

The Baloobius

A **seventh-eleventh** essay into the affairs of Taral Wayne, who is doing nothing of any note while the pandemic drags into its second year at 245 Dunn Ave. Apt. 2111, Toronto, Ontario, M6K 1S6, Canada. (416) 537-8974 Taral@bell.net Kiddelidivee Books & Art 324. If you don't have a Baloobius, you may be able to order one on Amazon, made by the Doozers of the Doozer Dome. Shipping free. As for this zine, it is a still a good way of disposing of lesser material, and hopefully inspiring a little feedback.



Looking Ahead Can be a Bad Idea

Here we are in 2022, and into the third winter of the Covid Pandemic. I'm at an age when you begin to think of things not as "tiresome" or even "interminable," but as possibly permanent. If you are under 30, 40, even 50 or 60, you expect to come out the other side ... eventually. But not when you are over 70. At 70 you must face up to the fact that this may be your permanent state of affairs. If the pandemic lasts another two years, it would not be at all inconceivable that I might never see the end of it before my own personal end comes.

I don't actually think this is highly likely. My family tends to be long-lived or short-lived, but not somewhere in between, and I am already crossing over into long-lived territory. Considering some of the shit I've been through over the last few years, it would almost seem a certainty that I don't have the stamina to reach 90. But you think about these things at 70. After all, it would only take some idiot backing their car over me while I'm in Traveling Matt to end everything tomorrow. Or a funny result on a poop test. Wise men tell us that we should learn to make the most of our lives, and take our days as they come.

They say this because what else *can* they say? Like, duh.

My immediate plans are as fluid as they usually are. I have still to finish a comic strip that I began at least three years ago, but I only have two rather simple pages remaining. I could ordinarily have done the work in a couple of days ... but my inertia is a measure of how much I've grown to dislike drawing for more than a few minutes at a time, made worse by eyesight that is not as strong as it used to be. It doesn't help that this is a commission that I have already been partly paid for, and that I have utterly lost interest in the erotic nature of the work. But this is certain to be the year in which the strip *is*, finally, finished.

I also have a writing project underway, based on a movie I'm fond of, which should amuse readers. I've rewritten the plot from "Marty" – set in a 1950s neighborhood in The Bronx – as a "translation" into fannish terms. It's going well, and already a fanzine editor is interested in publishing the result.

I have also made notes for another in a series of anecdotes told to me by my friend Steven, whose humorous stories make good short material. It still has to be written, of course, but that job will be fairly straightforward since, the notes are also straightforward.

And then there is "Where the Magic Is," the long-awaited origin story of my Fraggles Rock cycle. I have it in my head, and have made a start on the writing. But one delay always leads to another, and this project has been no exception. But I've been working at it fairly quickly of late, and hopefully it won't be long before I can report substantial progress. Not that I can expect any thanks from the Henson estate. That I escape a copyright lawsuit is probably all the thanks I can hope for.

Shit happens!

Some days you have literally shitty luck.

I needed groceries in the near future, and laid plans for the best day to shop. All the previous week had been cold, or deadly cold, or precipitation was a possibility, but on Tuesday a massive snow storm was predicted. It appeared as though my optimum day to shop was Monday.

On Monday I went to bed as usual, well after dawn. A couple of hours later, I woke up, needing to use the bathroom. It was a heroic dump, unfortunately, and clogged the toilet. Not worried at that point, I got the plunger. Two or three applications didn't clear the blockage, however.

On the next attempt, I saw the water rise all of a sudden. I waited while the water went down, then tried again. This time, the rising level of water was even worse. I waited a long time, but the toilet was on the verge of overflowing.

In the kitchen, I found a long plastic spoon designed for stirring soup or whatever, and stuck it into the shitty water to try to dislodge the blockage. I stirred as best I could, to help break up the jam. In the end, I could not entirely keep my hand out of the mess, and stirring the shit around was doing no good at all. By then, the water had gone down quite a lot, and I tried to flush it one last time, while stirring the contents vigorously. That's when the toilet overflowed, and – MUCH WORSE – didn't stop overflowing.

Horrified, I watched a pool of shit-festooned water spread over my bathroom floor, soaking the bath mat. At this point, I went to the phone to call the building maintenance number to beg for a plumber, quickly. Naturally, I was put on hold for fifteen minutes. Meanwhile, the water was now in the hall, racing into the kitchen and making advances into the living room. At this point, I had a little luck – the woman from the social worker downstairs came to my door, making her daily check to see that I hadn't died in the night.

