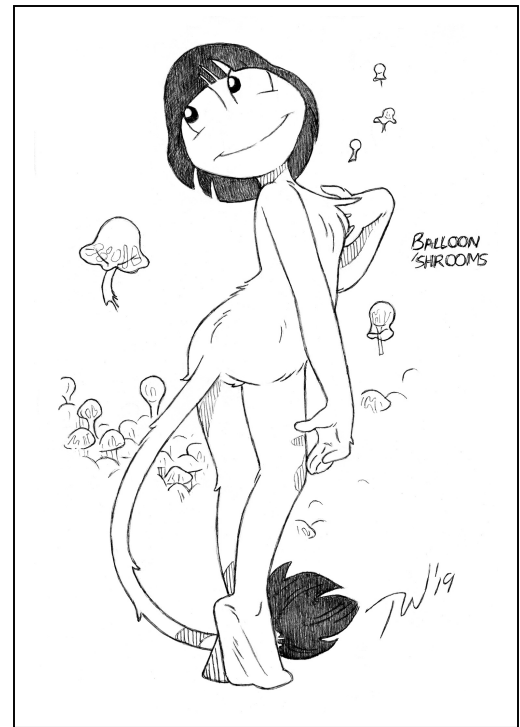


The Balooobius

Takes the Fifth

Again, I seem to have the need to publish an issue of The Balooobius. I feel I have done little of merit during the pandemic, but the usual outlets available for my lesser efforts have not really been available, so here I am, cobbling together what I can. I am no better than I was last time, so I'm still **Taral Wayne**, and my address is still **245 Dunn Ave. Apt. 2111, Toronto, Ontario, M6K 1S6, Canada**. Phone (416) 531-8974. Email Taral@bell.net - April 2021
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The Year That Never Happened

It wasn't literally so, but for all intents and purposes the year 2020 was not on my calendar.

I don't mean to say nothing happened in the last 12 months. For all too many people, far too much has happened, the most obvious of which include a world-wide pandemic and a tin-god losing his bid to remain in The White House. But for me, almost nothing has occurred since Covid-19 arrived on our doorstep. I stayed home like a good little boy, leaving the apartment only for scheduled doctor's visits, monthly banking and grocery shopping. I have seen none of my friends or family in almost a year, with a sole exception who performed a bit of computer maintenance in the fall, and yesterday brought me my Christmas present. By rights, I ought to be the last person who ever comes down with Covid.

Of course, it doesn't work that way. For instance, I was forced to share an elevator with two drunks earlier this year. One sneezed non-stop almost all the way from the lobby to my floor. Given the Principle of Maximum Perversity of the Universe, it stands to reason that some similar slip could easily see me choking on a ventilator before the pandemic is finally over. The transmission of contagious diseases is never entirely predictable.

Nevertheless, my year has not been entirely without some good news. For one, I have been waiting for months to learn when the paperwork and waiting for the replacement for my power chair, Traveling Matt, would finally be over. A week ago, the call I was expecting finally came, and it appears that everything is set. Now I only need to wait for a day to be appointed for the delivery. The woman who called me said it should only take 2 or 3 weeks.

Old Traveling Matt has served me well in the meantime. I had been afraid that breakdown was immanent, but apart from an unholy racket made by the rear caster, it has guided me true and faithfully to my unavoidable essays into the outside world. When Old Traveling Matt is taken away to the strap yard, the New Traveling Matt is likely to be identical in model and colour, but it will be without the many scars and dings that were acquired while learning not to drive off curbs, or get jammed in tight doorways.

It was also heartening to put the finishing touches on my longest short story, just completed a couple of days ago. I had the outline of “Heroes and Villains” in my mind for a couple of years before I was able to clear the slate and begin working. The next half-year I spent sharing my time on several activities, but mostly on writing. It has been a very satisfying experience, that I think flows quickly and seamlessly, despite a great deal of detail. But why read *about* the story when you can read *the story*? “Heroes and Villains” was posted on FurAffinity and Deviant Art for readers who are not too faint of heart to read all 17,500 Fraggly words.

Under the circumstances, I can’t say that 2020 was an entirely wasted year.

Where Does a Month Go?

In fact, where does a year go, when it’s spent hiding indoors from a Corona virus?

However little finished work I’ve done, it has not been as bad as all that.

