

Broken Toys 35 is brought to you in a fanfare of kazoos by **Taral Wayne**, who by mere formality lives at 245 Dunn Ave., Apt. 2111, Toronto, Ontario, M6K 1S6 Canada. Send locs by e-mail to Taral@bell.net. All back issues are available as free downloads at eFanzines.com, <http://www.fanac.org/fanzines/BrokenToys/> or at Fanac.org, <http://efanzines.com/Taral/index.htm>. Future issues will only be made available in the future. © Kiddelidivee Books & Art 294 – January/February 2015

View of a New Ocean

The Spaniard looked out at the sparkling sea. It stretched unbroken to the horizon, and to left and right as far as he could see. He turned to his Indian guide and said, "What the devil is that? That's not China!"

Now that I stand upon a personal summit and see the unexpected ahead of me, I feel almost as disoriented as that Spanish conquistador. You see, this is *Broken Toys 35*, and I have never before published more than 34 issues of *anything*. I know what lies at my back, but the vast sea ahead of me is entirely unknown. I didn't come upon it altogether unexpectedly – there were signs along the way – nevertheless, I don't know what's out there. Is there land? Will it be the fabled Orient? Or will the briny abyss just go on and on, and whatever might be over the horizon be forever out of reach? Do you even know what the hell I'm talking about?

Probably not. What it comes down to is that I've been keeping up an impossible pace for several years now, and while it has been rewarding in itself, I feel it is time for some kind of change of pace. Increasingly, I feel as though the fandom I knew and thrived in has been marginalized and no longer offers me any challenges. Even if I undertook something ambitious enough to interest me, it seems unlikely to find the audience I crave. There's probably nothing to be done about it but press on and see what happens.

With this issue, you should be able to perceive how my direction has been changing.

To begin with, there was supposed to have been a Halloween issue before this. My readers

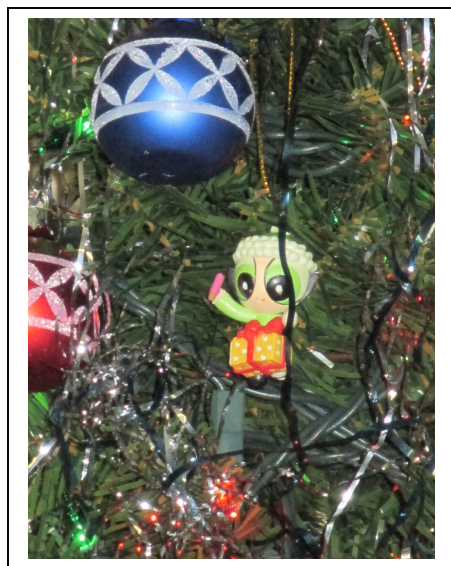
don't have to be very astute to notice it hasn't appeared. It hasn't been for the lack of trying, however. I'm afraid my plans were a trifle over-ambitious. I wanted to write a substantial Halloween story as the bulk of that issue, and while I pitched right into the work, it turned out to be more difficult than I had anticipated. The writing called for skills I didn't yet possess, and might not be able to develop.

I'm happy to say I've succeeded! Yes, I wrote an 8,200-word Halloween story, and it is either a very remarkable little feat of imagineering ... or a spectacular instance of supreme nerdishness. I suspect that opinions will differ. If you happen to think the latter, you may be in the majority, but keep it to yourself – after all, Shakespeare would probably draw a yawn from readers looking for con reports, reviews and fan gossip. I don't need to hear that I've published something you weren't prepared for – I already know that.

On the other hand, if the story brings a smile, be as fulsome in your praise as you can. It brightens up the day terrifically!

All that's for the next issue, however. Oh, did I mention that I'm publishing it at the same time as this issue? That's right. Issues 35 you hold in your hands, and issue 36 is the very, very late Halloween issue at last!

Last Year Was Ninety Minutes



Christmas has come and gone. And you know what? I actually got one of the items on my Wish List for Christmas! Yep, a humongous bottle of Grand Marnier orange flavoured cognac.

I even managed to put up my dinky little tree. Sadly, the effort of putting up the larger, old tree is now beyond me. Reaching up to the top exhausts me, so that hanging a single bulb is followed by an almost total collapse and a five-minute time-out. Even dressing a tree that is barely two feet tall – including the pot it is in – was a job that had to be prolonged over two days. On the first day, I unfurled the wire branches and fanned them out to create a magnificent spread of almost *14 inches*! I wound a single line of lights around it about a dozen times, and then carried the tree over to where I customarily displayed it in past years ... but couldn't find the end of the extension plug! I postponed the final step until Christmas Day.

Moving the tree to another spot did the trick. I decked it out with a couple of boxes of small glass ornaments I had bought, and the dozen or so cartoon figures I also had -- Lola Bunny with shopping bags, Kermit the Frog with Miss Piggy, each of the Powerpuff girls in winter coats, a mousie with an old-fashioned warming pan, etc. It was still a bit stark, but the tree always is until I've draped some tinsel over it. *Voila!* Like a Parisian tart, it's petite and very pretty ... especially with the living room lights out!

Those were the last words I wrote in 2014. There were also some notes for an article about the delivery of my power chair, about the other gifts “under” my tree, about Christmas day itself, on my own, watching a

pile of holiday films, and finally I had a few things to say about taking the chair out for its first spin on Boxing Day ... But the time I needed to finish the writing and proofread was fast running out. I posted what I had online with about an hour-and-a-quarter to spare, and closed the books on 2014.

So now that the turkey roll and the plum pudding are but a memory, and the Grand Marnier has been opened to celebrate the New Year, what more is there to say about the year just past?

Although nobody gave me the Roman denarius that I *also* mentioned in my Christmas List, I asked the dealer for his best price. It's a done deal, and now I'm waiting for it to come in the mail. That particular denarius is a coin with some dramatic history behind it, and well worth having. It reminds me a little of a movie in the stack I have yet to view over the holidays, *The Bishop's Wife*. This curious Cary Grant vehicle is about an angel named Dudley, who arrives over Christmas to sort out the life of David Niven, a bishop in some large American city, his wife and a number of other colourful characters. One of them is a professor of history who is writing a book on the Roman Empire. He has been writing it most of his life, and still hasn't discovered just what it is he wants to say about the Romans. He doesn't know it, either, but he is running out of time in which to finish his work. Fortunately, he has an angel to give him his angle.

For many years, the professor has kept a bronze sestertius as a kind of good-luck piece. To encourage him to finish his life's work, the angel tells him a story about the coin ... something that no one in the modern world knows. It's a preposterous tale, actually. According to Dudley, Julius Caesar ordered 100 of the sestertii struck to celebrate his affair with Cleopatra. His wife, Pompeia, got wind of it and ordered all the coins melted down ... of which only one, *this* one, escaped.

There never was such a coin, of course. Caesar would never have advertised the scandal. In fact, Caesar actually divorced his wife Pompeia over one of *her* supposed improprieties, with the pious rationale, "Caesar's wife must be above suspicion." Not that Pompeia's *husband* was above suspicion, you understand, but a Roman man could get away with those things as long as he wasn't actually seen sneaking out of the boudoir of another man's wife, naked and wrapped his milady's bedsheets. In any case, as a woman with no official *auctoritas* and little personal *dignitas*, Pompeia could never have ordered the coins melted. The Quaestor would have had her escorted out of the Temple of Saturn, where the minting was done, and notified Caesar immediately. Worse, the coin that the angel Dudley described as Julius Caesar's had the face of Trajan on it. *Trajan* ... who ruled Rome nearly 150 years after Caesar was assassinated.

Needless to say, the angel's anecdote was the perfect inspiration the old historian needed to finish his book ... even if it was a lie. Angels are devious beings. Dudley probably even knew that the professor would begin going to church again, and surely that justified any number of lies.

But think of that! The wonder of it isn't that it was the wrong coin, but that it was *any* real coin at all! But I got a clear look at it as the large brown coin went from one hand to the other, and the portrait of Trajan was easy to identify. I believe I was even able to spot its exact type from a catalog. If this wasn't a genuine sestertius, it was a darned good replica. Some prop manager had gone to a great deal of trouble to put the real article into Cary Grant's hand ... yet only to put the real, *wrong* article in it! What a joke. And I have to wonder how many people ever laughed at it, other than me?

