

SPARTACUS

no. 28 September 2018

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September 11, 2018 would have been my parents' 71st anniversary. I'd rather think of the date in that way, and enough time has passed since that obscene Tuesday 17 years ago that I can put that happy couple of 21-year-old kids ahead of the monsters in my mind. By 2001, My father was gone, my mother hospitalized. I'm glad they weren't aware of the insult delivered onto them.

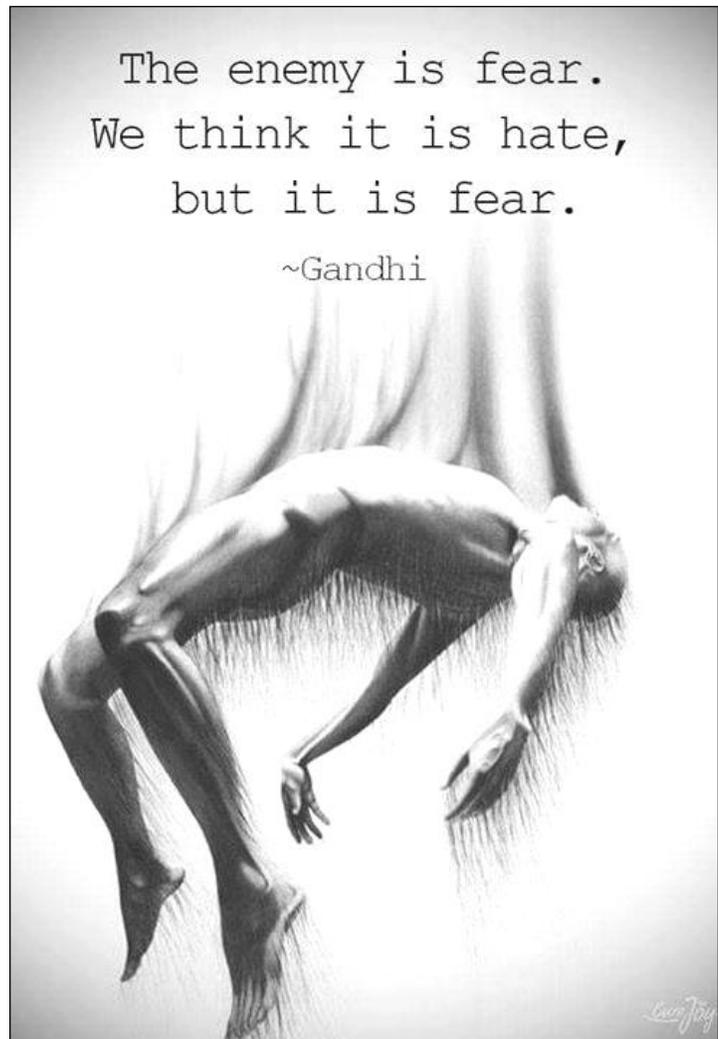
But sometimes my imagination pulls itself into the abyss, and I wonder, *what if --?* What if they'd been alive in 2001 and in New York to celebrate their 54th anniversary, and they'd decided to host a family breakfast at Windows on the World ... and Rosy, Lance and Marie, and I, running late, were standing below as –

Imagination makes it real. More real even than being in New York a few weeks after 9/11. All those fences filled with all those photographs of very ordinary-looking people. All that nasty gypsum dust everywhere, coating the sarcophagus of Alexander Hamilton, sifting across Wall Street, making you cough. The cranes at Ground Zero, moving, moving, like they'd never stop ...

Funny how such a huge, sprawling atrocity could be considered repaid by a single bullet into a wicked old man's forehead. So it was, though. It exemplified Obama's standing principle, established in the Captain Phillips incident and underscored with bin Laden and Jihadi John: *Thou shalt not fuck with us.*

9/11 ended with a gunshot. But it's never forgotten.

On to happier things. **Wasn't San Jose a fine Worldcon?** Rosy and I drove – yes, drove – out to San Jose to enjoy the convention and sights beforehand and after. I'll go into obsessive detail in a zine to be called *The Cathartic Route*. Therein I'll recount the comfort of returning to sites from my childhood – homes, schools, even my birthplace – and showing my *la belle* beautiful places like the Hearst Castle and



the Pacific Coast Highway. But the Worldcon will predominate. Unless I missed something, there were no great controversies. Perhaps a small hubbub about N.K. Jemisen's Hugo acceptance remarks – one gent I much respect called it the speech of “a sore winner” – but that was overwhelmed by the presence of my beloved Quinn Yarbro, a hug from Bobbi Armbruster, a series of phenomenal parties, a successful WOOF collation, good vibes.

