



THE BALOOBIUS ...*SIXTH*

It has been slow to dawn on me that publishing, short intermittent issues of my zine is useful. They don't all need to be world-shakers like my recent *Faux Pause*. As a means to clear out short material with limited shelf life, perhaps the odd issue of The BalooBIUS is exactly what is needed. There is no doubt that I am **Taral Wayne**, from 245 Dunn Ave. Apt. 2111, Toronto Ontario, M6K 1S6, Canada. Email Taral@bell.net Phone (416) 531 8974. Kiddelidivee Books & Art 330

Is This the Other Side? – Timor mortis conturbat me-oh-my! What could possibly go wrong next?
Seventy and Not Counting – 70 is the new 50, and I hadn't even gotten accustomed to 60 yet.
Friend or Faux – New feature, a letter Column!

Is This the Other Side?

Not long ago, I had an unexpected chat with Cantus. You may know him a little better by the name of Kermit the Frog, rather than the long-winded, magical flute-playing Fraggles. I had always wanted to speak to Jim Henson, and was suddenly granted the opportunity last month.

“Jim,” I said, “Can I call you that, or do you prefer Mr. Henson... or perhaps The Left Hand of God? It's nice of you to meet me at such short notice. I've wanted to talk with you about so many things, including how Fraggles know what a sock is if they don't wear them, and what does a Doozer stick taste like. Surely not like a radish? However, first I'd like to know where *here* is!”

“Not at all. Pleased to meet you.” said the Great Muppeteer. “I think you know where you are for the moment, but I'm afraid you really don't have time for questions. You weren't as far gone as you think, and you have to go back almost immediately.”

That was how I woke up in the Intensive Care Unit at Saint Joseph's Hospital. I never did find out what Fraggles see in radishes.

At least, that's how I would have liked my first encounter with whatever lies ahead in the afterlife. The reality was much more terrifying.

I had been feeling more poorly for some time, without realizing the gradual decay. I hadn't slept well for some time, but the difficulty had grown so much worse that I frequently lay in bed for a couple of hours before falling into a genuine slumber. Worse, I was constantly falling asleep while awake, drifting off and only waking when my face hit the keyboard. It was irresistible, and all that would rouse me was to get up and move around. I had begun to spill my coffee on the way from the kitchen to the work room.

Then I began to fall from my bed. I fell headlong like a tree, and narrowly avoided hitting my head on the way down, but managed to bung up my side on a footstool instead. I did it again only a couple of days later. Worse followed.

Late in August, I decided to run Traveling Matt up to the Mall for look for new movies, and was accident-prone from the start, nearly colliding with a passer-by. I blamed it on a gigantic garbage bin that was in my way, and totally blocked the sidewalk. I cursed it in florid fashion, but there was no way around, so I backed up. That's when one of the wheels of the chair left the curb and I began to lose balance. At least I was quick enough on my feet to stand up and stop the chair's movement, so we didn't go ass-over-teakettle. I carefully sat down again and maneuvered the chair back to stable ground. Unfortunately, I fumbled the control and rammed into the same bloody bin that was in my way, and badly stubbed my toe!

That was an understatement, in fact. I tore off a strip of skin on two toes that didn't entirely stop seeping for two days. It was at least under control once I was able to clean up the mess. I was beginning to think I might need help. It turned out that events were actually far beyond my control at this point.

The next day, I woke as usual and began the daily routine of dressing, shaving, making breakfast and booting up the computer. Although I had only been awake for around an hour at this point, I immediately began to drift off. My head would nod and within a minute I was staring down at the keyboard, unable to even hold my head up ... or else I woke up with a jar with the keys in my face.

This, I reasoned, was not normal! This was not normal clumsiness, or habitual insomnia, nor a bout of more than usual fatigue due to my Myasthenia gravis. This was the moment it was obvious that I needed to phone for an ambulance.

The emergency team was there within minutes, I'll give them that. I had just enough time to dress, grab my keys and inform key people about my whereabouts, but no time for books, paper, phone numbers or anything to occupy the unavoidable hospital stay

that was sure to follow. As quick as a wink, I was strapped down and buttoned up like a tight boot. One of the ambulance crew said that I had not left it a moment too soon. My CO2 levels were sky-high, and it was a wonder I was even conscious.

In fact, I blacked out just a couple of minutes later.

