



Broken Toys 25 is a personalzine by Taral Wayne. Despite the best of intentions, I've made little progress on backlogged projects since last month. The usual excuses apply ... as well as others that will become evident in the issue. Without intending to, I have almost too much material, as well as a letter column that just won't quit... But that's okay; bring it on! As I have for the last 23 years, I live with a view to die for at 245 Dunn Ave., Apt. 2111, Toronto, Ontario M6K 1S6. If you can't drop by to share the view, contact or loc me at [this all new address, taral@bell.net](mailto:taral@bell.net). The official date is **January 2014** ... though distribution is at least a week late, in February. This is ExtraTaraltoriality (or Kiddelidivee Books & Art) 275, © 2014 Taral Wayne

THE WORLD BEGINS ANEW

Egotorial – When I began *Broken Toys*, I didn't have a Master Plan. I set out to publish some of my own writing in a easy-to-produce format and to entertain people. I had no set schedule, nor any plan to discontinue at some point. To my surprise, the zine gained a substantial letter column, and grew from 10, to 14, to an astonishing 32 pages last issue. That's not very impressive if we're talking about *Challenger* or *SF Commentary*, I grant you. But, apart from the letter column, I write every word of *Broken Toys* myself, and have kept to a monthly schedule for two entire years. Nor have I stopped contributing to other fanzines. As well, I've written, on average, three locs every month. Guess what? I'm a little tired.

I'm also beginning to miss the drawing board a little. I have reams of drawings I've begun but never finished. It would be nice to catch up.

Additionally, I may have caught the bug to write more fiction. "The Canaries in the Dark," a story I wrote and hope to sell is not great literature, I grant you, but I enjoyed writing it. I also enjoyed writing "Fly on the Wall," in this issue, as well as other fiction about fandom such as "The Namebadge" (*Askance* 28), and "Why They Race Horses" (*FanStuff* 21). I have made a tentative start on a new story called "Only Once a Year," and though I've had to put it aside for the time being, the excitement hasn't entirely worn off.

What's all this mean for my several loyal readers? Shorter issues of *Broken Toys*, I think. Possibly even a slower schedule. Two months between issues would not only give me more breathing space, but also give my regular letter writers some rest. Another means of slowing down is to reprint some of my previously published material. Eric Mayer published a number of pieces I was particularly pleased with in *eDitto*. However, he's convinced that few fans ever read *eDitto*, and he's half-convinced me as well. Of course, I'm not entirely in control of *Broken Toys*. It often seems to have a mind of its own, so we'll have to wait to see what happens.

Another probable repercussion is that I expect to do less writing for *other* fanzines. To be honest, the thrill of seeing my name in print in a fanzine is not as electrifying as it once was. I dare say my reaction has even begun to run toward indifference. It's only natural that I want to keep up with a few favourites, of course. It should be easy to contribute to *File 770*, since Mike Glycer has only published about once a year for quite some time now. I think I can keep up with *Banana Wings*, too – though the quarterly schedule is a challenge that I failed for two issues running last year. I'm fond also of *Askance* and *Challenger*. It goes without saying that I'm obliged to support my fellow Canadian Publishing Jiant, Graeme Cameron, if possible. *Chunga?* Andrew Hooper has a couple of short pieces that he likes. Beyond that, the seeing is hazy, the future obscure.

It is a new year with this issue. To quote the *Muppet Show* chorus, *it's time to get things started:*



“Hello, My name is Mr. Peabody, and this is my boy, Sherman. Sherman?”

“Yes, Mr. Peabody?”

“Set the Wayback Machine for the year, **1992!**”

“Oh, my Gosh! We're not really going to Confurence III, are we?”

“Yes, we are, Sherman.”

“Well, fuck *that*, Mr. Peabody! That’s ancient history.”

So you might say, if you have trouble remembering as long ago as that. Worse, for some young fans, 1992 was before they were even born. Confurence III, though, was the year that I was asked to be one of the Guests of Honour and, not coincidentally, the first time most anthropomorphic fans had a chance to see me in person.

Before Confurence 0, in 1989, there simply *wasn't* anywhere that furry fans could meet. The nascent members of furry fandom sometimes bumped into each other at science fiction conventions. In southern California the number of furies was fairly high and they were relatively close together, so they also met at comics cons, animation clubs, gaming activities and other events. But furies in Poughkeepsie, Madison, Bismarck, Omaha, New Jersey or Atlanta were on their own for the most part. They were only likely to meet two or three other furies at best. I was in a similar situation in Toronto back then. I had only met two local furies – one who ran The Trap Line, and the other who was best known at the time for running a pirate art site. The Trap Line attracted a handful of others over a year or two, including a couple of decent artists, but Toronto was never the hotbed of furry fandom that the greater LA area was.

In those years, I was more or less the least-known, best-known artist in furry fandom. Confurence III changed all that because it brought me to Southern California for a furry con for the first time.

Then began a number of years in which I attended *every* Confurence! It turned out that furry cons were damned profitable for me. Also, they gave me a chance to visit LA and people I knew there, including Marc Schirmeister, Steve Martin, E.T. Brian, Bob Guthrie, Doug Winger, Mike Kazaleh, Lou Scarborough and others. Even people who were *not* furies ... quite a lot of them are worth knowing, it turns out.

The tide began to turn around 1998, when I noticed that I was making less money in the dealers’ room and art show than before. By 2000, the trend was so clear that I had to face the possibility that I would actually *lose* money one year. This may not sound like a big deal if you have a regular income, but furry cons *were* most of my regular income. I was facing a similar situation on the East Coast also, where Anthrocon was becoming less and less of a sure thing. I think 2001 was the last year I attended Confurence. The pickings that year were so slim that I decided to take no more chances.

I may have already abandoned Anthrocon by then. A change in how they booked dealers for the next year’s con made it a crap shoot. Not knowing whether you would be in the dealers’ room or not next year made for a very unpredictable income. Moreover, it complicated travel plans. I also greatly resented the implication that my regular attendance at the con was *so* valued that the concom would put it to a roll of the dice. Maybe they expected that, if I couldn’t be there as a dealer, I would spend a thousand dollars or so to merely *attend*? Ha!

Ironically, today I must be more or less what I was before 1992, one of the least-known, best-known furry artists again...

Mr. Peabody? Sherman can stay home and watch *Friendship Is Magic* until his brains turn to horse-hair stuffing. If you’ll let me, I’d be honoured to accompany you to 1992 again.



Twice Upon a Time

Two Stories: Frankenweenie & ParaNorman

Neither film is new enough to bother reviewing in detail, but I thought it would be worth comparing them, even at this late date.

Frankenweenie was one of Tim Burton's first films, a 30-minute short made for Disney that resulted in the studio firing his ass. Since then, he has long wanted to re-film at feature length. The other film is *ParaNorman*, made by the same animators who worked on Neil Gaiman's *Coraline*. Odd enough that there should be two undisputed Masters of the Light Macabre, but also that two such similar films should be made in the same year. It does make you wonder if there really are Forces Beyond Our Comprehension.

Or perhaps the coincidence is due to nothing more than an army of finks, squealers and industrial spies working in Hollywood. We'll leave that question unanswered.

The Burton film shows its origins in the 1984 live-action film for Disney. Not only are both *Frankenweenies* thinly disguised homages to those 1950's Universal monster movies that Burton loved as a kid, they also follow almost identical plots. Little Victor Frankenstein – an otherwise ordinary suburban American kid who lives and breathes horror movies – has a dog, Sparky. Sparky is run over in the street, but Victor has learned from school that electricity is the source of the Life Force. Using equipment that may as well have been borrowed from the set for the 1931 *Frankenstein*, Victor brings Sparky to life again with lightning. The aftermath is fairly predictable. People scream and look for the nearest torch or pitchfork to chase the monster down. There is a big confrontation at the end of the film in which the misunderstood “monster” shows that it has a heart of gold. Victor's parents and neighbors all learn that “monsters” can be *good* as well as evil.

The chief difference between the 1984 short and 2012 remake is a sub-plot about jealous students at Victor's school. They learn Victor's secret and try to duplicate it, with disastrous results that shout "padding" in the same ear-splitting shriek of the bikini babe at the Black Lagoon, just before the "gill creature" grabs her.