It's funny, in a way. I came back from the San Jose Worldcon not only cheerful but *confident*, ready to take on any challenge you could name: teaching, writing, fanac, living. I firmly believe that's one of the effects and therefore one of the purposes of fandom: to reinforce the best in all of us.

By the time we speak again, the mid-term elections will be held in the United States. Just in time, we have *Fear*, the phenomenal expose by Bob Woodward, and the *New York Times* op-ed by an anonymous member of Trump's inner circle. Like *Fire and Fury* before them, they reveal an administration run by a cabal of caretakers dedicated to restraining the actions of a President out of touch with reality and restraint.

As with most Trump books, it's painful to read *Fear* – at least the accounts of the early confidence that the orange-utan would be demolished. But after that, the book becomes a fascinating look at the American government in *inaction* – as professionals try to work the nation's problems against the resistance of an incompetent and untethered dunderhead. It's no wonder their candor is pocked with frustrated vilification and their boss – and it's less wonder that one of them has peeked out from undercover to assure the American public that the Resistance to Trump extends deep into his own staff.

Curiosity over the author of the *NYTimes* op-ed piece is muted these days, overwhelmed by the weather and the Supreme Court hearings. The writer states that “adults in the room” supervise everything Trump does, blocking or at least stalling his worst impulses, since impulse and whim are the *modus* by which the President conducts his office. Who is the guy? (Or lady?) My bet would be Vice President Pence because of the language used – how often have you heard “lodestone” in conversation of late? – though the word “malign” and the character of the writer would point to a lifelong public servant like Jon Huntsman, the ambassador to Russia.

Whoever it is, the point about Trump remains. He's the worst choice for President this country has ever made: hidebound, impulsive, unprepared, incurious, inexperienced, scatterbrained, and worst of all, *mean*. The man's cares stop at #1. That's the end of it. And he's surrounded by sycophants in Congress too frightened of his base to oppose a scintilla of his will. For God's sakes, *vote them out*.

One of the most obvious reasons for this call to (voting) arms goes on as I write, the Brett Kavanaugh Supreme Court hearings. At first, I was mainly in despair over the inevitability of a Court packed with Trump stooges dedicated to the reactionary agenda of the far right. But then, as happens often nowadays, a brave woman stepped forward, and the whole controversy became all about something else.

Having been a clumsy and insecure male for most of my life, I know that I've occasionally behaved in a fashion unbecoming a gentleman. For the occasions in which I have displayed an insensitivity to the feelings of ladies, I have, when possible, apologized personally, and when not possible, done so generally and publicly. (I do so again, in all sincerity.) Perhaps these admissions bind me with Judge Kavanaugh in a regrettable fraternity of fools, but I would object: I never tried to rape a woman, nor put a hand over a woman's mouth to keep her from screaming.

There are things you cannot do to another person, no matter what your age or impairment or under any circumstances. Restricting them, threatening them with rape or harm, imposing your will upon them – these are three.

We all make mistakes as young men and judging the intent and assent of young women is difficult. Getting smashed makes our sensibilities even less acute. But there are lessons we must learn in order to be Men, and respect and protection for our partners in the race is primary among them. Translation: *don't be a dick*. The lady always makes the call.

I don't know what Kavanaugh did, but my belief falls, at first hearing, with the professor pointing the finger. I have pity for Kavanaugh's daughters and wife. As for him, my respect depends on his

honesty in the face of the professor's accusations, and, should they be found valid, the depth of his apology and regret.

And his withdrawal. The Supreme Court is made up of human beings. They err. Hugo Black was once a Klansman. William O. Douglas liked to marry women young enough to be his granddaughters. All of us of an age remember the complaints of Anita Hill against Clarence Thomas. But attempted rape is too much. Such a man does not deserve to hold his head up in human company, let alone serve on the Supreme Court.

Finally, as if the Trump presidency could not get any sleazier, here comes **Stormy Daniels'** book, which includes a squalid, TMI-laden account of the porn star's sexual encounter with the man. Several, including the *Esquire* political guy, seized the segment – which centers on a repulsive description of Trump's ding-a-ling – to mock him and suggest that his entire life has been guided by a screwy form of penis envy.

Stupid. More than crude, more than tasteless, *much* more than titillating, this nonsense is *stupid*. It does the impossible: it builds sympathy for Trump. It makes the thug look like a victim. He's a cheap, foolish bullshit artist and *poseur*; he doesn't deserve victimhood and his offenses against America are too serious for kid stuff.