Well, the Grand Marnier I have mentioned. But, not really expecting it, I had gone to the liquor store myself, and for the first time in years bought myself a little Christmas cheer of my own. I had only planned on an inexpensive bottle of domestic peach brandy, but the LCBO was out of stock. I didn't

fancy peach schnapps in its place, but luckily discovered a large bottle of amaretto next to it. I love amaretto, and the brand was a decent one. At \$22 it was only about two bucks more than I had been prepared to pay, so I bought it. Now I have two bottles of my favourite tipples with which to make toasts to the angels.

My sister had given me a pretty little bauble – a .9999 pure silver coin, double struck. Strangely, though, the portrait on it was a snowman. The Royal Canadian Mint strikes some of the damndest, most trivial stuff to sell to naïve collectors. But there was also a bubble pack of some uncirculated \$2 coins with a new design that were precisely the sort of thing for my collection.

I had a few gifts come in the mail, as well. There was a handsome collection of Floyd Gottfredson's original Mickey Mouse strips from the 1930s that Edd Vick sent me. I got the two J.K. Rowling mystery novels that were written under the name Robert Galbraith, from Bob Wilson. The bottle of Grand Marnier came from Steven Baldassarra. From Marc Schirmeister I got a number of oddities – a couple of kitschy movies on DVD, as well as the first two seasons of *I Dream of Jeannie*, a big picture book of Toronto from 1961 (with text by Pierre Berton), some of Peter Miller's Drag Cartoons and a copy of Evan Dorkin's *The Eltingville Comic Book, Science Fiction, Fantasy, Horror and Role Playing Club*. (After you've met the Eltingville Club, you want to quit fandom and join the Republicans!)

In addition, I brought home about three pounds of chocolate and a turkey roll from dinner at my sister's place. All in all, a very diverse haul.

Still, something seemed missing. Something vague, yet enormous had left a palpable hole in my Christmas. I think what was missing is that I'm no longer ten-years-old.

The last chapter in the long story of my acquiring an electrically powered chair from the Ontario Disability Support Program has finally been written. At last word, I was expecting the chair to be delivered a couple of days before Christmas. For once, nothing went wrong. The chair was duly delivered, I had a few last questions about it answered, and it was left in my possession. I have named it Traveling Matt. In a way, it was the greatest Christmas gift of all – my freedom.



Travelling Matt

Had it not arrived in December, it would have been perfect. But it was December, and if the snow dumped on Toronto early in the month had all melted, it was nevertheless seasonably cold. I also have trouble sleeping when I want or when I should, and for some time my waking hours have been almost exclusively after dark – when nothing is open, there is nowhere to go and the temperature begins to nose-dive. The next Monday was moderately warm, however, and I was able to tool up and down the main drag of Queen Street West. I picked up my prescription meds, checked out the video store for any used films that I might want, and bought a few fresh greens and beans for salad. Then I did something I haven't done in years – I went around the block for the hell of it! It was the first time I had gone anywhere without a clear purpose in so long that I can't say when the last time was. It was an unfamiliar pleasure to be moving along, effortlessly, seeing big old houses I hadn't been acquainted with in ages. Walking is better – no two ways about it. Walking is automatic. You don't have to be careful you don't drive off a curb or hit a bump that can send you

into a tree. With the chair I do have to pay a little bit of attention to what I'm doing, or I could end up in the gutter or crippling some other poor soul. It helps if I keep my speed down. At a setting of 5, the chair will scoot along quite smartly, at least 3 or 4 mph ... faster than a normal walk. At that pace, it can get a bit breezy. And on even a moderately warm December evening, breezy meant chilly. Do I need a blanket on my lap? A hip flask for me rhuamtiz medicine, too?

It was a few days after Christmas before I had a chance to go out again. I had my check to cash, rent and utilities to pay, and some grocery shopping to do in the supermarket across from the bank. It all had to be done before the first of the month, but the 25th was Christmas, and the 26th was Boxing Day and the day after that was Saturday, when the bank is closed too early. But Monday, Tuesday or Wednesday should have been all right, so I dressed warmly and hit the street on Wednesday, when the bank was open latest. Bad idea! It was the day before New Years, so the bank actually closed a whole lot earlier than usual. And it was closed the next day because it was New Years Day. I had braved the cold weather for nothing.

And, let me tell you, it was *cold!* No records were broken, but sitting quietly while you face into a stiff breeze is a sure recipe for chilling your butt. Not only that, but I think the batteries powering the chair were colder than is good for them – the chair began to feel lethargic. The operating manual doesn't recommend letting them get colder than -8° C (18° F). Guess what? Whole months go back in Ontario where winter temperatures may not rise above -8° C. If I have to go out, I had better not dawdle out there.

Nevertheless, it was great to be out in daylight, however briefly. Being winter, it was dark again before I even rode the ten blocks home.

Tomorrow is the second, when I'll try again. The bank should be open, the bills must be paid, and the weather will be marginally warmer – near freezing. Chance of flurries, though, so there will be a hint of adventure.

In a way, the Second will be the real first day of the New Year and whatever it's destined to bring.

The Oil Reich

Q: What do the Communist Party and the Conservative Party of Alberta have in common? **A:** Both begin with the letter C, and both have a monopoly of power. It took more than 70 years for the Communist Party to relinquish power in Russia. I wonder if it will take another 30 years for the Conservatives to relinquish office in Alberta?

Someone I knew once looked up the history of Alberta, and told me something that shocked me. The province had only had *four* governments in its entire history. Each was elected once, and remained in office an ungodly amount of time, and, when finally defeated, was never elected again. The Liberal Party, surprisingly, ruled from 1905 to 1921. The next 15 years were dominated by the entirely-forgotten United Farmers Party. The Social Credit Party – a weird combination of leftie economics and right-wing social policies – controlled the province from 1935 to 1971, for 36 years! But that's nothing... Once the Conservatives took over in 1971, they have never relinquished control, and have run the province for 43 straight years ... with no sign they might lose an election in the foreseeable future. If anything, I'd wager money they will hold Alberta in an iron grip for at least a solid 50 years. Indeed, why *do* they bother with elections there? The Blue Regime is more tenacious in Alberta than most Middle Eastern dictatorships.

High Plains Halfling

One night, two cowpokes were tending their beans over a campfire on the high plains. It was 1858 near as they could reckon, although the trivial affairs of Eastern calendars didn't amount to much out here on the plains where the stars wheeled overhead like a crazy circus march, and the coyotes bawled at the moon.

It kindled their interest some, though, when the shortest hombre they had ever seen wandered into the circle of firelight. He was no taller than a man's belt buckle, and if you shot from the hip, your bullet would pass clear over the stranger's head! But what was even odder, by far, was that he wore no boots. This was out in the desert, remember, full of stones, cactus and sidewinders, but what the stranger wore looked like large, fuzzy carpet slippers!

"So, you could stand some grub, Bub?" said Jake to the little man. "Set yerself down. Bert, git him a bowl, will you?"

"Goddamn it, Jake," the other cowboy muttered.

The "bowl" was merely a tin can with one end haggled open, but it was fairly clean, and the beans within smelled pretty inviting to the Hobbit.

"Thanks awfully," he said. "I guess you don't often see Halflings here in the American Southwest."

"Half-breeds of all kinds hearabouts. Half-Comanche. Half-Mexican. Half-Coloured. What are you half-and-half of?" Jake inquired politely.

"Not a half-breed. I'm a full-bred, Shire Hobbit, but, as you see, we're a little short next you big lumm... well, next to Men."

"Goddamn it, Jake. A *Hobbit*," Bert muttered over his beans.

"Sayyyy... I have heard tell of you folks. Partial to a good smoke and beer, I understand... and sumthin' to do about rings."

"Kinfolk of mine. Long ago, one of us Bagginses came back from an adventure with a magic ring. Kept it for years, then left it to his nephew – who threw it away, the silly bugger. My name is Viagro Baggins, by the way."

"Pleased to meet yer. Jake Shapiro's my handle. This here is Bert Flimm. He don't talk much ... a valu'ble commodity on the trail."

"Goddamn it, Jake."

They talked a mite over their beans, and then talked some more over coffee boiled near to death with eggshells in a dented stickhandle pot. At last, the Hobbit suggested a riddle game to pass the time.

“What’s that agin?” asked Jake.

“Usually it’s a rhyme, but it doesn’t have to be. I tell you the riddle, and you have three guesses to get it right. My ancestor won his ring that way ... though I don’t mind telling you that he resorted to cheating. He was in a kind of a tight situation, so it was understandable.”

