



I'm back, with **Broken Toys 29**, only about six weeks after the last issue. It may seem longer - it certainly does to me - but in fact, I'm not really late at all. Although appearing more or less monthly for nearly two years, I never meant to publish more often than every six weeks! Still world-weary but perhaps a little less disillusioned, I remain **Taral Wayne**, and remain living in less-than-elegant style but with plenty of eye-candy in a 21st floor apartment at 245 Dunn Ave. #2111, Toronto Ontario, M6k 1S6. But that's only for cash in unmarked envelopes. You can reach me also at Taral@bell.net. It is now mid-July, 2014. This is Kideldivee Books & Art, or ExtraTaraltoriality, or Tarable Mistakes 284.

Turning the Page?

While my interest in fandom continues to plummet, other events seem to portend improvements in my living arrangements. I hardly know where to begin, so I'll just blurt out the first thing that comes to mind. That would be the hum in my left ear. It's caused by my *new air conditioner*. It's a Danby 10,000 BTU unit, and it's keeping me as cool as a cucumber in a crisper. The new unit has a remote control, three operating modes (including one energy-saver) and a digital read-out that displays temperatures instead of an arbitrary power setting. There had been some issue with how much of an electrical load the new unit would put on my living room circuit. That particular circuit supports my computer, monitor, wi-fi Internet connection and desk phone as well. The maintenance guy for the building said 5,000 BTUs was all the circuit would take. 5,000 BTU was far too little to air condition a room of that size, however, so I gambled on newer A/Cs being much more energy-efficient. The gamble paid off. I left it on the energy-saving mode last night while I slept, and was delighted to find that the new unit lowered the temperature in my bedroom all the way from the living room! Nor did the breaker ever trip. I'm looking forward to being comfortably cool all this summer.

Steven, my fix-it friend, helped me install the air conditioner. Did I say, "help?" More accurately, he did 90% of the work. Steve bought it for me from Home Depot, he brought it over, he pulled the old unit out of the living room window, he did most of the hoisting to get the new unit in, and he moved the dead unit to the garbage chute for me. I lent my rubbery muscles here and there, and mopped up some dripping water, but that was about the limit of my contribution, and my physical ability. As soon as everything was ship-shape, I declared I wouldn't pay him *a penny more* and slipped the full amount on the bill of sale into his hand.

Steven will be helping with my *new computer*, as well. I shopped around on-line, and the system that best suited my needs appeared to be an Acer. It was priced around \$600, which was a step or two up from the cheapest new model. As I recall, it has an i5 processor, runs at 3.0 GHz, has 4 GB of RAM, and a .5 terabyte hard drive. It was advertised as coming with Windows 7 installed. Goodie. I have no desire to find out what pitfalls might await me if I tried to adapt my files and other software to an operating system as flashy and giddy as Windows 8 – which seems to have been designed more for use with tablets and smart phones than a for-real computer. The new system has already been bought as I write this, and Steven will bring it over in a week or two. I'm all goose bumps ... but, to be honest, some of that is stark fear. Getting it set up properly is going to take days of work, and no doubt much frustration.

But it was getting to the point where getting a new computer couldn't be put off any longer. A couple of months ago, Windows had left XP users like me dangling. Google Chrome had stopped sending me updates for my Web browser, because my processor wouldn't run them. Websites were downloading like molasses dripping out of a cold straw. Too often, ACDSee would collapse before opening a file or folder I had clicked on. The Web browser froze up for a minute at a time, or crashed altogether. All this misbehavior boiled down to too much demand on a processor that was far too old and slow. I was heartily sick of it.

It's not every day I spend a thousand dollars. It's not even every *year*. I can't actually think of the last time I spent that much money in such a short period of time, for so few separate things. Fortunately, my disability pension is far more generous than welfare ever was – never mind what I was actually able to learn while I was self-employed – so I can save a reasonable amount every month. Also, I received a back payment that got my dragon's hoard off to a roaring good start.

The good news isn't finished. A couple of days ago, a social worker and a company rep brought over a demonstration model of a power chair. I admit that I'm a bit embarrassed about this. I preferred an electric scooter. A scooter is only one step away from a Vespa, in my mind. But a mobile chair makes a statement – “look out for the disabled guy.” I know I shouldn't think that way, but for a long time my robust nature has been part of my personal identity. Advertising the failure of my physique to live up to my self-image was not something I looked forward to. Despite that, I found the chair very comfortable, and it was extremely easy to control. A subtle twist of the wrist was all it took to steer, and it would literally turn 360 degrees on a dime! I was told it would drive 25 km on a full charge, and had a top speed of 6 kph. (That's about 4 mph.) It recharged from any ordinary electrical socket, without first having to fully discharge the battery (in fact, running the battery down to zero was bad for it). So the chair sounds perfect. The clincher was that a scooter might not have *fit* in my small apartment.

Whether a scooter or a power chair, the only place I could think of parking it was in the hall, in front of the door. When I needed to get out, I'd have had to move the wheels, or edge sideways around them. The social worker flatly told me that wasn't good enough. I hate to admit it, but she was right. But that left me in a pickle ... in my cramped, well-organized apartment, how was I to find space for a vehicle half the size of the Mars Science Laboratory? Where there's a will, there is always a way, fortunately ... but only if you plan well in advance. I spent at least three days thinking about how I could move A to B, if I first moved B to C, C to D and so on ... shedding unnecessary junk along the way. Once I was firm in my mind as to how the move was to be done, I started in, carrying out the rearrangements, one step at a time, over a period of days. When I was finished, I was as pleased with myself as though I had freed the slaves or established World Peace. Nor was I done a moment too soon. The social worker phoned me a day or two later, and asked if I had made satisfactory progress making space yet. “I had,” I said, and she set a date to bring over the demo.

Even though such scooters and chairs may cost more than \$3,000, the most delightful part of this story is that it won't cost me a penny. The province of Ontario has a program that provides the disabled with mobile assistance. I know it's wicked. Some poor, deserving millionaire will have to wait an entire month before he is able to install stereo air conditioners in the back seat of his second stretch Mercedes. But, you know what? *I don't care*. I'm going to be able to go out and selfishly enjoy the fresh air and sunlight this summer, or go shopping for necessities, without the agony of dragging myself 50 feet at a time, from one uncomfortable sitting place to the next. Until you've sat on a low curb or a step in the snow, breathing hard with an aching hip, and 25 pounds of groceries in a backpack, you don't know how much that matters.

Meanwhile, all around me I see other people's lives are going to hell. But for once, *it isn't me*. I see a glimmer of light ahead, and it's a good feeling.

As long as my life seems to be on the right track again, I think I'm good, too, if fandom goes its way while I go mine. We may meet again.

DINNER APRÈS THE RIVER

The River is a friendly little used-book store near where I live. It opened only four years ago, but already it is closing. Bummer. The books were rock bottom cheap and chosen for sale with care. There were no shelves loaded with dog-eared Harlequin Romances or broken-backed copies of Dan Brown. I never spent as much at The River as I'd have liked. However, until recently, I haven't had much money for books. This year, I finally began to enjoy more disposable income, but then the problem was that I didn't have the space for more books. With great difficulty, I shed large numbers of books that were no longer quite unthinkable to part with. Some of them I had to give to the Salvation Army down the street, some I was able to sell to The River. Ironically, I bought back about as many as I sold the store, and the net result was a negligible saving of shelf space. Then I brought even more books, movies and music home from The River. At this point, I may well be worse off than I was before. Maybe it's just as well that The River will shortly be closing its doors for the last time.

