

SPARTACUS 50



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'And when she dies she says she'll catch some blackbird's wing, and fly away to heaven, come some sweet Blue Bonnet spring'

Nanci Griffith died in early August. She'd had two bouts of cancer in her 68 years, so we can assume that was the reason. She was a folk singer out of Texas; her songs told little stories of little people, and her voice was sweet and kind and profound and true. I first encountered her in the late '80s as I was half-listening to *Austin City Limits* at Dennis Dolbear's house in Jefferson, Louisiana. Dennis and our man Rusty Burke were laughing goofily on the couch. After a few bars of Ms. Griffith's first song, to my complete astonishment, I was shushing them *Quiet! Quiet!* because something strange and good was happening.

I hadn't been in any frame of mind to imagine anything strange or good. I was through with law school, working as a public defender, but that was about the only positive thing in life. I was 15 years divorced, alone and deeply embittered; I was sure in the corroded center of my mind that solitary life was mine. Most of my friends, like Rusty and DD, were heavily into music – but not I. Music was inextricably bound with dope in those days; I hated drug use and I saw it as one reason that I would be forever alone. Music had nothing to say to or for me. But here was Nanci Griffith.

I found your letter in my mailbox today
You were just checkin' if I was okay
And if I still miss you
Well you know what they say

Just once in a very blue moon
Just once in a very blue moon
Just once in a very blue moon
And I feel one comin' on soon

No need to tell me you'd like to be
friends
And help me get back on my feet again
And do I still miss you?
Well it's just now and then

Just once in a very blue moon
Just once in a very blue moon
Just once in a very blue moon
And I feel one comin' on soon

There's a blue moon shinin'
When I'm reminded
Of all we've been through
Such a blue moon shinin'
Does it ever shine down on you?

Oh, 'cause you act like
It never even hurt you at all
And I'm the only one
Gettin' up from a fall
Tell me you don't feel it
Oh can't you recall

Just once in a very blue moon
Just once in a very blue moon
Just once in a very blue moon
And I feel one comin' on soon

Just once in a very blue moon

She sang that song, and she sang a song in which a sensitive Southern girl said goodbye to her obsessive yuppie boyfriend ("I pay the price for your will to survive") and she sang about her idol Loretta Lynn heading into Nashville in her Ford Econoline, and she sang about a Texas girl who really made that Woolworth's counter shine, punctuated by a single note from her guitar that told you more about being alive than most symphonies. There wasn't an iota, not an atom of irony or arrogance or offence. Little stories about little people, in a voice that sat right beside you and embraced you with its beauty. I could *feel* it evict bitterness from my head.

I got Dolbear to copy the show for me. I had the tape in my VCR and ready as I waited for the Bar results, to carry me through if I'd failed. I didn't fail, but I kept the tape, and I listened to it a lot, and watched Nanci Griffith sing backup to Dylan at his 50th anniversary concert. She got sick, she retired, and in early August her own story ended, as if stories like hers could ever end for the people who heard her. Because we'll think about her, and hear her songs in the air, and not just once in a very blue moon.

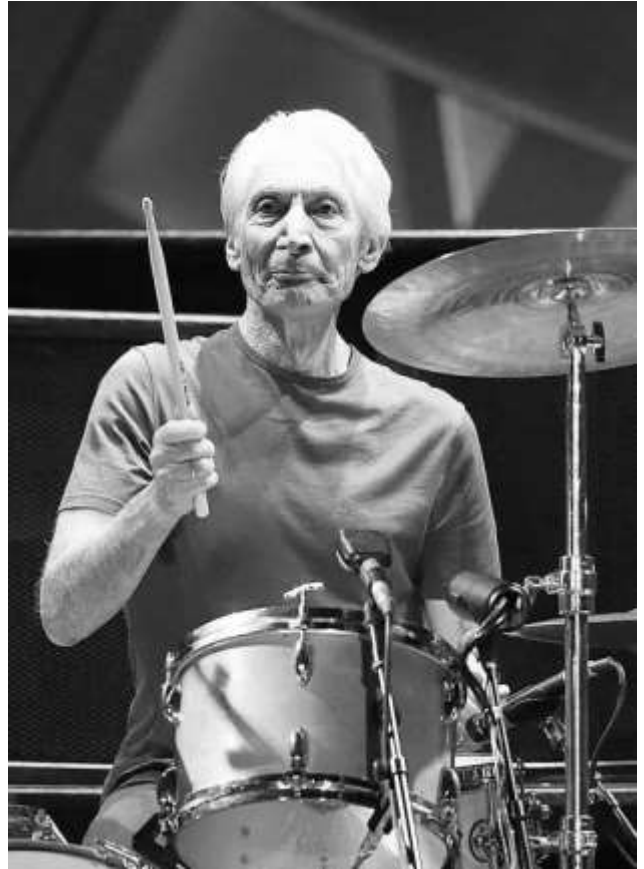


And then there was **Charlie Watts**. He was the Rolling Stone who said of Altamont, in perfect sincerity, “Oh dear, what a shame” in the great documentary *Gimme Shelter*. A rich girl – they slumped there in droves, although this kid was nice – said she’d been to a party with them in Chicago, and that Charlie had been goofy and pleasantly stupid, bouncing down the hallway in a huge bow tie. A freaky girlfriend once claimed she’d gone with her then-fella, a brilliant harmonicist, to play for Watts in his hotel room in New Orleans. “You oughta go to England, man,!” said Charlie. “You’d make a fortune!” And Facebook, in the days after Charlie died, was full of the Jagger-punching story. You know it: Jagger, loaded, calls Charlie, wakes him up. “Where’s my drummer?” Watts gets dressed, shines his shoes, goes to Mick’s room, nails him a fast five to the chops. “Don’t ever call me ‘your drummer’ again! You’re *my* fucking singer!”

And I personally remember hearing the crowd murmur his name when he was the first Stone on stage at my second Stones concert, sometimes in the ‘70s. This guy in the shadows twirling his drumsticks.

The Stones meant a lot to me in my teenagedom. Jagger was a skinny runt like I was, but he had ‘tude and that gave him identity and freed such as me from the strictures of California beauty. Of course, the Stones were commercial artists, making music and posing attitude to make money, but it was great music, and Watts was an essential part of that: tributes of late have praised his superb technique upon the skins.