“Wal... okay,” said a skeptical Jake. His idea of word games usually consisted of words of four letters, that ended either in gunplay or mattress sports.

The Hobbit put down the half-finished coffee ... making a show that he didn’t notice the scorpion he crushed under the tin cup. Then he pulled himself up to his full three-foot-five-and-a quarter to recite:

“What has six nipples, but gives no milk?
It has no teeth, but barks.
It has no eyes, but is sighted.
And it shakes your hand while it kills.”

The cowboy looked across the fire at the Hobbit. With Jake seated and the Hobbit standing, their eyes were just about level. After a minute, Jake spat tobacccy juice and said, “Whut the hell?”

“You’re supposed to guess what it is.”

“Whut *whut* is?”

“What *something* is,” the Hobbit answered in an exasperated tone, “that has six nipples, no milk, barks and shakes your hand while it kills,”

“Wal ... I don’t know!”

“Guess!”

“A horse?”

“What? Don’t be silly. How can a horse shake your hand?”

“Godammit, Jake, it ain’t no horse. It’s a dog,” muttered Bert.

“Damn it to hell, Bert, if it shakes your hand while it kills then it ain’t no dog neither. Now don’t you go git all blathery while I think,” said Jake, testily. “That don’t count,” he added to the Hobbit.

After a minute, he made a second guess. “It’s got bark, but no eyes, so it’s a tree ... aw, hell, no ... trees don’t got nipples.”

The cowboy spent another couple of minutes in deep thought, and said, “It ain’t a dried-up old cow which has gone blind, is it?”

The Hobbit looked very smug. “I don’t really think so,”

“Wal, spill it,” said Jake. What has nipples but no milk, barks but got no teeth ... an’ all that?”

“Your revolver,” smirked the Hobbit.

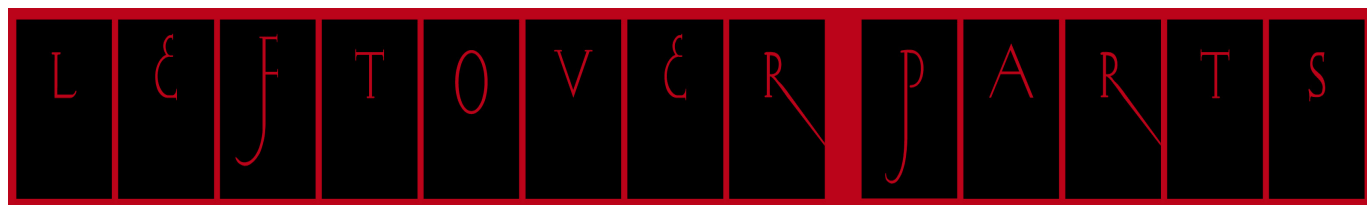
“My... “

“Godammit, Jake!”

The cowboy thought of the Remington in his saddle roll. Six percussion caps on the six steel nipples on the revolving cylinder. It barked when he shot. It didn't see, but had a sight. And the grip fit in his mitt like another hand, and shook his when he fired. Jake began a slow burn...

When morning came, two cowpokes gathered up their gear, stowed it methodically behind their saddles, and rode off with the sun at their backs, toward a purple line of mountains. Behind them, a small, still form swung at the end of a rope, the other end tied tightly to a branch of a tottering cottonwood.

Naturally, the Hobbit had died with his boots off.



WAHF: Ned Brooks: Who reminds me that the fanzine *Small Friendly Dog* was by Paul Skelton, not the Charnocks. **Brad Foster:** Who acknowledges being at least two issues behind, but says he has enjoyed what he has been too busy to comment on. He promises to do better in 2015. **Richard A. Wright (HotRod 302):** who apologizes for a late response, but offers in explanation that he was in the mental ward ... sort of ... and the don't allow computers. He says he'd love to soup up my chair with the battery from a Nissan Leaf.

Jefferson Swycliffer, abontides@gmail.com

Whoo-ee! Snuck up and dagged me! I didn't see that coming. Nice early issue, just in time for Christmas. Or Xmas. Or Sir Isaac Newton's Birthday. ("Persephone is the Reason for the Season.") I'm not religious, but I don't care: I love Christmas. I'll be spending a six-day weekend visiting my sister. We'll exchange paltry gifts ('cause we're all broke) and we'll sit around the fire (even though temperatures will be in the 80's -- this is San Diego, eh?) and we'll watch TV, and go for a couple of good long hikes in the mountains.

Hey, congratulate me: I wore through a pair of hiking boots! That means I'm doing something right!

Great that you're getting the Power Chair. I hope it extends your mobility and range, and I hope it's comfy as well as useful.

I've tried one out, and the seat is pretty comfy actually. Better than my sofa.

As Charlie Luce said, "You can referee a satisfying and fun game session using any game system. You can also drive nails with a wrench."

I don't do much computer gaming, as my hand-eye coordination just isn't up to the task. I do have a fondness for "strategic" computer games, like the Civilization series. You know, the kind where you don't have to be quick on the button, but can take all the time you want to think. Or go to the bathroom. I think some game controller systems need to come with urinals installed.

The first work I ever sold professionally was to *Dragon Magazine*, and I had a pretty good run with them, selling them a couple dozen articles, variants, and game supplements. A story or two, too!

Steve Jeffery asks what SF we might expose a newcomer to. May I recommend *The Engines of God* by Jack McDevitt? It's a really spiffing bit of space adventure, extremely thoughtful, very intelligent, and on a grand scope. It's the first book in his "Omega" series of novels -- but you don't have to read them all, and you don't have to read them in the internal order.

Another suggestion is *A Deepness in the Sky* by Vernor Vinge, which is one of the best "first contact" SF novels ever.

Also...both Jack McDevitt and Vernor Vinge are *really nice guys*, just about the sweetest-natured blokes anyone could ever hope to meet, so I always like to promote 'em. The two books are a little dated now -- 1995 add 2007, respectively -- but they stand up well to time, and reward re-reading, too.

(Me, personally, I'm going backward in time. I just discovered A.E.W. Mason, who wrote in the 1920s. But that's the joy of Project Gutenberg: free books!)

I think I read half a Jack McDevitt novel once -- probably his first -- but lost interest before finishing it. That may largely be because I was growing tired of conventional SF at the time. I've never read a Vernor Vinge novel, either. I would probably direct a new reader to something much older, that I was familiar with, such as *The Stars My Destination*, or *Cities in Flight*.

A silver denarius would be keen! I have a Byzantine "Bezant" that is kind of cool. They're very common, and thus relatively cheap. (Do you sense the emphasis on "cheap" throughout this LOC?)

Bezant doesn't seem to be a name the Byzantines ever used for their gold coins -- they were called the solidus in classical times, and the hyperpyron in medieval times. It is a rather cheesy-looking coin by the standards of a solidus. However, they were often called Bezants (after Byzantium) by their neighbors, who then imitated the imperial original.

Fun picture of Rocky -- with hand-grenades on the Holiday Tree? But, given the sort of adventures Rocky and Bullwinkle got into, hand grenades make a strange kind of sense.

Steve Jeffrey, srjeffery@aol.com

Some of us are still wrapping and counting presents and panicking in case we've missed someone. Or, more usually in my case, because I've overbought (again) and have a panic of indecision about who gets what.

Hey, that the second time I've seen an adapted Ferrari F1 car (and, I think the same 1999 the F33 design) in a fanzine picture. The first was on Dick 'Ditmar' Jensen's cover for Bruce Gillespie's *SF Commentary* 86. Where, though, are the full-body seat belts and the Hans device head restraint?

Devo action figures? You have to be kidding. Go tell me you Photoshopped that from an Action Man figure.

I'm afraid not. There's only one figure, actually, not four. It came with four separate, interchangeable heads, a whip and a red plastic pyramid hat. If you wanted the whole band, you bought four figures and ended up with way too many heads!

In the middle of Jefferson Swycaffer's letter, you write, "Say... when did I lose control of my letter column, letting it become a substitute for mailing comments? Loccers seem to be commenting on other loccers more than the original content of the issue!"

Too right. You're just the host of this party, Taral. Now get back in the kitchen and rustle up some more of those cocktail sausages on sticks while we sit here chatting and drink all your beer. Party hosts, huh. Think they own the place....

I don't know *Invader Zim*. The most bonkers animation I have seen, though, is something called *Excel Saga*, which is like anime on speed. *Earthworm Jim* runs it close. I just bought the complete DVD set of *Danger Mouse* for my brother. Apparently it's being re-made with a new voice cast. I'm sort of nervous about how that might turn out.