In its early days, The River used to host readings, literary discussion groups and workshops. Those gradually ended over the next year or so, for what reason I can't say. I wasn't a participant. Prices on the books began to creep upward, to match prices in other bookstores. Some of the homey feeling of the store grew more businesslike. Nevertheless, I liked dropping in whenever I passed by, and chewing the fat with either David, the proprietor, or his sister Mary, whichever was minding the shop. David was a character. He had been a biker when a younger man, and traveled the country on a Harley.

Unfortunately, rising rents were reflected in rising prices as Parkdale slowly gentrified. After four years, David decided that the street trade was unable to keep up. His plan is to move the store to Hamilton, a smaller city about an hour's drive from Toronto. Because of the steel mills, nobody wants to live there, but rents are cheaper. It seems that Toronto is growing too big and too desirable as a place to live for its own good ... small bookstores can no longer survive here. Even large bookstores are struggling against the rising tide of affluence and on-line shopping.

When I told Hope Leibowitz about The River's closing, and the 30% closing discount, she said she wanted to visit me in Parkdale, to see the bookstore one last time. Yet, despite having come all the way to Parkdale from North York, specifically to buy books, as far as I could see Hope bought very little – a collection on CD of Janis Joplin, and some cheap SF paperbacks. If I had come so far, I would have felt obliged to go home with a *shopping bag* full of purchases. Did I say Hope could be a little peculiar?

Unexpectedly, Hope was also interested in watching a movie on my big-screen TV. Normally, Hope has no interest in animated films, so I was surprised when she said she wanted to see *How to Train Your Dragon*. This is a wonderful film, mind you, and I was happy to show it to her ... but why *this* film? Why not *Cars*, *Despicable Me* or *Up*? Still, the same question could be asked of any request she made, so I let it go. Since she would be here long enough to need dinner, we decided I'd cook something for the both of us.

If you haven't met Hope at a convention, I have to warn you that she lives by logic of her own. For instance, at the butcher shop we visited, she complained that the chicken breasts on display were *too big*. We didn't need that much protein in a meal, which by natural law must be five parts green vegetable to one part lean meat. That was the first occasion on which I had heard of this law. Fat was bad; I knew that much. But what harm was there in fatless chicken breast? You could eat a bucket of it, and it would be all to the good as far as I knew. I promised Hope that I would swap the fresh chicken breast for one in my freezer – one that I knew was quite a bit smaller, as it was only a portion for one. Our next stop was a small grocery, where we improvised the rest of the meal. At \$4 a head, the cauliflower was out, but the price of the broccoli was considerably less shocking. I suggested we add baby corn to it, and make a stir-fry. Hope carefully inspected the label of the can of corn and said there was too much salt, but it would be all right if we poured the liquid out. Next, Hope suggested we add tofu. It was more unneeded protein, but, seeing that our options were limited, she thought it would be all right this one time.

After thawing, I chopped the small chicken breast from my freezer into short strips, and threw them into a wok with a bit of oil. Next, I drained the baby corn and threw it in with the chicken. While they cooked, I worked on the broccoli, chopping away the stalk and dividing the head up into manageable bunches. That was when Hope stopped me. “You aren't going to throw away the best part,” she said. I looked at the cutting board ... what “best” part? It turned out that Hope *liked* the stalk. To be fair, I usually chopped the tenderest part of the stalk myself, since the head is usually small. But I was dumbfounded that someone actually admitted that she liked the *stalk in particular*. Once I threw the brocc into the wok with the corn and chicken, Hope opened the tofu. She chopped it into cubes and scraped them off the cutting board into the wok, while I added a dash or two of soy sauce ... but not before Hope carefully checked the label on the bottle for the salt content, of course. She “tsked,” but you simply cannot do a stir-fry without soy sauce, or something much like it. Then I added the last of the peanut sauce from the fridge, ginger powder, ground chilies and garlic from my spice rack, and some sesame seeds for good measure. Since Hope had given me the peanut sauce, she didn't need to check the ingredients on the label. I was a bit uncertain about adding sesame seeds, though. On top of the other spices, wouldn't it just muddy the palette? But Hope said it was fine, so I tossed in about a teaspoon. And, lo, dinner was just fine! Hope congratulated the chef as he wolfed down the meal with her. Into the bargain, I had doubled the size of the chicken breast in my freezer. I was very pleased with myself.

The movie, *How to Train Your Dragon*, is four years old. There is now a sequel hitting the theaters, and it might have been the publicity for it that put the notion of seeing *How to Train Your Dragon* in Hope's head. Then again, I don't know of any time when Hope had been exposed to publicity and wanted to see any other animated feature. Perhaps we will never know why she wanted to see this particular one.

At the start of the film, the viewer is presented with a night attack of dragons on the Viking village of Berk. Dragons fill the sky, blotting out the moon. Fire swells, engulfing village rooftops. Viking warriors rush every which way, swinging broadswords, and – when occasion demands it – mightily punching dragons full in the snout. Watching all this well orchestrated mayhem, the viewer realizes that

there is a less than amicable state of relations between Viking and Dragon. We also learn that Hiccup, our protagonist, is weedy and unusually partial to book learning for a Viking. We are also introduced to Stoick the Vast, Hiccup's father – a brute even among warrior Vikings, but a fond *pater* nonetheless. Among other Vikings who we meet is Gobber the Belch, the blacksmith who was relieved of one arm and one leg in past battles with Berk's fire-breathing enemies. It wasn't long before Hope declared that she didn't like the opening. It was too violent. Ten minutes later, she announced that she didn't realize Goober was missing limbs. Finally, she asked in a puzzled voice why everyone looked funny.

"It's a cartoon," I said.

"I know, but why don't they look like real people?"

There didn't seem to be any way to answer that.

But, you know, at the end of *How to Train Your Dragon*, Hope cried like the widow who has just discovered that her late husband had willed his entire estate to his club, and left her penniless. That meant that, despite everything, Hope loved the movie!

Hope is a funny lady. I know I said that already. But she had a good time, and in retrospect I didn't have too shabby a time of it myself. At the end of the evening, I said we'd have to do it again sometime, and meant it. To my astonishment, Hope gave me a peck on the cheek, just the way Astrid kissed Hiccup in the movie, and said, "That's for the dinner." I gave her a swat on the shoulder and said, "That's for everything else" ... also just like Astrid. After that, the end credits rolled over the elevator door closing.

Walter Weight Champion

It's getting so that every day I check with File 770 to see who's passed away. It's a good day if there's only *one*! The number of obituaries in F770 is almost as overwhelming as all the awards Mike is forced to run in the place of genuine news.

I'm pleased to say that I'm not about to commit the same offence of reporting that yet another of our diminishing number has just died. However, my favourite proofreader, Walt Wentz, recently underwent surgery for a quadruple bypass. I heard about it a week ago, when his daughter, Amber, e-mailed me with unexpected developments. She said that he was doing all right, and should be moved from IC into his own room, shortly. Hopefully, he'll be up and around in about a month.

I hope he regains e-mail access before that, even though he may *not* until he's home again. His daughter doesn't intend to keep up the old man's voluminous e-mail correspondence, so it may be some time before I know further.

Worse, who do you think does my proofreading, and prevents me from committing grievous crimes against the proper punctuation and grammar of the English language? Yes ... Walt, my silent partner in fanac. He fully deserves at least 10% of the scorn and contumely due to me for my deluge of fanwriting over the last several years. I even offered to credit Walt as my co-writer at one point ... but he modestly refused it. Possibly he suspected I was trying to shift the blame to someone else.