The word was, for years, that Charlie was a family man who resisted groupies’ siren call, which I first took *cum grano salis*; it’s hard to imagine anything but debauchery coming from fifty years as a Rolling Stone. Unless, of course, you add adult character and professional excellence to the mix.



OROROR



Ansible reports that **Victoria Paris** has died. I feel it necessary to mourn her, publicly, too. Call it acknowledgment of a deep, if media-inspired, stimulation of my lizard brain.

I discovered Ms. Paris’ appeal in 1989, when she acted – ahem – in a video anthology called *Who Reamed Rosie Rabbit?* Something separated her in my mind from her contemporaries. I can’t express it. Something about her face. Something about her hair. Something about her et cetera. Take a look at her award-winning scene with Randy West in *Beauty & the Beast 2*. West – shakin’ his thang in a clanky suit of armor – is a hoot. Miss Victoria ... well, she is something else. That’ll give you a clue. Something about her *tan*. Et cetera.

I rented many, many gold-labeled VCR tapes – you could always tell one of *those* movies by the gold labels – with her name on them. Most were the usual crap, but some had a certain quality – *her* certain quality. I admit to being impressed and *staying* impressed – I even sent off for an autographed photo. Her inscription was, ahem, *kind* to aubbo bachelor, as I was at the time. No, you can't see it.

In regions of my head where light seldom penetrates, *she* shone.

Sic transit gloria mundi. Victoria Paris retired. Her pseudonym was taken over by a TikTok “influencer.” And she has been felled by breast cancer – a fundamental betrayal of, by and to her beauty.

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And lest I forget: though he did not awaken my humanity, my confidence or my basic instincts as did the above folks, farewell with affection to **Willard Scott**, *Today* weatherman, friend to all centenarians, creator of Ronald McDonald and champion of baldies, everywhere.

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Twenty years ago, still newlyweds, Rosy and I lived on Allard Boulevard near City Park in New Orleans. I was in the shower, in prep for a day in the public defenders' office two parishes upriver. Rosy told me to come out and see the TV: “They’re dive-bombing the World Trade Center!”

I flashed on that disaster during World War II, when a bomber got lost in the fog and whammed into the Empire State Building. Surely that’s what happened here, I thought. Then the second plane torpedoed in and hit the southern building. The thought came spontaneously, “Al Qaeda.”

In months to come from we would go by Ground Zero twice, the first time making tracks through the white dust that covered everything in lower Manhattan. immediately began a SFPazine. At the moment, though, I began a fanzine, and wrote, “What the Hell is going on here?”

What the Hell was going on was the beginning of a long, complex, confused war, partly justified, partly foolish, noble at first, as we sought to punish the Taliban regime for its support of Al Qaeda, just, as Osama bin Laden paid for 9/11 with an American bullet between the eyes, but wasteful, as our attempt to create a united democracy in Afghanistan, a country that has never known unity and in which tribal and religious schisms hold sway, went on and on and on. Americans all but forgot it was there. It was America’s war-on-the-side.

The end of August brought the end of the Afghanistan war. This denouement began with images painfully alike to our dreadful *exeunt* from Saigon in 1975 (only this time, desperate civilians were falling off C-17s instead of Chinook helicopters) and climaxed with the obscene suicide attack that killed dozens of Afghans and 13 superb young Americans. But in between America pulled off the most astonishing rescue in our history, and at long last, a 20-year fiasco, our latest failure in nation-building, is behind us.

The withdrawal was depicted in mainstream media as a disaster caused by Biden’s decision to abide by the agreement getting U.S. troops out by August 31. The collapse of the Afghan government, the liquification of the Afghan army, built and supplied and trained by America at incredible cost (and incredible profit by war profiteers), the triumph of the Taliban was all blamed on this action. I was stunned by the Fox-level criticism expressed openly on NBC, which has always – with the exception of its O.J. Simpson coverage – struck me as exceedingly professional and fair. That judgment is not correct.

I believe every aspect of the leave-taking is as Joe Biden has said. The corruption of the Afghan government weakened its hold on the populace; they didn’t trust it and it couldn’t survive. The Afghan military had no loyalty to that regime and felt they had no reason to fight the Taliban. Their loyalty, as centuries of Afghanistan’s invaders have found, is to whatever tribe spawned them. America failed because, as in Vietnam, we didn’t understand the country and we didn’t understand the enemy. Why stay? Inertia is the only answer. Biden was right to call our people home.

And though the Taliban’s victory now was inevitable, our presence was not in vain. Some of the changes we sought to bring to Afghanistan took hold. We *have* had an effect. Democracy as a form of

government may be alien to those people, but liberty is not. It is the natural state of humanity. We have implanted the idea of freedom. It will not go away no matter how many guns are leveled against it.

In the meantime, the western world has >100,000 refugees to deal with, to blend with our societies and welcome. Integrating them into our lives will be difficult, but we are responsible for those we have rescued. First things first: *inoculate them all*. COVID is swelling up again. It is too dangerous to forget. As we in the Greenhouse discovered in August.



Indeed, COVID struck too close to home this past month. Rosy's nephew Cary, father-in-law Joe's only grandson, passed from the disease. Mid-forties. Fine guy. What a goddam waste.

Members of the Southern Fandom Press Alliance, SFPAnS, will find more personal reactions to the tragedy in my apazine; here let me anticipate the Moderna booster we can get at September's end, and mark with utter disgust the idiots refusing to mask and/or taking Ivermectin, a *horse de-wormer*, instead of the vaccines. Useful in treating parasitic ailments, no value to COVID, potentially harmful, ridiculous on its face, the mind crashes. If you're not Mr. Ed or Francis the Talking Mule, you're *not* a horse.

For God's sakes, if you don't wear a mask, wear one! If you haven't gotten your shots – your legitimate, FDA-approved, Moderna Pfizer or J&J shots – get them!

And now, for a welcome change of pace ...

T. JEFF PARKER'S "CHARLIE HOOD" by JOSEPH GREEN

In my not-too-humble opinion the six-book "Charlie Hood" series, by mystery/thriller writer T. Jefferson Parker, has not received the acclaim and attention they deserve. I would like to do my part to remedy the situation.