I conveyed my sense of urgency to the woman, entreating her to find the building janitor. She wasn't able to find him, but she and another woman came back a few minutes later, with mops and buckets. To my relief, by then the water seemed to have stopped overflowing, and the flood wasn't spreading any farther. I was able to reach the maintenance number also, so a plumber was dispatched to fix the toilet as quickly as possible.

The operator told me to turn off the water if I could, and described the hatch under the sink where there should be two stopcocks. I found them and turned them both off. Things were finally looking up a little. After half an hour, the floor was dry, with only a little bit of filth left in odd corners. Unless I had the energy to soak the rug clean, I would probably have to throw that away ... but I had a clean spare.

What I had to do then was sit tight and wait for the plumbers. They didn't come until after 5:30, as I remember. While they did a excellent job, and explained that I *hadn't* shit so much that I stuffed up the toilet, a blockage had occurred somewhere in the main pipe to the bathroom water. The snake hadn't helped at all, so pressure on the mains had been used to blow the blockage out.

The plumbers said that they would send a clean-up crew in half an hour or so, and sure enough my floor was soon properly moped with soap and water. Everything was almost tickety-boo. I had a spoiled rug, and some towels would have to be laundered, and a couple of plastic bags in the tub got wet (making me unsure whether they were clean or not), but otherwise everything was back to the state it had been in when I got up to use the bathroom.

But now it was well after 6, dark, and the temperature falling. My grocery trip had

been ruined. And I had no further sleep that day. I phoned my friend Steven about a long-standing offer to do some shopping for me, and made arrangements. I don't like to do it, but since I couldn't get groceries, I had **nothing** with which to make any kind of breakfast. I gave Steven a list of things by phone, and he'll bring in some useful items for the time being ... until I can find another good day to shop for myself again.

Just to make my life annoying, however, when I went to bed the next day, a shelf on my wall, directly over where I sleep, partly gave way, nearly dropping a valuable model of a Lunar Module virtually on my head. Now I have to repair a shelf... Jeez. It ain't losing a job or breaking a leg, but could life let up on me for just a little?

Second Opinion: *A "Steven" Story*

Like everyone, my friend Steven has the sniffles now and then, even comes down with the out-and-out flu. But, one morning he was more congested than usual. In fact, he was having more trouble breathing than he thought was at all healthy. Steven was worried enough that, instead of dressing, having breakfast and reporting for work as usual, he decided to seek a medical opinion. As was par for the course, his general practitioner wasn't available, so instead he drove down the street to the nearby Doctor's Hospital.

It wasn't an emergency, so before Steven was allowed to see a doctor, first he had to cool his heels a while in a waiting room. When he was summoned by a nurse, he filled out forms, handed them in to the nurse a couple of minutes later, then cooled his heels a while longer. Then finally he was admitted into the sanctity of the infirmary, where he doubtlessly sat even longer. We've all been there and know the drill.

Of course, I don't know any of the details first-hand: only what Steven told me about the events later. After the usual examination – likely featuring chest thumping and cold stethoscopes – my friend was scheduled for an x-ray. This was before distancing and masks, fortunately, but involved being ordered around while somewhat embarrassingly clad in only his shirt. A surly intern manipulated him into an uncomfortable position in front of the x-ray machine, then ordered him, "Turn to the left. More to the left. More left. Not *that* much left. Take a breath. Hold it. Hold it..."

From the other room he heard the sort of electrical buzz you associate with mad scientists and a triumphant bellow of "Life, I tell you! I've created *life!*" Then the intern was back, setting Steven up for the next exposure. From all the plates made, it should have been possible to create a 3D print of him. Finished, the intern

guided Steven to another waiting room, with the instructions to “wait here.” With poorly feigned sincerity, he added, “I’ll be back with the doctor in a minute.”

“In a minute” proved to be at least twenty minutes. At last, a doctor bustled in, and without a word to Steven, proceeded to pin a number of exposed films up on an illuminated screen. The doctor was tall and thin, balding, wore a beard that gave him an authoritative look (which was undermined by a pair of glasses riding at the tip of his nose that made him look merely absent-minded,) and bore an impatient manner. The first thing he said to his patient – Steven – was, “People like you make me sick.”

“I beg your pardon?” said Steven, doing a double-take.