Walt has been a firewatcher, living the life of a rugged hermit high above the Pacific Coast forest. Once he was thoroughly bored with the life, he moved to Forest Grove, Washington, near Portland, where he worked as an associate editor of the magazine *Ruralite*. In that capacity, Walt early recognized the talents of illustrator and comic book artist Joshua Quagmire ... who I believe turned down the offered work immediately ... and passed *my* name along to Walt. As a result, Walt and I worked together as an editor-and-illustrator team for several years. I not only sold him two articles but also churned out around 60 black and white illustrations for other writers' articles in *Ruralite*. It is my most solid claim to the status of professional artist! Damn nearly the only one, in fact.

In 1998, a new editor in chief at *Ruralite* brought a new look to the magazine. Black and white illustrations were too amateurish for him – he thought black and white photos were infinitely more professional – and my work dried up. Walt didn't see eye-to-eye with the new regime and began to look at retirement, and the opportunity to putter around full time, as a palatable option. Since then, he has made stained glass windows, fixed plumbing, repaired roofs, messed about in the yard, written pulp fiction pastiches, and expanded on our friendship through a constant correspondence through e-mail. Now and then I pass some of Walt's writing on to fandom. A small number of humour pieces have appeared in *Drink Tank*, *eFanzines*, *Askance*, *Pulp Stories* and *Alexiad*. Some day, Walt's "Zeppelin Terror" might appear in a fanzine too ... if I could only remember if I submitted to anyone ... and to whom.

Walt has even written a short novel based on Edgar Rice Burroughs's *Barsoom*. If I can ever stop procrastinating, I owe Walt several full-page illustrations to accompany it. Surprisingly, it is quite readable, but ... who other than Shelby Vick publishes such foolishness? What Walt intends to do with his *magnum opus*, I'm not sure. Publish it through Amazon or Lulu, perhaps?

Meanwhile, Walt recuperates and I wait anxiously until he can return to his proofreading duties. My reputation as an unimpeachable writer suffers every day that he is *hors de combat*, and my lack of grammatical consistency and criminal spelling is on display for everyone to see. My dismay is not entirely selfish ... I even miss his daily correspondence. For his sake, for my sake, for my *readers'* sake, let's hope Walt gets well soon!

THE EASY WAY TO GOOD HEALTH!

I've never taken any pleasure in deliberate exercise. Some people seem to enjoy the buzz that comes from a heavy workout or several laps around the track, but not me. There is no way that jumping up and down while scissoring your arms and legs until your heart pounds, or running until the stitch in your side is ripping you in two, *can* be fun, nor is it exhilarating in any sense that I can comprehend. After any such perverse exertion, I'm sweaty and feel weak, and I pant desperately for air. How can exercise be anything but a form of self-inflicted torture? I suspect you have similar adverse reactions to exercise. But you have to realize that *some* people are adrenalin junkies. Under physical stress, the stuff is squirted into their bloodstream by the pancreas, and they get a high from it just as though it were cocaine. *Well, good for them.* But what use is their smug admonition to the rest of us – to be like them – if we don't possess the same extraordinary addiction?

I have the same negative reaction toward well-meant advice about diet from thin people. By nature, ordinary people dislike hunger. Our emotional well-being depends in part on gratifying the sense of taste, and much of our social activity revolves around anticipating, preparing and savoring our meals. How can our psyches weather a sudden, drastic change in how we eat, and not feel anxiety, depression, distress and distemper? Some people are lucky, of course – at least from their point of view. They can pick at a handful of boiled vegetables on their plate, take a few bites of whole-wheat bread and wash it down with a glass of water, then declare themselves full. On such a regimen, most normal people cannot survive long ... mentally, at least. It would be as if your doctor told you that your health was impaired by too much visual indulgence ... and so you must wear a blindfold over your eyes for at least 12 hours of the waking day. And this is not merely until you feel better, but must become a natural habit for the remainder of your life. Otherwise you would view more unhealthy colour, movement, shape and depth than is good for you.

Nature is unfair. That much we've learned from hundreds of years of objective experiment and personal experience. But we could just shrug, and accept nature's injustice, if it weren't for the fortunate prigs who constantly hold themselves up to us as examples of How Easy It Is. I find it unbearable when a patent narcissist, who is thin to a fault, self-righteously informs more robust members of the human species that *he* is satisfied with a pure vegetarian diet of no more than 1000 calories a day, never touches fat, sugar or gluten – much less an artificial sweetener or hydrogenated oil – and then asserts that the rest of us could do the same with no difficulty. Then he ties on his Adidas and runs his daily 5 miles, declaring how we would all feel the same intoxicating exhilaration of a body at its peak performance, if only we followed his example. It's a lie. This creature is simply a freak of nature, like someone who feels pleasure when he sticks his finger in a live socket. And it is an inversion of the natural order that he should chide the rest of us for not being the same as he.

There is no virtue in enjoying what is unpleasant to other people. It is an undeserved advantage, and feeling superior about it is no better than flattering yourself because you were born white.

And now, having vented the resentment out of my system, I can give a little almost-useful advice in the matter of looking after your health: get rich. Apart from having immediate access to the best medical advice and treatment that money can buy, if you are rich, adjusting your diet and physical activity levels is much, *much* easier. You won't feel deprived if you have a chef of your own to serve delicious, four-star meals, using only the highest-quality ingredients, prepared to the most exacting standard. Who will be thinking about greasy cheeseburgers and a Coke while wolfing down salmon almandine, sautéed mushrooms, garnished potato medallions, fresh garden salad on the side, a slice of toasted rye with orange marmalade, chilled Chardonnay and a cup of Blue Mountain dark-roast, one cream, no sugar to follow? Similarly, you can have all the fresh fruit you want between meals – boatloads of mangos, papayas, cantaloupes, blueberries, huckleberries, strawberries, mandarin oranges, Fuji apples, black cherries, pineapples, pears, dates, apricots, plums, kumquats, grapes, bananas, peaches, coconuts, kiwis, cranberries, lychees, soursop, raisins, tangerines ... I have hardly exhausted the list, so you need never get tired of the same old Chiquitas and Sunkist. Anything you want, for the asking. And if any is blemished or overripe, the cook disposes of it without your ever noticing.

And even exercise might seem enjoyable if you could go to a gentlemen's club. Spend a bit of time on the work-out equipment while chatting idly with other well-heeled members, run a couple of laps on the indoor track, swim the pleasantly heated pool, relax in the sauna, let the masseur rub down all those knotted-up muscles, take an invigorating shower and then saunter into the office for the morning's work sometime around 11:30 ... Lunch at 12:30, of course. To make time for all this pleasant, stimulating self-indulgence, naturally you leave your bed for the housekeeper to make up. Your valet had

your clothes laid out for you, and saw to your laundry as well. To spare yourself the aggravation of driving in traffic, you might well ponder the cost-effectiveness of a chauffeur to drive you to the office in your sumptuous Audi or BMW. All the more time for you to read the paper or buff your immaculate nails.

If you have ever wondered why media superstars, powerful businessmen and celebrity politicians are always slim and trim, being fabulously wealthy is the secret.

No, there's nothing as good for your health as being rich. No amount of virtuous exertion, self-discipline or preaching can make up for the lack of wealth.

LEFTOVER PARTS 29

WAHF – **Earl Kemp**, earl@earlkemp.com whose cat Zeus is 19 and still thundering. **Mark Manning**, tandmark@outlook.com who downloaded a corrupted copy. He thinks it was because his system was defragging at the time. **Dave Haren**, tyrbolo@comcast.net, **William Breiding**, wmbreiding@yahoo.com who doesn't generally read digital fanzines, but did download *The Slan of Baker Street*, and notes that I've become something of a "hyperfan" of late. **Alan White**, podmogul@cox.net who sends a photo of a three-headed guy in a three-headed dog suit ... or maybe just three guys in three one-headed dog suits. **William Earl Haskell**, forban@hal-pc.org who sent an e-mail attachment of an offbeat newspaper clipping.