The inserted section is only sometimes funny and in no way contributes to the plot. The 1984 film got to exactly the same point without the padding.

I have to admit, too, that I spend a good deal of time throughout *Frankenweenie* feeling that I had just witnessed a well-placed homage, but hadn't the foggiest idea what it was. Yes, I understood the white streak in the poodle's hair, and thought I understood the multiplying "Sea Monkeys." (Remember "Sea Monkey," from the backs of comic books, that were just tiny brine shrimp?) Unfortunately, I was mystified by other things that obviously possessed meaning for Tim Burton. What *was* the significance of an archaic, drunkenly-leaning Dutch windmill at the edge of town? Was it a scene from *Frankenstein*? I don't know. I never saw the original movie. Was I missing references to films like *The Fly* or *The Blob*, that I wasn't familiar with either? I had the nagging suspicion that I was. Clearly, *Frankenweenie* is a film that horror film buffs will get the most from.

For all that *ParaNorman* is also a film animated by stop-motion, and like *Frankenweenie* also belongs to the horror genre, there are remarkable differences the two films. The most obvious of those differences is that it follows an altogether dissimilar plot. Norman sees ghosts, but naturally no one believes him, and his parents actively discourage their son from admitting it openly – it makes Norman look *abnormal*. But the fact is that Norman *does* see ghosts, and the gift has come down to him from generation to generation. A smelly, disheveled, crazy old uncle who lives in a creaky, junk-piled, old house on the edge of town is the current possessor of a secret ceremony. It must be performed every year on the same date to keep the town safe ... or something *terrible* will happen! The uncle must pass the secret on to Norman, but of course, nobody wants Norman to go anywhere near him ... not even Norman. The secret is only partly passed on before the uncle abruptly drops dead, leaving the problem of how to perform the ceremony squarely in Norman's lap.

Another of the intriguing differences between the two films was apparent by this time. In *Frankenweenie*, the characters tend to be stereotypes. They exist to remind you of Vincent Price playing a mad scientist, to be creepy like Peter Lorre, or to be the fat, stupid kid on the block who you don't trust. The characters in *ParaNorman*, however were all people in their own right, and capable of delivering unexpected twists. One of those twists is, in fact, the principal pay-off at the end of the film. If you haven't seen *ParaNorman*, I won't spoil it for you. In fact, every character is broadly realistic, important in his own way, and well worth the time spent getting to know. Even the monsters.

While *ParaNorman* is at least as funny a film as *Frankenweenie*, it doesn't require anything of the viewer to understand the humour. It is not a film buff's film. Oddly enough, it is also at times a frightening movie, which *Frankenweenie* frankly never is, even when the "bad" monsters are running amok. When the real threat to the town in which Norman lives is revealed not to be the one everyone thinks is the threat, but one *much* more dangerous, the movie shifts gears to become downright scary. The final evil in the story is not something dragged out of an EC comic book, but the result of a terrible injustice done to the most innocent of people. The scene where Norman faces this injustice is literally electrifying. And it ends in an unexpectedly tender scene in which peace is

restored in a manner which was capable of bringing a tear to the eye of all but the most unsentimental soul. (You know who you are, you unfeeling brutes.)

While both movies are entertaining from beginning to end, and well worth watching if you're inclined to animated films at all, the chief difference between the two comes to this:

Frankenweenie was Tim Burton going through the motions of sharing a second-hand experience. He loved the old black and white horror movies he grew up with, and wishes you will too. But it lacks not only colour, but a third dimension.

ParaNorman may not be as sophisticated a film, in as much as it eschews Burton's self-referential showmanship, but it was a movie with deeper issues, and real characters to play their parts in resolving them.

See both, if you can. But if only one, let it be *ParaNorman*.





BEING IMMORTAL

Cats. Like most of us, I've lost a number of them in my time. The first was Scratch, who came to me out of a winter's night, with his tail half frozen, a bum hip and a grim determination that I was going to save his life, even if he had to follow me a mile through the snow to my home – which he practically did. I tried to get him to sit on the toboggan, but he preferred to walk. After living some years with me, Scratch ate a pair of bluejay wings given to me by the artist, Barry Kent MacKay, and his kidneys gave out – probably destroyed by the formaldehyde used to preserve the wings. I sometimes used to dream that Scratch was asleep on the end of my bed.

Many years later, I adopted a cat named Fussy. My mother found Fussy in a subway station, actually, and brought her home. She couldn't abide the other housecats and would get into fights with them, so she was banished to the basement where I slept and worked. Fussy wasn't especially friendly even with people, but eventually grew so used to me being around so that she sometimes sat on the chair next to me. Now and then, she even slept on the bed (next to the ghost of Scratch). Fussy continued to hate living cats all through her life, though.

After my mother died and my sisters both moved out, I relocated from Willowdale to my present apartment in Parkdale. I took Fussy along, naturally, but also two of Mom's *many* cats. We had nearly 20 at one time, as I recall. Finding homes for them *all* was impossible, even with my sisters taking a couple each, so five or six, sadly, had to be put down. It is a point of pride with me that we found homes for as many as we did.

Fussy never liked living in a two-room apartment with two other cats, but as there was no choice, she learned to cope. She was getting old by that time, too, having grown fatter and less combative. One of the two cats I brought with Fussy was Nicky, a shy, sweet-natured cat who liked to wash your hand and suck on your shirt. Unfortunately, he developed a rare bone disease a few years later. It began to eat away his face from the inside. When it became too painful to eat, he literally starved before my eyes. A visit to the vet put an end to his suffering, and taught me that life had not yet made me as hard-hearted as I had believed.

Then it was Fussy's turn. She began hiding away in the closet for long periods of time, and losing weight. All too soon, I had to take her on the the final visit to the vet also.

Then there was Amber, who was the last of the three cats I brought to Parkdale. Amber was the smartest cat I *ever* met. She came when called, and would sit up and beg when I made the right sign. But time ran out on Amber, too, as it does for all cats, and she began to have spells when she would suffocate. She mewed piteously, looking to me for help I could not give. Finally, it just had to end. Unable to take her to the vet myself, I phoned my sister to take poor Amber on her last trip. I am not proud of the fact that I couldn't bear to go with her.

So now I have a cat named Sailor Mew, who is entering her 18th year. I found her on the street outside my apartment building when she was barely out of kittenhood. A housecat all her life, she has been loving company ... and a constant pain in the neck. But now she is more than half-blind, and growing increasingly scrawny and eccentric. She loves to eat, but not the crap that comes out of a can. Since I won't feed her *my* food, or the gourmet cat food that costs \$2 a can, she fills up on water instead, then vomits it up again. For a change of pace, Sailor sometimes vomits up hair balls, or even her own food. And all too often, only her front quarters are in the litter box when she lets go, so that the piss goes all over the floor instead of in the box. For a while, in protest of the clumping litter she didn't like, she used my bed or sofa for her toilet. It nearly came to taking her to the vet before I figured out what the problem was. As for missing the box, I was fortunately able to find a solution to that as well. I place a stiff plastic mat with a raised rim that I can drain into the toilet under the edge of the box. But the sum of her antics causes me no end of grief all the same. I'm not getting any younger myself, and can't always rush for the mop just because Sailor has decided it is high time I did. It's almost certainly her last year or two of life, but I sometimes wonder if she isn't trying to kill me first. Odds are, she won't succeed. The question is, how wise it will be to acquire *another* cat, after Sailor's time is done.

Each time I've lost a cat, I've always wondered whether I had done as much for them as I could. Had I given them a good life, in exchange for their freedom and independence? Did I deserve whatever affection (or at least forbearance) they had shown me? Could I have not shouted at them, or smacked their heinies when they were particularly bad? (Like the times when Sailor refused to eat one can of food after another, as soon as they were opened.) You can't stop cats from dying, so it seems all the more important that they live the best possible life you can give them before they're gone.

I imagine an immortal being might feel much the same way about mortal humans that they accept as friends, or take for lovers ... it is sad to be a god.