The movie *BlackkkKlansman* is one of the best films I've seen so far in 2018, a comic tale of a black Colorado Springs detective infiltrating – by phone and white surrogate – the Ku Klux Klan. Like most of director Spike Lee's work, its humor underscores strong seriousness on the subject closest to Lee's heart: racism in America.

Principal among its targets: KKK Grand Poobah David Duke. I've met Duke and must report that the film's is not a particularly accurate portrait – actor Topher Grace, though highly skilled, is a head shorter, for instance. The movie also captures little hint of the mendacious fraud that fills Duke's every corpuscle – or his perplexing likeability.

Here's what I mean. I heard Duke give a speech once during a campaign he was running – he used politics to scam money out of supporters. He was facing a roomful of lawyers and was a bit intimidated, particularly when my boss asked him a question about maritime law that any informed citizen would have recognized at once, and this candidate for the U.S. Senate had to admit he'd never heard of it. Nevertheless, I have to admit that I got a kick out of him. Duke was having a great time and his smile was infectious.

Of course, when he made the finals in the Louisiana gubernatorial race, two years later, I was horrified. Riding past the back of a Nawlins TV station the night before election, I saw him being interviewed, that same boyish glee on his face. I remembered a photo of him marching someplace in a *faux* Nazi uniform – and the letter my father sent me after visiting Dachau. I rolled down the window. “*Sig heil, you asshole!*” I shouted, and drove away. Duke lost the election (I take full credit) and later, went to federal prison for fraud.

All that aside, *BlackkkKlansman* is great, satirically funny with a backbone of anger and anguish. It ends with scenes from Charlottesville. The creatures Duke leads are still around, emboldened by the elevation of a seemingly sympathetic lout to the presidency. Lee wants us to laugh at them, true – but also know that what we face is serious beyond measure.

Hurricane Florence hit the most beautiful place I've ever lived, killed a slew of its sweet people, destroyed and injured a lot of good lives. My ex is up there, and lots of friends from my years in Greensboro. I would have heard if anything had happened to Beth, but the others? No way to know. No way to do anything except wish the whole tarheel nation well, impotent though that response may be.

One of the nicest things to happen since we returned from Worldcon was my sister-in-law **Melodee's birthday party**, held at her house in Melbourne, about 25 miles away. Melodee and her girlfriend Heather are active in the area's deaf community, so the event alternated between spooky silence and

raucous racket – the first when folks were signing conversations, the latter when dogs or kids were acting up (no one could hear them).

Anyway, the highlight for all came when Melodee climbed onto a chair and announced the date of their wedding and the identities of the wedding party. Among the matrons of honor, *la belle* Rose-Marie. Happiness abounded and was quite contagious. I remembered my past reluctance to attend a gay wedding, and felt delightedly abashed. May 4th, 2019. I'll be there.

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

OR ... LETTERS ... on Spartacuses #26 and #27

Rich Lynch

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You write that: "This morning I went into my father-in-law's backyard to watch a Falcon 9 launch into the dawn's early light. I was alone on the canal, no family members or neighbors were awake to share it with me." I hope this isn't a case of "if you've seen one launch, you've seen 'em all". I don't think I'd ever become so jaded that I'd miss a big rocket launch, especially if I lived as near to the launch site as you do. Good for you for keeping it a sense-of-wonder experience.

My next-door neighbor feels the same enthusiasm for spaceflight that I do. I'm sure it was a matter of "Let me sleep."

Also: Thanks for that very fine remembrance of the late Harlan Ellison. He was so outgoing that many of us (Nicki and I included) have personal Harlan stories, but yours is better than most. I only wish that you'd have been invited to participate in the Harlan remembrance event at Worldcon 76 in San Jose. You would have been a great addition to the panel.

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The passing of Harlan... I never met him, so it is easy to fall back on reports of others, and I was in the audience when he groped Connie Willis. Still, not having met him, I shouldn't have any personal opinions, good or bad. I will say that all of his writing I got to read, all of it was an adventure. I should probably end it there, and listen to others who knew him far better.