Barry Ken MacKay, mimus@sympatico.ca

Lucille Ball trivia: She, and Roger Tory Peterson, were both born in Jamestown, NY. One year, Jamestown ran a poll to see who their most famous son/daughter was. Peterson, who was a mentor of mine (I never met Ball) won by one vote.

Lucille Ball was said to hate any images of birds, and had none in her residence. Peterson was, of course, a famous bird painter. Coincidence? I think not.

Being a bird artist myself, if not famous, I started not to like Ball, and then I heard that she was extremely right wing. Yech. I don't like people who get rich and then assume that, because they did it, everyone should be able to, and the State plays no role. Looking at her work critically, I became critical. But all evaluation of art and entertainment is subjective, no?

Michael Dobson, michael@dobsonbooks.com

"It's a sad and ranty distempered issue, so I'd almost not blame you for not reading it." (From your e-mail).

I did, and hope things look up. I went through my own battle with the "black dog" of depression a few years ago, the worst one I'd ever experienced. This too shall pass, they say, but that doesn't always mean

things get better.

I agree that modeling the FAAn Awards on the Hugos or Oscars is kind of beside the point. Recognizing excellence doesn't have to be a competitive exercise, and expanding the egoboo pool is always a good idea.

Bob Jennings, FabFicBks@aol.com

Received the latest issue of *Broken Toys*, thanks for sending it along. I sent you a fairly long LOC on your previous issue, but I am unsure if you got the email, since I noticed I am not even mentioned in the 'Also Heard From' lettercol notes. Anyway, this one will be shorter due to other things that have to be done around here.

I guess I didn't. Shit happens, and e-shit happens to e-mail.

My sympathies for the loss of your beloved cat. Pets become family members and it's awful when they die. This is the reason I have not adopted any new pets after my two cats died a long time ago. It just hurts too much to ever go through that again.

Although I've pretty much said all I want to say about the FAAN and the Hugo fandom awards, several times over, I will inject a couple of points, anyway. People tend to think in immediate terms. Few people (more likely, none) will go back through their fanzine accumulation over the past year to pick out the stuff they thought was the best. It's more a glance at what arrived lately, and then the tricks of memory – oh yeah, Joe Blow wrote some fine stuff – he's always been great, so I guess I'll vote for him.

In addition, so far as the FAAN awards go, a lot of name fans have revealed in letters and comments that they don't even bother to read most of the new zines they get in the mail, and presumably they also don't bother to check many the publications posted on the eFanzines site. If a majority of fans won't even look at the inflow of new material, then they are just voting from nostalgic reflex. I don't think either of these awards has any relevance to the world of SF fandom any more. I also don't see anything new or more inclusive or representative of the depth of our little hobby coming along either. That's just the way the world is today.

Ron Kasman, ron.kasman@gmail.com

Hi, Taral. The issue wasn't *that* much of a downer. OK, there were two deaths in it, but you wrote nice tributes about them both. And we found out that you got out a bit, overate, and got some books. Sounds like a good time to me. I am glad your legs are getting a bit better, and that, when they're not, your roller is helpful.

I am not sure if I like or dislike fandom more, myself. How about this – I like many of the people I have met in fandom. They are among my very best friends. But some of the people are so petty that there are times when it is just not worth engaging. But you know what is great about being a modern fan? Somebody finally coined a word to describe us, and that somebody was Dr. Asperger. And the word sounds like ASS BURGER, which fits us almost as well. Now, when I am going to a function and I want to describe to a normal person what I'll be doing, I don't have to go into a long song and dance. I just say, "They are all Asperger, like me, but I love them just them same". Of course, I don't love them all. Many of them are really dinks. Prodom is even worse.

Ron is talking about comics prodom of course. SF pros couldn't be dinks ... could they?

Brad Foster, bwfoster@juno.com

While you gave that short warning in the email accompanying last issue, as well as at the start of your opening comments *in* the issue, I can't help but notice that you also have upbeat things to note about what is going on now, and how things are even improving in some regards. So, personally, it reads more like the usual Taral. That is, as you yourself have noted in the past, your normal state is to see the darker side of things. So I was expecting a deeper dark this time from your warning, but not *seeing* it. Indeed, your note about "...and I'll get over it in all good time. Maybe even by next issue, if we're lucky..." comes quite quickly after a short grouching, and sets the way for good news in that very issue. (Of course, that could also be the result of my own normal state of being a Mr. Sunshine, always seeing the lighter side of things. Hey, maybe we met in the middle that way!)

We could Vulcan mind-meld and create an indifferent shade of off-gray!

That book on USA states that-never-were sounded fascinating. What is the title and author on that? Would love to check it out in the future, so can add it to my wish list of books.

It is called *Lost States*, by Michael J. Trinklein, Quirk Books 2010, \$24.95. Maybe you can find a used copy?

After reading your piece on Crad Kilodney, I checked out the links you gave. I think I have run across some of those in the past. Maybe not the actual books themselves, but a number of the titles are very familiar, as is his publishing name Charnel House, so probably read about them through other folks writing about him in zines. Possibly through zines like the ol' *Factsheet 5*, which covered so much of the world of small pubbing. Might even have had a brush with him myself way back when, but too lazy to go dig through decades old files right now.

I followed your posts on Facebook as you chronicled the end for the lovely Sailor Moon. I cried then, and made my comments there. I can only add again, I do hope you will find another companion to share your life with to carry on for her. They will pass before we do – but we know that, and why give up the love for years just because we know it will end. It is good to read you are already thinking of rescuing another small furry that might have no life at all, and bringing some purring joy back into your home. Looking forward to seeing photos in an issue or two of the new one!

"Whack!" sound of hand being slapped to forehead on reading your response to me in the locs "I think it's called the colophon." I should have known that! Thanks for kindly not adding a deserved "...you idiot" at the end of your response!

Great to read at the end here that you find yourself back at the drawing board more again. I'm still trying to get back my good habits of drawing that I seem to have lost last year with the two eye surgeries, cutting way back on how much work I was able to do. Finding too many excuses to do other things than actually sit down and pull the pen over paper at the rate I used to. But, getting better. I could identify with your line, "I can turn on the set, and let it babble at me while I bury my nose in the drawing board..." as I've noticed the same thing. I tend to treat television like a radio, just looking up once in a while, but mostly listening to it while I work. Whereas, if I went out of my way to pick something to play on the DVD, I'd feel I have to pay closer attention. On the other hand, I'm so lazy about actually looking at things like that, I have movies that were gifts that I have never actually watched from disc,

but saw them on television since receiving the gift. I think I just use the TV as background noise to fill in, so I can then concentrate on whatever I am trying to work on. Cindy can work in an absolutely quiet house, but I always have either the radio on, or something on the TV, or a podcast off the computer. Possibly as my hearing is getting worse and worse, I really don't care for the absolute silence – kind of creepy!

Too much silence and you begin to feel like you're slowly coasting toward Jupiter, and there's no one on the Discovery to talk to but Hal 9000. Even the 200th iteration of "Daisy, Daisy" begins to sound good.

What I *really* need to do is to hide my password to Facebook somewhere that I'd have to get up, and go get it, to make it less easy to "just check in" on FB a dozen times a day, and suck up and waste so much time that I should be using to work on drawing or writing ... or even work around the house. I still need to fix an old side porch that used to be enclosed with wire screening, and that the cats could get into from the house so they could get "outside" without being exposed to the other animals in the neighborhood. Had to rip out old rotted boards and such from there a couple of years back, and have meant to re-do the porch with new boards, re-tack up the chicken wire, and let the cats back out. Hey, guess what? Still haven't gotten to it... and here I am, sitting at the computer, still not doing it.

