

# SPARTACUS 29

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*In this fall of 2018, evil not only crawls across the face of America, it **rampages**.*

It's humiliating, but appropriate, that this cartoon – which Australian Nick Stathopoulos called “brilliant” – was drawn for a Canadian newspaper. The havoc done by Donald Trump and his Congress to American culture and American law has been panoramic in scope and oceanic in shame, but its worst betrayal has been to the repute of America and its institutions to the world.

This ‘toon was specifically directed at the **Kavanaugh** hearings – and the bluster, hypocrisy and mendacity which accompanied them – gutted whatever reputation the **FBI** had left, the **Congress** had left, the **Supreme Court** had left, and established *this* as the prevalent image of America. Little that happened in the rest of October, 2018, made a dent in that perspective. There was a time when this country and the ideas behind it were the hope of mankind. Who could possibly think that now?

What needled me was how *obvious* it all was. Perhaps I speak through a trial lawyer's perspective, used to the suffering of true victims and the desperate recriminations of criminals, but anyone who has ever dealt with an alcoholic certainly recognized the hysterical dipsomania in Kavanaugh's rantings, and anyone who has encountered a victim of violence should as certainly recognize truth when that victim speaks it, and speak it the professor has.

The scumbag did what she said he did. Any other explanation insults one's intelligence and one's knowledge of human nature. Kavanaugh got away with it at the time because he was rich and entitled and surrounded by a society which accepted such behavior. He gets away with it now because he is protected by political powers tolerant of the repulsive acts of its minions.

Question is, are we the people accepting, tolerant? Or just thoughtless and forgetful? Who, beyond a few progressive do-gooders, berated as a *mob* by Trump and his toadies, spares now a thought for the refugee children America keeps in cages? Who will spare a thought for the professor and #MeToo in a month? Americans are not wired that way. Within a week we were already on to Kanye West's repulsive clown act in the Oval Office, the murdered Saudi journalist, and whatever shameful atrocity next spills out of 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue. Our disgrace is on ongoing concern.

By the way, if your stomach can stand it, you might want to find a book called *Our Guys* by Bernard Lefkowitz, about the entitled high school dudes in Glen Ridge NJ who enticed a mentally challenged girl to give a sex show, promising that one she had a crush on would take her out on a date. These scum were rich kids, of course, jocks, entitled and protected in their town – until a jury nailed them and three went to prison. Kavanaugh and his supporters bathe in the same fetid light.

Not that the rest of October was better. It conveyed more corruption and loathing, dishonesty, division and violence than any election season I've ever been through. Gross idiocies and obscenities blossomed every day. Look little further than the ***Proud Boys***, the Brownshirts of the modern Republican Party. Witness their Miami attack on Nancy Pelosi, led by payroll-paid Republican staffers, pounding on walls, driving people to fear for their lives ...

And then, sluicing swampwater as he rose, came the lunatic who spread ***Pipe bombs*** about America, aimed at Trump's political critics. The breadth of the terrorism was a new one in American politics, and its genesis is unmistakable. Trump's out-of-the-phone-book condemnation of violence, following by *one day* his stated joy at a Republican thug body-slammng a journalist, was stultifying in its blatant hypocrisy. He didn't order those assassination attempts against progressives, but he instigated them, demonstrated approval of them, *caused* them.

And then Pittsburgh.

One of the women killed in ***the Pittsburgh synagogue massacre*** was a 97-year-old survivor of the Holocaust. Ah, murderer, ah, psychopath, ah, scion of this season of hatred – that was a *brave* stroke.

My father, not long before he died, sent me a letter and a book from one of his overseas business trips. He'd gone to Europe and as a side trip to Dachau. Dad was from Birmingham – grew up there – and spent World War II in the Pacific, so he'd only dealt with the European theatre as news, and history. But now he could see it. The letter he sent was the longest I ever got from him. He was neither political nor very demonstrative, just sensible in his engineer's way – whenever I went off on a rant he insisted that I research my subject in the encyclopedia, for instance – but the letter held a shaken need to communicate with me, specifically, of his horror, and that I found very moving. I was in my late thirties, divorced, in law school, but I cried. I'm crying now. I felt five years old. I didn't want my daddy in a place like that.