In order of publication the titles are *L.A. Outlaws*, *The Renegades*, *Iron River*, *The Border Lords*, *The Jaguar* and *The Famous and the Dead*. They average over 100,000 words each, for a total well above 600,000.

These novels were not ignored when published. There are numerous reviews and criticisms on Amazon regarding each, many unfavorable. But I've seen little that examined and critiqued the series as a whole. And they must be taken as a whole for their true impact to be realized.

The books were published from 2008 to 2013, or roughly one a year. A check of his biblio indicates Parker's only other publication during those years was a pair of short stories. After finishing the final novel he embarked on a new series, the "Roland Ford" books. So far there are four (quite good books and recommended, but each is a stand-alone, not a continuing story. And his next upcoming appears to be another single).

One interesting aspect of this series is that Parker waited until Book 3 to introduce a major element of fantasy. That is, if you consider hidden immortals living among us, who call themselves "devils" and "angels" to be fantasy. As Parker depicts them these beings have limited superpowers, can't be killed, have extraordinary strength, and can read minds if close to the person. And they are divided into factions, who fear or oppose one another – the only unifying quality being a desire by the devils to play with the lives of certain selected humans. They do this apparently for their own amusement, and because they like to think they can shape and guide humanity. After their introduction they play a more and more important role through the remaining story.

To me it seems likely Parker didn't quite know where he was going with this series at the start. It developed and grew with each book, and the final two have so many references to their predecessors that they are not really self-contained novels. The six must be read in sequence to gain the full impact,

which I find quite stunning – but only when taken as a whole. (Of course your mileage may vary individual tastes being what they are.) All are available at Amazon as used books, at cheap prices.

A quality I found somewhat unusual is that at no point in these books does the reader receive the impression one is reading a great epic. In *Lord of the Rings* most readers will realize, after a few paragraphs or pages, that an epic story lies ahead. The same can be said for *Shogun*, and many other major works of fiction. But while the quality of Parker's writing varies only from good to very good, it is also very "immediate"; it does not share that "epic" feeling. Nevertheless, each novel is highly entertaining on its separate merits.

The heart of this series revolves around the illegal drugs and guns traffic in Los Angeles and Orange counties. These two adjoining jurisdictions contain more people than in any other whole state, excepting Texas, Florida and New York. That's an enormous market. And the "Border Lords" who dominate it are two featured drug kingpins in Mexico, who indeed live like feudal lords on the proceeds derived from supplying that vast market. I have no personal knowledge of how these men operate in their Mexican fastnesses, but don't doubt Parker did his research, and the depictions here are reasonably accurate—if in fact fictional creations.

Charlie Hood is the only major continuing character in the first few books. Others come and go, get killed, or are left behind when the story moves on. In particular, that applies to the women in bachelor Charlie's life. Each new woman is an interesting and well-done character, but Charlie is unlucky in love. The reader has no way of knowing that a big surprise lies ahead for Charlie at the very end. (That's in addition to several other major story resolutions most readers will find satisfying.)

Later in the series several people emerge on screen who stay with us, one of these the young son of the woman Charlie falls in love with in Book One. (She narrates her own story in first person, while Hood's is told in third, a writing technique that seems to be becoming quite common.) Next to Charlie, the son gradually emerges to become the major focus of the series. He is indeed a very interesting character, if, like his mother, a little hard to accept as real. And, very much like actual human beings, he shares with many other characters here both good and bad traits, not always in even balance.

As for the immortals, once on stage they become a third major focus, adding an outré element to what began as a thriller series. They also provide another strong, unifying motif to the story.

In short, this series exceeds the genre in which it was published, a major accomplishment deserving of recognition far more than it has received. Read and enjoy.

LET THERE BE LOCS! And there were LOCs ...

Bill Plott, wjplott@aol.com

Of course, we are all in accord on the convictions of Derek Chauvin in the George Floyd murder. The whole business of overly aggressive police behavior reminds me of an observation wife Nancy Wilstach had some years ago. While covering police beat in several local towns, she said she sensed there was a lot of steroid use among cops. It is something that might be the explanation for some of these totally unnecessary killings – 'roid rage.

And we are all of an accord on the horrible treatment of Toni Weisskopf by DisCon III. The December date was totally unacceptable, but if there had been another date, the likelihood of me attending my first Worldcon in decades was over. I was not aware of the George RR Martin issue, but itarks back to Jeanette Ng and the gutless award committee's response to her attack of John W. Campbell Jr. This is not the fandom I embraced in the '50s. To be sure, there were squabbles, some of them vicious, back then. But the stuff today is reflective of the world

Trump has sanctioned and his followers have embraced.

Our fellow SFPAn Rich Dengrove had a cogent remark many mailings ago. I was so struck by it that I cut and pasted it on a file I could easily access from time to time. Rich wrote:

“Fandom seems to be dying. Science fiction is the love of a lot of people we used to consider Mundanes. Fandom for them is certainly not a Way of Life, not even a Goddamn Hobby. It is a Pleasant Diversion. However, let’s keep on being fans for a little while longer.”

SFPA keeps our fandom alive for me, Rich.

I agree with Jeff that ours is indeed a rape culture. Well, hopefully that is changing, but it has been true for a long, long time. When I was a young reporter, I remember a cop telling me that he didn’t believe many rapes really happened. He took a piece of paper, punched out small hole in the middle. Then he handed me a pencil and told me to try to put the pencil in the hole while he moved the paper back and forth. In essence, he said woman could not be raped if she kept moving her body. Never mind the gun, the knife or physical strength of the assailant, apparently.

Rich Lynch, <rw_lynch@yahoo.com>

The piece of this *Spartacus* that’s induced me to comment is your short remembrance of three recently-departed fans: Penny Frierson, Alex Bouchard, and Michelle Zellich. I don’t remember ever meeting Michelle, but the other two I was friends with. Particularly Penny, who I crossed paths with many times in the years, a long time ago, when I lived in southeastern Tennessee. You provide information about her memorial service which I’ll not be able to attend, just as I was not able to attend the

recent memorial service for a non-fan friend down in South Africa who I’d known for many years. When I learned of his passing it made me angry at the world that I’d never see him again. I guess the same is true for Penny. It was a privilege to have known her.