Okay, that's it. I should at least get up and cut down some of the weeds in the front yard before the neighbors move from glaring at me to actively throwing bottles at me as I drive by. I'm outta here!

Ned Brooks, nedbrooks@sprynet.com

Interesting about Crad Kilodney. I have only a bad photocopy of *Blood-Sucking Monkeys of North Tonawanda*. I would guess, from the three covers you show, that more than one artist was involved as the styles are so different.

Sorry to hear about Sailor, but 17 is very old for a cat.

My sister and one of her sons, Charlie McCarthy, went to Chile (where we grew up in the late 40s and early 50s) to see the city of Concepcion again - and they were on Easter Island at Easter. They came back with very bad head colds. While they were gone I cleared out a cubic yard of clothes that I would never wear again and put bookshelves in that closet (in this house, not the one where my sister lives in the next county). Now the kitchen ceiling fluorescent fixture there – the most useful and most difficult lighting fixture in the house – has failed and I will have to see if I can fix it. It should not have failed so soon – her son-in-law, who is an electrician in Gloucester MA, put in a new one a few years ago. I have owned three houses and never had one fail, though putting new tubes in is awkward.

I take it that your nephew, Charlie McCarthy, is not the wooden partner in Edgar Bergen's act?

Eric Mayer, groggy.tales@gmail.com

With the passing of Sailor and all your health problems it's no wonder you are feeling a bit of malaise. If you were able to crank out an excellent fanzine that's more than most would do under the circumstances.

Note that you've heard some of the following already, but I figured I had better put it into my "official" loc.

I am sorry about your loss of Sailor. As you know, our own Sabrina died a couple years ago, age twenty-one. In her case, she had taken to sitting in my lap constantly, and scolding me every time I put her down to leave the office. In her last days she insisted on sitting as usual, but I had to haul her up, as she was too weak to get up herself.

Mary and I considered whether she ought to be taken to the vet when she was obviously dying. But she seemed not to be suffering too much. I got up one morning expecting to find her gone, but there was still a spark of life there, so I put her in my lap as usual, which is where she died.

It is amazing how the absence of a mere cat is felt. After Sabrina died the house seemed much emptier. I had her remains cremated, and returned them to the house in a small wooden box with a plaque on it, which sits on the top shelf of the bookcase, whose bottom shelf she had taken over for a nest. She took to curling up in a space on that shelf, and after a while we ceded it to her, and put there one of those fuzzy, commode covers, which we haven't yet taken away.

I was heartened to read in Brad Foster's loc about his disinterest in much of modern culture. I had begun to think I was the only person in the world who didn't give a rat's ass about either Harry Potter or *Game of Thrones*. (Reading on I see that Ron Kasman and Ned Brooks are not Potter fans either!) Like Brad, I just can't work up any interest in them. Perhaps it has to do with age and being out of step with the times, but it is certainly not a conscious act of rejection, simply because they are new creations. I've never been able to work up any interest in wizards aside from the villainous ones encountered by Conan the Barbarian or Clark Ashton Smith's hapless protagonists. And as for *Thrones*, if I wanted to struggle through impossibly convoluted medieval history I'd read actual impossibly convoluted medieval histories!

Which I do! Harry Potter repays reading if you stick through the first novel, but I can respect anyone who just doesn't find the premise appealing. Similarly, I find nothing of interest in the premise of *Game of Drones*.

Like you and some of your loccers I am not a suit person. I had to wear a jacket and tie to the office when I worked in-house for a legal publisher. I found a big box full of ties at the thrift store for \$4. There were ties practically as thin as strings, others wide as bibs and every size in-between. I wore that selection for years. The tie was nothing more than a mark of corporate servitude really. No one cared about the aesthetics.

Re: Robert E Howard. I still enjoy his stuff. *Conan* in particular, but I recently read his Solomon Kane stories and thought they were quite entertaining.

I enjoyed the Howard *Conan*, but came to reject the efforts by deCamp and others to milk the series dry.

Probably I have already said too much about the FAAn awards. Your idea of a non-award appreciation poll, or whatever you would call it, makes sense as a way to recognize meritorious individual efforts in a hobby devoted mostly to communicating and socializing, where perceived merit is largely based on friendships.

I thoroughly enjoyed Murray Moore's *Fanthology*. He does admit it is only "some of the best fanwriting" but still, I think he shouldn't have called it "Fanthology." In the past that title has applied to collections of what the editor/editor's selected as the best fanwriting of the year, and usually that meant from fanzines. Granted, it is a good idea to expand fanwriting to include blogs, websites, lists etc. However, when you *exclude* electronic-only zines, which make up a big percentage of all fanzines, then you don't

have a really representative selection. Why Murray has no problem reading a column on a website but doesn't want to open up a pdf on eFanzines to read a column in a zine is beyond me.

Aside from that, I found it a very entertaining mix of different sorts of writings from every corner of fandom *except e-zines*. It was a lot more varied than the typical *Fanthology* – kind of Murray's favorites of 2013. And actually, it might be interesting if more fans put together such collections to bring to others' attention material they liked, but others might very well have missed.

Is it the FAAn award winner for next year's Best Single Issue?

My Official Line about the FAAn awards is “never heard of them.” It'll not only save *me* a lot of aggravation, but also save Andrew Hooper a lot of aggravation, because he won't have to read my gripping about it!

I've never been inspired to do art for it's own sake, or even art for my own sake. For me the game has never been any fun unless I knew I had an audience. Even if it was only Johnny who was sitting on the porch drawing his own cartoons, and we were going to share them with each other when we finished. These days I don't have much of a faanish audience for my mundane ramblings ... not surprisingly.

Richard A. Wright, Ogre302@aol.com

That's the thing about CGI... while it makes things possible that couldn't be pulled off any other way, it's become way too much of a crutch, and even simple things are being computer generated. It's taking the art out of movie making. While I know they need artists to make the stuff, it lacks the tangible *feel*... It's like the difference between a digital Mona Lisa vs. a hand painted version.

And Disney... how do they do it? I mean... *Frozen* was okay... but it's become this huge sensation. There are even videos of military squads singing "Let it go," and customers who have it as ring tones. For me it's very much an "Eh, that's kinda cute," while everyone around me is all starry eyed and emotional.

The *real* piss-me-off about *Frozen* was in the special features on the Blu Ray where they had "How was *Frozen* made?" which I intended to watch with interest because there might be some creative character creation methods and so on... but it was a Glee like musical number that was pretty much *nothing* but "How Was *Frozen* Made?" being sung over and over and over again until at the end they're all getting into the theater and sitting down and they hit the crescendo ... "We don't know!"

If it weren't a rental I would have used that disk as a target for my throwing knives ... such a satisfying thud...

I hear *Maleficent* is supposed to be pretty good but I'll reserve judgment for when it comes to video. It really ain't my thang.

For the life of me, I don't understand the blockbuster success of *Frozen*, either. It was a pretty fair animated film; strong on "pretty" visuals and the sort of stage music I don't really care for. But there was nothing really remarkable about it except for snowstorms. The female leads were strong and, as usual for Disney "Princess" films, the male characters were lovable lunkheads at best, or comic villains. I find this formula about as tiresome as dumb blondes and bitchy vamps must be to female viewers. There is even a "Jar Jar Binks" – had the comic snowman been deleted, it would have been a better and shorter film. As for *Maleficent*, I don't know much about it. Reviews seem mixed. However, if Disney is true to form, it'll follow one success with an imitation, then another, and another. So all I would expect from the new film is another Broadway musical, with pretty effects and strong female leads. And lots and lots of media tie-ins!