But he went because he had to go. His duty and right. His generation, after all, helped shut places like that down.

The book dealt with the whole camp system and held ghastly photos of inmates and sickening shots of aloof, arrogant Nazis – Heydrich, Eichmann, Himmler, that lot. The picture that offended me the most showed Nazi judges, in their robes, giving the *sig heil* salute. I said to myself, *Not in our country, Pop.*

I wish that was still true.

The Mad Bomber, the Pittsburgh maniac, and many of the Proud Boys have been arrested. We'll see if justice is done. We'll also see what follows them in the political life of this country, because our fearless, feckless President shows no sign of stopping the hate rhetoric he's spewed all along. The assault on the Tree of Life synagogue was in no way formulated by an active Republican or Trump official – but it was fomented, and at the top.

This situation is intolerable. If we have any decency left in us as a culture, it has to stop. *L'chaim.*

Being an unabashed liberal, a woman, and from Massachusetts to boot, I doubt the brash and brilliant **Elizabeth Warren** is progressives' most electable candidate for 2020. But my Gawd, she's got *cujones*, tearing into Trump like a burr bit. Such ceaseless attack is definitely important; Democrats need that depth of aggression. Her release of her DNA results makes mock of Trump's "Pocahontas" slur – she really does carry Native American genes – but I think she should soften her PC impulses and embrace the nickname. "Pocahontas is on the warpath!" *speaks* to me.

**Hurricane Michael** missed our part of Florida, but its havoc has matched the worst damage either Rosy or I have ever seen. She reported on Hurricane Andrew; we both saw what Katrina did to Waveland MS. Human lives reduced to *sticks*. Sticks are what is left to the Florida panhandle. In the meantime, Trump mocks the idea of global warming, and plays giddy games with the insufferable lunatic Kanye West in the Oval Office. The sex tape will be released soon.

Off I've gone on a **Classy Horror Binge**. I saw and rather enjoyed the new **Halloween**, very nicely played by all concerned, though the deaths of children and nice teenagers remain infinitely disturbing to me. Since I have no classes to teach in the spring semester, I'm going to try to write, and I have a horror story in mind, in which I plan to disturb myself profoundly. Wishing to keep it subtle, I've been buying up the works of **Shirley Jackson** and **Ramsey Campbell**, my favorite writers in the genre. Their *oeuvre* is creepy, subtle, literate and – in the best possible way – *sinister*. Also in the realm of the ghoulish, *Esquire* recently published an excellent list of their choices for the best horror films, including several of my high-rankers: *Frankenstein*, *Don't Look Now*, *Get Out*, *Psycho*, and *not The Exorcist*, which I've always thought overrated by thrice.



A quick review or two. **First Man** – Strong pluses, overwhelming all else: the flights, both in X-15 and spacecraft, are magnificent and terrifying; I was in tears during the moon landing. The astronauts are well-portrayed (with the exception that follows) and I found no historical inaccuracies.

Minuses: Gosling is miscast; I've thought so from *Jump*. Check out Neil Armstrong's *60 Minutes* profile on YouTube. The man shown is a strong, complex, thoroughly cool and competent man, a creature of absolute control. Furthermore, he looked like a glass of milk. Not only does Gosling look nothing like Armstrong, the fierce, explosive actor portrays him as perpetually miserable, and that misses the mark. Perhaps Armstrong is just too deep and just

too taciturn to capture. Same is so for Claire Foy as Jan Armstrong; a deep and complex person herself, all her interpreter does in the whole movie is pout. *Esquire* praised the film and Foy's performance for making the strain on a damaged family realistic and sad (the Armstrongs eventually divorced), but the conflict seems almost hackneyed to me; Rosy preferred the marital relationship shown in *Apollo 13*.

But man ... that moon landing. I was almost in tears. July 20, 1969 was my 20th birthday. There came a time when I got to thank Buzz Aldrin for the birthday present. It's one of the great disappointments of life that I never got to do the same with Neil.

Final word: gripping stuff, but it only comes alive when there's space-flyin' to be done.

And sorry, critics, but Rosy and I loved ***Bohemian Rhapsody***. Wonderful music and a strong performance by Rami Malek as Freddie Mercury, most moving when he realizes a huge stadium crowd is singing along with a Queen anthem. Far from being a run-o'-da-mill biopic, it's a powerful and beautiful and compelling look at the business and bonding of a band. If the critical reception had been less nit-picky, we'd be calling *Rhapsody* the best movie about rock-and-roll since *Almost Famous*.

