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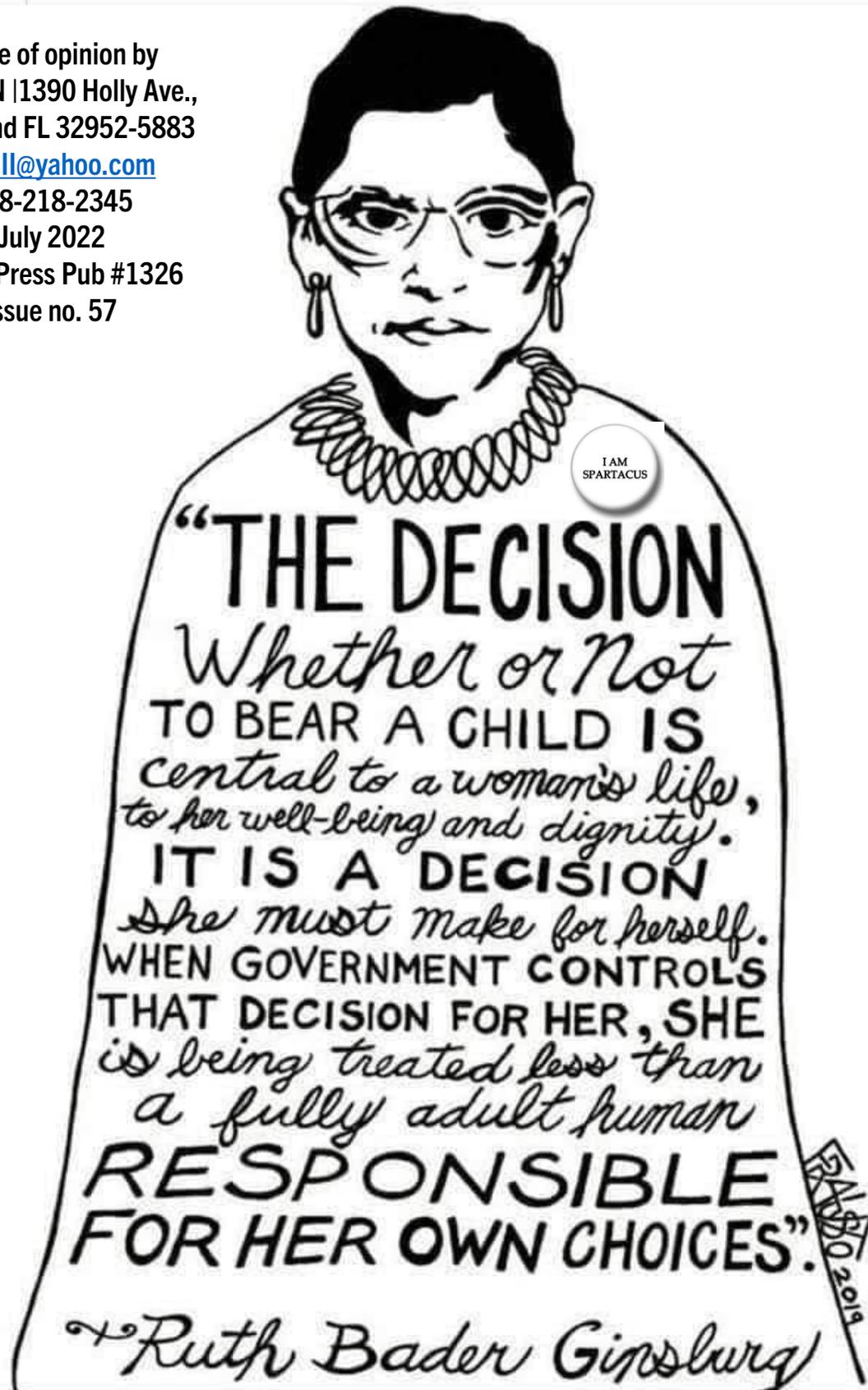
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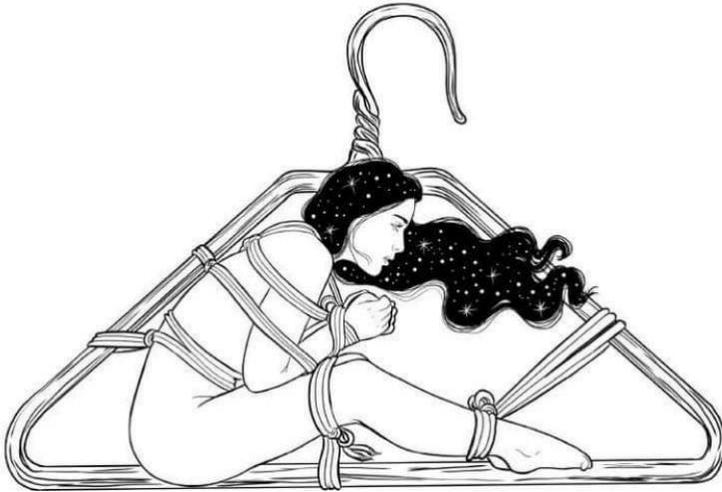
318-218-2345

