

# THE ALL-NEW LIGHTNING ROUND

## POLITICS AND ENTERTAINMENT: ARE THEY TWO SIDES OF THE SAME COIN? DISCUSS AMONG YOURSELVES.

### **POLITICS: THREAT OR MENACE?**

In each election cycle, I usually write one screed about how bad politics is getting, and then go on to other things.

This time around, it's getting so bad that Godwin's Law might have to be suspended for the duration.

Large sections of the Republican voter base are doing a damn good imitation of the German populace in 1932, or of a crowd at lynchings in the American south in the early parts of the Twentieth Century.

It's disappointing to me how quickly rabid hatred, racism, xenophobia and misogyny have been surfacing in the rallies we've been seeing... it had been thought that because it was hidden, it was on the wane.

On the other side of the spectrum, there's more sniping and backbiting between the two major candidates than is customary. I hear

things like "If he doesn't get the nomination, I'm not voting for her", or "If she doesn't get the nomination, I'm not voting for him"... Those people don't seem to realize something. If you get your knickers in a twist, and don't vote, then the die-hards who vote for anything on their party's side of the ballot will win.

This is not something you would want, it seems to me.

From my observations of the system, and from my research about what happened in the previous century, this level of vituperation hasn't been seen since the "witch hunt" days of the late 1940's and 1950's. And even then, the worst things I found spewed as labels were "commie", "fellow traveler", "pinko", and "disloyal". (There were more radical epithets used later, like "traitor", but not in the general flow of political discourse, at least as far as

I found. That came later, with the John Birch Society.)

And in addition, lest we forget, came the revival of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan in the late 1940's, which was tied to the efforts to stop integration and the civil rights movement. There was also the concurrent rise, in the 1948 election cycle, of the "Dixiecrats", disaffected Southern Democrats who wanted President Truman out of office for much the same reasons. (Truman integrated the Armed Forces after World War Two, and they wanted to stop him before he could do any more.) Because of the defection of the Dixiecrats, and the organized Republican effort behind their candidate, former New York governor Thomas E. Dewey, most "informed sources" and the "conventional wisdom" gave Truman's chances of re-election as minimal, at best.

You may have seen the photo of

a smiling Harry Truman holding aloft a copy of the front page of the Chicago *Tribune* with the banner headline, "DEWEY DEFEATS TRUMAN".

At the basic level, the American electorate will surprise you. Anyone who says they can predict things with any degree of certainty is either deluded or has an ulterior motive.

(In this election cycle, ulterior motives can not be ruled out.)

My suggestions? And, after all, that's all I can do, is suggest...

**Read.** Read as much about the candidates and the issues as you can, from a wide variety of sources.

Don't just read what you agree with.

**Think.** Does what a candidate is saying jibe with what that candidate seems to be doing? Does the message

match the rhetoric?

Finally, **Vote.** Vote your conscience. Vote your pocketbook. Vote your gut instincts. Vote for. Vote against. Just Vote.

After all, if you don't vote, you have no call to bitch at the result.

Oh, and by the way... all 435 seats in the House are up for election, and one-third of the Senate (I believe it's 34 seats this time). You think you can't make a difference? Seven more Democrats elected gives them the majority back, and Mitch McConnell goes back to being Minority Leader.

Think about that...



### **MOVIES - WHY DO I LOVE THEM SO?**

It amazes me sometimes that, despite being the cultural touchstones they have been for about a century now, movies - from Hollywood mega-hits or mega-flops, to European "art" films, to independent schlock-o-rama, sex-obsessive, gore fests - they get almost no respect.

A good deal of it has to do, it seems, a perceived lack of worth of those who make the movies. George Lucas was lauded for the first three *Star Wars* films, and ripped a new one for the "prequels". (I'm sure you remember all the "Jar-Jar Binks" jokes, controversy, and out-and-out hatred spewed by various social media sources.) Then Lucas sells Lucasfilm, Ltd. to the Walt Disney Company, takes home billions of dollars, and goes home to play with his own toys his own way.

(He said that was what he wanted to do after *Return of the Jedi*, anyway.)

And then Paramount goes to "reboot" their cash cow signature

franchise, STAR TREK, giving the directorial reins to J. J. Abrams, who then goes on to ruin, in the minds of many, the property which has been popular since its debut in 1966. He does this for two movies.

Having seen how Abrams can screw up an existing franchise so well, Disney hands him the reins, whip, and spurs to produce the "new" *Star Wars* movie, The Force Awakens. The reviews were mixed, that I heard.

DISCLAIMER: I haven't seen it, because I didn't like how Abrams screwed up the TREK reboots. (I'll bet you couldn't tell.)