LEFT-OVER PARTS

WAHF Steve Jeffery, "Yes, Christmas gifts do get a lot more difficult as your siblings' kids grow up, especially when they are in that in-betweeny age where they are too old for toys but too young for alcohol. I'm slightly worried that I find your hot buttered mice drawings not only cute but a little bit sexy... Perhaps I should lay off the cheese for a while." **Earl Kemp**, who was also unnaturally affected by the art, **Robert Lichtman**, who is getting up to 8 copies of each issue for unexplained reasons! **Alan White**, **Randy Bryer**, who also found the energy to tell me he got multiple copies, **Janet Wilson**, "Just read the year-end *Broken Toys* and loved it, especially the parts about your friends, with which I totally agree (well, I haven't met Schirm, but certainly the rest). Made me think of the good days of the early and mid '70's, and I was strongly tempted to write something similar about you, and Phil [Paine], except of course that he would probably kill me. **Ned Brooks**, who compliments me on discovering why I had trouble sleeping (did I discover a reason? Only partly, I thought.) He also complains of Walt's proofreading leaving too many typos. Given the rush to get the issue out, I was grateful that he only found *most* of them. Maybe I should give the job to Ned? **D De** and **Rich Chander**, who were also troubled with multiple copies of *Broken Toys* in the mail. Andrew Porter, who thinks I may have obsessive-compulsive issues since I keep sending him *Broken Toys*. **Kjartan Arnorsson**, who left Iceland to become a cowboy. **Craig Hilton (Jenner)**, who wants to persuade the author of "Hot Buttered Mice" to give a reading (as if authors needed much persuasion!) **Hot Rod-302**, who said "I'm with you about the holidays not being what they used to be. I used to really flat out LOVE the holiday season. Now I dread it. It doesn't seem to be about actually the holiday itself. It's just going through the motions. It's doing Christmas because we did it last year," also, "The US is the only country that watches other people drive oversized trucks for entertainment? I think you're right. I don't know why, but it is fascinating."

Kim Huet, [on BT 22] kim.huett@gmail.com

Even if it wasn't true that living in Australia means a childhood devoid of Halloween I'm pretty sure my attitude towards the holiday would be radically different to yours. In my case, the nature of my employment dominates my attitude to each and every holiday.

I've been working in the hospitality industry for just over eleven years now, and in that time my perception of holidays has been moulded into something quite different from what they were as a child. Back then the only holiday that really mattered was Christmas, for all the reasons you can guess, and the fact that in Australia it also heralds the longest break from school. Easter was on my radar to a lesser extent as it involved a good deal of chocolate and a long weekend, while dear old television never let me forget to do something about Mother's & Father's Day. Other than that however the annual schedule of official (and unofficial) events held very little interest for me. I

wouldn't even notice their passing unless they happened to involve a long weekend. I don't recall if Valentine's Day was even commonly celebrated in Australia back then. Perhaps, but I have no memory of it.

These days my reaction to the approach of public holidays is governed by whether I need to work on them and how busy they're likely to be.

In this new universe of mine the big one is Mother's Day. I don't know about anywhere else, but in Canberra this is the day that everyone and all their siblings decide that the best way to celebrate is to take mum out for a meal. Valentine's Day is famous for intimate and romantic meals but while some couples like this tradition many don't and prefer to give the practise a big swerve. Going out for a family meal on Father's Day has become more popular, but it's still far from the default option. Christmas is certainly a big event in the hospitality calendar, but from a hospitality point of view it's become a very diffuse event due to the proliferation of festive outings. Even Christmas Day is only an issue if you happen to work somewhere that opts to put on a lunch. And these aren't a big deal provided working doesn't clash with your own plans because Christmas Day lunch involves both set menus and set numbers of guests (besides, the sort of prices normally charged for these meals tends to scare off all but those desperate to have somebody else cook for them).

However, even though Christmas Day itself isn't a big deal to me given that most years it falls in the middle of an enforced holiday while my place of employment is closed (not a wholly bad thing), Christmas in a broader sense is a busy time of year. These days I like to say that that Christmas season starts on the first day of October. When I first started it wasn't this busy, but in the last decade the number of Christmas related functions has grown and grown so that now the parties start in November. There is a knock-on effect to this in that late November and early December are no longer suitable for weddings or other large functions, so these increasingly happen in October. So while some people notice the expansion of Christmas by the arrival of decorations in the supermarkets, I notice it in a rather more visceral manner. I suppose I should be grateful for the extra hours work, but since summer is busy enough as it is I don't feel 'that' grateful.

How I would feel about adding Thanksgiving & Halloween into this mix I'm not sure. I suspect Thanksgiving would be one of those holidays which sharply divides restaurants between very busy and dead, but as to Halloween I have no clue.

Ron Kasman, ron.kasman@gmail.com

I appreciate the comments on Christmas. It has changed for me as well. This is the first year I have had it with neither of my grown children at home. My wife, of course, passed away three years ago and it was really her holiday; I just helped her celebrate it. This year I put up the tree and took out all the ornaments but it is not as though all the neighbours are coming by for shots and reminiscence. Next year, things will change and I will suit myself. Right now with Christmas crap piled on regular crap, my house looks like a yard sale. I missed the family but I still have friends. They are the family that helps to enrich my life.

It is also nice to hear about your interactions with friends. It reminds me of my own, and the blessings I have in their going through life with me.

Great drawings.

A quick anecdote about Judith Merrill. Years ago a friend was looking to share her too-expensive apartment on Baldwin Street. She put up an ad looking for a roommate. Applicants came to the door. One was a bag lady who was out of the running from the moment she appeared, though my friend went through the song and dance of talking with her. Really, though, the door had metaphorically slammed in her face. Another mutual friend was there during the interviews who knew a bit about the world of SF. When the bag lady left, the mutual friend informed the apartment sharer as to who she had just interviewed. Your title is appropriate. Though the bag lady was, perhaps, the most respected SF editor/writer/fan in Canada, she still didn't get the room.

Bill Patterson, bpral22169@aol.com

I found the memoir-retrospective of Judith Merrill interesting. I got more of a sense of who she was, after more or less falling out of the U.S. picture later in her life, than I did from any of your brief encomia on your friends, even though I know some of them independently.

I think I can, to a limited extent, fill in (a bit) a gap in the sense of her importance in science fiction history. I came a little late to reading SF anthologies -- 1965. I happened to be in the hospital for an extended round of testing and was supplied with the *Spectrum* anthologies, some of the early F&SF annual collections, and all the Judith Merrill year's best to date. so I got the full-blast exposure all at once. Of course I was also 13 years old.

The thing is, until Judith Merrill got going, sf anthologies were skimmings of the pulp magazines. Nothing wrong with that -- that was simply the nature of the market from when it got started after WWII well into the 1950s, with some notable exceptions (e.g., Pohl's original anthologies). But starting in the mid-50s, at a time when there were dozens of SF pulps still on the market, Judith Merrill began searching out *everything*. And some of what she was finding could not even by the most liberal definitions be classified as science fiction in the pulp sense. We are far enough away from the pulp era now to have a sense of science fiction in terms other than the pulp magazines, but that was not the case in the 1950s.

She probably picked up the name "speculative fiction" from Robert Heinlein, who as early as 1940 was aware that what he was doing was not science fiction in the pulp magazine sense. And of course by the mid-1950s F&SF was covering some distinctly non-pulp ground as well.

Judith Merrill's wide-ranging reading transmitted to readers, pretty much for the first time, a sense of what SF was like outside the pulp ghetto, so she was a guiding light in the very inchoate part of the development of SF, which many SF writers, among them some of the brightest and the best, felt was important: to overcome the limitations of pulp genre writing, and to exercise the artist's prerogative of choosing the writing conventions according to story sense rather than publication venue.

By the time of your memoir, there had been enough of this experimentation that there were general fiction writers picking up SF conventions, and reviewers were saying of Heinlein's last, experimental novels, that they were midway between general fiction and science fiction (in fact, I suspect that *I Will Fear No Evil* owes quite a bit to Nabokov's *Invitation to a Beheading*, which I don't think anyone has ever remarked upon).

BUT genre readers turned their backs on this experimental edge of what might loosely be called "literary" SF and dove back into their bellybutton, and thus we have the space-opera craze of the 1990s and early naughty-oughties. In this climate, Merrill's agenda had simply no place. She was relegated to the fringes, to the margins. And that is where you found her.

I agree, I think, that she was never more than a minor writer, but as an anthologist and editor, she was a major shaper of the field.