July 2022

GHLIII Press Pub #1326

issue no. 57





## Roe.

*What more can the bastards do? – John Lennon, “John Sinclair”*

This. The bastards could do this. They overturned *Roe v. Wade*. In doing so, they gutted the idea that a woman has legal equality under American law to a man. Worse, as I wrote two issues ago, and that diseased fraud Clarence Thomas gloated in his concurrence, they opened the juridical door to overturning other rights. Anything covered under the general blanket of the right to privacy is on the block: gay

marriage, contraception, an endless slew of other privacies Americans have taken for granted, and should.

The decision is called *Dobbs*. Remember it. It will go down in history with *Dred Scott*, *Korematsu* (OKing the Japanese-American internments during World War II) and *Plessy v. Ferguson* (upholding racial discrimination). But this decision is far more insidious and reprehensible than those monumental mistakes of judgment. This decision is an overt move of political and cultural conspiracy. It’s the culmination – worse, the *beginning* of the culmination – of a radical effort to reverse the course of American civilization, as shown through decisions of the American courts.

Right-wing appointees to the SCOTUS have been seeking this outcome through decades of lies and prevarications in confirmation hearings. Samuel Alito and all of Trump’s appointees pledged in their Senate hearings respect for *res judicata* and *stare decisis*, vital concepts to legal finality and legal constancy. Even Clarence Thomas, pre-*Roe*, fell back on the race card to get himself confirmed after Anita Hill exposed him as unfit. Dishonesty has marked the SCOTUS’ right wing for a generation, dishonesty and an unflinching aim to turn back America’s ethical clock.

Cultural change has always been threatening, but when social justice has been behind the change, it’s worked out for the best. Granted that abortion rights are perhaps the most terrifying declaration of rights in the age. It is impossible for many to think of a pregnancy without imagining the life the embryo might someday lead. The end of a pregnancy, to such thinkers, is the end of a possibility, a hope. Also, before the advent of the abortion pill, the procedure for a therapeutic abortion could be hideous, an MVA or D’n’C. It would be impossible, for such people, to accommodate such a horror as justifiable.

But the justification is strong – rooted in the fundamentals of democracy. I printed a superb rundown of that rationale a couple of issues ago: William O. Douglas’ concurrence in *Roe v. Wade* on the subject of the right to privacy. That right is itself rooted in an eminent justification for liberal thought on abortion: trust in one’s fellow citizens to live their lives as they see fit.

Abandoning this perspective has legal and social complications already cascading. Confusion about the form of the new, post-*Roe* law is rife. No one understands what the law now commands. Although anti-abortion crusaders have filled the media with pledges to help mothers through pregnancy and post-natal care, specifics and legislative follow-ups have been negligible. The alleged compassion of the right for the people they’ve stranded without recourse is empty noise. Much more common is discussion on how to prosecute those helping women in anti-abortion states travel to safer climes – or even the patients themselves. Such bans seem unconstitutional on

their face to me, but does anyone think right-wing America cares for such niceties? The individual does not matter to them. Power is its own morality.