Some have told me to mind my own damned business when it comes to Trump and his particular brand of insanity. Seeing where I live, however, and seeing the Trump regime's negotiations with Canada and Mexico re the North American Free Trade Agreement, it IS my damned business. The negotiators have decided that American must have full access to our dairy industry (which is quite fragile), and also full access to our cultural industries like broadcasting, entertainment and publishing. The answer to both is a firm no. Our culture defines us as Canadians; who knows who would invade and buy up everything in sight, we'd be but ersatz Americans, and no offence, but I like being Canadian, and I'd like to stay that way. The fact that Trump was specifically not invited to the funerals of John McCain and Aretha Franklin should say volumes, but as always, he is deaf to it all, although the current Bob Woodward book may improve his hearing just a little. I hear the 25th Amendment being brought up here and there, but that is wishful thinking. I trust you are following the Brett Kavanaugh Supreme Court hearings, and if he is approved, current Republican policy may stick to the US and the world for decades to come.

I have seen *Citizen Kane* but once...after reading what your students have to say about the movie, perhaps I should see it again with fresh appreciation.

The local ... the looting of the USA is already underway, with the GOP getting their hands on the trillions of dollars set aside for your retirement. The INCEL movement has struck up here, with one of them using his panel van truck to run down pedestrians on a north Toronto sidewalk.

And on Spartacus #26 ...

Based on what little I have seen on James Comey, he seems to be an amiable sort, soft but cleverly spoken, the type you'd like to share a beer with. His dealings with the tre45onous shitgibbon, I don't envy, but it hasn't turned him away from the bright side of life. More and more, it's apparent that he is quite guilty of a host of crimes, and the newspaper says that he is set to seize control of your Federal Reserve. I firmly believe Trump is the clown act, hiding the fact that the Republicans will grab as much money from the treasury for themselves and their friends.

Toronto has had to deal with the Incels as well. One self-identified Incel ran down a number of people with a truck on a major Toronto street's sidewalk some weeks ago. He is happily forgotten by this city, but they people he purposefully killed are remembered every day.

You write here that in June was the 50th anniversary of the assassination of RFK. You may notice the date, it being the 49th anniversary of the first manned moon landing. As I have asked before, if we can put a man on the moon, why can't we put a man on the moon today?

When we watched the Royal Wedding, all we could think of was...mawwage! We expected someone to mention the Princess Bride, and have his eminence Peter Cook tell us that mawwage is wot bwings us togeder tooday. Mawage, that bwessed awangment, that dweam wifin a dweam... And wuv, tru wuv, will fowow you fowevea... So tweasure your wuv.

The local...I still have female friends to hug, and I am grateful for that. Newer friends are still a little standoffish, and I can't blame them. They may get more used to me, but hug or not, I will treasure (tweasure!) their friendship.

Yes, the passing of Margot Kidder. Her life was not easy, but she did make her mark. American news sources often failed to mention that she was Canadian by birth, and was born in Yellowknife, Northwest Territories. Her sister Annie often appears on local television, speaking about education in Ontario and within Toronto. The people who make the greatest marks on our lives are passing away; tell them how much they mean before they are unable to hear you. Tell them now.

Also on #26 ...

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Isn't that the coolest e-dress you've ever seen in fandom?

Thank you for your recounting of your time at the Scottish Rite Temple in Oakland (CA) back in 1968. I think Bobby Kennedy's change was genuine, but I take most of that from the cautious appraisal offered by a wary Martin Luther King Jr. not long before his untimely death. He almost certainly would not have been the man his hagiography made him following his assassination, but I think he would have been more like a preview of an ideological version of Bill Clinton, a pragmatist who did indeed have an agenda of ideas, and a sense of how to bring them into being. The real question of whether he had had already burned too many Congressional bridges to be effective is one which will have to remain unanswered.

Thank you for the reminisce of your father. It speaks well of the relationship you must have had with the man.

SOLICITATION

I'm planning a *Challenger* for this fall – #42 – built around the theme of A.I.: robots, androids, computers, the cloud, you name it. I'll need articles, art, maybe even some fiction. What I'll definitely need is LOCs on issue #41, up and at'em on Bill Burns' wonderful **eFanzines.com**. Get in touch: GHLIII@yahoo.com. Thanks – and don't forget to vote!

PHOTOS FROM SUMMER

You'll find many of these in my San Jose report,

The Cathartic Route, RSN!



Me with my fannish mama ... and San Jose's Guest of Honor: **Chelsea Quinn Yarbro**.



Above, the **Harlan Ellison Memorial** with **Tom Whitmore, Bob Silverberg, Christine Wein, Matt Segoloff**. Not shown: David Gerrold.

Our great friend **Lezli Robyn**.



Until November, seekers of truth.

And back in New Orleans, scarfing down at Liuzza's fabulous Italian restaurant, the *Sons of the Sand*: us, **John Guidry, Justin & Annie Winston**.