Forthcoming: a new *Challenger* film, a new *Superman* TV series. I wish they would bring back Tom Welling for the latter, since the guy they stuffed into the super-suit for *Supergirl* is completely wrong for the part.

Being prepared for publication by Greenhouse Scribes is a novel of my father-in-law's called *Apalachicola: Freedom River*, and as an unbirthday surprise the other week, he showed me its ***dedication***.

This novel is dedicated to a life-long champion of freedom for those unable to defend or free themselves, Public Defender Guy Lillian III

How 'bout that?

## **LONG LIVE LETteRcOLS**

*From our local newspaper:*

### **Woman run over by her car trying to escape cat attack**

By Austin Rushnell  
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BREVARD COUNTY - Wild animals aren't something that we often have to worry about, but for one Cocoa woman, a stray cat changed her life.

On Jan. 5, Jeanna Battles was backing out of her home in Cocoa when a stray cat jumped into her window and began clawing at her.

During a frantic fight in the front seat, Ms. Battles took her foot off the brake of the vehicle,

Still struggling with the feline, Ms. Battles became stuck while attempting to exit her moving car, and after she landed on her driveway, she was run over by her car's front tire.

The car then rolled into the street, where it struck another vehicle's car door.

The Florida Highway Patrol was called, and FHP Officer Dominique Howard was on the scene within 11 minutes. Once there, Officer Howard called a Life Flight EMS to transport Ms. Battles to Holmes Regional Medical Center. See ATTACK, page 10

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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. 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 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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9/11...I remember that day because I was at work, noticed that almost everyone in the office had disappeared somewhere, and knowing that I was rarely told what was happening, I went to see where everyone was. I saw televisions I didn't know where here and there around the plant, and I arrived at the main meeting room to see the second plane craft into the second tower. It will be a haunting memory for a long time to come.

I'd be interested in your thoughts on Brett Kavanaugh becoming a Supreme Court associate. It looks like American men will not be enough to change things in the mid-terms. You must call upon American women to do the job, and vote the monsters out of office. One brave woman got this started; millions of brave women must step forward to start to bring sanity not only to America, but also to the world. Trump's horrific attitudes have emboldened similar politicians elsewhere. The Canadian provinces of Ontario, Saskatchewan and now Quebec have elected right-wing politicians who ran on nationalistic platforms (or in Ontario's case, almost no platform at all), or a platform of acting for the people, and now are pushing through destructive legislation that are meant to do things to the people.

My letter of comment...NAFTA was renegotiated with a lot of pressure from Trump and his cronies. Our negotiators, led by the extremely competent Chrystia Freeland, pushed aside US demands for open access to our media industry, and kept the chapter that meant there was a dispute-solving mechanism in the agreement. We had to give up a percentage of our dairy industry to US dairy farmers, but for many years, we've learned to Buy Canadian, and I suspect we will be reminded of that when the agreement goes into effect soon.



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Nice memories of Harlan Ellison. No doubt that he had an enormous influence on science fiction. After his death, I read many tributes by those who loved him and had stories demonstrating his caring. Unfortunately, some had less than positive interactions with him. As much as I admire some of his work, I can understand those who had issues with him. A unique individual, indeed.

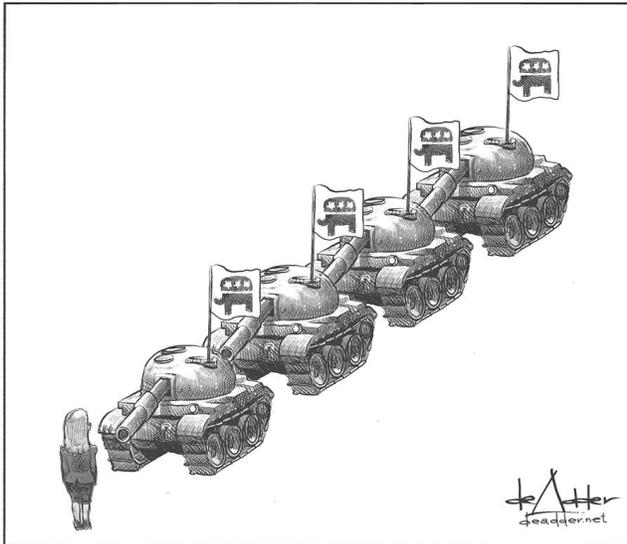
Bob Jennings' LoC: What the frack? "...ladies these days... want Mr. Perfect." "Women today don't want a human being of the male persuasion, they want a dog." "For women especially, marriage is seen as a way of making everything wonderful." Again, what the frack? He says he doesn't sympathize with the INCEL movement, but his views sounds pretty bloody close to their party line.