Reaction against Alito's decision is also strong, though. I'm especially impressed by the declaration by Dick's Sporting Goods. The company pledges financial help to any employee or dependent who needs to travel across state lines for abortion services. Such corporate courage should be common. We'll likely see a clandestine network develop, a new Underground Railroad for desperate women. Which will lead to police tactics to shut it down, and a further draconian erasure of the human right to live one's own life.

Will they get away with it? Will American voters care? Yes ... and no. My faith in people rests on an individual basis. For the general population, I have little. The American people *adapt*. It's our greatest strength and our greatest failing. We accept the Way Things Are; we learn to live with injustice all too quickly. We will die in a less free country than that in which we were born. Such is the major and lasting repercussion of the decision gutting *Roe v. Wade*.

Abortion has always been present in society. I know four women who have had abortions. They took the step out of family need or economic desperation -- reasons of their own that were certainly not trivial. None deserve the opprobrium SCOTUS and the right wing have been and are visiting upon them.

In the King James Bible, Genesis 2:7 is a beautiful phrase. It fits well into the long-accepted legal truism that juridical rights – personhood – accrues at the first breath taken outside of the womb. *And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.*

A living soul – which in our society means a person with inalienable rights, the most vital of which is the right to individualism and privacy. And when we say “man,” we mean men, women, all of us.

### **January 6<sup>th</sup> 2021**

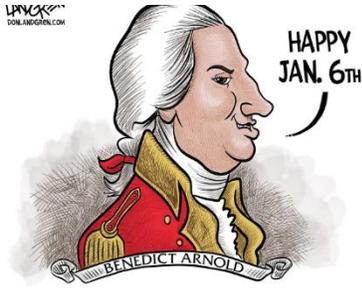
Two Georgia poll workers, mother and daughter, were slandered by name by the President of the United States and his addled stooge. Giuliani and Trump made accusations that directly resulted in mob violence against them and their family. So went the most painful testimony heard before the Congress' hearings on the January 6, 2021 invasion of the Capitol, and subsequent efforts to overturn the 2020 election. It will do little to assuage their trauma, but the ladies should sue those lying rats for every scrap of their underwear.

The stories told by the Moss ladies was bloodcurdling, but I hope I'll be forgiven for outright enjoying other witnesses. The various lawyers from the Department of Justice, for prime example. Confronted with pressure to aver that the election was crooked and to support an unqualified flunky – experienced only in environmental cases – for Attorney General, they acted like brutal wiseguys, wielding sarcasm like stilettos. In other words, they acted like *lawyers*. “We'll come and get you if there's an oil spill.” Oh, I miss that.

The most terrifying witness was the assistant to Trump's chief of staff, Cassidy Hutchinson, Mark Meadows' 25-year-old aide-de-camp, and the most courageous public servant America has seen in the last fifty years. Her testimony was mostly hearsay – someone told her such&such had happened – but devastating nonetheless, honest, painful, undoubtedly self-serving but also accurate. She depicted a senior staff in the thrall of a paranoid, delusional brute, uncaring of the law, our national history, his word, the safety of others, the dignity of our institutions. If Hutchinson's information is true, their efforts to restrain Trump finally came down to physical force, prying the hands of the President of the United States from the “clavicle” of a Secret Service agent, as the President tried to force the man to take him to join the January 6<sup>th</sup> Capitol riot. If

true – and there’s little reason to doubt it – then that day was the most disgraceful moment in the history of the American presidency. Disagree? Name a worse one.

So the hearings have done their job. The truth is out. If we the people are at all susceptible to the power of the truth, our duty to this country is clear. The most we can reasonably hope for is that



Donald Trump is forever eliminated from 2024 and presidential politics. That would only clear the way for Ron DeSantis, the Son of Frankenstein, a smarter, more ruthless, equally unprincipled winger to take over the Republican Party, but ... one monster at a time. First, they – we – have to deal with that orange-utan in Mar-a-Lago.