I haven't enjoyed much in the way of movies lately. *Fast and Furious* is an obvious favorite, also loved *The Losers*. But really nothing much has said, "*buy me!*" While the movies weren't *art* (Except to car guys ... those cars are works of art. They were fun and took me into their world for a while.

I have been spending more and more time on Youtube watching old cartoon series like *Bravestar* (a moving inspiration in one of my *own* creations), and *Tiger Sharks*.

I like cars, but think I'll pass on automotive porn.

Steve Stiles, stevecartoon2001@gmail.com

Just came to an abrupt halt on a piece of art I've been working on; sometimes there are jobs that just seem to flow wonderfully, and then there are the other kind, when every brush stroke or pen line seems to go wrong. It was like wading through tarry sludge. That being the case (temporary, I hope), I have given up on this commission for today and am going on to do something entirely dissimilar ... namely attempting to write a LoC ... and I'm not even getting paid for it! Hopefully, I can do some justice to *Broken Toys*. God, I've got a box full of worthy, uncommented-on fanzines. I stopped counting after a dozen, and, of the unread, some of the ones I'm particularly eager to peruse are from 1958, 1962, and 1968 – booty from Corflu 31. Not only that, but I've also just picked up the Benford/Niven novel *Shipstar*, because I thought it would be unique to read some science fiction for a change. (Also hope to pick the new Christopher Moore book if it's in Balticon's huckster room this Friday.)

In light of all the unscrutinized novels waiting for me, why have I spent the last few nights rereading a *Freddy the Pig* book?

Because you're free to enjoy *Freddy the Pig* without your literary standards hovering over you like a scolding aunt, demanding that you appreciate what actually bores the crap out of you?

It's always rough when someone you know passes on. In February of this year Bhob Stewart died. There was a memorial in New York for him on May 4th that I wasn't able to attend, being in Richmond that Sunday, but I thought it would be appropriate to say a few words about him during the Corflu awards ceremony. To my surprise, I started to say a few words and then choked up – speaking aloud about Bhob's death somehow made it suddenly seem more real, more "official," more awful. When we got back home, I then learned, via *File 770*, that Larry Ivie had passed away. All this about a year after Dan Adkins had left us.

The late fifties/early-sixties were very important and exciting years for me as I developed, and Bhob, Dan, and Larry were integral parts of my memories of those years; their deaths diminish me, as so many others have. Those three were among the earliest fans I met when I got into the microcosm in the late fifties, all three were artists and all three had encouragement and advice for me. I was closer friends with Bhob and Dan – Larry was a very quiet guy and difficult for me to know, but there were many pleasant Saturday afternoons spent in his apartment, going through his marvelous collection of *The Spirit* Sunday supplements; Eisner was totally unknown to a younger generation of comics fans in those days, and it was a big revelation to me that there were more creative ways to tell an adventure story than the crappy pabulum that DC Comics was turning out in rigid blocks of panels. Larry also introduced me to Tolkien's fiction, then largely unknown, but the thing I'll remember most about those days was when we, and my best friend Bob Krolak, were chased out of Central Park by a mounted policeman for the sin of attempting to make an amateur film without a license. Maybe the capes and weird helmets freaked out his unimaginative soul.

Fandom has had too many visits from the Grim Reaper this and last year. I'm used to seeing strange names on the File 770 site, those who have passed away, and thought nothing of it. Lately, though, the names have been people I knew. Soon, the obituaries are going to start striking even closer to home! All too soon the callow newbies and their podcasts and web comics and all that will have fandom to themselves!

Sorry to read about Sailor. This is pretty much the way most of our previous cats died after fortunately long lives – a drawn out process of fading away. With our last cat, Socks, it was as if he had gone from being an old but highly energetic cat to suddenly being extremely aged and feeble, as if a switch had been thrown – which, genetically, was what had happened. The decline similar to your cat's followed – sad but to my mind preferable to a trip to the vet for death in unfamiliar surroundings. We had to do that with our second Lab [Labrador Retriever], Dickens and it was unavoidable but heart breaking. Watson, on the other hand, unexpectedly died from brain seizures that hit him a two in the morning – it was more than an hour before the emergency vet could get to our place, a horrifying experience. Some years later I was dozing on the couch and felt him climb up and snuggle next to me. I could feel his fur and smell his clean-laundry scent. And then I woke up.

I've had dreams like that about my cats – as well as my mother – but that's for another time, another issue.

Interesting about the literature of Crad Kilodney. I love the titles and covers of his books, and posted a number of them on my Facebook pages. I wonder if any of his fiction could be adapted in underground comics format – not that there's any underground comix market that I'm aware of above the level of amateur magazines. I note that some of his novels are priced as high as \$99.00 on Amazon. I've bookmarked his two sites in the Humor/Weirdness folder, hopefully not doing him an injustice, although I see in his biography that he wrote for The National Lampoon.

I've been gratified to win the FAAn Award, but the regularity, although flattering, has gotten to the point of being embarrassing in the light other talents like you and Schirm, even though you and Andy Hooper love me like a brother (actually, truly, my brother disowned me years ago, so I hope you don't love me like he did). I'd prefer to just contend in the Best Fanzine Cover arena. Dan probably feels similarly.

For my part, the issue is probably beyond repair and has become an embarrassment for me too. I don't like kvetching – it makes me vulnerable to accusations of having too big an ego. (As if it *could* be any larger than it is!) So, if there are no surprises next year, either, I'm just going to keep my peace and think about something else. After all, I still have the Aurora awards to beat up on.

Lloyd Penny, penneys@bell.net

Got another loc for you ... I did find *Broken Toys* 28 in the pile of e-zines to be locced, so here goes, and I will be caught up with you.

We understand about it being a hard year. We've had a number of hard years, and the light at the end of the tunnel is in sight, and I won't depress you further with the details, you might read about it elsewhere. It's just that Yvonne and I are quite relieved, and we hope to pass on this good luck onto to other who could use it, including you.

I do understand that you could dislike fandom, seeing how much it's changed while you weren't looking, or maybe you were looking, and didn't like what you saw. I feel much the same way, but

fandom is not some union or secret mystic society, but what we and others put into it. There's fewer of 'we', and more of the others, so we shouldn't be too surprised to see how much has changed. Fandom has certainly left me behind, but I am finding other things to enjoy.

There are always other things to enjoy. Although with the passage of time, age tends to erode away at them... I enjoy having company, watching a movie, talking, or going out to dinner instead ... but it doesn't happen often. I never took a shine to the current crop of Toronto fans, whom I don't seem to share any interests with. If I do, I don't know it, because all I've overheard at First Thursdays is gossip, convention business and talk about books or authors I have no desire to read. This is one reason I rather loudly go around saying "I'm not an SF fan." I read very little SF or fantasy, and have enough old, old work on my shelves to keep me satisfied for years yet. Who needs the latest iteration of L. Sprague deCamp when I have the original unread, and I'm not very keen on it anyway? Same with Larry Nivenesque or Samuel Delanyesque "moderns." Generally, I benefit from Bob Wilson's recommendations. He put me onto Michael Chabon, for instance. But of late, I don't think he has been especially enthusiastic about much in the genre, either. I think the last things he suggested I try were *Cloud Atlas* (which was very good, if a little difficult), and Ted Chiang's short stories. Bob seems more interested in the genre's short stories than most of its novels.

I think a previous loc of mine commented on Crad Kilodney. I'd seen him on the street, but had never had the impetus (or the cash) to buy a book from him. I'm sorry he's gone, for he was one of the true characters on Toronto streets.