Bob Jennings / 29 Whiting Rd / Oxford, MA 01540-2035 / fabficbks@aol.com

Your comments about the two Billionaires In Space episodes that played out recently in the internet news and elsewhere struck me as being a prime example of sour grapes. Since when did it become illegal in this country for a person to start a business and become rich thru his entrepreneurial efforts? And since when do you, or anybody else, get to dictate to another person how they should spend their money?

I doubt that Jeff Bezos or Richard Branson is writing sanctimonious letters about your fascination with watching newly released movies in theaters, paying full price for seat tickets and exorbitant prices for popcorn and snacks, when, of course, you should just wait and see it thru Netflix or DVD rental, spending a lot less money, and making your own microwave popcorn at home. How DARE you squander all that money on the temporary thrill of seeing a movie on a big screen in a theater filled with people (a bunch of whom probably haven’t even been vaccinated for the Covid yet, and are likely prime plague spreaders), when you could be donating that squandered extravagance on charity, feeding the poor, and fixing the roadways.

If really rich people want to blow a lot of money taking rocket ships up to the stratosphere, who are you to tell them they can’t spend their buckos any way they want to? How is that any different from rich people buying expensive sports cars, thousand dollar tailor made suits, diamond

stick pins, or front row seats at the opening round of tennis competition at Wimbledon?

You don't get to make moral judgments on the way people spend their money, and that applies to famous billionaires the same as it does to people working a minimum wage job, or any scale in between.

*Oh, but as citizens we **do** have the right to critique the **public approbation** given spendthrift billionaires and their goofy self-aggrandizing stunts, just as we can righteously deride the attention given the Kardashians. These are public figures performing public acts, reflecting upon our entire culture, and subject to public criticism as well as praise.*

I note again your comments about the Trumpers and their denial of their Fearless Leader doing any wrong. I don't know how many of those folks really believe his Big Lie about a stolen election, or the Other Lies about the Jan 6 insurrection. I have the feeling that they mostly pay lip service to the Lies because they don't like Biden and the Democrats, do not like the new agenda, and are looking forward with barely controlled glee to the mid-term elections and 2024 where they are certain they will retake both houses of the legislature and then witness Trump's triumphant return to the office of President.

You keep repeating what you said in this issue; that "Good works – passage of the voting rights bill, the infrastructure project ... and steadiness at the helm. Whether these acts represent qualities Americans favor ... well, they were in 2020; let's hope – and work – for 2022" will do the job.

No, that will not work. I realize this sounds like bumper-sticker-philosophy, but the reality is that if you could actually reason with Trump Supporters, there wouldn't be any Trump Supporters. Reason, logic, appeals

to a higher morality, none of this matters to Trump Supporters; they are adamant in their unwavering loyalty to Trump and to the racist, misogynist principles for which he stands.

I refer you to pages 14 and 15 of Gary Robe's SFPA fanzine *Tennessee Trash* #160 in which he making a very telling argument that the Trump Phenomena clearly meets all the perimeters and requirements of a religious cult, including a messiah figure and legions of fanatical true believers. You might consider reprinting that article in the next issue of *Spartacus*; it deserves a much wider audience. [Gary?]

If you can't reach the True Trump Believers, then what can be done? In my opinion the only hope is to try and communicate with that elusive group of voters who are not committed to either major political party. There seem to be more of them in this new century than in past decades, and their votes can dramatically affect the outcome of the upcoming elections.

Unfortunately, working against all that things you suggested "Good works – passage of the voting rights bill, the infrastructure project ... and steadiness at the helm," you have the GOP Senators and Representatives who are absolutely determined to thwart any legislative initiative proposed by Biden or any other Democrat no matter how worthwhile it might be. Take a look at their opposition to the infrastructure funding proposals, work that is critically needed and has been long overdue. With this kind of bullheaded obstruction, what chance is there for something like a national voting act, or any other piece of positive social legislation?

I certainly hope I'm wrong, but the political future of this nation continues to look very murky to me. [To me too. Regard

the thugs who recently threatened a young female grade school principal with "citizen's arrest" and bonding with zip ties. Typical craziness ... like my bacover, posted by a friend, believe it or not, on Facebook.]

So far as the Worldcon mess goes, I am happy to see a new chairman has come on board, but I sincerely doubt that Ms. Kowal would be able to make any of the changes you suggested at this late date, even if she wanted to. It would be almost impossible for them to do a double back flip and re-invite Toni Weisskopf to be the Guest of Honor. I am personally more concerned about the absurdity of that insulting juvenile rant about George R.R. Martin being nominated for a Hugo. To me this just establishes how far out of kilter with reality the whole Worldcon system has gone. It seems to me that the entire structure and format of Worldcon no longer meets with the original intention of the convention. Instead of representing a majority of dedicated science fiction fans and readers, it now seems to mostly reflect loony-toons nut cases, political bigots, and juvenile miscreants. It will be interesting to see what the attendance figures are for the upcoming con, and what happens with the Worldcon that follows.

I wish you luck on your continued exploration of the works and psyche of Theodore Sturgeon. A lot of the material he wrote is excellent, but a good chunk of his material isn't very good at all. The fact that he suffered from repeated bouts of writer's block and self doubt didn't help his career or his creative abilities. On the other hand everyone who knew him has remarked that he was a vibrant, gracious personality, especially friendly to science fiction/fantasy fans even in awkward situations. I dunno if you can capture the entirety of his life with its labyrinth of personal twists and turns in

your upcoming *Challenger*, but I wish you luck.

Ray Palm, <raypalmx@gmail.com>

Good to hear that everything worked out well for your wife Rose-Marie. Male breast cancer is rare but does occur. It's an interesting situation when a man visits the Women's Imaging Center. The receptionist asks if you're accompanying the woman in front of you. Ah, no. Sexism, anyone? Time to make such centers more inclusive.

Yes, your state's governor. I call him Desanity. Don't Republicans realize they're killing off their supporters? Then again, consuming cattle deworming medicine instead of getting vaccinated demonstrates social Darwinism in action.

Bad cops. Let's get rid of qualified immunity. "Oh, I'm sorry, I didn't know I was violating your civil rights when I conducted a warrantless illegal search, forcing you to show me the images stored in your camera. Oh, well, qualified immunity. Neener, neener."