We can do it through the bravery of such people as Cassidy Hutchinson and the defiance of men like Richard Donaghue and the dedication of folks like Wandrea Moss. Spartacus in whatever form.

### Parkinson’s

I have no major developments to report regarding my health, or lack of it. We’re going to see a neurologist specializing in Parkinson’s in late August – the earliest appointment his receptionist, who had a *divine* voice, could give me – and start whatever therapy specialist prescribe. Here’s a list of the common effects of the disease and how they’re hitting me to date:

**Lightheadedness (orthostatic hypotension):** drop in blood pressure when standing. *Yes! Not serious ... yet.*

**Loss of sense of smell or taste.** *Nope.*

**Mood disorders**, such as depression, anxiety, apathy and irritability. *I take a pill for that already.*

**Pain.** *Shoulders. And of course my damned flat feet. Neither is attributable to Parkinson’s.*

**Sexual problems**, such as erectile dysfunction. *Piva the Priapic? You must be joking.*

**Sleep disorders**, such as insomnia, excessive daytime sleepiness (EDS), REM sleep behavior disorder (RBD), vivid dreams, Restless Legs Syndrome (RLS). *Yes, yes and yes! I’ve gone whole nights without sleep.*

**Urinary urgency, frequency and incontinence.** *Do you really want to know?*

**Vision problems**, especially when attempting to read items up close. *Hmm ... could be. But my eye doc says I show no signs of macular degeneration or other problem.*



**Weight loss.** *Don’t I wish!*

**Cognitive changes:** problems with attention, planning, language, memory or even dementia. *I’ve noticed nothing, and as I said last issue, my action in this regard is simple and definite: choose goal and **focus**.*

**Constipation.** *If only! \*ahem\**

**Early satiety:** feeling of fullness after eating small amounts. *Again, if only!*

**Excessive sweating**, often when wearing off medications. *Not recently.*

**Fatigue.** *This is so.*

**Increase in dandruff (seborrheic dermatitis).** *I’ll have to grow hair first.*

**Hallucinations and delusions.** *I haven’t noticed any. How about you, Harvey? [“I am Spartacus!” sez Harvey.]*

## LOCŞ that DO NOT STOP on *Spartacus* issues 54-55-56.

**Perry Middlemiss** <perry@middlemiss.org>

You did extremely well in being able to get into the Mona Lisa room at the Louvre with so few people. I've been in that room two or three times and on each occasion the crush was such that getting within three meters (10 feet) of the painting was nigh on impossible. The flashing of phone cameras was also rather off-putting, and yet there didn't seem to be any museum staff trying to control the throng. I guess they've given up and just try to stop people getting too close.

*As I explain in **The Iconic Route** (on eFanzines.com), I was aware of the mobs heaving and flailing at most times before the "Mona Lisa", so chose a tour that put us in the gallery near the end of the day. Few people were there, so we could linger (and dance) mere feet from La Gioconda's knowing smile.*

The other thing I found of interest is that the other two da Vinci paintings in the room ("Saint John the Baptist" and "Madonna of the Rocks") were being completely ignored. Which was a good thing from my perspective as I consider them the best paintings in the room. Maybe I've just become jaded over the years by the ubiquitous presence of "Mona Lisa" that I've reached the point where it holds little interest for me.

*Our tour guide made a point of discussing both paintings – which are outside of the gallery these days. He averred that "Saint John" was da Vinci's best painting, and the colors on the St. Anne work were still as vivid as when Leonardo daubed them on. Again, check out my trip report. I print a version of "Mona Lisa" as she would appear without 40 layers of nasty varnish.*

Your front cover image [*van Gogh and Mona Lisa*] is a mash-up that I have seen previously and liked. I'm glad your trip went well.

