.

What this item has to do with involuntary celibacy is a matter for debate, but salutes to the **Los Angeles Scientifiction Fans' Amateur Press Association** (a.k.a. **LASFAPA**) on achieving, in May, its **500th** mailing. It was grand to see the lotus-eaters' apa still a'thrive, and see not only nostalgia, but intelligent commentary in those pages. I was a LASFAPAn for many years. *Vive the Chart!* In fact, **RE-vive the Chart!**

I understand that Baen novelist **John Ringo** was disinvented from **ConCarolinas** this year because the convention had heard a threat against the conservative author and maintained that they could not guarantee his safety at their event. Of course I find this disgraceful on any number of levels. ConCarolinas is supposed to host the DeepSouthCon next year; I need to read a full explanation of their actions. Otherwise I'll sponsor a motion through the Southern Fandom Confederation to reconsider the fitness of their bid.

Give YouTube enough time, and eventually everything you have always wanted to view will show up. So it was with "**The Two Worlds of Charlie Gordon**", which I finally got to see there in mid-May.

The first media version of "Flowers for Algernon", it aired on *The United States Steel Hour* as a live production in 1961. Later, of course, author Daniel Keyes expanded the story into a novel, which won a Nebula to go with the story's Hugo, and the star, Cliff Robertson, won an Oscar for the movie, *Charly*. He was nominated for an Emmy for this TV version, and I wish he'd won, because it's a better, subtler, more moving rendition of the classic story than the film. Glad to have it around.

Now, YouTube, let's have 1955's "The *Caine* Mutiny Court-Martial" from *Ford Star Jubilee* ...

Speaking of television, *The Terror* struck everyone at the Greenhouse as lame; father-in-law Joe Green (new book coming: *Murder in the Real World*) said the show varied enormously from Dan Simmons' derivative novel. *Mom* continues to delight, *Westworld* continues to baffle, although I'm beginning to sense a storyline developing. I beg for the return of *Manhunters*; at the multiplex, it's the new *Picnic at Hanging Rock*. They're pitching it as being told from the girls' point of view, which makes no sense to me – most of Peter Weir's earlier masterpiece followed Miranda and her mates, Mrs. Appleyard and poor Sarah. I don't see how that classic can be improved upon, but we'll give it its chance.

LONG LIVE THE LETTERHACK

Space here to wish Bestest of Luckest to Br'er GARY TESSER as he pesters the nurses at a NYC horse-pistol! Get outta there quick, dude!

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The comments on hugging in fandom reminded me of the time when a female fan commented that she thought I did not hug enough. In retrospect, I'm rather glad I did not.

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I liked *Spartacus* no. 24, filled with politics, literature and sex. What more could I want even if the sex is artsy.

As far as politics go, it is easy to see the origin of Trump's toughness pose. It has been passed on from father to son about how tough we were during the World War II, and how wonderful it was. At least, to people then: for once, we weren't being namby-pambies. Then toughness dovetailed with the cause and

the goal. People liked the exhilaration of telling tyrants where to go and what to do. For that reason, getting tough was the politicians' battle cry decades after the end of World War II. Also, the battle cry of ordinary individuals. I heard "We gotta be tough!" a lot of times in the '60s and '70s. Now, though dormant for some years, we hear "Get tough!" once more, from Trump's followers.

Us too! We gotta be tough to stand up to Trump's insanity.

The reason is they have finally found a politician who speaks their language. The fact that toughness is problematic in a world of unholy alliances and shades of gray is irrelevant. That the US has been bitten in the rear end so many times in its attempts to be tough is irrelevant too. Trump's followers still follow that holy grail.

In addition to the violence of present day foreign policy, you come closer to home, Guy: you wonder about the mass murders that have been occurring in the schools. What's to be done? I admit your program for minimizing mass murders sounds good. The problem remains how to predict mass murderers before their crimes occur. For a lot of them, it couldn't be predicted from their previous conduct: often enough, that was beyond reproach. Furthermore, even where mass murderers have identified themselves as mass murderers, there are cracks in the system. They are protected by influential parents or community politics. Thus school authorities, who are often craven, ignore would-be mass murderers. An example was Nicholas Cruz. If the school security officer didn't tag him as a murderous psychotic, he tagged him as a bag full of trouble. Nonetheless, nothing happened until Cruz killed.

Ultimately, Guy, you go from mass murderers to political correctness. It is just like old fashioned prudery. You said the wrong thing and you were in trouble. Referring to a chair's 'leg' was considered gauche. A woman was once sentenced to five years at hard labor for a book about the holiness of marital sex. All this resulted from cowardice. If people had the guts to buck the zeitgeist, a lot of political correctness and prudery would have been laughed out of court.

You go from these issues to Billy Graham. No prudery or political correctness here, No toughness here either. You find Billy a decent person. There was something else that interested me in Graham. He believed that god was a matter solely of faith. It fascinated me that when I have heard Graham speak, he did not try to cover god in the clothes of science or even logic. He said faith alone should guide us. I agree with him on that. I think the problem is not that my position is complex; it's that, in general, people are confused about this issue. For them, God has to be scientific, logical and historical. If I remember correctly, the New Testament found faith sufficient.

You go from Billy Graham to movie reviews, and to the movie "Annihilation." You find the movie weird and exciting in some places. However, you cannot understand its message. For you, it would have been better had they used Western Union. Or, I have another cliché for this. Remember the t-shirts that used to say, "If you can't dazzle them with brilliance, baffle them with bullshit."