Now, all things considered, I can't hold Lucas, or Abrams, or Joss Whedon, or any writer, producer, director, actor, or crewperson personally responsible for making a bad film. Nobody deliberately sets out to make a bad film.

In fact, I'll emphasize that point as much as I can in this setting.

### **NOBODY DELIBERATELY SETS OUT TO MAKE A BAD FILM.**

Sometimes, because of a misalignment of the stars, another iteration of Clash of the Egos, miscommunications, jealousy, apathy, thuggery, muggery, buggery, or whatever, a movie, however well-intentioned it may have started, becomes a mess. And when movie star egos combine with the astronomical amounts of money these egos get paid, there is a severe unwillingness to just "pull the plug" and stop throwing good money after bad.

Now, don't think that the drama gets less as the money goes down; there have been examples of counter-

#### **LEGAL SCHMEGAL:**

This is *The All-New LIGHTNING ROUND* Volume 3 Number Two, about April No-Foolin' 2016. Since this is a science-fiction fazine, science and science-fiction WILL be mentioned, or even discussed in its pages. YOU HAVE BEEN WARNED.

This is another Totally Superfluous Publication by Alexander Bouchard, who disavows any knowledge of his actions. Bill no posts. Two spaces after a period (I'm old school, yo.). Edited by Al Bouchard. Published by Megan Bouchard. **eFanzines.com** has copies, and others available by whim.

Letters of comment, subpoenas, general inquiries, sheet music of Scott Joplin arranged for tuba and bassoon, bacon chili cheeseburgers, and Sanders bumpy cakes should be addressed to:

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If this had been an actual emergency, you would have been given instructions.

This concludes this test of the Emergency Colophon Notification System.

productive behavior in micro-budget films whose fate is direct-to-DVD release.

#### COUNTERPOINT;

Just to clear things up, a large majority of the actors, crewpeople, and creative talent I've come across, regardless of budget, are (and have been) totally professional, dedicated, creative, and flexible in their approach to the material - whatever it is. The easiest set I've worked on was a low-budget horror film whose total budget was in the range of six thousand dollars - and that included feeding the cast and crew. The hardest set, at times, I was on was a student film when I was in school at Wayne State; nobody seemed able to stick to an idea of what needed to be done. (To be fair, I have to include myself in that assemblage.)

I must say, that shepherding a project from the murky dawning of an idea to the final release print (a holdover term, in these days of digital), is one of the most difficult, frustrating, hair-ripping, headdeskning jobs on God's green earth... and one of the most satisfying, when it turns out at least 75% of what you first envisioned it to be.

As I said, it amazes me that films get no respect. It partakes of all the "arts" that the cognoscenti revere and the critics worship... the literary skill of creating characters on the page, the visual skill of "painting with light" to produce beautiful, or horrible, or otherwise affecting images, the theatrical skills of actors presenting a story to make you laugh, make you cry, make you fall in love, make you scream... And yet, there are still those who are interested in "show

business" for who got busted for DUI, who had a "wardrobe malfunction" on the red carpet, who is terrible to work with, or for, and who makes outlandish amounts of money for no obvious talent.

But sometimes, when all the stars align just right, we get magic. We get *It Happened One Night*. We get *The Godfather*. We get *The Deer Hunter*. We get *Silence of the Lambs*. We get *Star Wars*. We get *2001: A Space Odyssey*. We get *Birdman*. We get *Casablanca*. We get *King Kong*.

We get a flickering silver carpet that takes us away from our cares for two hours or so.

And that is worth our respect.



#### WHAT'S SO FUNNY?

I had planned to write a whole scholarly article examining what we see as funny, and trying to explain why we do.

You can laugh now.

I got really into it, trying to categorize the different types of things we find funny... from high farce to fart jokes. And, before you ask, no, it didn't just roll off the brain and into the fingers.

I had forgotten one primary rule of comedy; trying to dissect the process is like dissecting a frog. You don't learn that much, and the frog dies.

That is probably why the article got heavy, and bogged down of its own weight.

About all I can do, then, is discuss what I think is funny, and let you agree (or disagree) however you will.

And I'm sure you will.

However, onward...

Over the last few years, I've tried to give a chance to what the three major television networks are calling "comedy" nowadays... My reaction to these attempts is almost identical each time... How could somebody take a premise that had the promise of being funny and make it into twenty-six minutes of painful to watch, pointless, unfunny dreck?

Asimov said it best, I think... comedy is a target that's all bullseye. It's funny, or it's not. And when it's **not** funny, it's about the most pitious thing on this earth.