The big news is that I got my replacement for Traveling Matt in the early New Year. Traveling Matt II was more or less like Traveling Matt I, but there were a small number of differences. The two drive wheels are a little spiffier on the new chair. On the other hand, I got a cheesier cushion cover ... but I was able to swap the covers. The left-hand arm rest was cut down to shorter length, presumably for greater ease at the controls. In practice, it doesn’t seem to have made much difference. But the chair is new, with fresh batteries and has hardly been broken in, yet.

The only complaint I have is that there is nowhere to go in the depth of winter and a pandemic raging all around. I have few discretionary destinations. I have to test my blood once a month, go to the bank once to pay bills and cash checks, and bring in fresh groceries about once a week. That’s been my life since last January, and it’s likely that 2021 won’t be much different.

Once again, I may have been stung by a customer. This guy has stung me before, but made amends last year by pre-paying a commission. I got my money this time, though he wanted enough changes to have made it more of a nuisance than it was worth to me. But he wanted a new commission, and I began a new sketch. As before, he wanted enough changes to make it half-again as much work as it was worth to me ... but then I didn't hear from him again! I waited for almost a month about payment. Yesterday I e-mailed, and he says his brother has Covid!

Was it true? How can I know? Should it matter? Life goes on, does it not, or has my client been hovering over an ICU bed all this time?

I ought to make up my mind once and for all ... no commissions ever again. Yet here I am, dickering with another potential client for another commission. Why do I do it? I don't need the money. I wonder if my fear is that without a financial spur I would just give up drawing entirely?

Perhaps not. I have been monkeying around with a drawing from late last year, preparing it for colour. I need a cover for my next fanzine, and I have never coloured both Kiki and Darl before. In fact, I've never coloured Darl at all, and it's about time that I did.

However, I still haven't drawn anything new this year. It's unlikely I'll finish the first piece in time for January, but now I face an entirely new month for procrastination. It may force me to actually finish if I dawdle long enough.

And before I forget, Donald Trump no longer disgraces the White House, his office, nor threatens the American Republic. 2021 is looking up already!

Cancel My Order

I spend too much time on FaceBook, and the curious thing is that the more time I spend on-line, the less interested in contentious issues I have become. It isn't as though I have ever been slow with my opinions, but as time goes by, I see that the disputes seem to be growing more heated in inverse proportion to the actual importance of the issues.

Dr. Suess... really? What happened to police brutality? The environment? The assault on Congress by a rogue president? No one has forgotten about those matters, but surely there is no time to waste on non-existent issues about whether books may be permitted to acknowledge that the Chinese ate with chopsticks? When Dr. Seuss's first book was published, there were likely *still* Chinese men who dressed in traditional costumes, and when Ted Geisel was young he may well have seen older Chinese men who still wore the Manchu pigtail. So run this by me again – why is this racist?

I did have to stop for a moment over a picture in one of the other books, which depicted a pair of Africans in costumes that amounted to a bone in their noses and grass skirts. But to be factual, there are parts of Africa to this day in which the extremely hot weather makes minimal clothing very practical, and various forms of body modification are also common. In other words, it is not quite accurate to say that no-one ever dressed that way at the time of the book in question, or that no-one ever dresses that way even today. But that may be missing a wider point in this case. But also missing is just how easily such a small point could easily be rectified. Do I need to draw a picture?

But from the sublime to the merely cartoonish. The advocates of "cancel culture" have also dwelt on the stereotype erotic Frenchman – Pepe LePew. First of all, I notice that no one is complaining about the unfairness of characterizing all Frenchmen as mashers and sexual predators. But I guess it's okay to disparage all white men, regardless of whether they are even French. Even when I was a kid, however, I didn't find Pepe to be especially funny. One cartoon, okay... fourteen of them using same idea is just *lazy*. The same could have been said about most Warner Brothers characters. That's what makes Pepe so irritating ... not because he ran a simple idea into the ground, but because so many more French stereotypes were overlooked! Never mind Pepe the womanizer, what about Pepe the gourmet? Pepe the French chauvinist? Pepe the wine snob? Pepe the Left Bank Impressionist artist? By no means is Pepe LePew a character without many cultural assets available to Warner Bros. animators. But studios are lazy, as I said. So much easier to just issue a statement that the character gives the wrong signals and write him out of the script.

But I'm not saying anything new, here. It has been discussed to death in FaceBook. But you may be less aware that Warner Bros. has announced *Space Jam 2*?