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*On Spartacus #53 ...*

I am not certain of the way the Chinese Worldcon was won, but it looks like that with the task of getting as many voters as possible to overcome the numbers of the usual voters, anyone can obtain the Worldcon for themselves. However, things may be completely legitimate. One person who can tell you a lot about Chinese fandom and the facilities in Chengdu is Robert J. Sawyer. He has been a guest of the regular convention in Chengdu for several years, he's been there four times now, I think, and he came out in favor of the Chinese bid and facilities long before being named the 2023 Worldcon's ProGoH. I fear Rob may have lost some friends for endorsing Chengdu over the competing bid from Winnipeg, but time will tell. Given the Winter Olympics are in Beijing right now, and security is extremely tight and enforced, I would wonder how Chinese officials would react to the typical Worldcon attendee. I will watch the Chinese Worldcon from a safe distance, and see what happens.

*Editor's note: I'm leaving out a long comment on the demonstration by Canadian truckers against COVID vaccination as being passe – and a total flop insofar as arousing public interest was concerned.*

Other things to talk about...in my own journalistic career, such as it is, I have been a sports reporter, first for the school newspaper in my final year of studies, and when I lived on Vancouver Island, being a sports report for a weekly paper, the Arrowsmith Star. I had a variety of school sports to cover, but on the Island, it was softball, tennis, football and rodeos. Just wait 'til next year? Ah, sounds like the plaintive cry of the typical Leafs fan. The Toronto Maple Leafs have not won Lord Stanley's Cup since 1967, 55 years this year. I take a little solace in the fact that if the Cubs could wait more than a century to win the World Series, Leaf fans can wait just a little longer...but please, just once before I die!

Were you able to find the *Lan's Lantern* Sturgeon issue?  
*I have the zine. I'd appreciate 'roxes of any Sturgeon articles you happen to find, hinhinthint ...*

On #55 ...

Your trip to Europe sounded great. We hope for one last trip to London, and we'd like to hit Edinburgh for a couple of days. We'd like to do so many things, like take the Chunnel train to Paris, but Edinburgh sounds better to us right now. Everything, including the trip itself, is subject to change.

When we go to Stonehenge, about three years ago almost to the day, we arrived in our tour bus, which had gotten lost in the countryside after a major road had been blocked by construction. We were very late, the welcome central had closed, and the armed guards there were not pleased with our late arrival, but at least they could claim for overtime. It was a cold day, and some young ladies were dressed in very little. The site was surrounded by sheep, and we got into the inner circle, too.

We understand why no photos at Westminster Abbey, but the names are truly legend, even if their remains are there or not. The British taxis were better than rides at the amusement park. We want to go to Hampton Court the next time, perhaps run into Lucy Worsely.

*The rule against photography was in Parliament, not Westminster Abbey. There we took hundreds of pictures.*

My loc...the attacks on Ukraine continue. Life in Russia is regressing to pre-Cold War levels, given that companies like McDonald's and Starbucks are leaving Russia in droves. Bad for history, bad for business. Some companies that have decided to stay are losing business on this side of the world.

Justice Warren's opinion on gun freedoms...Buffalo, Uvalde, Tulsa, where does it end? Nowhere else does this happen with the frequency it does in the US. But then, in a country where disbelief in the seriousness of COVID-19 has caused more than a million deaths, a handful killed by a team of gunmen seems small.

We watched the first prime-time January 6 hearings...wow. Trump can complain and whine all he like, but I think even he sees his end coming. We will continue to watch, and also watch the news for any violent reactions to what the Rethugs are calling political circus.

#56

Buffalo and Uvalde...we saw so much of the coverage of the Tops supermarket shooting on our local stations, many of which can be seen in Buffalo. If AR-15s can be so easily purchased in a border city, there's nothing to smuggling such weapons into Canada, and that happens all the time. Our own such problems come from the love of guns, as seen on American news and entertainments.

The great problem is the chasm-sized divide between the left and right, just about everywhere now. If only one could talk to the other, if only the 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment could be clarified once and for all and not twisted in the name of the NRA and Republican Party, if only we had more morals and longer attention spans...that's a lot of "if only"s. Even the most important stories are at the top of the front page for only a day, or at the top of the telecast for a couple of minutes. Then, attention goes to other stories, assuming that the public saw that paper or paid the slightest attention to the newscast as a whole. I must assume that the subject of civics is no longer taught in any level of school.