They were only a buck or two, but back then that seemed like \$5 or \$6, didn't it? Also, I never found them a very good read – just a sort of literary vandalism that the author practiced.

If a portrait is a painting with the mouth done wrong, then my passport photo is a portrait. I look like I've been in a fight, and lost.

Mine was taken at the worst of my droopy eyelid episode, and makes me look like Popeye the Sailor. Driver's License too.

A friend of mine who runs a small men's wear shop, and who is also an Anglican priest on the side, told me he officiated at a wedding at a furry convention, probably the one this past spring on the airport strip. I think I surprised him, by knowing who the furies are, and by not falling over laughing. I told him I might have had friends at that wedding. I did not inquire as to how the bride and groom were dressed. There's an answer I'm a little afraid of.

The headquarters building for the movie *Police Academy* was the old insane asylum building just beyond the foot of Kipling Avenue. Now, there's typecasting. They also used to run long flatbeds in our old neighbourhood with police cars on them, sometimes at a 45° angle, and a camera in front of it. Our old red Micra might be in the background of one of the shots for a split-second.

I remember that place. You couldn't get near it, of course, but sometimes caught a glimpse of a big old building through the trees. At one time I thought it might have been where that WWII spy school near Toronto was. But that's actually in the east end, somewhere, near Ajax I think. You're probably aware that Kensington Market was where they shot the race riot in the same *Police Academy* film?

I have already commented on the FAAn winners, and congratulations to them. I have won my share, five awards, so I am pleased, and shall continue with letter writing. I can't say more than that.

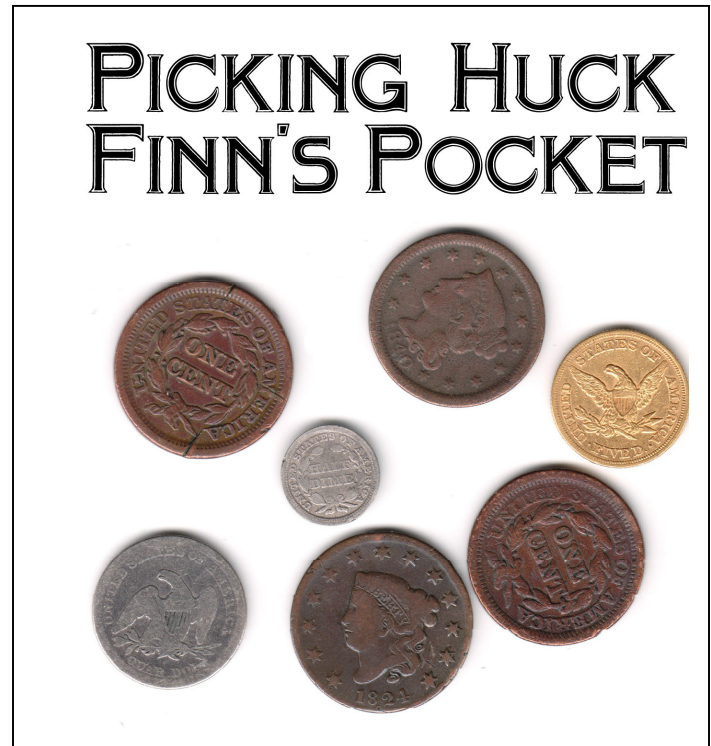
FAAns or Auroras? I know you've won one or two FAAns for letter hacking, before Robert Lichtman sewed it up completely. But I had the impression you won at least a pair of Auroras. Without my physically attending cons, I haven't a chance at anything, I don't think. Even the awards for fanzine activity seem largely determined by social factors. Oh well, I've won every year in Graeme's awards... Speaking of which, I wonder if he can stop writing for

Amazing Stories long enough to run them this year? I'd kind of like to manage a "hat trick" -- best fanzine, best fan artist and best fan writer. I'm lacking the last one still. Not that anyone has heard of Graeme's awards ... like a true Canadian fan, he can't give them a short pithy name that anyone can remember. Instead, he named them like a government bureau for fish hatcheries. Anyway, he seems to be having too much fun being a columnist and has said to me many times that he tends to be scatterbrained (i.e. has far more projects on-going than he can possibly remember to keep up with). Maybe he'll give the 2014 awards in 2015?

Years ago, a good friend of mine gave me a book. Not any old book. It was an early edition of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, dated 1891.

I was never sure what edition it was, however. Plainly, it wasn't the *first* edition, since *that* was published in 1884. But my copy was the original publisher, and had the correct illustrations. Certain other points, however, were different. For one thing, the colour of the boards was brown, not blue. But I was never able to pin down whether the book was a second, third or even later edition. Book dealers I knew were unable to help.

I also went on line for the information, but that was before powerful on-line search engines, so my efforts were fruitless. After a certain amount of time thrashing around the Internet, I finally gave up.



Then, just weeks ago, I read a book on the San Francisco Bohemians. They were the brief-lived literary group that took its name from Bret Harte's *nom de plume*, "The Bohemian." It consisted of Harte, poets Charles Warren Stoddard and Inna Coolbrith, Ambrose Bierce and Mark Twain. As a group, their existence corresponds almost exactly with Twain's arrival in San Francisco in 1864 and his departure to the East in 1869.

Regardless of the two-part episode of Star Trek: the New Generation, Twain never returned to the West Coast, and never met Jack London. It must have been an alternate time-line.

Reading about the Bohemians woke an old impulse. I had read *Huck Finn* many times, of course, and I wanted to read it at least once more in its original form. Yet I kept putting it off, over the years, until by and by (as Twain would say) I forgot the whole matter. Now, nothing would do but read it right away!

I still did not know what edition I had. But now that the matter had been brought to mind again, I realized that it all came down to Google, and knowing the right questions to ask. Sure enough, my copy of *Huck Finn* is unquestionably the *second* edition. There are copies of it for sale all over ABEbooks.

Wowzers. (Which is *not* anything Mark Twain would *ever* say.) I was a little disappointed to discover that the second edition cut a few corners in production. Not all the original illustrations were reproduced

in 1891. Also, it didn't turn out to be the fabulously rare and expensive volume that I had expected. There happen to be quite a lot of second editions for sale, even numerous *first* editions, and at prices that are surprisingly reasonable for what one would think to be a scarce and highly sought after work. To be sure, you can spend up to \$38,000 on an impeccably preserved, first edition, personally signed by the author. But if the reader is prepared to do without author's own hand on the title page, and can endure a bit of wear, the price drops to a few hundred. Second editions, a little beat up, go for under \$200. I believe I saw one that might have been in somewhat worse shape than my copy, for sale at the measly price of 80 bucks.

I won't say much about the book – you've all read it, I assume. If not, I can't imagine the reason ... unless, perhaps, you are a recent immigrant to this country, and your command of the English language is still not fluent enough for recreational use. Even then, I'm certain there are translations into Tamil, Russian, Arabic and even Jamaican.

The experience of reading *Huck Finn*, just as it was read by thousands of readers in Twain's own lifetime, gained even more authenticity when I remembered my coin collection. I hurriedly ransacked it for contemporary loose change from Huck's own era. I came up with four pennies, a half-dime (not a *nickel* – a *half-dime* is silver), a quarter and a \$5 gold piece called a "half eagle." \$5.38 doesn't sound like very much, but in fact it was five days wages for an unskilled workingman in the 1840s and '50s.

The sense of money's value in the book is, in fact, hard to get a grip on. Tom or Huck several times gave one of the slaves a five-cent piece to buy his silence, so it couldn't have been thought any great loss. But then, Tom gives Jim \$40 at the end of the book, for being a good enough sport to put up with all Tom's make-believe during the "escape." That doesn't sound like a great deal of money either, considering all the bother they put him to. Yet Jim said he was rich again, just as his fortune-telling hairball foretold! Was \$40 a lot of money then ... or not?