Finally, we get to the letters, EVIDENCE MOUNTING. Lloyd Penney makes a comment that because of harassment accusations, he doesn't know how to treat female friends anymore. I would imagine there is less problem with older women. There are two reasons for this. One, they are less likely to believe that every man wants to get into their pants. Two, they have lived a good deal of their lives in a pre-political correctness era.

From there we skip to the end of this issue of *Spartacus*. There, we get back to politics again. You comment on the good tidings Kim Jong Un seemed to be giving Trump at the time. You say it is to the good but you wonder what Kim is up to. It was more than Kim; the whole thing was not what it seemed. Trump got all the credit for what sounded like Kim making concessions. And this was before he had even negotiated anything with him. On the other hand, the President of Korea, Moon Jae-In, had just negotiated with Kim, and got no credit, at least not in America. In addition, North Korea has always wanted to negotiate with the US, and other big powers. Negotiating with Trump was probably one of their objectives. They couldn't negotiate with Obama because he considered them tricksters.

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In your abbreviated review of the movie *Annihilation*, you mention that it tries to emulate in tone and mood many other movies of various genres but in the end it was a case of “nice house, no furniture.” A lot of the reviews were not very kind, some even going so far as to tear it a new one. And summaries of the plot that I’ve read describe it as more horror than science fiction. And horror has never been my favorite genre. So I’ve decided that I don’t want to see it, at least until it comes to free cable. But hey, at least it *did* get me to read Jeff VanderMeer’s novel the film is based on!

Also, condolences on the loss of Paprika. Nicki and I have suffered the loss of several loved pets over the years. It’s made us ever more aware that life is transient and to try to get the most out of every day.

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Sadly, I agree with your friend’s speculations [in *Spartacus* no. 24] on whether our country can pull out of the Trump bog. Even if there is a Democratic uprising that sets the house in order again, there is an undercurrent of incivility out there that may never go away. My truck, which has Democratic stickers of one kind or another, has been moderately keyed in one place. “The driver of this truck is a dumbass” was written on one of the Demo stickers. That’s Trump’s base.

Lloyd Penney

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Many thanks for issue 25 of *Spartacus*. I suspect this will be a difficult issue to respond to. I will say that in Canada, we do have a substantial amount of gun control, but any gun registry was done away with by a previous right-wing government, and the current right-wing opposition party in the federal government wants to not only relax gun control, but do away with it entirely. Some people refuse to take lessons from any mass loss of life via guns.

I have seen outbursts online claiming that both the Republican Party and the National Rifle Association should both be declared terrorist organizations. The numbers killed, the pallid response from politicians, and the arrogance of those who love their guns is astonishing when I see the news up here. Thoughts and prayers are useless, and action is thwarted by politicians paid off by the NRA.

The practical suggestions you list. Do them all. If guns are such a vital part of American life, make them of infinite value so that you must work hard to get access to one. Instead, you need a doctor’s certificate for antihistamines, but anyone can buy a gun, often at Walmart. There is so much the people of any country can do, but the world fears America right now, mostly because of guns and the equally safety-off mouth of DT45. America is playing hardball when it comes to NAFTA, and Trump could walk America out of the deal at any time, on a whim.

I am hopeful that the kids from Florida who survived that latest shooting can motivate the country to show some common sense with guns, and I also hope that your mid-term elections can turn Trump into a lame-duck, his Russian masters notwithstanding.

The world bade goodbye to Billy Graham, and all mourned his passing. And yet, after his passing, he was reported to be quite the homophobe. His son...some of the things he has said are just astonishing. Are there any true men of God who are willing to speak out against the hatred that comes out of so-called Christian mouths?

Aren’t cataract operations fun? I seem to be sensitive to anything that is given to me anesthesia-wise, and so-called locals knock me right out. When I had my cataract op, it was interesting to see that my

eye had been emptied of its virtuous humour, which made looking through nearly impossible. Then, the eye replenished the humour, and the level in my eye rose every day. This kept me piqued through my recovery.

The South Korean Olympics ... well, our usual strengths, curling and hockey, just weren't there this time, but Canadian athletes did win a record number of medals for us, so we're all pretty happy. Curling and hockey will have a look at, and it is four years until the next Winter Games.

I pray that this American nightmare, one the whole world is having, will end soon. Most of the world never knew about mid-term elections, and now, they are praying for a Democratic victory on all available seats. Trump a lame-duck exec? We can but hope, and we also hope the youth of America will rise up and take their voters' responsibility.

FAREWELLS AT THE END OF MAY

Two to note: **Clint Walker** was a hero of my boyhood, starring in the second-best Warner Brothers TV western, *Cheyenne*. (The best was *Maverick*, of course, when James Garner starred.) Something about the base story – a dude wandering through the West, without a home, struck a chord. Cheyenne Bodie kept up his travels for seven seasons. I can't find the most memorable episode on IMDB, and it's been deleted from YouTube, but my contemporaries will remember it: cowboys camping out on the range are menaced by a creature who creeps up on them out of the dark, eyes gleaming, then tears them to bits. Cheyenne hires on to kill it. I saw the beginning of the program when I was about eight. I saw the end when I was *fifty-eight*. My dad had to tell me the *denouement* because I'd hidden my face in the couch. (It was a badly burned bear.) Thanks for a memorable bit of my youth, Clint. Sorry your guy bought the farm in *The Dirty Dozen*. And yes, your beard *was* tougher than mine.

Then there's ... well. A lifetime with the comics. You know whom I mourn.



Fly high.