I think the fad for adopting everything from Burroughs to Frankenstein into the genre was misguided, but it may have been a necessary stage of looking beyond the pulp era's limited horizons. Now we are past that (mostly,) and the transition doesn't seem as significant or as dramatic.

Tim Marion, timothy.marion@rocketmail.com

I swear I'm not trying to make light of your physical afflictions, but I keep thinking that "Myasthenia Gravis" should be the name of a villainess in a melodramatic work of fiction. Or, at the very least, the title of a story.

Or a femme fatale in a spoof spy story.

Like you and Steve Stiles and unlike Bob Jennings, I like to daydream before I fall asleep. Usually these daydreams turn into actual "nightdreams," by which I mean dreams my subconscious creates while I am asleep. Frequently it feels as though I have come up with fantastic ideas for stories, but in my half-asleep state, these memories of intricate plots and dynamic, unusual developments suddenly fade away, without even a hook that I can clutch onto to try to retrace the threads of my fantasy. Then I am almost always left with a vague, unsettled feeling that perhaps I really did *not* dream up all those fantastic details; that it had all been merely a delusion. I suppose that, like you, I should sleep with pencil and paper next to my bed so that I may write down some of these things...that is, if they don't fade away by the time I've even turned on the light.

I've gotten pretty good at finding a tag to hold onto, then follow back to the complete dream. But I have to start right away, the moment I wake up. Most of the time, my fleeting memory of the dream indicates it wasn't unusual enough or logical enough to be useful in later writing.

I'm sorry Bob Jennings has had such an unpleasant experience with (clinically prescribed) morphine. From what he says, his reaction to morphine is very similar to my most recent reactions to hydrocodone, a very similar substance. I have been prescribed this several times during my life for dental pain, and, I must confess, at one point in my life my dental pain was so severe that I was taking hydrocodone all the time, even at work. I began to see how easy it was to become addicted to the substance — not only did it take the pain away, but it made me feel so wonderful! (I wonder if the people at work noticed how cheerful I had suddenly become!) Even then, however, I had to be careful to take it only after having eaten something solid, otherwise I would get the worst, queasiest, queerest, most chemicalene (no other word for it) nausea I have ever experienced.

The years passed and I was once again prescribed hydrocodone for a new mouth pain. Remembering how pleasant the experience had been before, I was eager to take some. “No,” I told myself. “There may come a time during which you’re totally incapacitated with pain and then you won’t have these if you take them now.” So I saved them. I saved them for only a few months when there was a genuine occasion of pain where they could have proven efficacious. I dutifully ate something, then took a pill. The pain didn’t go away, but that awful, almost unspeakable nausea came back, just as though I had eaten nothing! I may have decided I merely had a “bad batch” at that point and did try it once again a year or two later with a different prescription. Same reaction. So once it affected me positively and seemed like the most wonderful thing in the world; now it only makes me extremely nauseous.

Personally, I would love to keep a stash of codeine around the house, in case of need. Although I’ve been given some powerful analgesics in my time – Percodan, Demoral, Morphium – I don’t find the dream-like state they can create to be much of an incentive to take them. Dreaminess is for when I’m in bed, not when I want to be awake and doing things.

As I write this it’s been in the single digits for a couple of days here in New York at the beginning of the year; part of an Arctic blast we’re getting. Pretty awful weather, and the worst in many years, but in some ways, I almost feel as though bad weather has become rather sensationalized by the news outlets, particularly The Weather Channel. No one but me seems to remember that awful February in 1982 when the snow stacked up over *twelve feet!* A tunnel literally had to be dug over the sidewalks to allow people to leave the building. My theory is, no one mentions or remembers it now because the news media was not there sensationalizing it.

True. I remember some terrific snowstorms. Only as recently as 1998, three heavy snowstorms hit Toronto in succession, over a four-or-five day period, leaving 44 inches of snow! That wouldn’t be so unusual in Winnipeg or Calgary, but it had literally never happened in Toronto in recorded history. And the recent ice storm that knocked out power for up to a week for some unlucky souls, was no worse than one I remember as a kid, sometime in the middle 1960s. But everyone has forgotten it. The rain of flaming salamanders and drifts of crystal meth, on the other hand, was without precedent.

Eric Mayer, groggy.tales@gmail.com

Sorry for being slow to reply. Not a very good beginning for the new year from a fanzine point of view is it? Actually I guess I won’t be keeping track of my locs this year since in 2013 almost all of them went to *Broken Toys*. In 2012 I see I wrote 83 locs, and 77 the year before. I’m sure I eclipsed those numbers back in the Seventies though.

At any rate, I haven’t been in any mood to write or even read this past week. We’ve been hit by two Internet outages, necessitating me calling customer support in India (did you know all Indians have names like Bob and Joe and Jake? Talk about globalization!) to argue with them until I can convince someone it is their damn access number which is on the fritz *again* and not my computer so please instruct the appropriate technicians to just fix the thing. Almost as bad – nothing is as bad as being cut off from the world – we have had two unwelcome visits from Mr. Polar Vortex (which Rush Limbaugh claims was only just this month made up by liberals to fool good patriots into believing in that socialist global warming) with temperatures falling below 0 degrees Fahrenheit (no wimpy

Celsius zero degrees here!) during a few nights, and the high one day struggling up to 5F. Our heating system, as someone once said, canna take it (or something like that). So we'd get up to inside temps of 48 degrees, and if it was lucky it was 50 by bed time. It was like living through a Jack London story.

However, here I am. Well, sort of, since our Internet is still out so who knows when I'll be able to send this. And I am glad to say that the zine this time considerably cheered me up. I know very little about the friends you write about except via your descriptions, Victoria being slightly an exception since I read her zines way back when. But they have got something out of their kindness to you, mainly this beautiful tribute.

I didn't know Victoria had an apartment by High Park. I once went running there with Paul Skelton when we were visiting Mike Glicksohn. Both of us happened to be into exercise at the time. Gorgeous little park, although the swarming hordes of unnatural black-colored squirrels gave it an shuddering aura of the utterly alien.

A shame about your Christmas, and your holiday flu. One Christmas, when my two kids were toddlers, everyone came down with a horrible bug on Christmas morning. The kids were so sick they feebly tore some wrapping paper off their presents and then just sat on the floor and stared glassy-eyed at them. Now that's sick! We all reeled to bed with terminal dizziness and didn't get up for two days. Haven't had a bug that bad since.

It was back around 1991 that I experienced an ice storm, when I was living in a suburb of Rochester. Like you, I lucked out. My electricity stayed on. It was strange. Half the town had its utility lines underground, and half above ground. The above ground half kept power. The other half lost it. My backyard was filled with fallen trees which my neighbor helpfully cut up with his chain saw. I got up and started out to work as always in the dark before I realized how bad things were, there being no trees down by my front door. The sky being lit up here and there by arcing electricity from downed wires and every surface covered with a thick coating of glistening ice alerted me. I really hadn't been paying close attention to the weather forecast. Today, with the Internet, I'd have seen it coming. Provided our ISP was functioning of course.

Funny how Christmas often seems to wither away as family members grow older and pass on. In your case, with younger relatives around, the holiday might make a comeback for you. My family, small as it was, is virtually all gone now, and Christmas with it. Not altogether a bad thing since it allows me more easily to ignore the commercialism I detest. I never could afford to buy enough for people, so I know how you feel about that. But hey, what's a family get-together without the crazy old uncle? We can both play that part I'll bet.

The poem with illos was a great piece, by the way. I really am rendered commentless by hot buttered mice, however. (It does occur to me that popcorn must be a bitch to draw.) Are you Paul Kidd? How about illustrating the biblical Song of Songs with furrries?

I guess my loc comment sounded kind of bitter. I really have given up loccing, though. I consider these "locs" letters to you, built around whatever you've just sent me. So maybe I am being too careless about what I'm saying. But by way of explanation as to why I'd prefer to avoid faanish death notices, I have observed how there are certain fans who gleefully take advantage of the passing of those they dislike to try to smear them, try to define them for readers who perhaps never even knew the deceased. Totally despicable. But pretty safe to kick your enemy when he's dead. One guy in

particular is guilty of this, and I don't think I need to name him for any honest observer of fandom.

Anyway, so much for 2013. Maybe 2014 will be better. Perhaps you will start selling fiction. Perhaps I will force myself to try writing something again! Happy New Year!