**John Purcell / 3744 Marielene Circle /
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Once again you have produced an interesting collection of commentary on an assortment of topics, some of which have provoked return commentary from my now awake brain - two cups of coffee augmented by a bowl of cinnamon chex with banana and berries helps a lot, I tell you - and so here goes: a high-dive off the locking board, with a twisting half-gainer; maybe he'll hit the water this time...

First up, since the last page of *Spartacus* #48 is open in another window on my computer screen, I am going to politely acknowledge Rich Dengrove's disagreement with my position about not

trusting politicians in your 46th issue. Rich wrote a fine LOC to the issue of my zine *Askew* (#33, to be precise) in which I made the same statement about distrusting all politicians as a matter of course because IMHO they all have agendas, and so forth. I agree with Rich that loyalty is an important element in the political hierarchy, and that there are decent people in political positions. Very true. However, I still reserve the right to question politicians. In light of the current heightened sensitivity of American politics, I think having a healthy sense of skepticism is good; it helps to sift the wheat from the chaff so that an informed person can reach a reasonably sound decision based on the information they find. Generally speaking, this is a good frame of mind in which to operate. Sadly, that is not how many Americans at all levels of society operate. It is aggravating to someone like me who sees this country operating on an Either/Or Fallacy basis. Way too many Americans think like this: "if you agree with me, fine, but disagree? Get thee behind me, Satan!" I exaggerate, but the analogy works, or at least I think so. It helps when people like that nice Mr. Dengrove who have the benefit of actual experience in the subject matter are willing to share what they have learned through civil discourse, and I do appreciate it when they do. Rich is a good guy, I know, and he's cool.

Overall. Guy, I am sure you would agree, thanks to your experiences in civil court (am I getting that right? Correct me if necessary) [95% in criminal court, actually], that one of the major problems in American society is the deterioration of civil discourse, best summed up by the commonly used phrase "we agree to disagree." This negative trend bothers me, too. As a Community College professor of English Composition and Rhetoric, with healthy helpings of Literature and Applied Linguistics in my academic diet,

this cultural communication decline is sometimes depressing. Still, I have hopes for the future in that this nation will somehow begin to pull its head out of the muck and clean out our collective eyes, ears, nose, and mouth in order to start actually listening to each other again. Wouldn't that be lovely?

wheh Onward to something else in the 48th iteration of *Spartacus*.

I am really looking forward to that Theodore Sturgeon issue of *Challenger* - almost done with my contribution for it - that should appear Real Soon Now, I am sure. Sounds like it will be a huge ish. [Your contribution was one of the first here, and I only hope the rest are as good.] Shifting gears, I watched both Branson's and Bezos' suborbital flights with interest, and do agree with your statement that these mega-rich men should devote more of their assets towards feeding the hungry, fixing infrastructure, and such. Even so, the technology that they have demonstrated will have positive consequences in the long run for making travel into space more affordable by creating reusable launch systems. Right now they definitely are acting like rich boys playing with their expensive toys, but the hope is that they will channel these efforts towards more humanitarian concerns and cost-saving/planet saving technology. Here's hoping.

Hmm. Discon III is definitely out of our convention plans. I doubt Toni Weiskopf will be reinstated as a GoH, although perhaps the new convention chair, Mary Robinette Kowal, will extend an invitation to Toni to attend and participate in Worldcon activities. We shall see what transpires. I have a lot of respect for both women, and truly wish this entire situation had never arisen. Chicon 8 is on our agenda, after next year's Corflu in Vancouver, British Columbia, plus some regional conventions. We support Memphis

in 2023 and Glasgow in 2024, so those are likewise on the distant horizon. For now, Valerie and I have ArmadilloCon 43 as our first in-person convention this coming October 15-17, 2021. It sounds good, and hopefully the Delta Variant won't put the kibosh on that event. Keep your fingers crossed!

Lloyd Penney / 1706-24 Eva Rd. / Etobicoke, ON / CANADA M9C 2B2 / penneys@bell.net

Spartacus #48... Juneteenth is overdue, and is a good start on some healing. We have just had the same thing ourselves. August 1 (my late father's birthday, by the way) has been declared Canadian Emancipation Day. It marks the day in 1834 that the Slavery Abolition Act of 1833 came into effect around the British Empire, which included Canada. So much of our current society was based on slavery; in our case, black people and indigenous people as well. We have so much to make up for, and again, this is a start.

I see more and more Repub idiots are being banned from social media because of the insult they cause, and the misinformation they spread. Must everything be politicized? Trump must be stopped from running again, and I am a little hopeful that there is a core of people who remember what the Republican Party used to stand for, and may step forward to restore the balance. Just for the record, we are now in the midst of a snap federal election, our parties are out campaigning, and of course, our right-wing party has, as if on cue, descended to attack ads and misinformation.

Do you think Biden has made a mistake re Afghanistan? I am not sure. You can't just continually prop up this state, and the Afghan armies simply folded and let the Taliban walk in. US troops are helping with Canadian diplomatic evacuations, and

Kandahar, which was the centre of Canadian ops, is firmly Taliban held. Some Canadian soldiers are bitter at all the sacrifice during the time there, and it all seems to have been for naught. I am sure this move will cost some votes the next time around, but given how fast the news cycle goes, I am sure the electorate will have forgotten all about it.

Tax the billionaires so fund projects, or let them feel good about funding the projects. The second might work a little better. Together they have enough money to solve the world's problems, but choosing their own little money-burning projects...well, if we had the money, would we do the same thing? We just might. We shouldn't blame so much as we do, but encourage Branson, Bezos and Musk to do something more constructive.

Your Sturgeon project...I see the Childs-Heltons on Facebook, IIRC, same with Jeanne Mealy. One name I know is David Palter. So, I looked him up... David lived in Toronto, was on the edges of fandom early in my own career until he joined the Scientology church. He eventually left the church, becoming one of its most vocal critics. He died in 2018.

My letter... We are old, for we are still losing friends. One local fan died recently, and her funeral was this past Friday. This pandemic has been one gigantic cautionary tale. You will love London...we certainly do. After two successful trips, Yvonne and I are planning an eventual return to London, and we want to spend a whole month there. Saving our shekels...

#49... We have our police problems here, too. And, we have had our share of young black men and women killed in police actions, and no charges, or charges dismissed, offices found innocent. It is a disgrace to all, an outrage that some of our fellow humans are targeted. I imagine the

good cops have had serious reflections about being in that profession, and the various bad cops they have to work with. I keep an ear open for any other developments on the January 6th investigations. I think Trump looks great in prison orange.