What I awoke to was a nightmare. I had no idea where I was, or how I had got there from the ambulance. I was not merely secured in a gurney, I was struggling to free myself from bonds, surrounded by strange people. The corridor was dingy, badly lit with yellowy overheads and had all the reassurance of the back entrance to a crematorium. I later discovered I had acquired several mysterious bruises that I couldn't account for during the struggle to get free. Fortunately, I blacked out again before I could tear more than one of my arms free.

In time, I awoke to a new reality. I was no longer restrained, and my mind was clear enough to recognize that I was in intensive care. A huge plastic regulator of some sort obscured my vision, supplying me with welcome oxygen. I drifted in and out of awareness again for the next day or two. My thoughts were simple and not as frightening as I might have expected. I really didn't meet anyone at the other end, certainly not Jim Henson, I only thought that that maybe this how it all ends, as it does for all of us sooner or later.

I knew I was getting better when I given a little soft food. It wasn't *cordon bleu*, but it was the best-tasting thing I could remember in a long time.

Just how long I was in IC I don't know, I can only say that I was an impatient patient who clamored to be released to the general wards as soon as possible. Luckily, I was in the midst of a pandemic, where the doctors were as eager to free up Intensive Care space as I was to leave it.

If you have any curiosity at all, you have already asked what put me in Intensive Care in the first place. The doctor who first spoke to me informed me that I had come down with just about the last thing I expected: *pneumonia*.

How in the world did I catch pneumonia, I asked. No way to know, the doctors said. I have spent most of the last year and a half isolated from almost everyone other than health care workers. I only saw one friend, and kept my distance at the bank and at check-out counters. The best guess I could make was that I was exposed in my building's elevators, but that's probably jumping to conclusions. I'll probably never know.

It didn't hurt that I was responding rapidly to a combination of oxygen and antibiotics, however, so I was soon moved to a room with only one other occupant, and allowed a

regular diet. This was not as much of a promotion as it seems, since St. Joe's has some of the least appetizing hospital food I've been forced to live on. It isn't that it was *all* bad, but I was annoyed by being given only give coffee in the morning, and tea for both other meals. That was only an irritant, however. What genuinely annoys me whenever I have to spend time at St. Joe's is that I'm invariably served both watery scalloped potatoes and powdered mac and cheese, *every* time. There are few things that are so vile that I cannot eat them even when hungry, and those are two of them! So far, I've not had to choke down beets or liver, but I'm surprised that both aren't on the menu. Maybe when I inevitably come down with leprosy?

The next few days led to daily improvement, driving my desperate need to get home. Without a phone of any kind, no connection to the internet, no music, no books, no paper or pencil, there was literally nothing I could do but wait for meals and long for sleep. I spent the next few days maintaining my self-control, despite an overpowering urge to begin climbing the walls. At the first moment I was able, I began walking to and from the washroom by myself, and responded to the doctor's visits with chipper lies. Finally, I turned cunning, and reminded everyone that my room was needed for patients who were still genuinely ill. It worked. I wore them down, and I was released about ten days after admitted.

I won't pretend that everything was normal right away. I was still weak and having trouble with routine chores that shouldn't tire me. But there was no exaggeration about gaining strength day by day. By the end of the month I realized that I had probably put the entire experience behind me.

I'm still looking forward to meeting Jim Henson, but I'm in no hurry this time.

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Seventy & Not Counting!

The other day was quite a day ... I turned seventy.

Not friggin' fifty, a mere child's play, or even a respectable sixty. But friggin' seventy. That's ten years longer than my mother lived. Now, I'm a friggin' old goddamn man! Yet I don't feel a bit of it! Did I just say that? That I don't feel the years, the aches and the pains, nor the lost causes? Actually, it's a damn lie! Of course I do! It's only that the alternative is too grim to admit, so one looks to the brighter side. Despite having lost many of the careless freedoms I was once able to enjoy, I feel healthy and capable most of of the time, not do I think I have been merely fooling myself.

Thus it was that I met with an old friend for my birthday. Steven wanted to take me to

the Mandarin for a dinner at the Chinese buffet. Chinese cuisine may still be my favourite, regardless that I am not a purist at heart. I love my sweet and sour shrimp, General Tsao's chicken and Egg Foo Yung! But while I had a splendid meal, I admit I had to put a lot of effort into the occasion.