*The July 4<sup>th</sup> shootings all but ruined the holiday for average Americans. No denying the American experiment is in deep toilet water, and no one can agree on what rescue lines to throw.*

I had heard about Mercedes Lackey being booted from the Nebulas weekend which gave her the Grand Master title. I hate racism, and while a zero-tolerance towards racism is admirable, snap judgments are not admirable at all. We react quickly with the goal of being suitably attentive to the problem at hand, but people are hurt, and there is too much opportunity for using such

zero-tolerance to hurt people, people who have done nothing. Lackey apologized for a 'slip of the tongue', but was it meant as a slur? Looks like it wasn't. One person's slur may be another's innocent word. Perhaps the person who reported Lackey didn't like her, and tried to hurt her this way?

Darius Hupov lives in Romania, and is one of the newer fan-ed's, now editing *CounterClock* with Wolf von Witting. I would contact SFFWA about this...many Eastern European publishers seem all too willing to publish writing they have no license or right to publish. If you hadn't submitted this story to them directly, they may have obtained it by other means. It happens to other authors, so check to make sure you aren't being ripped off.

*I shall; thanks. Frankly, though, I feel flattered, not victimized, by the publication. This once.*

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As of today [*March*] the military forces of the Ukraine have managed to fend off the Russian advances with far more success than anybody, especially Vladimir Putin, ever expected. Whether they will be able to successfully withstand the invasion in the coming weeks is another matter entirely.

You ask what possible motive Putin could have for launching this reckless military operation. In addition to being a soulless sociopath with no sense of compassion or other redeeming human emotions, is the fact that as an ex-KGB officer, he has never agreed with the idea that the USSR came crashing down decades ago, with its power and international prestige wiped out in the process.

In addition, a bunch of the individual "Republics" in the USSR declared that they didn't want to be part of the new Russian Federation and decided to succeed. Russia, and Putin in particular, didn't like that, and some fighting ensued before most of the breakaway Republics establishing themselves as independent nations, including Ukraine.

This was particularly galling because Ukraine was the bread-basket of the Russian nation, and also a supplier of assorted minerals that Russia sorely needs, plus it has access on three sides to open water negation, which the Russian Federation needs to survive economically.

Putin and a large percentage of Russian citizens have never accepted the idea that Ukraine has become an independent nation. A fair proportion of people within Ukraine also see themselves as Russians, and while they are happy to escape the heavy-handed soviet regime, their cultural and economic roots are over in Russia, not with the Big 8 European nations.

I think Putin has wanted to take Ukraine back for most of this new century, and with strong support from those living in the so-called breakaway provinces, he anticipated that his Russian troops could reclaim this lost land without a lot of difficulty. After all, he took the Crimean Peninsula back in 2014 with almost no effort, and only minimal grumbling by the anti-Russian western alliance. Scooping up the rest of the errant "Republik" was going to be another easy win, despite his phony-baloney stated justification for the invasion.

I'm sure he never anticipated either the stiff Ukrainian resistance, or the sudden hard-nosed resistance of the western alliance. This last must have come as a particularly nasty surprise, considering how well he got along with his lackey Donald Trump. And if Trump has been re-elected US President in 2020 you can be sure that neither the United States nor NATO would be imposing massive sanctions on the Russian nation or pouring billions of dollars of military and medical support directly into Ukraine so the Ukrainians could continue to resist the Russian invasion.

Trump would have justified his stance not only by defending his good buddy Putin, but by stating that Ukraine was at heart historically and economically always a part of Russia, and besides, the world, and the US in particular needed Russian oil, copper, zinc, and especially all

those rare earth metals that are essential to modern electronic manufacturing, material that Russia supplies, in order for the US economy to continue recovering from the COVID crisis.

Without a strong American response, Europe and the rest of the world would have loudly tsk-tsked, shrugged their shoulders and maybe said some nasty things about Putin, but done nothing else. Hey, it worked in 2014 with Crimea, why not in 2022 with the rest of the Ukraine?

