



Broken Toys 37 is brought to you against sizable odds by **Taral Wayne**, who by good fortune is still alive and kicking 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>. Bitter experience suggests that further issues will appear roughly monthly for the foreseeable future. 50 issues now seem a realistic goal! © KIDDELIDIVEE BOOKS & ART 296 – MARCH 2015

*Editorial Mutters: This issue almost seems a miracle. So much has happened to me in the last few weeks that might have signaled a need for such terrible changes in my life that missing a deadline or two would have paled by comparison. But in the end, it seems as though I have dodged a bullet ... there was little wrong with me that some changes to my medications wouldn't straighten out. I'm being necessarily vague, since most of this issue is about all the fuss I've been through, and I want you to read it. Obviously, this won't be the most fun issue I've published. But despair not! I have one or two light-hearted pieces to add to the issue that should help it be less of a downer. In fact, I have so much material that I could have made this a fifty-page issue! However, I think the extra articles would be better held over for April. By the way, I forgot to include credits for the art in the Halloween issue! First of all, the splendid front cover by **Ken Fletcher**, whose black & white line work I coloured with Photoshop. Then the magnificent back cover, in diabolical red & black, by **Brad Foster** – whose art I sat on for about two years, originally intending it for something else.*

This Too Shall Pass

As a writer, one of the most important tools that I use is irony. Yet there are times when the irony is of a different quality from the sort that creates a face-palm, more like one that leads to an anticlimactic “waw-waw” sound, instead. I face one of those moments later today, when I keep a 2:45 appointment with my doctor at the clinic down the street for a general check-up.

I'd needed one for months, but for one reason or another it was never convenient. Early in the month, I finally called to set an appointment. As it happened, I was unable to make that appointment. A weather bomb went off, blanketing the city with snow and low temperatures that my power chair, “Traveling Matt,” wasn't equipped to cope with. All I could do was call in that morning with my excuses ... however, it was the clinic that phoned me first, to tell me that it was *my doctor* who wasn't coming in! In fact, when I called back to set a new appointment, I learned

that a number of physicians were canceling their appointments that day. A flu was going around, the clinic said. I'll bet. That's the "face-palm" kind of irony.

The clinic put me down for the 19th. On the 17th, however, I woke up to a pain in my side. I had had a mild ache there about week before that quickly went away, and appeared to be nothing more than a stretched muscle. Who doesn't have a sore muscle, now and then? The new ache was a great deal worse, however, and *didn't* go away. It was, in fact, suspiciously like the symptoms of something I had thought I had finished with as long ago as the 1980s. Before long, the pain grew worse still, and I began to experience a need to vomit. Curiously, there was no nausea ... just a need to vomit. And I had a sore testicle. If you're ever had them, you recognize these as symptoms of a kidney stone.

A kidney stone! But I thought I wasn't supposed to get those anymore! I had gone through the agony of several, and on two occasions had had to be operated on to remove stones that would not budge, no matter how much fluid I drank, or how long I waited. The last stone afflicted me in the late 1980s, and was so severe that the small blood vessels in my face burst, covering my features with a spiderweb of dark lines that must have frightened the bejesus out of everyone – I never knew that until later, when a flustered nurse told me. A doctor shot me up with morphine, which took enough of the edge off the stone that I was able to quiet down ... and eventually it passed. As you might imagine, my memory of events subsequent to the shot are a little hazy. The surgeon who removed my first stone gave it to me as a souvenir, and I have it to this day. It was about a quarter of an inch long, and nearly as wide. I don't know how big the last stone was, but from the way it felt it would have qualified as a good target for an asteroid fly-by.

I was determined not to have kidney stones ever again. Since there had apparently never been anything wrong with my blood chemistry, there was no medication that would be any use, so I decided that by hook or crook I would dramatically increase my fluid intake. It was my belief that years of not being able to afford any beverage but water had led to chronic dehydration. There were not many options to correct this, but of those available, coffee was the most attractive. I disliked it less than tea, it wasn't expensive, it was easy to make at home and was available everywhere. Fortunately, I learned to appreciate coffee quickly ... and never had another stone.