Invader Zim was roughly a contemporary of *Earthworm Jim* ... but a lot more bent.

Why is Saara's Christmas tree hung with hand grenades?

The portrait on the "card" is that of Rocky the Flying Squirrel, not Saara. If you had read the "Interview With Rocky" I wrote about – ohmigawd – 30 years ago, you'd know that Rocky had been a combat pilot in the South Pacific in WWII.

Rodney Leighton, rodney.leighton@gmx.co.uk

More than 500 articles?! Good Lord, no wonder you feel bummed out. Lack of comment on this, or specific articles, is probably due to not being seen by that many people who write letters. I don't know where they all went to, but I have likely only seen a few. And as you know, I don't read sercon type things; most of your *Alexiad* articles have not interested me. I have only seen 1 or 2 issues of *The Drink Tank*, none that had you in it. Haven't seen *Banana Wings* in ages. And who is to say I would have had anything to say about what you wrote?

I don't believe there are a lot of loc writers any longer. And maybe, I don't know... I not only am none too interested in writing locs, but I have no interest in seeing any. I gather Chuck sent Lloyd a copy of *Rodney's Fanac #2*, said that would guarantee a loc. Who cares? No reflection on Lloyd. But I have come to realize that people will read your output, or I should say my output, or not. Some people will respond in some way. Some not. I have reached the point that I don't care, I am going to try to do some zines because it is mostly fun and Chuck wants me to.

But I see I have become self-referential again, haven't I?

Hooper is likely correct in that fanzine reviews will generate much more response than articles about books, movies and fan politics. He should know, that's what he writes. Go ahead and do some reviews...steal a thing from *Flag* and fill the back page of *Broken Toys* with fanzine reviews.

True, but as I said in one issue of *Flag*, I lack the essential empathy with fanzines to review them fairly ... which is an upbeat way of saying that I'm rather indifferent about most zines lately, and couldn't possibly be patient enough to read them all the way through, much less judge them on their merits. Better I don't review them than render ill-tempered pronouncements ...

But if you do and you use the 'Also Received or Released' idea, explain to the readers what the hell that means! Looking over the reviews and lists in all these issues, Chuck has done a great job in choosing zines to print and ship to me. I didn't find much that I had not seen that I would have wished to. I note that Hooper pays you quite a compliment by stating that your article in *Drink Tank 340* is the best single piece of work by a fan he has seen so far.

Tsk. I actually had to check to see what article that was. It was a long retrospective of my artistic and fannish roots called "100 is Not Too Many" that I honestly didn't think would go over well. With fanwriting, you just never know ... In any case, the reminder to myself makes sense of your next statement, which seemed out of the blue.

I agree with another comment: anyone who can create Saara Mar is a very talented person.

Not ass kissing, no sir! True comment.

Oh yeah...the venison was from the lone person I can call friend that I have actually seen. He had been hunting Usually gives me a couple of pieces of venison a year.

Almost had more a couple of days after that. Headed off to do some work and roads were a bit slick. A pair of does came out of a field, and onto the road about 50 feet in front of me. Tapped the brakes, started sliding. One doe fell down and scrambled up and thankfully jumped into the ditch. I was thinking: this bitch is going straight across the road. Sure enough, that is where she went. Thankfully for my truck she went fast enough, and the tires grabbed hold of some pavement, so we did not have an encounter.

Easy way to get some meat; hard on the truck and insurance and stuff though.

Bambi ala Interstate 90?

Eric Mayer, groggy.tales@gmail.com

The wave. I've always liked the wave, but what is in it this time? Effective logo at any rate. You sure come up with amazing fonts.

Is cookie! Is cookie monster! The fonts can all be found as free downloads on-line.

Oh man, the June Taylor Dancers. What an image. I remember them from Jackie Gleason's show. Seems so old-fashioned, but then again, that show was closer in time to Busby Berkely's movie dance epics than

we today are to Jackie Gleason. And awaaaay we go!

Congrats on doing some work for the Worldcon Program booklet. I can't believe that no one looks at the program booklet, and considering the membership it will have a pretty big circulation.

The last time I had something in a WC program book, they messed the art up badly – adding grey tones to parts of it without my knowledge. It looked like hell. So, I'm easily able to find a dark cover around any silver lining.

I hope there's a solution to be had for the sleep problems. Lack of sleep kills one's mood, makes it hard to work and is generally tough on quality of life. I don't sleep as well as I used to. Getting up to use the bathroom, turning over because a hip hurts, always something. I used to sleep right through the night and leap out of bed ready to roll. Not anymore. Now I need to guzzle coffee and stagger around for an hour or so before my engine turns over.

Lately, I seem to have turned a corner and have been getting improved sleep. I now know how to guess whether I'll sleep or not, also. It depends on how hard my heart is beating. If it goes on beating hard for a long time after any effort, I won't be able to sleep until I've literally rested in bed for two to four hours first! But if I feel nothing, I'll sleep normally, as I should. I mean to ask my doctor about that. I may need increased medication for my blood pressure. Then again, if I had high blood pressure, my left foot wouldn't be swelling from fluid loss from the arteries... That's usually a sign of poor circulation. Well, making sense of this stuff is what doctors are for... Too bad they can't just say, "Oh, that's simple, you're getting old and your body is breaking down. Here, take this pill and you'll be like young again for another 20 years."

Hey, your chair is just in time for Christmas!

Yes! And there's no snow yet, either! We've had snow, but it all melted, and none is due in the immediate future. Maybe I can get out in the chair a couple of times before New Years!

It strikes me I've already yapped on at you about my fascination with games. Board games were a favorite activity for my friends and me. Monopoly was a big favorite with us, although I never won. No head for business, even at a Monopoly level. Civil War games appeared around the centennial and there were several we enjoyed, some more complex than others. I'm tempted to say these were the first military simulation games I remember but I think they were predated by Summit, a Cold War strategy game which was perhaps our favorite. It wasn't exactly a military game because if you ended up starting a nuclear war you lost. The idea was to accumulate military power and economic and social influence in enough countries to overwhelm your opponents without actually resorting to fighting. Excellent game.

Never played Dungeons and Dragons but I did play computer text adventures which, in part, grew out of the D&D craze, the first ones being cave crawls. Not having a home computer until almost 1990, I totally missed out on the heyday of text adventures. As soon as computers could handle some half-way decent color graphics, those were tossed aside. My brief involvement with the early, graphic games was, I am ashamed to admit, finishing Leisure Suit Larry. In the late Nineties I got involved for a few years with text adventure enthusiasts who still loved the old text-only format, and programmed quite a few games myself. Sure they were mediocre but considering I can't program and am a totally non-technical sort of person I was tickled to be able to produce anything. In this regard it is worthwhile noting that fanzines may be obsolete, like text adventures, but they do, like text adventures, have unique characters which more modern formats lack and so, arguably, should still be able to attract followers.

It's not so much that I object to the commercialization of Christmas, I simply detest celebrations of greed per se. And yeah, I loved getting presents as a kid and I enjoyed how excited my kids were at Christmas, but it is just way, way overblown.

I had a single of the Three Stooges performing "All I Want For Christmas Is My Two Front Teeth" but I preferred the other side – "I Want a Hippopotamus For Christmas."

You had Eaton's catalog. I had Stull Brothers. Stull Brothers was a local department store which stocked a terrific array of toys at Christmas. My best friend's family was rolling in money -- his dad was VP of an auto dealership, whereas my dad taught school. They were also a very business-like family. So a couple weeks before Christmas my friend's mom would drive him to Stull Brothers so he could look over the toys in the showroom and decide which ones he wanted Santa to deliver. Oh yes, he brought along a paper and pencil to record his order. I got to accompany him and put in my opinion about which ones would be the most fun. If he had been pubbing a fanzine back then, its title would have been *Expensive Toys*.

Car 54 Where Are You was only on for two seasons?! Wow. That was a favorite. As Toody would say: "Oo! Oo!" Toody's "Oo! Oo!" was just a bit behind Curly's "Nyuck Nyuck Nyuck."

And a little ahead of Bush's "I misspoke myself." Yep, only two seasons of *Car 54*. But it was in re-runs for years, I guess, and when you are ten, two seasons may seem like a decade.