I think another important fact to consider here is the fearless stance adopted by professional performing comedian Volodymyr Zelenskyy, elected President of Ukraine on a fluke, who turned out to be a dynamic, charismatic, and determined political leader. Without his fiery speeches and urgent appeals to the western alliance nations as well as shaming the other non-aligned countries, the Russian invasion might well be closing in on its final days of crushing the Ukrainian nation right now. Never underestimate the power of one person to galvanize the patriotic spirit of an entire country, even in its bitterest moments of crisis. Winston Churchill must be smiling from beyond the grave right now.

How will it finally end? I dunno. Maybe WWII is in the offing. But I know the people of the Ukrainian nation will not stop fighting this invasion, and even if the Russians somehow manage to occupy the whole country it will not be a successful occupation. The Russians will only control the ground they physically stand on. Every other piece of land, and every other hand not in their direct line of sight will be forever raised against them.

This brings me to the comment made by Curt Phillips. He says that the organizers of the Chengdu Worldcon to be held in China have supported the Putin Ukrainian invasion, and are urging others not to condemn it. I don't know if that is necessarily true. I haven't checked on their website (having no great interest in attending a Worldcon in China), but I would suggest that what the committee is actually trying to do is to stay apolitical and not take any kind of stance.

And if that's the case then I say Hooray for them. It strikes me as imperative that the people who put on Worldcons, the Chengdu one or any other one, should stay the hell out of politics of any kind. The idea is that this is a convention for fans and creators of science fiction literature and its spin-offs, movies, audio, video, games, whatever. We are supposed to be involved in this mutual hobby for our pleasure and enjoyment; the joy of fellowship, sharing new developments in the hobby, NOT engaging in bickering partisan politics.

Yes, I certainly am opposed to Putin's invasion of the Ukraine, but I do not think science fiction organizations like Worldcons should get involved declaring themselves one way or the other about this or any other political issue.

The Worldcon should be above and beyond mundane politics. If we as fans start insisting that the Chengdu staff make a political statement opposing the invasion of Ukraine, what is to stop the next Worldcon or the one after that from coming out and, say endorsing Donald Trump for President of the USA? Or declaring that their political position is an absolute opposition to abortion in any form? Or declaring that Israel occupation of Arab lands is a crime against humanity and the entire Israeli nation should be wiped out immediately? Or that death by gladiatorial combat is the perfect way of dealing with repeat violent felons in any nation around the globe? Or declaring that this particular religion (fill in the blank) is the only correct one and every other believer in any other religion is a heretic who deserves to burn in hell forever and shall be banned from attending the convention?

Just because you don't happen to like the Russian invasion of Ukraine, let's not go dragging organizations that are supposed to be above politics into the fray. Keep the Worldcon now and forever, out of politics of any kind.

"Frigid" weeks of winter in Florida? 70 degrees!?!?!? is what you consider frigid!!! It is probably a good thing you are so many miles away from me Guy, otherwise I might not be able to resist the urge to reach out with my heavily mittened fingers and strangle you. That's if I could see with over the muffler wrapped around my neck right up to the bridge of my nose, and of course, the fogged glasses caused when some jerk opened the door and left it open so the latest arctic blast sweep over the entire room.

I'll have my revenge in a couple of months when you Floridians are being properly parboiled in 105% heat with 97% humidity while we here in Massachusetts enjoy a pleasantly warm and comfortable summer season.

*Local temp today [July 3, 2022] 88°, humidity 82. Oh, how we suffer.*

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Did anyone really believe that the Chengdu Worldcon was ever anything but a front for the Chinese government? Buying a Worldcon is a cheap way to manufacture some happy propaganda that modern China really supports the arts and welcomes outsiders in to share culture. B.S. The way that the Discon III committee got played in allowing the Worldcon to be purchased is shameful. Sure, they were technically within the rules for site selection, but there's a time when an ephemeral organization like a Worldcon committee just says no.