I walk around in my apartment without much difficulty. The distance from my computer chair to the front door, or my bedroom to the kitchen, is under fifty feet. If I need to badly enough, I can walk all the way to the elevators; however, at that point I am beginning to make a major effort. To go down to the lobby to check my mail, I usually I take the chair even for that short walk. But to visit the Mandarin, I had to walk not only to the elevators, then then through the lobby, and finally out in the street to let myself into Steven's car. Astonishingly, I hadn't been in a car for so long that it felt claustrophobic, as though I were jammed into a space capsule and looking up through the windshield for the rocket to launch. It took a couple of minutes to get over the uncomfortable position.

When did cars begin to be so cramped? When I was a kid, my family's station wagon was almost the size of a mobile home. Even when I was a young man, the bench seats of the average Mercury or Buick were as roomy as most living room suites. Yet somehow cars shrank over the years, growing more and more compact, more and more efficiently using every available centimeter of space.

Fortunately, Steven's car wasn't parked far from the restaurant. The Mandarin had handicapped parking at the entrance. I have a handicapped parking permit, and it's gratifying when I have a rare opportunity to use it. The distance from the foyer to the buffet, and to our table, was rather more daunting. Every time I went to refill my plate, I sampled dishes farther away, and the walk from table to buffet grew longer and longer. At the end, the distance had not only noticeably grown, but I was beginning to fatigue from accumulated effort. I finished my last plate of Shanghai noodle when I realized that I would also need to seek the facilities ... facilities that were at the far end of the buffet and some distance farther, a forbidding journey of an extra forty or fifty feet. I only then began to wonder if I had bitten off a little more egg roll than I could chew.

It was a very weary Taral who successfully navigated his way from the rest room all the way through the buffet, out the restaurant lobby and into Steven's car. Also a very full and satisfied one.

When I finally got home I was exhausted, but not too tired to thank Steven for a lavish dinner and rare outing from the apartment. To think ... all I have to do is arrange to be born on October 12th more often than once a year, and life would be open to many more such possibilities.

Steven drove away, and I turned to look up at the building front entrance. I still had steps to climb, a security lock to activate, an elevator to call, then one final stagger to my apartment door. I was at home!

The one saving grace of Myasthenia gravis is that the fatigue it causes lasts only a short while before your strength is restored. Half an hour later, I was absorbed once more in my increasingly pointless routine of internet mail, Facebook or fanac.

There was only one thing to do ... Next day I fired up Traveling Matt, and drove up the street a short way to the Ontario Liquor Control store, determined to buy a treat – something sweet but more gratifying than a bottle of bargain port. My eyes roved over the short rack of liqueurs, choosing among a disappointingly small display. I ought to have gone to the a larger store, farther away, where I would have had much more choice. This OLC tailored itself to drinkers who seemed mainly interested in beer – whether cheap or import – whiskey, gin, vodka or rum. There seemed to be little demand among these peasants for Drambuie or Amaretto. I looked longingly on a huge bottle of Kahlua, but it was a full 1.5 liters, twice the size of the usual 750 mls. A \$30 a bottle of that ambrosia normally costs \$30. But the much larger bottle would price at a whopping \$60 ... more than a “little treat.”

That’s why I noticed the “sale.” There was a \$17 discount on the \$60 double-size bottle. In other words, the double-size was less than half the price of buying a second 750 ml. It was the last one on the shelf, as well. I wandered the store for several minutes, torn between prudence and taking home the entire self-indulgent extravagance! You can guess which won out.

Nothing less would suit the dinner the night before, although I will in all likelihood be nursing Kahlua for the next half year.

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Friend or Fauk

*TW – I did not actually have to plead for this loc, but it came damned close! Six issues of The Balobius, and yet not one damn reader sent even a scrawled warning on the rock before the rabbit ate him? Letters are the lifeblood of fanzines, or at least the lifeblood of this fanzine editor, who can't join into the fannish swim in person. Conversations over Corflu dinner, or who plans to go to Worldcon next year, go over my head like conversations overheard in the train station full of Korean tourists. I don't even read science fiction anymore, ending that avenue of commonality. So **write**, dammit!*

Here is at least one lot, from the indefatigable Loyld Penny, whose name I just misspelled in an entirely novel way...