To begin with, the first was a f***ing bad movie. It was developed expressly to capitalize on Michael Jordan's immense popularity at the time. No matter that he really couldn't act, or that Warner Bros. literally whored all the Warner characters, depicting them as showering love and affection on Jordan in a way that violated every aspect of their personalities. Could you honestly imagine Bugs Bunny gushing, "Michael Jordan? The Greatest basketball player, baseball player and human being who has ever lived? And he's saying hello to *me*?" Of course you can't imagine it ... Bugs Bunny more likely would have stuffed a stick of dynamite up Jordan's a** before anyone could have said, "th... th... that's all, folks!"

So it's getting on 30 years later, and Warner has announced some sort of sequel. Interestingly, Jordan has said he wants nothing to do with it. The studio seems to have found some other basketball player. Never mind who – I don't care. It's a sport I know little about, and care even less about. What does pique my interest is *why*

Warner is doing it, considering the critical savaging the first film got. It's only an educated guess, but I think it is because the studio is thinking once more about the potential viewership that they believe exists among the young, urban, black audience.

I think we can assume it isn't because the studio cares deeply that young, black audiences are not being served by the entertainment industry that white audiences are. "It is to laugh, *mes amis!*" This is just another attempt to lure green money out of black pockets.

One bright note in the original 1997 movie was a character named Lola Bunny ... the first really new leading female character to be created by the studio for the big screen since cartoons were actually *presented* on the big screen.

Lola was a big hit among the fans, you can be sure, and in theory she represented an attractive, politically correct, strong female lead for Bugs. In actual fact, the character was the bone of contention virtually from the get-go!

The animation department designed Lola to be a counterpart to Bugs, and there was not even a hare's width of difference between them, other than a lock of hair over Lola's eyes. (As proof I have photocopies that I'm not actually supposed to have.) Lola was meant to resemble Bugs, and be totally without gender other than a modest pair of eyelashes.

That was the Lola submitted to the companies who had contracts to produce the hundreds of toys, burger prizes, colouring books, note pads, hair bands, stickers, lunch bags, back packs, tennis shoes and a million other useless money-making landfill gimcracks ... and every one of those companies had a s***-f**.

"Why does Bugs look like a guy? Is this going to send a signal to kids that Bugs is gay? Why doesn't Lola have b***s like a girl?" Complaints came flooding back to the studio, *tout suite*.

The studio took another bash at it, and turned out a new set of drawings that looked exactly the same. Bugs with bangs, and that was it. The drawings were returned by the toy companies *et al* with exactly the same complaints. I was told this war between the marketers and the studio went back and forth several times before the studio finally gave up, and gave the marketers what they wanted, the Lola Bunny that everyone knows ... one with t**s.

Apparently, Warner Bros. will get to correct that mistake this time. The new Lola Bunny that has been shown is as sexless as a 12-year-old schoolgirl. She will also wear baggy sports gear, and even a second pair of longer pants under her shorts! It can be argued that the original Lola was *too* sexy, with that brazen, bare-midriff,

'80's look. That many young girls wore their own midriffs that way may or may not have been exploitative, that that's just how it was, and the majority of young girls were likely in favour of the going fashion. Who was I to tell them how to dress?

But it is apparently *someone's* power to make such a decision this time. *Space Jam 2* will have an empowered Lola Bunny of their dreams, and just like real women everywhere, she will have no b***s.

I wonder if the new film will do better than the 43% approval rating on Rotten Tomatoes that the last one had?

Thurston Thursday

Today I needed to go out for a monthly blood test, and on the way home I noticed a coin on the sidewalk. It was about the size of a quarter, but bronze coloured, which was an oddity in itself. It was dark, and the obverse inscription not very clear. There was a left-profile face that looked a bit like George Washington. The reverse was inscribed "Good Luck" in a shield, and was dated 1928. Well, it was obviously a token of some sort, and perhaps it actually **was** 100 years old. I worked out the inscription around the portrait, and it seemed to read "Thurston the Magician" ... that was a name I had heard before.

And it was Thursday, as luck would have it.

Once I was home, it didn't take long to discover that it was a promotional item that the magician gave during his tours, and they were **collectible,** although not terribly valuable. I saw one go for about \$60, but the majority for closer to \$30 ... and those examples were rather better than the one I found. Mine isn't bad, but there is wear around the hair and ear, so I wouldn't put it above \$20. Still, it was a surprising find.

The next day, I scanned both sides to record for my collection.

The only thing I've ever found that was at all similar was a bar token (also found on the sidewalk), with a Detroit street address – there is no Gratiot Ave. in or around Toronto, but there is in Detroit. There was no dating it, however.