Telling the Chinese bid to go \*\*\*\* themselves might have been unprecedented and obeying the rules of the organization has its place, but c'mon. Everyone involved in site selection and the DC convention knew they were being gamed. It was time to kick over the chessboard. Now we are stuck with having legitimized this Worldcon without any way to mitigate the damage this will do to future cons. It's not too late for the Discon III committee to declare the site selection vote to be invalid and award the 2023 Worldcon to Winnipeg.

*At last something fannish for this issue. I must disagree; it **is** too late to deny Chengdu its Worldcon. The votes are in. Chengdu's victory was apparently legitimate. Fandom now needs to keep a vigilant eye on the Chinese committee to make sure its repressive government doesn't intrude onto the convention with political propaganda, and rules need to be formulated to prevent one country's monopolization of future sites. Excepting North America, of course, which brings up a whole 'nother controversy.*

**Elvis. Elvis.**

When I was a little boy I was wild about Elvis Presley.

I must have been six when I watched him for the first time on TV. My mama loved him because he was, in her words, a country boy made good. I made drawings of him on stage – triangle body, block for a head, no comment -- fronted by arm-waving silhouettes of screaming girls. I loved “Hound Dog” and collected his .45s. I played “Blue Moon” and “Long Tall Sally” and all those classic rock'n'blues covers, even though I was ignorant of the meaning behind the lyrics. What *did* Long Tall Sally have that Uncle John need?

My great-uncle got Elvis' autograph once on a copy of *Reader's Digest*. He said Elvis couldn't believe a grown man would want his signature. Wish I had that autograph now. I remember when he got drafted – remember the peacetime draft? – and had to cut his hair. I got a kick out of it when the proper pronunciation of his name helped uncover a crook on, of all shows, *Howdy Doody Time*.

Then Elvis went into movies, and except for (maybe) *Kid Galahad* and (definitely) *King Creole* – directed by Michael Curtiz, the same genius who made *Captain Blood* and *Casablanca* – they were drivel. He became pitifully mainstream, crass Las Vegas, and though he still drew'em in -- my aunt Margot went to see him several times – the genuineness seemed a thing of the past. When he posed with Nixon during the worst days of the domestic war over Vietnam, you could feel his relevancy burn away.

But he was still Elvis. When he died the secretaries in my office wept out loud.

He became a redneck God. Living in North Carolina at the time, his image was everywhere. A country couple touted their toddler as “The reincarnation of Elvis!” As an icon, he also became an

object of derision, the king of kitsch. A Memphis native I knew described a citywide celebration where the boys slicked their hair into ducktails and wore sequined jumpsuits, and the girls sported ridiculous Priscilla bouffants. (Who could tell when Elvis married her that Priscilla Presley would eventually be acknowledged one of the most beautiful women in the world?)

We weren't immune. When a convention brought us to Memphis one year, we toured Graceland, and stood over his grave. Graceland had a strange effect. Totally without meaning to, I started *liking* Elvis, that country boy made good. Walking through his home, we didn't find it, or him, tacky at all. He seemed like a pretty okay fella.

The current movie about him is possibly the best 2022 film to date. It surpasses *The Northman* and *Top Gun* and easily outclasses Emma Thompson's drearily unpleasant *Good Luck to You, Leo Grande*. It shows an intelligent, honest talent – a *huge* talent – struggling to let himself be heard beyond his fame. Rosy kept nudging me during the film, whispering Oscar nominations she's sure will come its way. It's *my* early in the year, but I hope she was right. Fine performances by Austin Butler and Tom Hanks, for once playing a complex, sleazy character. Impeccable production. Flawless prosthetics. And *perfect* synching of live performances with Elvis' music.

At the end, the actors step away, and the actual man takes over – for a late performance recorded shortly before his daily shoebox of uppers and downers exploded Elvis Presley's heart. Obese, clearly sick, barely able to move, Elvis nonetheless sings "Unchained Melody" with passion, depth, and complete conviction. It isn't merely with regret and pity that tears well in the viewer's eyes.

There are lots of different ways to be Spartacus in this world ... His was wonderful.