David Redd, dave_redd@hotmail.com

Just gathering my thoughts on the non-Halloween *Broken Toys* when 34 arrived – better write now on #33 before everything gets lost in the rush ... ah, you over-achievers ... I can only be amazed at your productivity despite all the obstacles.

Finally printed out #33 despite the incredible slowness of my ancient ex-construction site Laserjet. As luck would have it, I find I've hit on possibly your least typical issue, being more of a traditional zine ("*Broken Toys 33* is a little late" is a *very* traditional opening.) But still good, of course. I sympathize with your problems and applaud your determination.

Not sorry to miss a Halloween issue; don't get me started on that particular loathsome festival. TAFF report Canadian segment welcome (I still cherish earlier reports from Ken Bulmer and Ron Bennett, and look forward to finding Jacq Monahan's complete one day.) Most poignant moment was seeing Judith Merrill's fanzine drawer forever closed to mere fans.

Well, they *must* be preserved for future generations of Marxist-Freudian-Deconstructionist University grads who want to study Bill Bowers for their PhD! At least that way the material should go untouched for a good thousand years... Anyway, I strongly suspect the Merrill is not energetic about acquiring fanzines like *Flag* or *Broken Toys*, preferring scholarly publications with a respectful attitude toward the genre, and the names of terribly important figures like Ted Cosgswell, not a lot of mucking around with humour or social gossip. Whether or not the Merrill still retains any of that sort of thing, I can't say, but I'm positive that *File 770* is as low as they are willing to descend in active acquisition.

Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance? I picked up a copy a while back, thinking it looked interesting, and it's on my mental to-read list, just like the *History of New Zealand* I bought back in 1966.

When life gets a little less busy, perhaps.

Suppose my Fifties childhood was a little early for plastic figures, as most globalised stuff hadn't yet followed Disney to our shores. From later years, one little plastic Smurfette does still pose on our piano top.



Milt Stevens, miltstevens@earthlink.net

January 2, 2015, My First LoC of the New Year **First loc I've gotten this year, too.**

In *Broken Toys #34*, games are one of the topics. I've never been much of a gamer. I have played cards pretty regularly over a lot of years, but somehow card playing doesn't count as gaming in the modern sense. Most of my board gaming experience occurred before I went in the Navy in 1966. I played *Monopoly* and *Clue* in junior high school. I recall playing *Chutes and Ladders* at an even younger age.

In college, I encountered the Avalon-Hill military strategy games. Unfortunately they were so time-consuming that scheduling an actual game was very difficult. I've long thought that the Avalon-Hill games should be computerized. I've been told there were legal reasons why that couldn't be done, but the explanations didn't make much sense to me.

Then there was *Diplomacy*. *Diplomacy* was a non-strategy game with the board representing pre-WWI Europe. You couldn't win this game by strategy. You could only win by lying and cheating. It was very popular with fans in the mid-Sixties. We had a game going at LASFS with one move per week. *Postal Diplomacy* became popular. In *Postal Diplomacy*, fans spent as much time writing funny press releases as playing the actual game. Since there was no limit to the amount of cheating you could do, some games became very creative.

I played *Risk* as a board game and later as a computer game. Conquering the world can be quite therapeutic. In the computerized version, I figured ways of conquering the world every time I played. It got to be too easy, and I lost interest in the game.

I played *Sim City* through several versions of the game. I found I really enjoyed games that have a building aspect. I played *Sim City* until I had one city that filled the entire playing area, and there was nowhere else to go. After that, I lost interest in the game.

I played *Civilization III* for about ten years. I only moved to *Civilization V* in the last year. I have a *Civilization V* game going at the moment. I have Istanbul surrounded. However, I'm afraid of committing too many resources to the war against the Turks lest the insidious Chinese use it as an opportunity to attack me. Great fun.

Never mind the Chinese... what about the Bulgars?

Keith Soltys, keith@soltys.ca

Hi, Taral. I think I will take some of the last time of my Christmas vacation to get off a LOC on *Broken Toys* 33 and 34. If I don't do it now, it may not happen.

In #33, Kent Pollard's letter about the vagaries of collecting old paperbacks was interesting. We went through our book collection this summer and weeded out many of the paperbacks. In checking on sites like AbeBooks, it seems there's just no value in them. We've kept the signed ones with the intention of trying to sell them, but I'm not sure what the best way of going about that would be. I thought about eBay, but the cost of mailing books makes that a dicey proposition. The used bookstore market is pretty much dead, unless you're dealing in real antiques or rarities.

I would take them to cons or fan get-togethers to give to anyone who would take them, but I'm in no condition to be carrying large numbers of books anywhere, even if I was of a mind to go. It might make more sense to invite fans to my place to look over the available discards. Of course, first I'd have to go through all the books to set unwanted ones aside ... and that would be work.

I'm not in a big hurry to see your Halloween edition – it can wait until the appropriate time next year. With the kids grown up, Halloween has a minor place in our household – it's more of an inconvenience than anything else, as we have to monitor the front door to hand out treats. This year was pretty quiet, probably because of the wet weather. We only had about 50 or 60 kids, which is less than half of what we would have had ten years ago.

Re: Ron Kasman's letter, I have no interest in any of the big comic or fan conventions. They just seem like another way of separating people from their money. We didn't even go to the Toronto Book Fair, held the same weekend as SFContario, although there were some authors I wouldn't have minded seeing. We did, however, go down to SFContario for some of the free readings (Peter Watts and Rob Sawyer) although we didn't attend the con itself. If we go to anything next year, it will be one of the fan-run conventions such as Ad Astra or SFContario, but even those are starting to lose their appeal except as an opportunity to meet friends.

Unfortunately, the power chair won't make it that much easier for me to get to SFContario. I can't get into the current generation of buses and streetcars. I suppose there's always WheelTrans, though. I don't know much about using it, such as whether there are hours it's unavailable (such as when 1 a.m., when I want to get home), how to arrange for it, and cost.

Oh yes, thanks for publishing Jim Mowatt's TAFF report. We enjoyed meeting him, and it was nice to be mentioned in his report.

In #34, re: Eric Mayer's letter, I don't find Facebook or Twitter venues for creative expression – for that I have my blog. Rather, they're primarily a way to keep in touch with people and share interesting information. I use Twitter mostly as a kind of news feed, keeping my followers list small and tightly controlled. If Twitter ever moves to the Facebook model of an algorithmic selection for feed articles, I will drop it.

Milt Stevens's letter about problems reading *Broken Toys* with a screen reader struck a chord. For some time, I've been reading it on my Kindle. I send the file to Amazon as a PDF and they send it back to my Kindle in their format. The conversion wasn't perfect, but generally perfectly readable. However, something changed around #31 or 32 and portions of the zine were garbled with strings of random

characters appearing instead of readable text. I now take the zine to work and use Acrobat Pro to convert it to Word's .docx format, then send that to Amazon. That seems to work perfectly. The reason I prefer Kindle is twofold – first is that I read mostly on the Kindle now as I can set the font size to something comfortable for my poor vision (about 14-point text currently), second, I can add bookmarks and notes for when I get around to writing a LOC. I do look at the PDF in reader so I can appreciate your layout and art.

In the long run, this is how digital storage will defeat itself. MacWindows will think it is doing the world a favour by putting out iWord 78 and render the whole of human history incompatible with existing media overnight. Civilization will cope as best it can ... and then the computer industry will do it again... and again... until we fall so far behind in copying the past that it's all lost.

I too miss the Eaton's catalog and its ilk. Browsing Amazon and eBay listings online can't come close to the joy of flipping through the toy sections in those huge catalogs. The last department store catalog I can remember getting was the Sears catalog, and that was at least a decade ago. We still get an IKEA catalog, but they're just not the same.

Nor are the Home Hardware, Office Depot or Canadian Tire catalogs that are still published.

I saw your FB post about almost getting stranded by the snow the other day. Do be aware that Toronto does an abysmal job of clearing snow from sidewalks and especially around curbs at intersections. You may find that you can't get through or over windrows at intersections, even though the sidewalk may be passable. If you have to go downtown, stick to the PATH, which is mostly accessible (though you may have to hunt for the ramps and elevators).

For non-Torontonians, PATH is the pedestrian underground network that connects over 1,200 stores downtown. According to Guinness, it's the largest of its sort in the world. This sort of surprises me, as if anywhere needed it more than Toronto it would be almost any other large city in Canada ... all of which are colder in winter.