Lloyd Penney, Toronto

Yes, 'tis I, perhaps not quite as churlish as you may have thought, finally getting around to responding to *The Baloobius* 5. I shall try to fill the page with sparkling wit and wise smartassery, but to be honest, I wouldn't hold my breath...

The year 2020 was cancelled due to illness and the fact some governments either couldn't or wouldn't understand what needed to be done. It's not like there's anyone in government who remembers the Spanish flu epidemic, but some ideas from doctors and scientists were simply too much for the pols who kept saying they paid attention to the science when they obviously couldn't, or wouldn't. This explains why provinces with Conservative governments have the highest COVID-19 case rates. We have been inside pretty well since March of last year, but thanks to the brain-dead fools who live in this building, who would not wear masks or self-isolate, we caught it anyway, in spite of our best efforts. We've recovered, and we have had our first Astra Zeneca shots, so we're good. The death toll in this country has hit 25,000, and I could blame Conservative premiers like Ford and Kenney who couldn't understand the pandemic, and figured how they could stop spending money here, and didn't do enough to stop the spread. I have some hopes for 2021, but I think we will be outside and busy again for 2022.

Yvonne's been working on Hawaiian-style shirts with floral, colourful and steampunk motifs, and I have been busy with making jewelry, doing some voicework, and getting lots of editorial work done. Add to that the never-ending job hunt, and my plate has remained fairly full.

Yes, I spend too much time on Facebook, too. I have lots to do, but sometimes, you just don't want to do it. I keep lists of Things To Do, and it's the only way that I am reminded of what I have to do, and I'd better get with it.

I have a few trade tokens in my collection, but they are mostly for video games, or bathroom tokens, or tourism tokens. I do have a telephone token from Hungary from before WWII...I guess you needed those to make a phone call.

Here I am, making amends, and with luck, you will like this, and have a letter column. I heard on the CBC some time ago that a redo of *Fraggle Rock* is now being created in a studio in Calgary. Heard anything more about that? I think we'd all wonder how faithful to the original the new version will be... Doozers working here and there? Gorgs hanging about, trying to catch Fraggles? Doc and Sprocket on the other side of the wall? Who knows what *Fraggle* fans will get?

I have to start doing something to plan for dinner tonight, so will polish this loc off, and fire it into the aether. Take care, and I promise respond to issue 6. There it is in print. See you then.

*TW – Hawaiian shirts? Not with palm trees? Those are Wembley Fraggles’ favourite – and only – apparel. He has a closet full, being a “wembler,” just so he won’t have trouble deciding what to wear. Although it’s tempting, I’m not sure that “wembling” is exactly the power statement I wish to project. I’m more of a “loser,” so I bought a Toronto Maple Leafs shirt instead. <> There is just so much that has to be said about the pandemic, and the dangerous denials by no-nothings of all shapes and sizes, that it is hard to know where to begin. Or what hasn’t already been said (to the point of futility) is often clouded by obfuscatinal thinking. Refusing the vaccine is not a matter of protecting rights, but protecting **lives!** Those who choose not to be vaccinated out of some misguided sense of their own rights are also taking away the rights of those who do live safely, by exposing them to sickness and possible death, if they want the risk or not. Who, then, is making the choice not for themselves, but for **everyone.** Stand on your scientifically illiterate, culture-war inspired stubbornness or religious nihilism, by all means, but you have no right to endanger other, sensible human beings! Stay home! <> I have a few trade tokens, but only a few and there are literally millions of kinds. I have one of those odd telephone tokens from France, for instance, and also a transit token from somewhere in farthest Siberia! Most recently, I found an odd copper or bronze piece lying on the sidewalk earlier this summer, just lying on Roncesvalles Avenue. It was too big for a lost penny, but it was something far better. It was a magic token that was given as a promotion by the many thousands around the turn of the century by the wily Thurston the Magician! Now how did one of those get in so unlikely a place? Magic I tell you! <> Or is it only illusion? I’ve grown concerned about the new Fraggles Rock, “Back to the Rock.” The trailer looks alright, but there were some changes in the trial episodes, “Rock On.” My concerns now center mainly on Mokey Fraggles, the dreamer and mystic. For no reason, she has been given a total make-over, changing her hair, fur colour and clothing ... as though the producers didn’t like hippies or bag ladies!*

Endit!