With a look of disgust, the doctor continued, “You heard me. I’m sick of people like you, who take no responsibility for their own health. I’m tired of helping people like you who come in, and then expect me to make them *well* again!”

Steven could scarcely believe what he was hearing.

“See those spots on the x-rays? That’s emphysema,” and by way of emphasis he waved his hand at the images. “By the looks of it you’re in late stage of clinical lung disease. What are you ... a six-or-eight pack-a-day smoker?”

Steven had recovered most of his poise by then, and mustering a little indignation as well, truthfully proclaimed that he had never smoked in his life. “No one in the family even smokes in the house!”

The doctor looked taken back somewhat, and he demanded, “What’s your name again?”

“Steven. Bal. Dass. Arra. It’s Italian.”

The doctor looked back at Steven as though he didn’t believe a patient could ever contradict him, looked at the labels on the x-rays again, and said, “Wait a minute.” Without another word, he walked out of the room with the x-rays in his hand.

Half an hour later, the same doctor returned, looking much less cross, but made no mention of an apology. “You just have a bad chest cold,” was all he said.

He scribbled out a prescription for a common cold medicine and gave it to Steven before walking out ... without so much as “have a nice day.”

As Steven returned to the car, fumbling for the remote, next stop the pharmacy, he thought, “It’s good to have a bedside manner... What does the doctor prescribe for *that*, I wonder.”

Terry Whittier: Patron of Furry Art

Well, dammit, more bad news. I got a call today from an artist I know from LA.

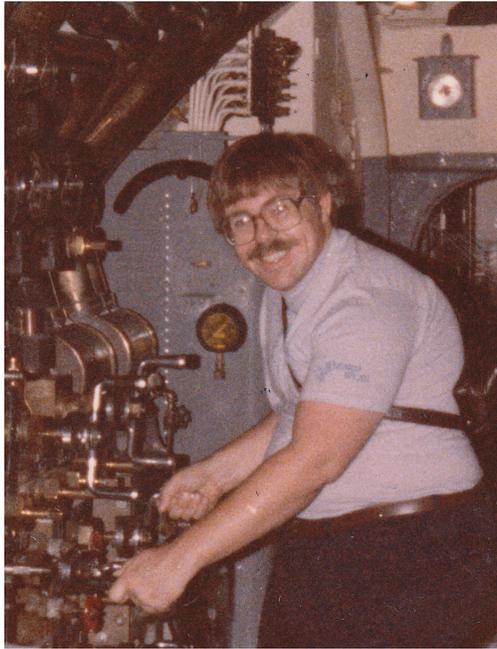
Terry Whittier never made a big name for himself in SF, but early on he was known for being an active photographer in fandom. He was also a fan of manga and anime. In the early 1980s, Terry's interest in art attracted him to furry fandom, where he naturally accepted a role as a collector and patron of the arts.

I'd known Terry since the mid-1970s, when he published a fanzine called *Altair*. He was a big fan of mine, and flatteringly compared my work to George Barr. I now realized that Terry had somewhat unsophisticated tastes in art, and I should have felt somewhat embarrassed by a such comparison then. Nevertheless, we remained in touch through the years, and Terry bought a lot of my work over the years I knew him. I knew he was ailing, but early this year I got the news that he was dead.

I didn't know much about Terry's family, though I've since learned that he had two sisters. Although he seemed to be a rather private individual, he had many friends. He lived alone in the Bay area as long as I'd known him. I only once visited him on his own turf, when I was on a long road trip with Marc Schirmeister. We were only there for one day, but we took in as many of the sights as we were able to in a single overnight stay – somehow taking in Fisherman's wharf, Haight-Ashbury, Coit Tower, the cable cars, and the USS Pampanito. In fact, we took a tour aboard the WWII submarine, where I snapped this photo of Terry at the valves.

Terry worked most of his life in engineering, and I believe was a specialist in hard drive design. His interests included his collection of racy art, but also the astronomical sciences.

After I began to fade out of the picture from furry fandom, I had less contact with Terry, but never completely lost touch. Unfortunately, I learned last year that he had been in poor health, and then he was diagnosed with bone cancer. As though his life wasn't under enough threat, while in hospital he caught a in incurable fungal infection in his lungs. He expected to onl live a year or two, and had arranged to live with one of his sisters as long as his health held out. In the end, he died *far* sooner than that, after only a few months after I heard the news. Terry passed away suddenly around the tenth of January, when a pulmonary blood vessel burst. Apparently some kind of effort will be made to preserve Terry's collection of art.