R-Laurraine Tutuhasi, laurraine@mac.com

Just finished reading the issue. Responding to your initial article, it seems to me that your basic problem was that you were undercharging for your commissioned artwork. I'm extrapolating from the fact that sometime in the mid-1970s, I sold a very small pen and ink sketch of Mr. Spock for \$20 in auction. I'm talking to 2X2 inches.

If you'd charged more, you might have had fewer commissions and more time to work on your own projects, which you might subsequently been able to sell in art shows. Either way you would have made more money,

Setting a price was always a very delicate matter. As it is, I tended to charge more than most of my peers at furry cons. There were a whole lot of reasons why so many of them were willing to work dirt cheap – they included rapid work with markers, as well as younger fans living at home and only trying to make burger money instead of earn a living. Also, the fandom was over-supplied with artists. I used to joke that there was only about one customer for every one artist ... but I'm not sure it was really just a joke. As well, the emphasis of the fandom shifted from comics (and art) to costuming. People would pay hundreds for a fur costume, but were antsy about spending more than \$20 on something to look at.

I made most of my money on cheap sketches at cons. If not harried too much, I could spend five or ten minutes on one, and charge \$20 or \$25. I also used to do well selling \$10 prints – some customers would buy five, six or even a dozen. Over the years, I grew tougher minded about large jobs, generally quoting \$75 as my starting price. And about 50% of the time, that was too much for the customer. Clearly, I couldn't raise my rates further. I'm glad I don't have to bother with commissions anymore, since \$75 was not good pay for two-or-more day's work. Of course, now I just get faneditors asking me to do it for free... Not altogether a change for the better.

Lloyd Penney, penneys@bell.net

I am finding myself two issues of *Broken Toys behind*, 33 and 34. It's high time for a catch-up.

You nearly set a record for yourself! If you had waited another two or three weeks, you would have missed two consecutive issues and made headlines in the next!

33...In years past, I offered some of my little stories under the title of "Tales From the Convention!" to various fanzines, but I think for some fanzines, they just weren't suitable for the theme of the convention, or the zines were perzines, or perhaps my little stories were unreadable. They would up in John Purcell's *Askance*, and in the monthly *Statement* of the Ottawa SF Society, and a few times in *WARP*, from the Montreal SF&F Association. I've got them written down, at least, and in future years, there might be some use for them.

I've always found it difficult to write about conventions ... which is why I cheat. In principle, I might be writing about a gathering of fans in Poughkeepsie, but in practice I write about nearby civil war battlefields, the local geology, weather phenomena observed that weekend, coins I found in my change, regional cuisine or dialects ... in fact, almost anything but the con. It almost goes without saying that I won't even mention who the guests were ... I probably never saw them. To my mind, all programming is alike. You sit there and listen. Really, is there any duller thing on Earth than a convention? Making one sound interesting takes major talent.

Perhaps you could collect your "Tales" under one cover. With digital publishing, it could be 674 pages long and not cost you a dime.

Greetings to Jim Mowatt and his fabulous TAFFish trip report. We were there, we did need to leave early because of other commitments, and how do I write all those fanzines? Force of habit after 30-odd years, and otherwise, damfino. I say this only because I never got the chance to talk to Jim at either visit. I guess I wanted to participate in fanzines, being a journalism student, but I needed to see where I could contribute. I couldn't quite comprehend what made a fannish article, and a can't draw a straight line to save my life, so with a few gentle guiding ideas from Mike Glicksohn and Harry Warner, I started writing letters of comment, and I have been in the locol for over 30 years.

I've been to a few Halloween parties over the last few decades. That's how often we've found them. Halloween now seems to be mostly for adults as an excuse to dress up, and I guess we haven't been cool

enough to be invited. I suspect it is simply that everyone is hoping to be invited, but few are actually staging them.

Cooler than me, I guess. I can't think of one I've been to in 20 years ... likely a lot longer. You may be right that a Halloween Party is something people hope for, but few hold.

I have read that collecting is an extremely mild form of mental illness, but I don't buy it. Could such an illness be so fulfilling as collecting everything of one thing together in one area, and learning all you could about it? As an expert, that's a form of achievement.

As an "expert," you can charge money for your expertise. Collectors usually lose huge amounts of money rather than make it. That's what it's all about, really. Nobody who makes a fortune is crazy, even if they make it by staging circus ride accidents for lawsuits, or raising frogs for French restaurants. Do it for the love of frogs, though, and you're a crackpot.

I don't think I've misspent my life, but I can say I've had some achievements, and some disappointments. This is why I don't like bucket lists; instead of being disappointed in what you didn't get done, you can take some pride in what you did get done.

I have kept my interests in fandom to just a few. To be honest, comics, gaming, anime and *Doctor Who* – the most common interests in fandom today – never interested me at all. When I see lists of upcoming SF shows and movies, I am not really that interested. I think it was because there was always someone else with a great collection, and I never really had the \$\$\$ to sink into such a thing...if I can afford it, then I won't be interested in it.

Children of the famous...this reminds me that there is an exhibit of the works of M.C. Escher at the National Museum of Art in Ottawa. The reason it's there is that Escher's son George is Canadian, living in Nova Scotia, or possibly outside of Ottawa, and he seems to have inherited all the Escher woodcuts and prints. We are looking to go in the spring near the end of the exhibit's run. 34 ... I cynically note that so-called holidays where there is some implication of buying something in order to properly celebrate the occasion...Christmas, Valentine's Day, Easter ... every six weeks or so, to give businesses a financial boost they can rely upon. We seem to be well trained.

You can volunteer your substantial talents, and perhaps regret it, but at least you are visible, and saying through your work that you are there and available. It may lead to work that you really want to do, and can feel comfortable doing.

That Power Chair looks great, and we won't see you for the dust, but the skid marks on the sidewalk will tell us where you've been.

I never really had an interest in D&D, but I did go to school with Ed Greenwood, better known today as Elminster and as a major dungeon designer. I did design the contents of three rooms in that dungeon he sold for seven figures all those years ago.

Lots of stamp collectors in this crowd, I see. I still have mine, haven't done much with it the last 30 years or so, but it is still there, and I have been saving the more exotic stamps used to send me fanzines over those years. Maybe I will revert to stamp collecting when I am finally too old to care much about this fandom thing.

The local...one aspect of our fannish lives that we enjoy is the fact of physical clutter. Our complex background scene is complemented by our complex interests. Most times, when the apartment needs cleaning, we're tempted to simply put a CONDEMNED sign on the front door.

Grand Marnier is delicious. Back when we dabbled in liqueurs, we also enjoyed Crème de Grand Marnier. That is really good.

I think I have done what I can. I hope you got what you wanted for Christmas, and I hope that 2015 is a damned sight better for all of us. It's not starting well with terrorists in France, but it can still end well. Good wishes for all.

Steve Stiles, stevecartoon2001@gmail.com

Thanks for *Broken Toys*. All of them. I've been remiss about LoCing past issues, I know; I really don't enjoy LoCing for some reason, preferring to send art instead, although I've made more of an effort to comment on fanzines in 2014. I tend to feel more fatigued myself these last few years, habitually taking an afternoon nap for an hour or two. I can't blame any major ailments except for a longtime problem with calf muscle pain, probably caused by a bad reaction to statins. Although it isn't an overwhelming ache, it tends to drain away energy used to block it out. This morning I woke up with a yell due to a severe calf muscle cramp. Then again, really incredible as it seems to me, I am now over seventy-one years of age.

Loccing is a chore for me, too, that I usually excuse myself from on the justification that I'm busy doing more than can be expected from me already. Nevertheless, guilt tends to extort a few locs from me every year – as many as 30 or 40 in past years, but falling off to a little over a dozen in 2014.

Congratulations on getting the Power Chair, which looks quite comfortable. I tend to doubt that the United States, land of the miserly millionaire politicians, has anything like a Disability Support Program; if the way we treat our veterans is any indication, the civilian disabled might get a second-hand wheelbarrow or two skateboards taped together. A year's wait would probably be considered speedy in these parts. Should I ever have mobility problems, I'd like to get a Segway since it was created by E.C. artist Jack Kamen's son; I'd decorate the thing with Kamen art decals from *Tales From The Crypt* and *Crime SuspenStories*. Unfortunately, currently the things sell for 3-5K.

It's very comfortable, and fun to ride! I just wish it were not winter – extremely cold temperatures are harmful to the battery, so I have to be careful about which days to go out. I've only been out of the house with it about four times, so far. The problem with the Segway is that you have to stand – at least those I've seen were without seats, and I *need* to sit. But if you ever need one – go for it! Three-to-five-thousand smackers isn't bad. The invoice for my chair lists it at \$10,209! The Segway is cheap by comparison.