Stylistically, I'd guess 1910 to 1930. Since I was never able to find a perfect match for my bar token, however, this bar token from the net is pretty much the same thing, but it's from a bar in Lansing rather than Detroit. These things have been mass-produced all over the country, not only these particular types for bars – I've seen others – but also for bakeries, grocers, liquor and hard goods. What I have not been able to find out yet is when these things were made. According to

Wikipedia, the heyday of these cheap tokens was from the late 19th. Century to 1920.



Joe Haines Bar
3739 Gratiot Ave.
Detroit -- Good for
5 cents in trade!

Tall Tails (A mere suggestion for a letter column)

To begin with, I usually receive long and thoughtful comments on my recent one-shots from an old friend. Unfortunately, he no longer has any interest with interaction with fanzine fandom, and our correspondence is strictly personal. This is a terrible shame, as those were really nice letters that I would love to print, but one needs must... However, Lloyd Penney has inadvertently neglected to loc even a single one of the previous four issues of *The Biloobius*, and has promised to make amends. But for our first read letter of comment in this fanzine, we bring you ...

Oh, Jeezuz... I have the letter in front of me, but for the life of me I have no idea who wrote it! Ticking off a letter writer is one way to guarantee response... Assuming any need for a next issue, maybe next issue will have letters as well.

Heroes and Uillains *A Prologue*

I took my time over the writing. It's been revised, proofread and tweaked. I showed the story to three or four people for comment (none so far). So what do I do now?

For the time being, I've picked about a dozen more people from my address list to show the story to. Ultimately, I may have to publish yet another issue of my "one-shot," *The Baloobius*, rather than publish it as a new fanzine for a slightly larger audience. But, for the moment, I don't feel up to publishing another fanzine. Maybe around Christmas or in the New Year. I ought to add some drawings, and – in a way – that's why I'm so unenthusiastic about drawing. I would need to create time to undertake new drawings. This year, I've so far done very little drawing at all, and most of the starts I've made were never finished. Maybe next year will be better?

(How could it be worse?)

The story is “Heroes and Villains,” a 17,500-word story that I think is fairly lively, and should not be difficult to read. The major difficulty with finding readers is the nature of the story itself. Between serious writing and humorous writing there is a grey area I call “whimsy.” It is not entirely either, and some readers seem unable, or unwilling, to read whimsy. However, whimsy is precisely where the nature of Fraggles most comfortably lies. “Heroes and Villains” involves two Fraggles named Kiki and Darl, as well as the entire cast of characters that were brought to life during the Jim Henson television show. Kiki is a rather more intelligent-than-usual Fraggles who became lost outside in what Fraggles call “Outer Space,” and where she made friends with a “Silly Creature” who lived there. During the events of a story yet to be written, turnabout becomes fair play, as “Darl” becomes lost in Fraggles Rock. The events that follow this beginning are long and complicated, touch upon tragic ... and discover magic instead, when Darl takes up a new life by becoming a Fraggles himself. This must sound like the most painful cliché in history, but you have to bear with me. For now, accept that Darl – whose Silly Creature name is mangled into “Darl” by Kiki – faces daily challenges in order to adapt.

Hopefully, you will be able to follow all this without too much eye-rolling. Writing these stories has been a pleasure, and a source of new experiments. It is a mistake to stray too far in the direction of either serious writing, or in the direction of humour, without striking the wrong tone. There is a lot of silliness in Fraggles Rock, but on occasion there are issues of life and death. I’ve chosen to err a little further in the direction of making Fraggles Rock into a *real* sort of place – there are rules for not dirtying the water in the Fraggles Pool, for example, and Fraggles *do* eat more than merely radishes and “Doozer sticks.” It’s all well and good that Boober Fraggles *likes* to do laundry, but it was necessary to explain where clothes come from in the first place. Also, how do Fraggles make a fire, or tell the time? At one time or another I’ve tried to provide explanations. (Not all in the same story, of course.) But if there can be danger in Fraggles Rock, or sometimes anger, it will not be in my mandate to explain where babies come from in any detail! In that direction lies unwanted “serious” writing.

It’s hard to say how many of you will read any of this – I understand that many people have been unable to read the first chapters of “Lord of the Rings,” since it is too saccharine at the start, and are also unable to read any of the darker, more frightening events that follow. At least I can assure you that boogiemens that appear in “Heroes and Villains” are somewhat less formidable.

ENDID