Jason Burnett, jason.burnett@starfleet.com

Your exchange with Steve Stiles about the comic fans he works with has gotten me thinking. I'm really not surprised that they didn't know who Al Capp and Milton Caniff were. First of all, that was a long time ago: Capp died in 1979 (I was 6 at the time) and Caniff in 1988. Also, even Capp's biographers (who'd be expected to be sympathetic to him) say that Capp's work won't age well because so much of it was topical. Also, newspaper comics are now pretty much totally separated from comic books, with a completely different fandom. Finally, fewer people (especially young people) are reading newspapers. As for me personally, I recognized them by name but I've never really read any of their stuff. I remember when I was young and I'd go to my grandparents' house their local paper carried Steve Canyon, but I never read it - I didn't know what was going on, and it wasn't funny anyway.

I didn't read Steve Canyon, either. Too dark, wordy and grim. And, as you say, who knew what was going on unless you'd been following it for some time? Al Capp may not fare as badly as the biographers suggest. For one thing, he only became topical in later years. For most of the 30 some-odd years he did L'il Abner, the lampooned easily identified types and situations that anyone could laugh at. Fearless Fosdick was funny even if you didn't realize it was a parody of Dick Tracy. Senator Fogbound was a valid caricature of any Southern politician of the time, and not too far off the mark in the present day. However, nobody remembers "hillbillies." Dogpatch was never an accurate depiction of hillbilly life, either. If people are to laugh at it, it will have to be as as a make-believe place – which is really all Dogpatch ever was.

But your point about newspaper strips is probably valid. The only newspaper strips that will likely be well known in the next 50 years are those like Calvin & Hobbes, or Doonesbury, that could easily have appeared on a web page.

Milt Stevens, miltstevens@earthlink.net

In *Broken Toys 24*, I liked the *Hot Buttered Mice* poem. How would I describe it? Actually, I think it was rather twisted. Twisted can be good.

For many years, I have dealt with Christmas as if it was a charging rhino. I stay out of its way at all costs. I'm not a fan of crowds under any circumstances, and reports of the excesses of Christmas shoppers don't encourage me to try the holiday crush. For giving, I reach for my check book, and everybody seems to be happy with that.

My family was never attached to December 25. My father was a police sergeant, and police had the option of being off either Christmas Eve or Christmas day. Since my father usually worked PM watch, he would take off Christmas Day and not have to go to work until 3:30 that day. We got used to doing Christmas on Christmas Eve.

My sister has three children, and four grandchildren. Two spouses and two step-grandchildren are also included in the family. Each year, we gather on the most convenient day somewhere around the winter solstice. This year, it was December 22.

Bob Jennings, FabFicBks@aol.com

Received the gala Xmas issue of *Broken Toys* a week or so back. I found it to be even more a mixed bag than usual. This is not necessarily a bad thing, altho it made the issue harder to follow and to comment on.

The best thing in the issue, and certainly the most interesting to me was your article on Judith Merrill. This was an excellent piece of writing, well laid out, presenting a nuanced overview of Judith Merrill the science fiction writer/personality and your interaction with her thru the years. I wish I could have presented this in my own zine *Fadeaway*.

I think you underestimate the influence of Ms Merrill on the world of science fiction. As a writer her own body of work is not particularly large, but she did create several significant and influential works. In particular “That Only a Mother” and “Dead Center” were spectacular stories that blazed the way for a difference in perspective of characterization based on science fiction themes. Her short novel “Shadow on the Hearth” is also an excellent piece of work that stands the test of time, while other stories using the same central ideas have not aged so gracefully. Most of her other stories were strong and well written, but not earth-shaking. Every story an author creates cannot break new ground, but her total body of work compares nicely with most other writers of the 1950s.

Her influence as an anthology editor for the sort-of-almost-kinda annual Best Of SF series was very strong in the late Fifties and 1960s. Unfortunately, in one of those anthologies (I don’t remember off the top of my head which one it was), she included a story that had been originally published in 1948 or 1949 in a little literary magazine, that was picked up by *F&SF*. The story involved planned racial genocide and cannibalism. It was interesting, but the fact that the story originally appeared back in the late 1940s should certainly have disqualified it as being one of the best “new” stories of that particular year. There was quite a lot of discussion about that, some of it nasty and snipeish, which cast a pall over her efforts to become the ultimate, authoritative voice/editor for what qualified as the “Best” in current science fiction. Sales for her anthologies may have dropped off after that, altho Dell kept putting her other anthologies out in paperback over the years.

Lately, I’ve been forced to reread a lot of older SF writers, lacking much new to read. In general, I’ve revised my opinion of many of them downward. Perhaps in a way, this elevates my impression of Judy’s place in the genre? I don’t think we disagree much on one point, though. Her real influence on science fiction was as an editor and trend-setter.

She may have looked like a bag lady when you encountered her, but photos show she was an attractive woman in the years before she moved permanently to Canada. Maybe that unique Canadian weather we’ve all heard so much about had some kind of effect on her.

The word I would use is handsome, as there is a mannish cast to the photos I’ve seen of the young Judy Merrill. As well, the standards of the time were different – the make-up and hair styles of the

1940s and '50s leave their mark. But even the older Judy could dress quite differently, when she wanted to make a good impression.

I also think you nailed her personality perfectly. By the time she moved to Toronto she had decided to live by her wits and look out for herself first and foremost. I understand she could be very friendly and gracious with people, your article makes the point in several places, but I think she had figured out that the world was not necessarily a nice place, and that if she wanted to survive on her own terms she would have to be relatively relentless and sometimes ruthless about making sure her own survival needs were met. Cultivating a wide circle of friends she could lean on in lean times was part of that.

I think her attraction to the New Wave science fiction was in line with her belief that SF had been in a literary ghetto for a long time and that it should somehow or the other escape and merge into the mainstream. New Wave stories were a way of doing that, although not necessarily successfully, in my opinion. Of course science fiction has merged pretty nicely into the flow of modern media life these days, just not the way she or anybody else would have envisioned it. Science fiction concepts are so wide-spread now that when you try to explain to young people how rare it was to see any kind of science fiction TV program, or that the few science fiction movies that came out were almost always cheap junk featuring giant insects or rubber-suited BEMs, they act like you're putting them on.

Again, this was an excellent well-written article. I'm green with envy. That article would have been a perfect lead in *Fadeaway*. Please keep me in mind if you ever come up with something else like that.

(Rubs hands in glee.) "Splendid! Who shall I vilify next?"

Very interesting to read that you have written your own Carnacki the Ghost Finder pastiche. You mention sending it off to some magazine, but you don't say which one. I would be interested in reading this. You are right about the enduring popularity of the character. Carnacki seems to have had a more agreeable (or at least accessible) personality than many of the other early detectives/adventurers who encountered the weird and supernatural at the turn of the twentieth century. The only thing I found odd about the Hodgson's handling of the series was his belief that swine are somehow the embodiment, or at least the earthly representatives of Ultimate Evil. So far as I can recall offhand he was the only writer who demonstrated this kind of malicious fear/hatred of hogs, and seeing them injected into the occasional story as harbingers of supernatural malevolence is strange. At least it seemed strange to me. Maybe Hodgson chocked on a piece of bacon as a small child and never got over it.

Or just lived on a farm with pigs. People forget how big and dangerous a full-grown porker is!

Loved the cartoons you provided for the *Hot Buttered Mice* song parody. I didn't follow the song or the poem's sequel, since I happen to be one of those people who does not appreciate or understand poetry in any form. It's all meaningless mutterings so far as I am concerned, but the illustrations were excellent. You should include more of your illustrations, old or new, in these e-zines. Even though you have a lot of your art archived and theoretically accessible with a couple of mouse clicks, I don't think too many people are actually browsing the files. Running the stuff in *Broken Toys* would display it to a largely new audience.

I have a hard time explaining to myself why I run so little of my own art in Broken Toys. But it was clear to me from the beginning that I didn't want the zine to be seen as merely a vehicle to push my art in people's faces. I also didn't want to get into the "trap" of having to illustrate every issue, which could only have the effect of slowing me down and turning the zine into a chore. When I have used art, it was often to fill an awkward space, or there was something on hand that was just right.

As I say, varied issue, not that many comment hooks, but enjoyable as always. Looking forward to the next one.