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On James Comey's *Higher Loyalty* you note, *He tells of the Hillary email investigations, which turned up no prosecutable misbehavior, and the clumsy decision to reopen her file which possibly torpedoed her presidential hopes.* No "possibly" about it: Nate Silver and others have carefully documented that it moved the needle sufficiently in at least five states. [Those "others"

include Lanny Davis, lawyer to Presidential consigliere Michael Cohen's, for fuck's sake – I almost said "for heaven's sake", but given Cohen and Davis, there's no heavenly involvement possible – at length, in a recent book, *The Unmaking of the President 2016.*] Of course, Comey didn't release that information publicly. He only sent notification that he was reopening the investigation to the relevant Congressional committees. It was the Republicans on those committees who broadcast the letter. And if they hadn't, the virulently anti-Clinton agents in the FBI's New York office would have done it.

*In the shared world, the loudest political noises have been the movement of the American embassy in Israel to*



*Jerusalem ... The Jerusalem move had been sought by the Israelis for decades. To please them, [the President] 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... and hundreds of people who should not have died did so. That's [the President's] diplomacy in action. That's American foreign policy being dictated by the criminal Benjamin Netanyahu to the criminal Jared Kushner to serve the interests of the masters of the Russian agent in the oval office. Today (the last day of August) the BBC is reporting that the US is withdrawing support for a UN commission that provides aid to displaced Palestinians. Because,*

as this Administration continues to make clear by its actions, they believe a n\*\*\*\*\* is a n\*\*\*\*\*, no matter whether he's a Palestinian or an NFL player or an Hispanic kid seeking asylum with his parents or a hurricane victim in Puerto Rico.

[And, added while editing: To celebrate September 11th, our President's national security advisor, John "I never met a diplomatic situation I couldn't make worse" Bolton, announced that the United States was ordering the closure of the Palestinian mission to the US. The AP reports, "The administration cited the refusal of Palestinian leaders to enter into peace talks..." It probably doesn't have anything to do with the current administration's requirement for peace talks that the Palestinians bend over the table and drop their pants. Worse, the AP report also says, "John Bolton launched a broadside against the Hague-based International Criminal Court. Bolton declared that the ICC 'is already dead' to the US." Put another way, the current administration is putting the international community on warning that it is planning to commit war crimes. At least they're pre-announcing it, unlike Dick Cheney admitting it after the fact.]

*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, its online posture characterized by resentment, depression and loneliness, it can fester into neurosis, misogyny and sometimes outright violence. .... 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. Then they need to pull themselves up by their own bootstraps, stop believing that women are Barbie dolls, put down their X-box controllers and their on-line porn, and rejoin the human race. Calling it "involuntary celibacy" or the too-fucking-cute-by-half "incel" doesn't change that. As the twenty-something who lives across the hall from my office notes, depression and loneliness are medical conditions that have zero to do with getting laid. His suggestion [to them] is blunter than mine: "pull your heads out of your ass."*

*In the obsessively distorted feminism of this mean and crazy time, masculine loneliness is too often greeted by non-generous laughter, often contempt. Yes, self-absorbed, self-defeating, whining from people who have no intention of bettering their lot are treated with laughter and contempt, whether the whiner is black, white, male, female, gay, straight, or Martian. And they deserve to be. I've stopped watching movies in which the characters wallow in their own shit and try to make a plot of it. Anyone doing it in real life deserves to be equally ignored. And that goes double for hateful turds like neo-Nazis and these incel self-castrators. And what "obsessively distorted feminism"? Women are rightly standing up to harassment and sexual abuse, and, as one does in fury and righteousness, sometimes overshooting the mark. But that zealotry doesn't change that Harvey Weinstein assaulted and threatened Mira Sorvino, Rose McGowan and Ashley Judd and damaged their careers, nor that a Presidential candidate had sex with porn stars and paid them off, nor that an incel asshole murdered a bunch of helpless co-eds in Santa Barbara a couple of years back because he couldn't drop his dick long enough to actually get a date.*