I'm afraid I've never been one for games of any sort; card games, board games, role playing games, and killing people & creatures video/computer games; they take up too much time. I will say that the ones you describe sound like fun, particularly *The Neverhood*; I could get hooked on that one and then I'd never have any time for important things like Facebook! There **was** a period of years that Elaine and I played cards and board games with Ted and Karen Pauls, mainly because we enjoyed their company. Ted always won, though, handily beating all three of us even in games of largely chance like Uno; since he was once a poltergeist, we all suspected him of using Higher Powers.

Regarding Ned Brooks' comment on bellbottoms; I have a pair and wear them from time to time: I like the way they look and they go well with my Mohawk. They aren't survivors from the Sixties, though; my era of a 32" waistline will probably never return. What impelled me to get a new pair was going to TorCon 3 in 2003; one of the first things I noticed when walking the streets of Toronto was that there were *men* wearing bellbottoms! Then, as now, such a thing wasn't done in the United States! Only *women* wear bellbottoms here! Maddened by this blatant example of fashion gender inequality, I set about getting a pair. There wasn't much time for shopping in Toronto, so I did a web search back in Maryland and found an outfit in Iowa that still carried bellbottoms for men. Evidently no longer, though; I recently did another web search and the only bellbottoms for men that I could find were part of plastic Hippy Halloween costumes.

I've never cared for them myself ... bellbottoms only favour people with Elfen builds, I think, or who at least had one once. I always felt like a cheap record promoter wearing them. For about a decade it was impossible to find any pants for men that were not flared at least a little, and I'd have to ask my mom to take them in. Now I only wear fleece jogger's pants. I'd love jeans, but nobody makes them with elastic waists, and at my age I don't have a waist for a fixed waistband to fit. Regular jeans are either falling down, or uncomfortably tight, going from the later to the former in a matter of seconds ... usually when my hands were full, or I was walking.

As others will probably point out, the "War Against Christmas" hype is something that the Fox News and right-wing "pundits" have been beating the drum about more than any real religionists. It's a predictable annual ritual and I have strong doubts that characters like Rush Limbaugh, for instance, give a rat's ass about much of the teachings attributed to Jesus, but they certainly do like to wave the Bible (and the flag) around, the better to bamboozle their gullible sheep waiting to be sheared, and, of course, to goose their own ratings. I converted to Judaism years ago, and am an agnostic to boot (you can be that in Judaism), so, aside from the beautiful carols, the Christian aspects of the holiday don't speak to me, but the Charles Dickens sentiments, "Peace On Earth," the trees and the lights, do. I like to remember the days when our whole family —grandparents, parents, uncle and aunt, cousins, would get together to feast and exchange gifts. It's a tradition to watch *The Christmas Carol* versions, alternating with Laurel and Hardy in *March Of The Wooden Soldiers*. One of my fondest memories is the Christmas Village my grandfather built in his railroad apartment on Manhattan's Third Avenue; he kept on adding to it, tiny homemade wooden houses that lit up, dozens of metal figurines, a twinkling night sky, until it was eventually eight feet long and suspended at eye level, held up by a braced platform. Unfortunately, my grandparents eventually had to move to smaller digs and the whole affair was turned over to a cousin — the one who never shared any of his toys — who at some point threw it all away.

Christmas to me is an entirely secular celebration, with connotations of the year's end, the onset of a long period of hibernation, and the promise of renewal. Christs in mangers, and crumbled bones in holy crypts have nothing to do with it.

We didn't get any snow for Christmas, but we're getting a predicted three inches today (January 21), so I'm winding this up now as we'll be heading out to the supermarket shortly.



Ka-Blam, Zow!

Now that Drink Tank has been retired by its editor, Chris Garcia, I've decided I'd like to republish some of what I think are the best pieces I've had in its 400 issues.

It's that time of year. The Canadian National Exhibition opened two weeks ago, and the First Day of School is around the corner. The earliest warning I had of it was a deafening crash, followed by a roar that nearly shook me out of bed.

It was the annual CNE airshow.

Although the Exhibition grounds are a bit east of my building, the jets have a *wide* turning circle, and whether I want to or not, I see a great deal of the show from my 21st floor balcony.

I've seen quite a few impressive things from that balcony. One year, not long after the fall of the Soviet Union, I realized I was watching a '50s-era F-86 Sabre and Mig-15 fly side by side. Who'd have thunk *that*? I've seen the huge bat-winged British Vulcan bomber, a B-17 in flight, B-52's and I think even the B-1 "stealth" bomber. P-51 Mustangs, Steadmans, F-16's and F-18 Hornets are such a commonplace that I hardly notice.

I've seen the F-22 Raptor as well, a so-called fifth-generation "stealth" fighter. It was out for the final afternoon of the air show like a tipsy fruit bat, swooping and dancing around, draping long streamers of jet exhaust over the watching boats on the lake. The one thing the Raptor ain't, is *stealthy*. It may be well-nigh invisible to radar guided air-to-air missiles, which is the only real point of stealth technology I suppose. But the plane is *huge*. Flying alongside two Mustangs and a Hornet, it dwarfed the WWII fighters, and was about half again as large as the F-18. It also made more noise than all of them together. Even at what I guessed to be ten or fifteen thousand feet -- so high it was nearly out of sight -- the F-22 roared like Niagara Falls. When it eased off the throttle, the Raptor could glide silently, but step on the gas and GRRROOAR-BB-BB-BOOM! I don't know how anyone could miss it coming as much as five miles away.

This year the special treat seemed to be the U.S. Navy Blue Angels. These hot shots fly on more testosterone than the usual Canadian Snowbirds. Our stunt pilot team flies the modest Canadair built CT-114 Tutor trainer. The U.S. Navy's aerobatic team flies a full-fledged combat aircraft, the F-18 Hornet. The difference is mainly in levels of noise. The Tutor whispers at a thousand feet, but the Hornet at ten thousand sounds like a freight train going off its rails. The Navy pilots also fly a *lot* more aggressively, as I found out.

Toronto is well positioned for an air show. The city huddles on the shore of Lake Ontario, and has all the open sky over the lake for planes to dive, climb, turn, tumble, and once in a while even crash. Only a few years ago, a four-engined, British Nimrod anti-sub plane went straight into the drink, killing the crew aboard. (A piece of the tail now resides in our air museum.) The planes pass over the city too, but usually on a simple return loop. The Snowbirds maintain their formation flying on the return, but keep a pretty fair altitude.

Not so the Blue Angels. When I rushed out on my balcony the first day, I was just in time to see a deep blue Hornet with yellow trim zap around the corner of my building. I was looking at the pilot almost level. And he was close enough to see clearly. This can't be right, I thought.

The next day I was up a little earlier. From the street you can't see as much of the action as from my balcony. Trees, buildings, and homes get in the way. I bought a slice of pizza and sat on the curb a while to eat it.

Ka-blam, zow! A *huge* blue Hornet races across the fifty feet of sky between the building on the other side of the street, and the trees on my side. I know how big these planes are. It gives me a pretty good idea how far away they are too. If that plane was higher than 200 feet and going less than 200 mph, I'd be much surprised.

The height of my building, by the way, is about 200 feet. It's one of the taller ones in the neighborhood, but not the tallest.

Okay... I didn't have much time to estimate. I recall the F-18 seemed about as large as my hand held out. Might have been 300 feet. Certainly he was flying over the stall speed, so that puts a lower limit on the m.p.h. Either way, that was much too low and much too slow. Had the slightest thing gone wrong, he would have had less than a split second before plowing into Queen street. And whoever was on the ground would have had no notice at all before they were blown to glory. And the neighborhood would be incinerated by a rain of blazing aviation fuel. It would be some show, alright.

When did they relax safety precautions, I'd like to know?

There were a few other close encounters of the Blue Angels kind that afternoon, but it seemed there were no repetitions on the final day. U.S. pilots are notorious for being trained to be exceptionally aggressive. Worse, they're deliberately hopped up on speed – artificial stimulants. I'm guessing these top guns were given a little too much leash, and perhaps they were pulled back a bit the next day.

Anyway, I don't want the next tremendous bang I hear to be the engine and sundry parts of an F-18 Hornet crashing their way through my apartment while I'm watching *Iron Man* on DVD.