To put it in perspective, a working man in the 1840s likely wasn't paid more than \$1 a day for labour we'd judge a cruel burden for a mule! So \$40 is a little less than six week's wages, six days a week, ten hours a day. At \$10 an hour, think of it as about \$4,000. It's not a shabby sum to toss around lightly!

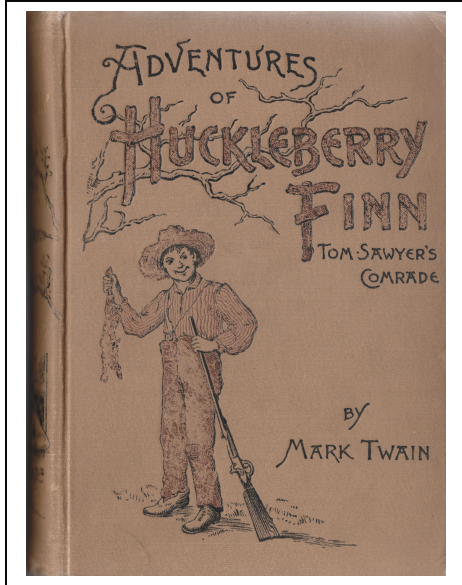
As it happens, five cents is about five bucks in today's terms, so maybe that *is* about right for a minor bribe to ensure a slave's silence. Mind you, I still think Jim owed Tom a thump on the head for putting him through all that trouble of living with spiders and snakes, inscribing gibberish on an old mill-stone that he had to move into his prison himself, for having to make a saw out of a case knife when there was a perfectly good saw at hand, and all sorts of other rubbish Tom had read in adventure books. In fact, a thump hardly seems to cover it. Maybe a duck in the river, with 70 pounds of ballast tied to Tom's good leg. If you don't know what all that's about, you better read the book.

And my \$5.38 would be roughly equivalent to \$538. Rest assured, I paid *much less* than that for it.

Bottom line, though, is that it was a blast reading the 125-year-old book alongside the 175-year-old coins that would have been in Huck's own pocket in the 1840s. Now if only I had an old slouch hat, a raft, and a river...

As it happens, I do have a nice Tilly, which is functionally about the same as the shapeless crown and wide brim commonly worn by ordinary men in the 1840s and '50s. And I've been on The River. Years ago, when Victoria and I drove to the Kansas City Worldcon, we camped overnight on the Mississippi, directly across from Hannibal, Missouri. Hannibal was where Twain spent his childhood, and is the

inspiration from which he drew the fictional St. Petersburg, where Huck Finn grew up. Next day, we drove over the bridge to do the tourist thing. Much of old Hannibal remains just as it was when Twain left to take up riverboat piloting. His home is open to visitors, as are some of the other buildings. The center of the old town was literally a stone's throw from the dock and The River. The street was still dirt, if I remember correctly. Later, we toured the famous caverns that Twain turned into Tom Sawyer's cave. The reality is much as the author depicted it. It is a labyrinth of narrow, winding passages,



with a flat floor and no flowstone formations. As caves go, it is not in fact very impressive ... but it would be no place to be lost in, that's certain!

The Mark Twain cave was early on known as the MacDougal cave, after the property's owner. Made famous by *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, it was later renamed after the author, and became a popular tourist attraction. All manner of people have visited at one time or another, including even Jesse James. His name and the date, smoked on one wall of the cave, are shown to tourists to this day. One only hopes that it wasn't *MacDougal* who smoked it upon the wall, long after the outlaw's death...

So I have been to The River, as well as jingled the coins in my own hand ... and re-lived memories, vividly brought to mind again by one very old book. This was one present that went on giving, indeed.

Pocketful of Histories:

Saladin Half-Dirham, 1169 – 1193

I have little interest in Islamic or Arabic coins. A couple of those that I *do* have are from Northern India. One badly encrusted bronze in my collection was from Mamluk Egypt, so only marginally "ancient." I also have an Abbasid silver coin about the size of a transit token whose identity I'm uncertain of. The dealer who sold it to me for \$5 back in the 1980s ID'd it as 10th. Century Abbasid. The Abbasids were the second line of caliphs, after the Umayyads. The problem is that I've seen a lot of Abbasid coins on the Internet since, and in dealer's collections, and mine looks nothing like any of them! I've searched the Internet for a match and found nothing convincing. Nor does my expert dealer know what it is ... other than it *is* Islamic. He suggested perhaps North Africa, but I lean to the Northwest frontier of India. The final Islamic coin I have is a badly worn bronze thing that was copied from comparable Byzantine coins when the Arabs overran Syria. They are usually called "Standing Caliph" types because they resemble the standing Byzantine emperor on the coins of conquered lands.

That was how matters stood with my collection for ages. But early this year, I bought a very fine silver Dirham that was struck by Haroun Al Rashid in the late 8th or early 9th century. It was a fairly modern looking coin. As usual, there was nothing to see on it but Arabic squiggles on both sides. That's why I don't collect Islamic coins. Bor - ring! I wanted this one for a particular reason, though. Haroun Al Rashid, the caliph who minted it, as the caliph who appears in many of the stories in "A Thousand and One Nights." Yes, he was a real person ... though the stories are just stories. For that matter, the stories are older than Islam and the caliphate!

So, you might ask, what have I bought now? As it happens, there was one other Islamic coin I wanted, one by Saladin that I never seemed able to find. Finally, my favourite dealer offered me two. One was what is called a "mule." That is, it was struck with the same die on both sides, rather like a Lincoln Head penny with Honest Abe on back and front. I decided that wasn't for me. The other Saladin was the one illustrated. *It's* a bit peculiar too. While the sides were struck with different dies, they were the dies for a larger coin, a full Dirham. This is a half Dirham and too small for the entire strike, so the inscriptions run off the edge. Mind you, off-center strikes happen a lot with ancient coins anyway, so this didn't seem especially unusual. I bought it. Strangely, although Saladin struck these in the late 12th century, they are more primitive looking by far than the coins of Al Rashid ... struck nearly three centuries earlier!

Who was Saladin? Was he the guy who brought Salada tea to England? No, no, no ... For one thing, Salada isn't an English brand. It's actually Canadian. Saladin, however, was the most famous of all Saracens who fought the European crusaders in the Middle Ages. He was canny and quite successful in driving the "Franks" – as the Muslims knew the Crusaders – from Jerusalem and most of the Middle East. He was also known for his chivalrous behavior. When Jerusalem fell, he spared the inhabitants, which is more than the Crusaders did when they took Jerusalem a generation earlier. Richard the Lionhearted spoke highly of Saladin. I'd love to know what Saladin said of Richard, since the English king was in fact a bloodthirsty monster with little love of anything but war and money to wage war with.

Strangely, Saladin is not so famous in the Islamic world as he was in Europe. His generosity may have been his undoing, because he died bankrupt. His progeny carried on his dynasty – the Ayyubids – but the Europeans had not been completely expelled from the Middle East. They still held impregnable fortresses such as the Krak de Chevaliers, as well as major coastal cities such as Antioch and Aleppo. It took another militant hero, the Mamluk sultan Baybars from Egypt, to finally throw the European presence out of the Holy Land. So it is Baybars the Islamic world reveres, not Saladin. But, honestly... can you imagine anyone drinking "Baybars Tea?" Of course not. It had to be Saladin, or nothing!



NEXT ISSUE! ... will also be issue 30, and I wonder whether or not I should do anything special for it? Or just the usual bitching, hysterical raving and gloom?