*The hostility of the embittered women seems to have thrown up an unscalable wall, and the only suggestion made as to breaking 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. Well, if you approach someone – regardless of gender, sexual preference, preferred pronoun, color of skin – as a fake, you bloody well deserve to meet anger and resentment. That false front makes sincere contact impossible.*

With deep affection and respect, Guy, you're full of shit again. You're better than this. You *know* better than this. You have real relationships, including with a woman who loves you beyond measure. Yes, you're a product of your time and your upbringing and your frustrations and your past, but you've shown that the past doesn't define you.

*Our regard is mutual, but I find this disregard for male loneliness surprising. Perhaps the anguish of solitude never has gotten to you (and why should it, with 34 years of marriage to one of the world's truly lovable people to your credit), but it certainly does to some. It was to that contingent of our benighted gender that I addressed my **Spartacus** comment about Incel. No doubt the loathsomeness of sexual predators and psychopaths who use their isolation as an excuse for reprehensible behavior stymied your ability to read on. You would have observed that I ascribe sanity to those "who don't blame women for their troubles" and urge sane unhappy guys "[t]o change the way the world treats you [by changing] the way you treat the world ... [to t]ry to understand ... people ... with sympathy, empathy and with the simple – but challenging – idea that everyone has his or her own reasons. ... It's simply a recognition that other people are important." Or as you put it, "pull your head out of your ass." How is that being "full of shit"? But of course, you're talking about my view of feminism, which I admit changes depending on the aspect of feminism I observe. Kooks have castigated women for "serving the patriarchy" by shaving their legs and denied abused men the right to speak of assaults because of their gender – and I have this on unimpeachable authority. Such "feminists" are a bruise on their movement. OTOH, I must refer you to my support of Hillary, my legal efforts for "Lucy," described in **Challenger**, and to this very zine, where disgust with faux-male violence and admiration for feminine courage are expressed to the limit of this poor twit's ability.*



Of course, it has not ended. Trump ended October sending 5,200 American soldiers to our Southern border to block a "caravan" of women and children from "invading" America, an obvious publicity stunt to impress the rabid racists and terrified working people in his base. The next day he asserted that he had the power to declare that children born in the U.S. of illegal immigrants aren't automatically American citizens.

This proposition is absurd and unconstitutional. It goes against the plain language of the XIVth Amendment, *the* legal result of the unpleasantness of the first half of the 1860s. To quote:

**All persons born or naturalized in the United States and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside.**

Trump has gone so far as to declare this sentiment – this *law of the effing land* – as "insane." One wonders – is this creature blessed with this society's highest responsibility courting (say the word) *treason*? Because the Constitution is the law. It is the United States.

*On this basis alone, Trump should be removed from office.*

Though his grandstanding effort – which even a fool like Trump *must* know has no chance of happening – is obviously an evil, brainless, dictatorial move, I am almost certain that he will get away with it. Can anyone say "packed Supreme Court"? (I knew you could.) Kavanaugh is on the Court for one overwhelming reason: to protect this corrupt and evil President from the legal consequences of his acts and words.

We await the judgment of the ultimate authority. It's November 2, 2018. The midterm elections are in four days.



It's a funny election. The big races went Republican. But the big winner of the night lost his race.

That's Beto O'Rourke, who nearly accomplished the impossible by winning the Senate race in Texas, but who impressed everyone who saw him. They're talking about running him for *President* in two years. (I'd prefer to see him on the ticket as Vice President, beneath Elizabeth Warren.) But the immediate and most important news was this: the House of Representatives went Democratic, insuring that subpoenas will inundate the White House, and the last half of Trump's term will be a nightmare for that bellicose troll and all his works.

For that we can be grateful.