Lloyd Penney, penneys@bell.net

Many thanks for *Broken Toys 24*, and with luck, I will get this to you on time for issue 25. It is harshly cold outside, so one good thing about sending a loc by e-mail is that I don't have to get bundled up to go out to the postbox.

I'm sorry your Christmas wasn't better, but at least you now have social workers who can help you. Our Christmas was fairly quiet, a few presents, and Yvonne wisely decided to pass on the family Christmas gathering...always a fight, always lectures from older sister, guilt for all, and dissatisfaction over presents.

There are times I feel I have a lot of friends, and that I am blessed. But, I do realize that as much as I do have friends, none of them are close. I am finding that when we stopped running cons, some friends simply went away. However, other interests are bringing newer friends, so there's some hope for me yet.

I long ago learned that there were friends, and there were friends you had in fandom. If some happened to be one-and-the-same person, so much the better. But you should never mistake one for the other when they aren't.

I frankly wouldn't trust the Conservative Party of Canada to keep their front lawns green, let alone have any idea about pollution and waste reduction. Their bill to reduce protection of most Canadian waters makes more industrialized countries like the US and China look fairly green in comparison. We desperately need a new prime minister ... the other day, Harper marked 8 years as prime minister, and I do not want to see a ninth.

Only a ninth? Until the Center and Left stops spreading their votes over four different parties, and unite in one against the solid Right, Steven Harper could well be Prime Minister for as much as 12 more years. Or a calamitous 16! When he boasted that he would leave Canada unrecognizable, he wasn't kidding. It will be a downsized corporation with headquarters in a Calgary office.

"Hot Buttered Mice" reminds me of the Fraggles, and that reminds me of a commercial I've seen on TVOntario. Next month, TVO will broadcast animated episodes of Jim Henson's Doozers. I guess the Fraggles have had their air time, and now, it's the Doozers' turn.

My loc...being 54 means I volunteered to help out at a trade show some days ago, and now that it's past, I am in my third day of muscle aches and pains, and all the AC&C I can take isn't enough to rid

myself of them. I will just have to wait until I can work them out, and I still have to go back for teardown.

The times I met Judith Merrill, I found her arrogant and rude. While so many here locally praise her to the skies, I frankly am glad she's gone. However, the article here is quite extensive, and there's a few details here I didn't know about.

Judy was a politician. She schmoozed with people who could do her some good.

Done for now, and I hope this fills a gap in the local. Hope you have a most enjoyable weekend, and see you with the next issue.

Keith Soltys, keith@soltys.ca

You've been sending me *Broken Toys* for a while now and I've been shamefully remiss in not responding. I have been reading and enjoying them, just too busy to comment.

My favourite part of #24 was your article about Judy Merrill. I first met her sometime in the 1970s, when she came to Hamilton (or possibly Dundas) to give a talk about science fiction. It might have been at McMaster, I don't remember. I do recall a couple of people from OSFic coming with her, but for some reason I never followed up with them, and as a result didn't make any real contact with fandom for another five or six years.

When I started publishing *Torus* in the late '80s, I interviewed her and included that in the first issue, and I've always been grateful to her for taking the time to talk to me. The one memory I have of her that I will never forget was when I was talking to her at a party, possibly at one of the local cons. She kept looking down and smiling. After a few minutes, I realized with horror that my fly was open.

One of these days I will get around to scanning *Torus* and putting the issues up online. I intend to publish the interviews I did as an ebook as well as there might be some historical value to them.

I noted with some sympathy, your frustration about finding a typo in the last issue just after sending it out. It's a simple fact of life that no matter how well you proof a document of more than a few pages, there will always be typos. At work, I have a technical specification of more than 300 pages. It has been through multiple releases and reviewed many times both by me, business analysts, and product managers. I published the latest version last week and yesterday I got an email pointing out a typo. Sigh.

Brad Foster, bwfoster@juno.com

My somewhat delayed loc on *Broken Toys 24*. Seem to be playing catch-up on things for most of my time recently. This must change!

Bummer to hear about the medical problems again. It looked like for a while there things were actually on an upswing, at least as far as your being able to treat stuff properly, and new options for

getting around. I had some kind of combo flu/muscle-crunch thing hit me a few days back; I couldn't lie down flat in bed, just too much pain when in the horizontal position, and ended up spending three nights, wrapped up in blankets, sitting upright on the sofa to try to sleep. That is – nothing – compared to what you are going through, but I think it gave me a little taste of the crap you are having to put up with most of the time. I wish I could offer more than condolences. Just hoping it will pass, and things get better.

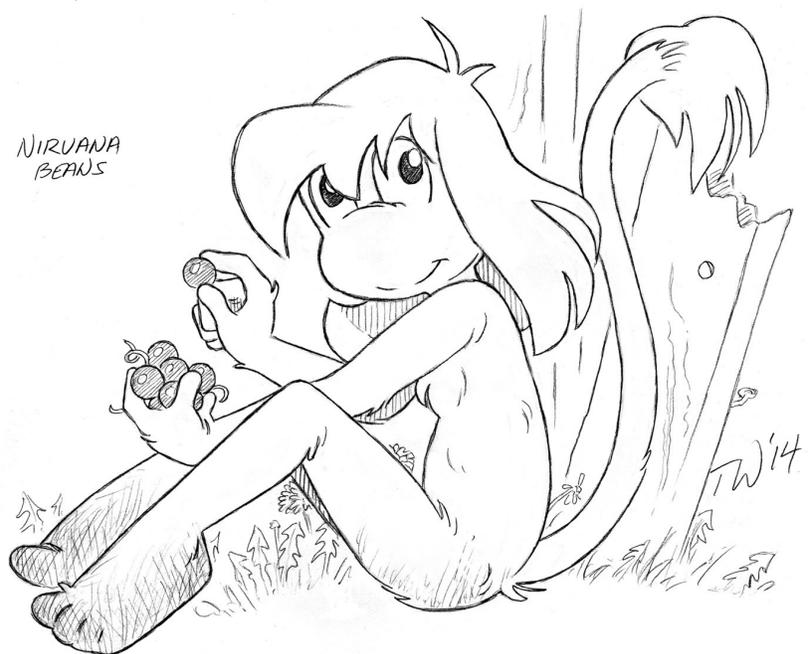
I'm with you on not really knowing what to get for my grown-up niece and nephew. They don't need anything at all, and the last couple of years has turned into a kind of pointless- "Here's a gift card for you", "Oh, well here's a gift card for you!" exchange. I'd love to change it where we all get together at some point, eat and visit, but the giftie stuff can be set aside. (Save for the kids-- kids are fun to shop for. You hit 18, you're an adult and on your own.)

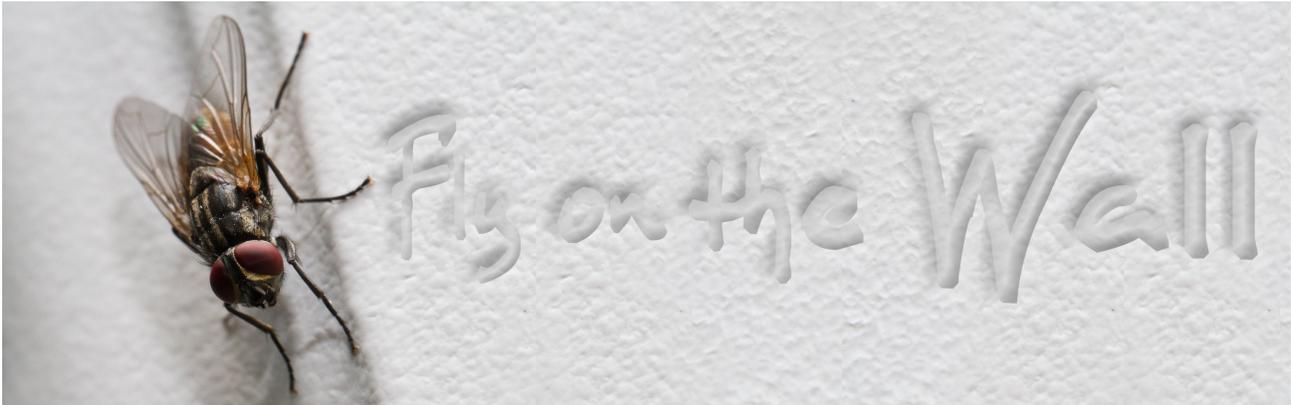
Of course, it depends on the adults. My sister-in-law and her boyfriend are both as weird as Cindy and I, so the books and toys will fly when we all get-together.