The Olympics...we didn't watch, but Canadian athletes did us proud, with 24 medals. Now comes the Paralympics, and I hope they get the same attention and coverage the Olympics did. The CBC will be covering it; I don't know about any other network.

I have seen articles about COVID-19 booster shots, and if one was to be offered to me, I'd take it in a heartbeat. [*I'd take it in a hypodermic!*] I have a lot to live for, and I will

be damned if my life will be endangered by some redneck idiot who won't wear his mask (or wear it properly) for some false reason. Don't give me a good reason to nail the mask to your head, Junior... Now that the Delta variant seems to be everywhere, we still have to be vigilant and careful. And, if those people who won't wear the mask spread the Delta around, they should be declared a health risk, and...well, I don't know what. Seems overly strict to deprive people of their liberty over this, but if they won't help with getting rid of this pandemic, they should be kept somewhere where they can't spread it. Didn't they jail people who wouldn't wear masks in the 1919 Spanish flu pandemic?



Oh, God: déjà vu. August had one more insult to level against us – Hurricane Ida. Following roughly the same path and on the anniversary of Katrina, its approach to the Louisiana coast engendered terror remembered from 16 years before.

We watched the incredible wind, rain and water ravage the turf south of New Orleans and the city itself with morbid fascination – and familiarity. I know most of those places. I've walked on the beach at Grand Isle at low tide. Grand Isle is now empty of civilization. The Marriott Hotel where the Weather Channel correspondent fought sickening winds was one of the sites of Nolacon II. I spent four years as a public defender in flooded LaPlace, and I swear went to a party in one of the lakeside homes shown being inundated. Rosy and I visited Golden Meadow, the rural town all but erased by the Cat 4 monster, when she researched a Mardi Gras story for the Thibodeaux *Daily Comet*. (The town's built on a channel where a gigantic oil platform stood docked.)

The storm left Louisiana and embarked on a furious march to the sea. As a tropical storm it inspired tornadoes and gushed floods onto the unprepared northern cities beneath it – and left more destruction and misery, drowned roads, drowned people. They weren't used to such weather; Ida tore them up.

In New Orleans, though, the levees held. The pumps worked. Our people were without power and in forlorn shape – but alive. (Annie Winston sent Rosy a simple heart-filling message: “Okay.”) There would be no Contraflow – COVID killed it before Ida blew into town – but there would also be no soul-wracking search, nor mourning, nor a funeral for a sweet helpless friend. We observed Ida from afar. So – how can we help?



The new Texas abortion law is so obscene that it beggars the imagination. It counters a slew of basic legal doctrines, from the value of *res judicata* to the concept of standing to the mutual trust at the very core of American social democracy. An atrocious attack on the fundamentals of this country, it has *got to go*.

I certainly understand the moral offense some feel about abortion. It's a hideous procedure. When I worked at New Orleans' Charity Hospital a slew of “TAB” (therapeutic abortion) specimens came through our lab. I held one, in a glass jar. It had fingernails. I've read Phil Dick's “The Pre-Persons” and recognize his disgust. *Esquire* published a fantastic article, “What I Saw at the Abortion”, that struck at

the confusion of conscience the issue commands. In a hallway at Tulane University's excellent medical school was an array of aborted specimens; some were genetic malformations, some were not. They were meant for study. I wondered what lessons they taught. You see things like that, you can't champion abortion as an absolute good. OTOH, seeing the stunned look on a precocious 15-year-old who has just received her test results, and hearing her story, or the story of a financially-strapped single mother, or a woman with pelvic injury, no decent person could deny her whatever help there is.

I once began an ambitious article for *Challenger* on abortion, but it was obliterated by a Russian cyber attack. That was probably for the best; people might read it whose feelings could be sore hurt, and human feeling is, after all, at the heart of the issue.

Take a look at *Roe v. Wade*. The decision is a mess, so I'd advise cutting to the chase and concentrating on William O. Douglas' concurrence. It's a masterpiece of liberal thought. While acknowledging that the government has a legitimate interest in regulating such procedures, Billy Goat's decision places above that interest the basic, fundamental, beyond-question right of an individual to make her own judgments – in consultation with her doctor – about her own life.

We deal with fundamental rights and liberties, which, as already noted, can be contained or controlled only by discretely drawn legislation that preserves the "liberty" and regulates only those phases of the problem of compelling legislative concern. The imposition by the State of group controls over the physician-patient relationship is not made on any medical procedure apart from abortion, no matter how dangerous the medical step may be. The oversight imposed on the physician and patient in abortion cases denies them their "liberty," viz., their right of privacy, without any compelling, discernible state interest.

Trust is then at the heart of American democracy. We *trust* our fellow citizens to make decisions and take actions that won't screw up the society. Thus gun nuts get to misread the Second Amendment all to Hell and fondle their firearms. Thus you and I get to express ourselves in fanzines without fear of government reprisal. Thus adult women can decide for themselves whether or not to carry a foetus to term. So far.

The TX law restricts abortions to the period before a foetal heartbeat can be detected. That's around 6 weeks, before many women even know they're pregnant, and the embryo – no foetus yet – is about the size of a grain of rice. The most reprehensible part of the law provides for vigilantism on the part of other citizens. Involved with the family or not, *anyone* learning of another assisting a woman to get an abortion after a heartbeat is detected can report them to Big Brother and earn a bounty. Need I point out that this aspect of the law throws the concept of *standing*, having a valid stake in the matter being litigated, out the nearest window?

It also deals a blow to the idea that a SCOTUS decision is the law of the land. That's called *res judicata*. This law is a direct contradiction to *Roe*, and therefore to the idea that the issue is settled. The present SCOTUS majority claims it hasn't blocked the new law because appropriate appeals haven't been filed, but it's clear they're simply seizing on the chance to let this overtly unconstitutional bullshit winnow its



way into public acceptance. Their agenda is obvious, and odious. The right has been after *Roe* since it was decided. With Trump's three justices on the Court bolstering the wingers already there, the right wing's troops are in position.