Where's a Billy Wilder when we need him? "The Apartment", "Some Like it Hot", "The Seven-Year Itch", "One, Two, Three"... classics. Woody Allen, when he's not trying to be Ingmar Bergman; "Play It Again, Sam", "Annie Hall", "Take The Money And Run", "Bananas"... Mel Brooks, Carl Reiner, Buster Keaton, Harold Lloyd, Laurel and Hardy, Abbott and Costello, Martin and Lewis, or even Chaplin. Masters of comic timing, the "throwaway" line or shot that brings down the house, the ability to use our sophisticated expectations of what's going to happen against us... and then, at the last instant, cross us up again...

James Agee, a famous film critic in the 1940's, wrote an article about the demise of silent comedy called "We're Not Laughing Like We Used To"... much of what he said is still valid today. And there have been tries to "bring back" silent comedy, or to replicate it in a widescreen, Technicolor™, Dolby™ world... "It's A Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World" comes to mind. (So does the word "pitiful".)

About the only way I can see the kind of benevolent anarchy of silent comedy can be achieved in today's world is by the small filmmaker, with no budget, doing the sort of run-and-gun shooting, improvising with what's there, going with the flow that the best of the silent comedians did on a daily basis.

And don't be mistaken; flying by the seat of your pants is hard. You need a cast and crew you trust, and who trust you, and inhibitions checked at the soundstage door each morning. Something fabulous can come up from anyone, and a good crew can take that nugget and build upon it, reaching for something as sublime as collective genius.

Maybe it'll happen. Maybe you can make it happen. Maybe I can. The only way to know is to try it and see.

Good shooting!



### **BATMAN V SUPERMAN: DAWN OF JUSTICE**

(Or, why I couldn't care less than I already do)

In my estimation, Zack Snyder has pulled off two pretty damn good movies: *300* and *Watchmen*. *300* was a somewhat overblown retelling of the battle of Thermopylae (with Gerard Butler as the king of Sparta, it kind of figures), and *Watchmen* was mostly faithful to the Moore/Gibbons/Higgins book, with a few differences evident.

Then he was hired to direct *Man of Steel*, the latest Superman reboot. The reviews were mixed, especially since, at the end of the movie, he has Kal-El do something that the Superman I grew up with and knew absolutely would not do; <<SPOILER

ALERT if you haven't seen it>> He kills General Zod in hand-to-hand combat, breaking his neck.

Between this violation and the desaturated, grayish color palette he used in the film (very hard to watch), I lost all interest in Snyder's take on the DC cinematic universe entirely, especially since he was given creative control to shape the following films in their schedule.

DISCLAIMER: I have not seen more than the YouTube clips of *Man of Steel*, nor do I intend to see *Batman v Superman*.

Now comes *BvS:DoJ* (and why in the name of Rao do they make the title almost as long as the movie?), and the anticipation among some in the fanboy community is peaking. Henry Cavill is back as Clark Kent/Superman, and he still looks to me like he's constipated. Batman/Bruce Wayne, a (supposedly) older and wiser hero, is played by Ben Affleck, who seems to be mouth-breathing in all the footage I've seen (mostly the trailers). Gal Gadot, an Israeli model, is cast as Diana Prince/Wonder Woman, and from what I hear, she poses well, but does not act. And Jesse Eisenberg as Lex Luthor? Oh, please...

Many people I know have seen the movie, and few are gobsmacked by it; most reactions I've read go from "meh" to "no, not really". And there is a move underway, that I've heard of on the Net, to push a petition to have Snyder removed from the upcoming *Justice League* movie, as well as anything else in the DCCU. Knowing the ways of the studios as much as I do (which is precious little, I can assure you), Warner

# LOC'N'LOAD

I didn't mention it in the first issue...

I would like letters of comment and fillo art.

(It lets me know I'm not just farting in the wind, y'know?)

I can handle most wordprocessing files, and most standard graphics types... I try to be flexible that way.

The address, in case you didn't read the colophon, is as follows:

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Let me know what you think...

Okay?

Brothers is not likely to do so, unless a movie that Snyder controls lays a titanic ostrich egg at the box office.

The ways of Hollywood are cryptic and seldom logical.



### **NOW IT'S TIME TO SAY GOODBYE...**

Well, it looks as though I've managed to fill up four pages this time.

If I can keep this up, I may have something.

Ghu, Foo, and Roscoe willing, and the creek don't rise, I may have something out by the beginning of next month (speaking of May, here). A special miracle for any days early; inspiration is usually not as reliable as grit-your-teeth-and-bear-down perspiration, but things are always in flux.

Be well, be happy, and mostly, just be. It's what I intend to do...