Terry, 1984



That makes it a perfect trifecta. At one time, there were three furry fans who I once joked about as my three most loyal fans – Albert Temple (known also as Gene Catlow), Greg Giacobe and Terry Whittier. Al was rather young, and died from complications due to diabetes. Greg was only middle aged, and succumbed to cancer. He knew his end was coming. Terry was about my age, and also knew his days were numbered. One by one, they have departed, leaving behind a very spooky void.

Friend or Faux:LOCs

I have locs for both this issue of The Balooobius, and for Faux Pause. The problem is that I'm not entirely sure which locs are for which fanzine, nor how to apportion them. I'll do my best to see where they should best go, but if you don't see the locs you write in this zine, it is likely that I've held it over until the much fancier and shmancier Faux Pause.

Jerry Kaufman, jakaufman@aol.com, 29 Nov 2021

Thanks for sending this my way. Yes, turning seventy years old, makes you an old coot. Like me. (Not like Suzle, who still looks much younger than me, despite actually being four months older.) But you will soon forget this as you play with your coin collection and draw your Fraggie Rock creatures.

I've got to point out that I've never seen Fraggie Rock – I must have been too old for it, just as I was for Sesame Street. So stories based on it are outside my frame of reference.

Thanks for sharing your experience with pneumonia and your hospital stay. I wonder how I would deal with a similar experience. I wouldn't mind having a feverish conversation with Kermit, though I think I'd more likely be trading insults with Charlie McCarthy.

Kahlua is a good sipping liqueur, but if you need a change after half a year, you might try Sambucca, which is a sweet anise-flavored Italian tippie. Just a little fire with the sugar.

[I believe I may have tried Sambucca, but the local Liquor Control Board outlet is not well supplied with drink that isn't the usual whiskey, rum, gin and vodka. The best liquors are also pricey, so I haven't experimented much. Have you tried Chambord? TW]

Eli Cohen, eli.cohen@mindspring.com, 12 Jan 2022

Provoked by Nic Farey's review in *This Here... 48*, I just sought out Baloobius on efanzines.com. You kids! Wailing about turning 70! Why, 10 years from now you won't believe you were ever this young! (I'm turning 74 this year. Now, that's old!) (And you kids get off my lawn!!!) Anyway, I am sorry to hear about your medical issues. I tested positive for Covid on Dec. 30th, a perfect end to a perfect year (my wife, initially negative, tested positive 2 days later). Symptoms, fortunately, are mild, like a cold. We are both twice vaxxed and boosted, by the way.

Enough medical complaints. What are we, old people? Are we "as old as Tucker" or something? (Of course, Tucker was 10 years younger than we are now, when that was a common phrase...) I was moved by your lack of Loc to write this. Go thou and fanac some more!

[Thanks. 74? Do you mind if I throw snowballs at your top hat? After literally pleading, and having to endure the humiliation of Nic Farey's cruel jibes, I finally have enough locs. It's not like it was in the old days, however. Six or ten years ago, I got often had too many locs for Broken Toys than I knew what to do with. Now only a small number of fanzines seem to have burgeoning letter columns any more. I won't name them, lacking proof that there is some kind of conspiracy involved. If not conspiracy, then, I have no idea what changed ... unless it's just that we're simply growing older. TW]

Kent Pollard, kentpollard@gmail.com, 28 Nov 2021

OK, no kings, but what's not to see in a radish? Round, red, full of antioxidants and with a crisp spiciness that delights the mouth. They are probably the best red root vegetable there is.

I'm doubly sorry. First, that I haven't set aside time to write sooner, and secondly that the year was so tough on you, but glad it was something they had an answer for and you took to the cure so efficiently. I haven't achieved your level of *gravitas*,* but 60 is staring me in the face pretty shortly, and with that (assuming I can make it through another year) I'll have lived longer than my father. He'd have turned 100 a few days from now and it's hard to believe he's been gone nearly 40 years. I have always been a pessimist, and never allowed myself to imagine making it to 60, let alone your lofty age. There is so little about my life now that I could have successfully predicted when he died. Had I stayed with the railroad, where I was at the time, I'd have a thirty year pension already, but would have been a CUFF delegate or published short fiction for money? So much came out of my 15-ish years as a bookseller that it's hard to imagine my life under any other path.