How to oppose this horror? Several ways. Many voices clamor for an expanded court, giving Joe Biden more padded black chairs to fill, presumably with reliable liberals. No. Too many opinions. The Court would be a cacophony. Nothing will *ever* be decided. Codifying *Roe* into written law, through Congress, is a wonderful idea – but it only adds another item for SCOTUS to negate in its attack on the right to choose. A constitutional amendment would be best – but would take a decade to affect and stand little chance of passage through the requisite 2/3 of the states. Best I believe would be giving the Supremes what they demand: well-written appeals, covering every constitutional issue with a blanket of solid argument, and coupling that defense with strong political incitement for liberals and women to get their butts to the polls *every* time there's an election and *vote*.

The illo on my back cover is from *Terminator 2*, of course, but the meme is pure Q-Anon. There is a hysterical, violent edge to America's right wing which has and is ginning itself up for a storm – a political discordance of which January 6th was only the clumsy overture. Trump's defeat was only a goad to the *tormenta* they envision. Okay, America will weather it – this society can take anything. But we should

still prep for more challenge to the way we want this country to be.

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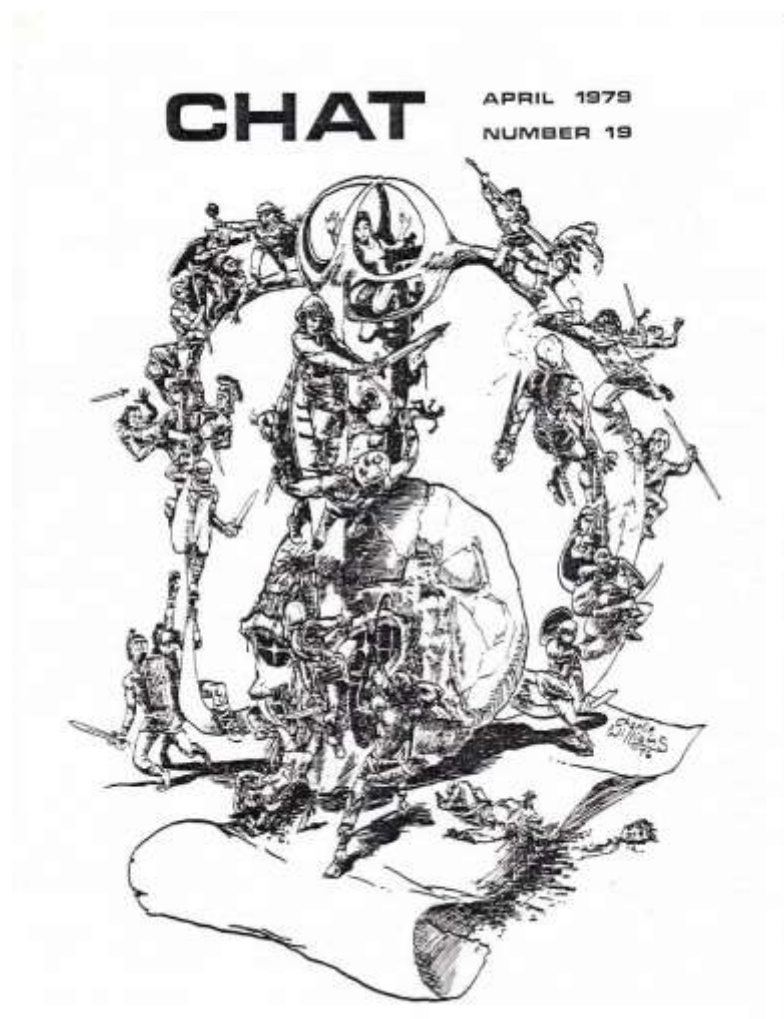
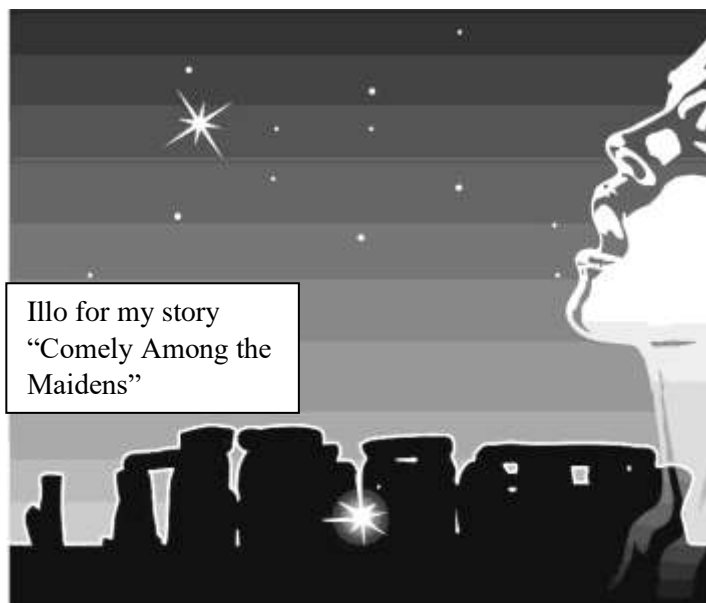
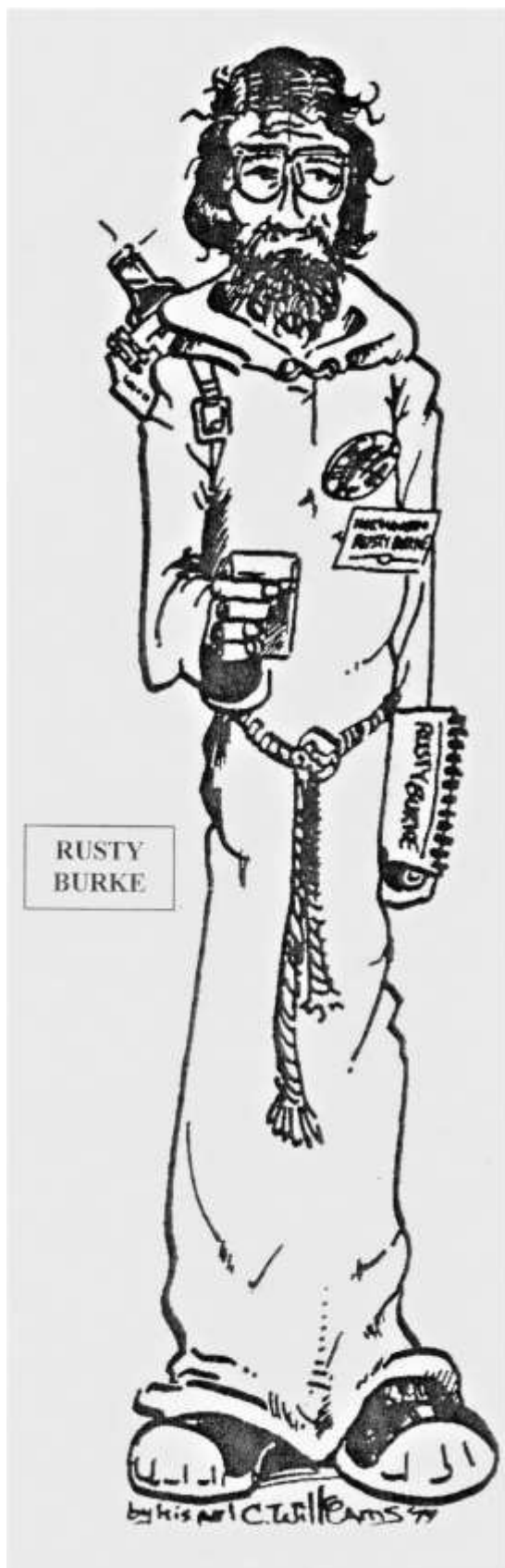
There is much more I could write about – the ridiculous California recall, my Sturgeon project, my public defender memoir, and I could always throw in some fanzine reviews. But there is one more loss to deal with, and it primes everything else.