WINTER BLAHS

Sometimes it's hard to sustain interest in anything. You slouch from one project to another, hoping to recapture the fascination you once felt for your numerous hobbies and pastimes, and then slowly realize that the zest is not there anymore. You earnestly wish you were doing something else ... but what?

Of late, I've been experiencing a little of that kind of ennui. New Year's is the beginning of the winter blahs, and they won't let up until at least May.

Among the many things I've done lately to keep myself busy, I watched my *Batman* DVDs (the 1990s series) from beginning to end. They're still great stories – better writing than in any of the many venues in which Batman has appeared. But, in my daydreams, I no longer want to be the mysterious crime-fighter who steps in when Batman is outmatched, to drag his bacon out of the fire.

I'm also reading two detective novels by Robert Galbraith ... who is far better known as J.K. Rowling, the author of the "Harry Potter" series. Since I'm only halfway through the first of the two books, the jury is still out. But I can say this much: so far, the first one is not heavy in action. So far I have not found most of the characters as intriguing as those in a Raymond Chandler mystery, nor does the crime pique my curiosity at all. In an apparent suicide, a pop star has jumped to her death from her posh London apartment. Meanwhile, our flawed hero sleuths around the city to satisfy a client who suspects it was no suicide. Halfway through the novel, though, there is not yet any sign that the death was anything *but* a suicide. In other words, there may be no crime at all. I suppose I ought to finish the book before forming an opinion.

Although I've continued to draw over the past few weeks, rather little of it has gone on-line. The activity of drawing itself remains satisfying, but scanning and editing with Photoshop is such a pain that I can barely force myself to do it. A few comments on *FurAffinity* aren't the reward they once were. In fact, I'm not anywhere near as interested in the site as I once was. I haven't "watched" anyone new in ages, and save very little of what I see. I have more than 350 folders for different furry artists on my hard drive ... and rarely look at any of them. Well ... who has time? And it all begins to blur after the first couple of thousand files.

Every day I log onto Facebook for a minimum of 20 minutes. Ostensibly, this is to keep up ... but keep up with *what*? Idle gossip, photos of cute kittens, and reinforcement from the politically like-minded? Yeah, that's *mostly* "what." Occasionally, though, someone gratuitously insults me. Most recently, I was blind-sided by an acquaintance, (and supposed friend) who apparently decided that one of my posts was offensive. Fair enough ... I make *faux pas* with the best of them. But instead of dealing with it in a constructive fashion, her preference was to hold me up to public humiliation, and she called me a racist creep.

Actually, all I had done was to link to a photo posted all over Facebook elsewhere, and to ask a Chinese-speaking friend whether it was for real, or a Photoshop gag. Facebook, always being "helpful" when you don't want it, added the photo from the original post. All the same, why does this make me "racist?" It even turned out that the photo *was* for real. According to Snopes, there really *is* a Won Fuk Hing bookstore in Shanghai!

I figure with friends like this, I don't need enemies.

I've been busy writing, also. Only I haven't been writing what I was supposed to be writing. Instead, I've written some short material for the next issue of *Broken Toys*, and a 3,300-word article about which Roman Emperor I would most like to have dinner with. I also wrote a short summary about the gas attack on Midwest FurFest for the editor of one SF fanzine.

This is not the writing I ought to be doing, though. I have a longish short story that is 95% finished ... but is hung up on a couple of points that require sharpening some skills that I don't presently possess. As well, I have a different short story in mind, based on real incidents. Unfortunately, even if I changed the names and details, the subject has a short temper, and if he were ever to get wind of the story, I suspect he would blow his top. Under the circumstances, it's hard to coax my muse out from hiding.

It doesn't help at all that the last short story I wrote was submitted to the magazine *Weird Tales* exactly one year ago ... and the editors still haven't read it!

At this point in my life, I don't expect to make a living at writing – developing a career at my age would take far too long. So I'm beginning to wonder if I can reasonably expect to publish a professional work of fiction sometime *before I'm dead*. Somehow, writing long, ambitious pieces that I can do nothing with except post online doesn't motivate me.

If there's been one highlight in recent weeks, it has been the power chair. I have dubbed it Traveling Matt. Because of the frigid weather (bad for the battery), I haven't been out of the apartment with it very often. But I have been out and around the neighborhood often enough to remember how much fun it can be to go places *just to be moving* ... and not going somewhere because I *must*. I've extended the distance I've traveled to about half a mile, which hasn't noticeably drained the batteries. The next few days ought to be moderately warm (for Toronto in January), so I'll be out again at least once before the weekend. I'm looking forward to the naked sun, a breeze in my face, the parking meters slipping by faster than I can count them, and the rhythmic, barely-felt thump of sidewalk cracks under my wheels!

Symbolic of the start of the Blah Season, I plan to take the Christmas tree down any day now.

THE TURKS & CAICOS

Over the years, this Caribbean island nation has made overtures to Canada to be admitted to the Dominion. For some reason, no Canadian government has ever taken them seriously. It's a fascinating idea, though, and it would probably annoy the hell out of Washington ... that may be good enough reason all it itself to admit the Turks & Caicos into the Dominion of Canada. They aren't big islands. The population is only around 32,000. Even if we bribed the entire population with \$10,000 each to vote in a referendum to join Canada, it would cost less than the payroll for the NHL's 300-or-so hockey players for a given season. We'd make that back from the tourist industry in no time. Other good reasons to absorb the islands? Well, how about a site closer to the equator to launch Canadian satellites? As for a suggestion they be joined to Saskatchewan ... that's absurd. The islands should be their own province. But, if not, they should at least be joined to one of the maritime provinces ... say Nova Scotia or PEI. I can't wait to see what they name their hockey team! They'll have to have one, of course. Perhaps the Cockburn Town Crabs? Yes, that's right! Their capital city is named after the Canadian folk singer, Bruce Cockburn! This is a match made in heaven ... or at least made in a tropical paradise. So, naturally, it'll never happen.

Yes, I Said That

Interlinos 2014

Sometimes when money talks, it's the voice of reason.

The law may change, but it is never wrong.

In space, no one can hear you snore.

Facebook is the opiate of the masses.

It's never too late for a righteous lynching.

Where in the world does *anyone* live where they came from?

If it was really manly, we wouldn't let women do it.

Bad as it is when our government says it will do something and doesn't, it's usually more cause for concern when it doesn't say anything but goes ahead and does it.

Feeding your cat is the art of the impossible.

I have to laugh at those oil-rich Gulf states, building huge new cities in a void. When the oil runs out or the banking moves on, those shining office towers and gaudy hotels will be without purpose and empty. There is no native economy that can support them. Their foundations will crumble in the shallow desert sand, and the 100-story ghosts will topple into the Gulf, but already they will have been forgotten.

God has either become a lot more interesting since he created the world in seven days ... or he never had anything to do with it.

First rule in business: lying is part of doing business. Second rule: don't believe what you hear doing business.

There is a school somewhere that teaches Moms to make peanut butter sandwiches for their kids by spreading it as thinly as possible ... then scraping it off again until nothing is

left but a brown stain on the bread. Anything to avoid spending an extra \$1.98 a week from the household budget.

One reason there is so much wealth in the United States is that a lot of rich people are born rich. In fact, that's the main reason ... not the free market.

Facts remain facts, no matter how much time goes by. But who believes in Wotan, Jupiter or Mithra any more?

My last words on the subject of fandom - something that means everything to all people means *nothing* to *anyone*.

When you have to capitalize Art, the letters to use are BS.

Hammers may be blunt, but they can at least drive in a point.

History rewrites itself over and over again, but it always writes the same thing ... and the readers unknowingly read it again and again as though it were new.

I would never trust the safety of anything that depended on my competence to make the right call.

Highly progressive income taxes have been the most effective means of keeping some individuals from being so astronomically much richer than everyone else that they routinely corrupt government. But most Americans are so phobic about taxes that beings with the god-like power of possessing billions of dollars walk invisibly among them.

If all you read is t-shirts, maybe you deserve to be stupid.

Inside every old person is a dead person waiting to eat brains.

Whatever happened to government for the people, by the people and of the people? Answer, the people elected the corporate elite on the promise that the poor would be oppressed even more rigorously than before. Lincoln wept.

I think *my* god is a stand-up comedian.

Give a man the freedom to choose his own destiny, and confidence in his own wisdom, and he will probably mess himself up badly before the end of the day.

If you can't say anything good about a person, post it on Facebook.

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