Our own Christmas this year was broken up over three days. Day before Christmas we left for a get together with my half of the family grouping. Then on Christmas day we stayed home, and had Cindy's sister over. The following Saturday, got together with the rest of Cindy's family. I've never been a stickler on having to do it on "the day," everyone has different lives and schedules. If getting together is the real point, trying to make it work for everyone is the best way to go.

While had no interest in the subject of Buttered Mice, did find the illos and layouts well done. But, have come to expect no less from you. I think you would have to work hard – not – to put together an interesting illo or design.

Regarding one of your comments to my loc, I would love to see what you create when you work only on those projects you want to.





A Story About Fandom, Taral Wayne

There were seldom any new faces at the Pump and Bucket. When there were, they were invariably met with a degree of cautious friendliness and, if all went well, a resumption of the customary good cheer.

That is, until the day a portly, lugubrious-looking gentleman in an old-fashioned, pin-stripe suit and muttonchop whiskers slid into a nearby seat that plainly indicated he knew who *The Flying Squad* were, and why they regularly gathered there. Seated in the shadow of an overhanging pot of ferns, the stranger looked like a carved Buddha ... or a retired British major from the army, which was more likely.

He sat quietly in the leather-covered seat at an empty table for two, and, when the waiter came, ordered a German Bock. The waiter went away, and a minute later returned with a reddish lager in a plain glass. The sideburned Buddha sipped his beer. Although he didn't appear to take an impolite degree of interest in the nearby goings-on, clearly he was listening in on the conversation. It was hard not to notice.

Martin Molle was the first to speak to him.

"Say, you look as though you've been following our conversation all along. Are you a science fiction reader, by any chance?"

"That I have been," the Buddha boomed. "And I *have* been following your conversation – I hope you don't mind. It's not often, these days, that I hear the names John Brunner or J.G. Ballard spoken – it's always Harry Potter this or Dr. Who that or Indiana Jones the other thing ... You can't find anyone who says anything intelligent about science fiction – just the popular stuff, you understand?"

"Sure. That's why we're here every Wednesday night. We're the local science fiction group, actually."

"I'd noticed there was a rather large crowd here every week. Didn't pay you any mind, at first, but then I began to pick out certain words from the background buzz, and I became interested. Aubrey James Bartholomew Ainsley, OBE," he said, holding out a beefy hand with immaculately groomed nails. "But everyone at the office calls me Barty ... if they're my superiors ... Sir James if they're not. That's my little joke – you may call me Barty." A round of introductions followed.

From his accent, Ainsley was from the north country, somewhere – not a Yorkie, more likely Lancs. “Newcomer to the Bucket, are you?” asked Martin, skirting the issue.

“No. I’ve been coming here, on and off, for years. For the last few years, though, I’ve been out of the country, and only just begun dropping in regularly again. That’s how I noticed your group.”

One of the other members of The Squad became interested. Sheila McAuley leaned over to ask, “Your work takes you out of the country often?” She batted patently false eyelashes.

“It does,” answered Ainsley, “but It’s not something I can talk about. Official Secrets Act, you know?”

“Oh.” It was not the answer Sheila expected. Nor anyone else.

“Sure you’re not some sort of spy, then, are you?” asked Kripps from farther down the table. Not known for subtlety, the question dripped with his characteristic sarcasm. There was laughter from his end of the room.

Ainsley relented just a little, then. “No, no ... nothing like that. Government service, of course, but ... an *agent provocateur*, not at all. Haven’t carried a gun since that Falklands affair. Back in ’82, when I ... well, never mind that. It’s all in the public record, anyway. It will have to do if I say my job involves keeping my finger on the pulse, and my ear to walls.” Having established a rapport, the Buddha-like stranger pulled his chair over to join The Squad.

It was Townsley who made the fatal remark, a moment later.

“So, you’re sort of a fly on the wall.”

Ainsley’s face held a peculiar expression for a moment, then he replied, “Not exactly. Not exactly. But funny you should bring up that particular turn of expression. I was recently thinking of my aunt Ersibeth – “he pronounced it ‘awnt’ “ – and her devilish delusion that she was a member of the species *Musca domestica* and, of course, her unfortunate tragedy.” He took a long draft of his Bock, waiting to see if the floater bobbed. No one spoke a word. One and all, he had The Flying Squad hooked.

“A fly, you mean?” queried a puzzled Molle.

“To be precise, a *common housefly* is what she believed she was. We thought she was just being daft at first.” Ainsley pronounced it “dawft.” “She would only act up once in a while, buzzing in your ear or tickling your arm by walking her fingers up and down. As time went by, though, she fell into her fly persona more and more often, and persisted long after there ceased to be any sort of humour in it. A few years ago, we realized that it had been some time since Aunt Erzy – as we called her – had been herself.

“We consulted doctors, naturally. At my late wife’s insistence, we even called in a spiritualist, but it was no use. ‘Dementia’ said the medical profession. ‘Beelzebub,’ said the spiritualist – before I threw her out of the house, unpaid. The one thing they both agreed on was that there was nothing to be done about Auntie’s condition except more visits and more money. At least the doctors were covered by the National Health Service, which is more than I can say for the table-rapper.

“The family finally had no choice but to learn to live with Aunt Erzy’s delusion. It wasn’t such a hardship, really ... once we grew used to it. She would spend most of the waking day wandering around the house, her face to the wall, arms bent like so – ” Ainsley demonstrated “ – and her fingertips on the wallpaper like *so*.” He demonstrated with hammy fingers splayed out, their tips pressed lightly against his end of the table. “And then she’d ‘walk’ with her fingertips, like *this*.

“The poor old thing would make her way around the room in that fashion for perhaps half an hour, or sometimes half the day. On other occasions, she might take flight after only a minute, and take wing. She’d ‘fly’ out of the room, so to speak, buzzing to herself, wandering in erratic circles and loops until she found the door. Many’s the time, as a boy, I saw poor Aunt Erzy fly in and out, up and down stairs, only to land again just a few inches from where she had fled. So she spent most of her days. After a while, we hardly took notice of her.

“The one thing that Auntie did that was sure to be a nuisance, however, was on those occasions she insisted on landing on *one of us*. There you would be, sitting, reading the business section of the newspaper, when suddenly the ten tiny pads of her fingertips would ‘land’ upon your shoulder – so lightly that you almost didn’t know they were there. Then, with nervous little advances, her fingertips would dance down your sleeve and over the back of your hand, where she would gambol among the coarse hairs. The temptation to swat Auntie was very hard to resist ... very hard. But it wouldn’t do to upset her, so whenever you could no longer stand the tickling, you had to brush her gently away. Auntie would buzz around the room for ten or twenty minutes ... but, inevitably, you would feel her ten timorous fingertips on your shoulder or sleeve again, and it would start over.

“We among the family grew used to it, naturally. We also grew to take considerable amusement in it when there were visitors in the house, and Auntie would be attracted to their after-shave or perfume. They were always informed of Auntie’s ... peculiarity ... of course. Not that it ever prepared them for her attention, if they were so unlucky as to receive it. We watched the unfortunate soul as long as we could, maintaining poker faces on the outside while smiling with sadistic glee on the inside. After a while, we would spare the poor devil any further embarrassment by showing him the family ‘technique.’ Whenever Auntie was an especial nuisance, it never failed to draw her away by leaving out a sugar cube where she could find it! She would sit next to the end table or sideboard for hours at a time, one finger on the sugar cube as though feeding.

“For heaven’s sake, though, let’s not talk about the neighbor’s dogs! Although we’d spoken to them on several occasions, they *would* let the brutes wander around at will. One of us had to go out every morning to make sure the lawn and sidewalk out front of the house was clean, lest Auntie discover something ‘nasty’ to play with.”

A few po faces suddenly appeared around the table, and at least one fork hit a plate with a clank as it was put down in a hurry. “*Please!* I was having chocolate truffle,” said Myrtle Troup, revolted.