**Charlie Williams** was one of the Knoxville nuts who played an essential role in the revival of Southern fandom in the early 1980s. He was probably the best caricaturist I ever knew, and a savagely funny cartoonist. He was also a funny, friendly, family fella. I got him to draw portraits of the Guests of Honor for the Noreascon 4 program book, and he made brilliant the covers of a hundred SFPazines for his comrades in K'ville and others. Including me. But it's his heart that we'll miss.

Charlie died of cancer in early September, surrounded by family, rich with love from all who knew him. Good life. Too short. But good.

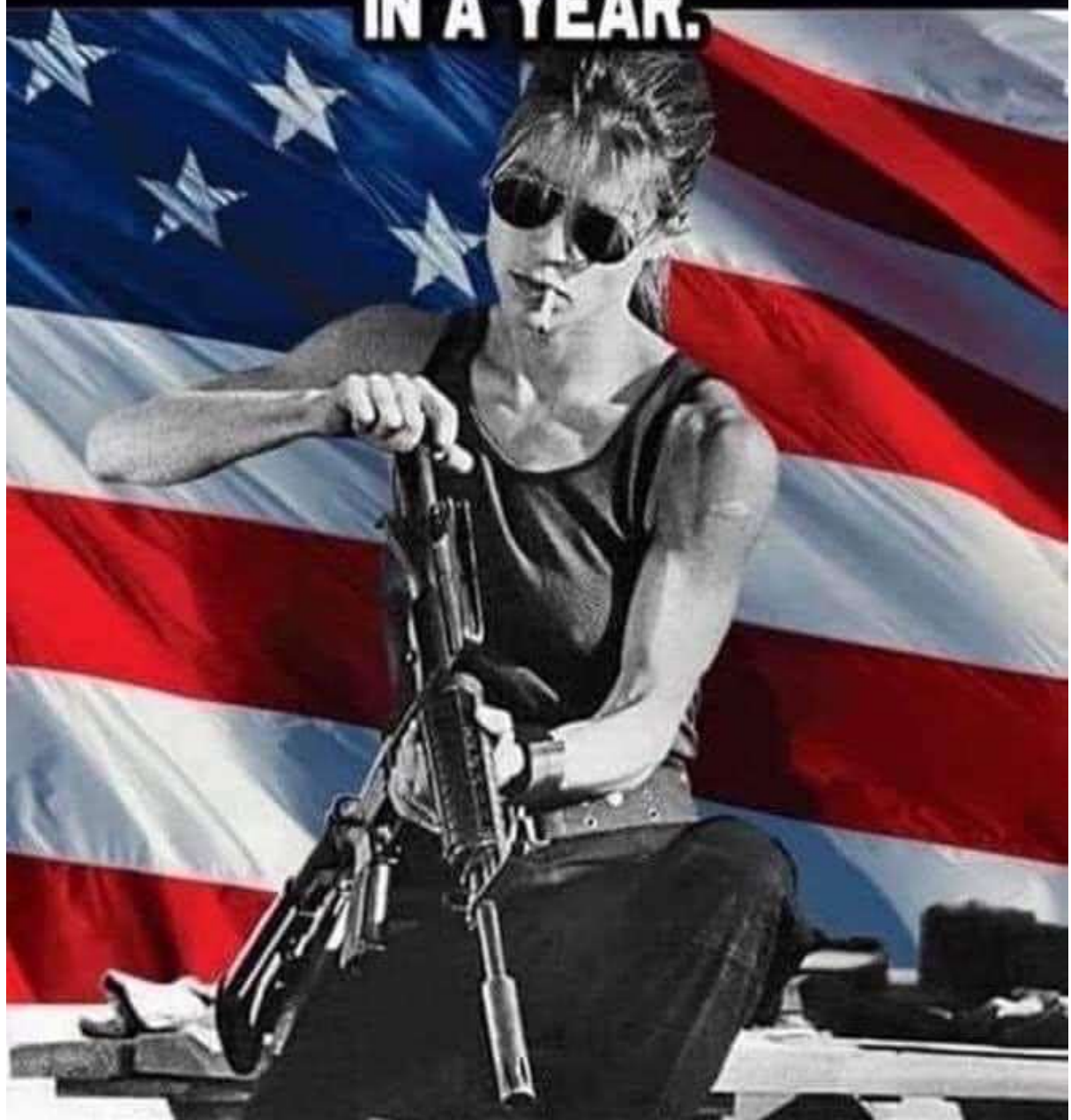


PEOPLE'S  
PARK





**LOOK AROUND YOU.  
APPRECIATE WHAT YOU HAVE.  
NOTHING WILL BE THE SAME  
IN A YEAR.**



**THERE'S A STORM COMING.**