*[*Not to be confused with Myasthenia Gravis! TW]*

I have to confess, in some ways I have thrived during the pandemic. For me, most social gatherings are a bit of a burden, and having good excuses to stay home has been calming for me (though, again, not my waist-line). I still get to play occasional games online with my normal circle

and have enjoyed online gatherings about as much as I ever did the in-person ones. Sadly, that's not true for all my companions. A couple of them have done very poorly in isolation, though they've all done what they ought. I have to say that the complete absence of Covid cases among my normal circle has made me quite pleased. Victoria was having bad falls once or twice a year for the last few years, and has not had a single fall since I've been working from home and able to assist with transfers, so I think my employers will be hard-pressed to convince me to go back to the office with any regularity.

And now it's winter once again on the prairies. The snow and cold are creeping in. We seem to have a bazillion channels available, and nothing worth watching. "Man in the High Castle" finished last year, not as strong as the first two seasons. "American Gods" also failed to be as enjoyable after the first season. At least there's another sequence of "Good Omens" coming, and JM Straczynski is working on a reboot of "Babylon Five," which might provide some entertainment in a year or three. Also I'm tempted to sign up for Apple-thingy to see what they've done with "Foundation." I guess all I can hope for is that when the story of my life is finished, the ending will be a surprise? I can only hope that in the meantime I have the will and opportunity to finally do a CUFF report and use the cover you designed for me. Just one in a long string of small regrets that continue to trail behind me.

Happy winter, my friend. I hope the coming holidays and the new year bring you much joy.

[So far, 2022 has only brought us our own, Canadian version of the attack on the U.S. Capital. And the Conservative Party has mostly abetted the protesting trucker convoy in calling for mass resignation of the Liberal government, and installing a non-democratically chosen Parliament of their choice. While mainly peaceful, the protest drags on and has inspired several minor outrages! Spokesmen claim they won't go home until their demands are met. Confederate flags and Nazi symbols have been spotted! It seems clear that some protesters are foreign agitators.

On a more personal front, at the end of the January I had my third vaccination. I do hope this won't turn into a bi-annual precaution! That's the end of this installment of the letter col. Hopefully, there'll be another for the next issue ... not to be confused with the loccol of the next issue of Faux Pause. TW]

Stoned on the Rock

I am going to try and summon up some home truths. They've been at the back of my mind for some time, and perhaps it is time to examine them.

I think it's obvious to everyone that I've become infatuated with *Fraggle Rock*. It's not a surprise to anyone that it is a well-known weakness of mine. The fact is, I *wasn't* an immediate fan of the show, and barely knew of its existence until it had been on television in re-runs. Among other things, I wasn't keen on the corn-ball music, which ran too much to country and folk for my tastes. Yet I had to acknowledge that something lodged in my subconscious that didn't go away when the show left the air. By then, my life had been uprooted time and again, and

through it all I've had several favourite inner fantasies – including the one with my extraterrestrial companion, Saara Mar ... who is known to be a closet fan herself. Over the years I've clocked an incredible amount of *Fraggle Rock* that grew steadily in my estimation, so that it engraved itself in the subterranean recesses of my own subconscious Fraggles Hole.

My first Fraggles story was written in 2014, and I've been writing them ever since. There have been seven, so far, and I have a new one underway. I have the nub of three or four more that I want to write and inflict on my readers. They are closely based on the original series that was broadcast on the CBC, BBC and PBS, but I have modified the world of the Fraggles to be slightly more realistic, and to have greater internal consistency. After all, Fraggles apparently don't wear socks, but nevertheless know the word for socks anyway. They have been known to awaken to an alarm clock, but certainly could never have built such a thing. It seemed inconceivable that they could only have eaten radishes, food made from radishes, mushrooms and Doozer Sticks (made from radishes) all this time. So *my* Fraggles Rock is expanded somewhat. I may mention that little boys and girls have mothers and fathers, but I will never describe where they come from more explicitly.

What is the point of writing about *Fraggle Rock*? I've asked this myself, and all I can say is that it gives me a good deal of satisfaction. I feel that I'm breaking new ground as a writer, while by comparison, writing about fandom has become over-familiar ... relatively unrewarding. I *like* a challenge. I also like the sense of purpose that writing fiction gives me. No doubt, I'll write about other things when the time comes, but in the meantime *Fraggle Rock* gives me a rich and varied tapestry over which to work.