“Auntie’s affliction was *mainly* harmless, though,” Ainsley continued, unperturbed. “She injured no one else, and only rarely herself. One of those few times was the summer we were so badly plagued by *genuine* flies that we took action. We kept the swatters and spray out of Auntie’s sight, of course, but early one morning we were all woken by an unearthly scream that came from down in the kitchen. We tumbled down the stairs in housecoats and pajamas, slippers flip-flopping on the carpet and anxious voices exclaiming, ‘What in the world was *that*,’ and ‘For God’s sake, who do you suppose that was.’ Father stiff-armed the door and barged in like the retired police serjeant that he

was, and we all crowded in behind him to discover the *last* thing any of us expected. There was Aunt Erzy in her night shift, standing barefoot on a kitchen chair, her head and arms and upper body all tangled in a roll of sticky flypaper hanging from the ceiling fixture! After that, we hastily removed the remaining flypaper from around the house and disposed of it.

“There was one thing that Auntie was positively afraid of ... and, as you might guess, that was spiders.

“Which made the following story all the more difficult to understand.

“One day, Aunt Ersibeth went out for her afternoon buzz, and, to everyone’s surprise, came home with a suitor. According to the young man, they had met in the city park a few days before. It was his custom to take lunch there, and he had a sweet tooth. No doubt, that was why Auntie was attracted to him. He had bought a sticky bun, as usual, and left it on the bench next to him, also as usual. Oddly, he rarely ate more than half his bun, and then left the rest. On this occasion, he noticed that our aunt was sitting next to his bun, her hand poised over it as though undecided whether or not to take it. ‘Help yourself,’ he said to her, whereupon she ‘landed’ and began to ‘feed.’ He laughed. It must have brought her back to herself, somewhat, because what she did next was so ... well ... normal. She took a bite of the bun, chewed it, then ate the rest up just as anyone would. ‘She doesn’t speak much,’ said the young man. ‘I like quiet women who don’t screech and whine about.’ He also said that his name was Hounslow, and that he would like to see more of dear Ersibeth if he might.

“Of course, he had our blessing. It was just the thing for Auntie! We thought, perhaps, she had only needed a romantic interest all along. It was far from an orthodox relationship, however. The young man, Hounslow, was himself markedly peculiar. He was a salesman in an exclusive haberdashery, that specialized in silk undergarments, ties, gloves and socks. What was odd about it was that Hounslow would wear nothing else himself. He surrounded himself handsomely in silk. Even the lining of his wallet was shot silk. He was not vain, fortunately ... nor ought he have been. Despite the perfection of his attire, he was not what was commonly thought good-looking. His eyes were close-set, small, jet black and beady, and the refraction of his thick-lensed glasses seemed to make them drift around to where they shouldn’t be. It was all too easy to count the same eye twice and come up with disconcerting results.

“That was not the end of it. Hounslow’s sweet tooth I have mentioned, but not that he rarely, if ever, finished any sweet he began. He would open a chocolate box, eat one or two and forget that it was there. Or else he’d order a tea and absent-mindedly shovel so many spoonfuls of sugar in it that nobody else would drink it, and then not take a single sip of it himself! Instead, he would idly watch insects gather around his tea or bun or biscuit, as though he took pleasure in their company.

“It seemed that Auntie Ersibeth had met her match in Hounslow, and that they were a perfect pair. Alas, it was not to be! The wedding was set for June, a band had been hired, a caterer found who was inexpensive enough to suit Grammam Leda, but who could have known that the ceremony would end as it did, in disaster? We should have seen it coming as soon as the minister pronounced them man and wife ... but we weren’t listening to the words.

“The honeymoon was to have been in Paris, in the grand Hôtel Ubu ... a wonderful old place of *fin de siècle* luxury, with a piano, brass banisters, molded plaster, surly managers, an elevator cage that hadn’t worked since Napoleon III’s time and Russian *émigrés* reading the newspaper in the lobby.

The happy couple would not be able to leave for Paris until the next day, however, due to inclement weather in the Channel. They might have stayed the night in a London hotel, but we were an unconventional family, and the house was large and mostly empty. So, for the evening, Aunt Erzy and Hounslow were allowed Grandfather's old room in the tower, the biggest in the house. His ghost would never notice, as it was habitually haunting the billiard room. Considering the occasion, among ourselves we thought it good fun to call it the 'nuptial suite.'

"Next day we expected to see the happy couple off with the usual fanfare, but in the middle of the night a bloodcurdling screech woke everyone in the house! The scream had plainly come from the direction of Grandfather's old room. We came running in night-shirts and pajamas, wielding heavy curtain rods and baseball bats and other improvised weapons, according to temperament, and all burst into the nuptial suite together.

"To our astonishment and horror, we found Auntie altogether in the altogether, trussed up like a sausage! And there was Hounslow, hovering over her with a ludicrously operatic carving knife, inching toward her bosom! As he looked up to see what all the commotion was, we saw that he was actually slaving – gobs of mucousy-looking saliva dripped from his chops! We put an end to this scene of Grand Guignol in pretty damn short order, naturally. To this day, we are unable to remove the unnatural bend from the living room fireplace poker."

The Flying Squad was unusually silent after this revelation, the expressions up and down the table ranging from guarded to outright horrified. No one knew how to react, and all were waiting for a clue.

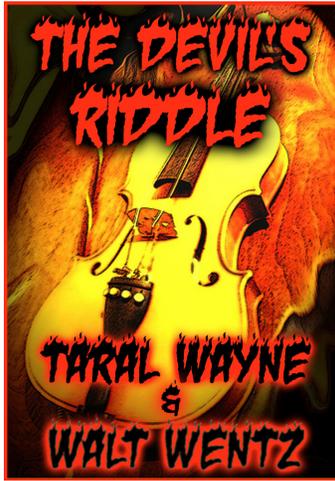
Which Ainsley gave them. Both barrels. "So the newlyweds never did go on their honeymoon, and Aunt Erzy went on believing she was a human fly. And Hounslow? The police bagged him, of course. Looking down at the matched luggage – a wedding gift that would never be used – we only then realized why Mr. and Mrs. Webb would never be. For Hounslow believed he was a human spider, you see."

That's when the pandemonium began.

And that was only the first of many Wednesday nights dominated by tall tales told by Aubrey James Bartholomew Ainsley. It was also the last time that the Pump and Bucket's Flying Squad welcomed a newcomer without deep-seated, and understandable, suspicion. – *Taral Wayne, Feb 2013.*

We have moved! After more years without television than I can remember, I am finally in a position to add another \$40 or so to my monthly expenses. That means that television and I are about to become reacquainted. Bell offered me a good deal for bundled phone, internet and wifi TV that worked out to about the same it would cost me to simply add TV to my services, on top of which I will be able to boast very high speeds, a near-infinite download limit, a 150-hour recorder for the TV, a free wi-fi modem, free installation and no activation charge. Unfortunately, it also means that my familiar Teksavvy address will now join my old netscape and 3web addresses in oblivion. Please take note, otherwise I will not receive any locs, mail or efanazines sent to me, and there will be no letter column next issue. Please note, I am now at

taral@bell.net



*Reprinted from eDitto 5 ,
edited by Eric Mayer*

*Satan an' Christ was havin' a chaw, on a balmy day in Hell,
Nick ast Him in, with a cheerful grin,
To set and talk a spell.*

*"Nothin' is free," the Devil said, as he scraped his golden fiddle.
"Why folks think so, and want it, though,
That is the damndest riddle."*

*"Salvation's free," said J. K. Reist, "Been sayin' that for ages.
Writ here, ye see, 'Salvation's free,'
Right on them Holy Pages!"*

*"Salvation from what?" Ol' Scratch replied, "Black plague or liver spots?
From income tax, excess earwax,
Or death in freight car lots?"*

*"And there ain't no cost, no bottom line, nor catch that waits fer you?
It cain't be done, Ol' Son of a gun,
I've tried that racket too!"*

*"Well... damfino," J. Reist replied, with a sorter nervous smile.
"In all the past, folks has never ast.
I'll think on this a while."*

*"You do that, Jake," Ol' Satan spake, an' grinned, while slyly winkin'.
"I'll give ye a hint that's kindly m'int--
What Man fears most is thinkin'!"*

*The Devil he sawed a frantic jig, an' let out a whoop of glee,
"After all these years, what Man most fears
Is the only thing what's free!"*