A complex evening, very frustrating here in Florida, but too promising in re the House to completely mourn. There will be, for the present at east, a check on Trump, someone in power to hold him and his klatsch of crooks responsible for their acts and their efforts at self-enrichment. Trump has not only a thorn but a javelin in his side. Talking heads are already mulling over the probable subpoena actions against his tax returns.

As for myself, I find the prospect delicious. The American government will no longer bellow with one croaking voice. There will be questions now, and caution, and opposition that has real power, and cannot be ignored. Who knows? Maybe the evil mountebank will learn from this reverse and ... no. I was going to say, "try to learn what it means to be President of the United States," but I don't think him capable.

Small victories, but they add up.



From the perspective of a week later, the election victories look a *bit* larger. Progressive losses in the Senate are not as severe, with our lady from Arizona overcoming theirs. The races too close to call are putting fear into Republican hearts here in Florida and Mississippi. They may not end up as victories, but you can tell who is most upset by the withering right-wing pluralities: . Republicans. A powerful Democratic House – 2019 and 2020 are not going to be comfortable times for the orange-utan.

The elections look larger – but Trump does not. A little story. (I'm full of them.) Sometime in the late 19-teens my great-grandmother Erickson, hanging clothes out to dry in her back yard, was alerted by my Aunt Lil that a man was at the door. He was a Western Union deliveryman, in full uniform. The telegram he carried dealt with her son, a doughboy in France. Soon after, my great-grandmother hung a Gold Star in her window.

Trump was in Paris in early November, representing the United States at ceremonies honoring the men who fought in World War I. An essential public part of this tribute was a visit to an American cemetery where, as in Flanders Fields, the poppies grow, between the crosses, row on row. The French President, the British Prime Minister, the Canadian Premier all went ... but not Trump, because it was raining.

Again he embarrasses the whole of the United States. Again he insults the better men who fought for this country. And now I have the right – in the name of my great-uncle, whose first name I don't even know – to take it personally.

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Rosy and I had just finished watching *The Girl in the Spider's Web*, a very good thriller, especially in comparison to the stultifying *Red Sparrow*, viewed the previous night. I checked my phone for calls and news and discovered that **Stan Lee** had abandoned this mortal coil. Another story. An anecdote, actually.

In 1974 I was in the midst of my year at DC Comics. Under the direction of Sol Harrison, we "Junior Woodchucks" had prepared – in secret – the first issue of *AMAZING WORLD OF DC COMICS*, our classier answer to Marvel's *F.O.O.M.* – a "fanzine" about DC. We elected to premiere it at the Seulingcon – so named for Phil Seuling, its chairman and founder – where it made an appropriately big splash. (Roy Thomas' expression on seeing it: absolute astonishment. I should have given him a copy, but sold him one instead, just so I could say I did it.) Later on, at an industry party for professionals, someone took my arm and pulled me over to a well-lit wall. There stood, amongst supplicants, Stan Lee.

He was very gracious. He complimented me on my letters of comment ("You must have written a billion") and on *AMAZING WORLD*, which he admitted far outstripped Marvel's *F.O.O.M.* I was impressed (even though his toupee was obvious) and when I reported my conversation to a gloating Sol, felt a glow. (Stan must have had something: I introduced Carmine Infantino's secretary to him and she said she found him attractive.)

That was the only time I met him. The young staffers at DC and Marvel co-mingled pretty regularly – much to the displeasure of our bosses – but there was a great deal of rivalry. (I always thought the two companies appealed to different ages – DC to kids and tweens, Marvel to older teens and collegiates.) One Marvel writer had me seriously p.o.ed at one time, but I got back at him. Once he was introduced at a Worldcon as "one of the best comic book writers in the world" and I shouted out "**Alan Moore is here?!?**" I howled at Jack Kirby's evisceration of Lee's ego in *Mister Miracle* (who can ever forget "Funky Flashman"?) and in recent years was known to *MST3K* – loudly – Lee's cameos in Marvel movies. I wanted Jack Kirby and Steve Ditko and Wally Wood credited for *their* genius at Marvel – and Stan seemed to be hogging all of the glory. Besides, I worked at DC for a reason: I was a Julie Schwartz man all the way.

But Stan Lee had the vision, and it changed American pop culture, and he had the grace to know me by name. So *excelsior*, Stan the Man. 'Nuff said.

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*For Pittsburgh ... and Thousand Oaks ... the whole country:*

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