To date, my finest story was "Heroes and Villains," but my sense of complacency has lately been threatened by an unexpected *re-launch* of the original show! The Henson company recently produced a small number of 15-minute shorts called *Rock On*. I wasn't able to view them properly on YouTube, and I had no intention of subscribing to Apple TV just for access to a limited number of shorts. All I could find for free was from some kid who had posted the first episode ... but it was presented on his laptop. The screen was tiny and the volume inaudible. What I was able to gather from this painful viewing is that the Fraggles were distancing, just as in our world! The Doozers had created a sort of cave radio, suspended like an old-fashioned studio microphone, for the Fraggles to communicate among themselves while under lockdown! The apparatus resembled a potato. Right away, this sort of topicality didn't bode well.

News followed a while later that the Henson company had green-lighted a full half-hour show called *Back to the Rock*. I knew even less about *that* at first.

Trailers, stock photos and promotional spots followed. Gradually, it became possible to build up a pretty fair picture of what the new *Back to the Rock* would be like. I was now more than ever disturbed.

By and large, what I've seen looked much like the old show, but bigger, better, with more production. A couple of the old cast has returned in their own roles, notably Red and Boober. Oddly, although the actor was alive and well, Mokie was absent. Doc, the "silly creature," and Gobo were unfortunately dead, so most of the cast of *Back to the Rock* were newcomers. It had been over 30 years, after all. It still *looked* like *Fraggle Rock*. But the good vibes ended there...

Shockingly, Mokie had been changed out of recognition. Her original incarnation was of a tall, willowy Fraggles, with long silvery hair, a shapeless smock and a pendant— actually a soda-pop pull tab — hung around her neck. Characteristic of her appearance were heavily lidded, languorous eyes, that popped wide open when surprised! The new Mokie's eyes are simply round, and outlined as though she had been awake for the last forty-eight hours and living on bennies. Worse, her hair changed colour to bright blue, pulled back into a long, stiff ponytail. I don't know how she sounds or acts — I assume nothing else has changed — but all the same, why has Mokie's appearance been so drastically altered? Do they dislike hippies, or think she looked like a dooper who might give the wrong message to impressionable youth?

It only gets worse. Clearly, the producers did have a problem with the character of Doc. The actor was Gerry Parks, who has been dead for some years, and would be hard to replace. Rather than "writing out" the elderly, eccentric tinkerer, the show replaces him as though Doc never existed. The new "Doc" is a young, black woman, no doubt showing how "inclusive" and "woke" the producers are. And rather than make her a lovable, half-baked inventor, she is a marine biologist, doing important environmental work in a spacious, spotlessly clean lab. My instincts are that a young, attractive woman is not likely to be a very interesting foil for Fraggles ... but what the hell. I'm *sure* we will learn many instructive things, such as how important it is to identify trendy politics, to show how with-it we are.

Also worrisome, there will be *guest stars* ... something familiar to *The Muppets*, but altogether unheard of in the Rock, where Fraggles have never met anyone from Outer Space. I've seen a list of the guests to appear in the first episodes. Not a single one is familiar to me, so it is unlikely any have the broad popularity that guests of

The Muppet Show once had. Sadly, though, who the guests are isn't really the point. *Fraggle Rock* is supposed to be a world in itself that isn't represented by celebrities, whoever they might be. Fraggles and "Silly Creatures" should not dance and sing together, any more than should Geronimo and Custer.

I hardly know how seriously I should take all this. I may worry too soon, and should give the program more of a chance. It's only a TV show, which I can ignore if I want. On the other hand, we have seen many, many cases where a beloved property has been fucked up the ass by people who didn't understand how it worked, and it's infuriating that they get the chance.

There is one more thing that I may as well get out in the open. Jim Henson and his crew created *Fraggle Rock*. His heirs didn't. They inherited the rights and may think they understand the wonderful, beautiful thing that was *Fraggle Rock*. Maybe they don't. It wouldn't be the first time. The heirs and assigns have owned the show for 38 years, and done nothing with it. Now they want to revive it like some Frankenstein's Monster? Maybe it's time for me to come out and claim *Fraggle Rock* for my own. Maybe the muses intended for *me* to have it, to see that it is protected and preached to the world it should be. God smite down the blood-sucking lawyers and undeserving heirs, and give *Fraggle Rock* to me and all the other fans!



Red, Gobbo, Boober, someone *impersonating* Mokie and Wembley Fraggles

Endit