Until a couple of days ago, that is. So ... what happened? As best as I can tell, I've been getting sloppy. In addition to the coffee, I need to drink as much soft drink or water as I can, and water – as always – bores me. Feeling the pinch of a dollar-twenty-a-day habit, I realized I could no longer keep guzzling soft drinks. My puritan friends selfishly cheered the good news – but they were only thinking of *their* disdain of *my* pleasures. They *weren't* thinking in the long term. Even with keeping water cold in the fridge, I've gradually fallen out of the habit of drinking it, and the inevitable consequences appear to have caught up with me.

After a few hours of waiting for the pain to subside, it had plainly only gotten worse. It might go on getting worse all day ... or all week. The choices were to wait and see, or just act on the assumption nothing was going to get better through inaction. I made up my mind and phoned the social services office downstairs in my building. They came right up, asked questions and advised I call for an ambulance.

They were wonderful. While I rustled up some clean underwear and a shirt without very many soup stains on it, *they* actually phoned the hospital. They helped me gather my prescription meds

and a few things into a bag, turned off the lights and unplugged the coffee machine. Almost before I got my shoes on, the Fire Department's emergency response team was there, tramping slush and mud into my bedroom with their huge boots. I had to forgive them – they were there in case I had had a coronary. The paramedics from the ambulance got there only a couple of minutes later. They asked if I could walk to the elevator. These days, unfortunately, that's a lot to ask of me even at the best of times, so I had to answer, "no."

I was on a gurney rolling down the hall almost before I knew it. I was pretty much at my least comfortable at that point, as some of the gymnastics of getting aboard the gurney had doubtlessly bruised my ailing ureter even more. I was out of breath as well, so as soon as I was tucked away inside the ambulance (away from the brutal minus-15 weather), the paramedic gave me oxygen. It didn't seem to help as much as just gulping air through my mouth. I began to catch my breath, though, and the ache in my side was subsiding. The paramedic and I had a nice chat on the way to Toronto Western. I'm afraid that I had to confess to her that by the time we arrived, the pain had entirely gone away!

That's an irony too, but on the same order as washing your car before it rains: far too commonplace to take notice of.

To make a long afternoon short, I had modest waits between furious bouts of activity. They took blood, an urine sample, and stuffed me into a CAT scanner to do the one indispensable thing – see if there was still a stone stuck in me. Between blood lettings and other medical procedures, I mostly dozed. Having problems sleeping while lying down, I've been getting much better at sleeping upright. I thought everyone was wizardly efficient and the people uniformly pleasant. There was only one exception, a staffer who said it wasn't far from the waiting area to radiology, and persuaded me to walk. I should have asked for a cab. It wasn't very far, to be honest, but he *badly* overestimated my stamina. For the last bit, he found me a wheelchair.

There was a little more waiting and dozing in a sitting room, before someone came by with a note for me. It said, "please call your sister, at ..." I had planned to call several people, but had been hustled out of my apartment so quickly that I had had no chance. But the social workers from downstairs kept my sister's number on hand, and had already informed her about my trip to Emergency. Darn, they were good! After a little while longer, a doctor arrived and confirmed that I had had a stone. In fact, I *still* had a stone. It was not very large – about a millimeter long, and I had almost passed it. It lay in my ureter just before it opened into the bladder. I was given a prescription for some powerful, morphine-derived painkillers and then asked how I planned to get home.

I had been worrying about that from the start, but whenever I asked about it, I was told not to worry about it. However, it was not a matter of "walk or take the bus" – neither of which was an option. I was offered a trip back by ambulance, or a paid-for cab. I picked the cab, thinking the hospital might have better things to do with an ambulance than chauffeur me around. I barely had time to leave the examination area and get to the lobby before the cab turned up.

So that was my afternoon. From the time I left my apartment, had a CAT scan, been diagnosed and then released had been about six hours. All things considering – I wasn't in pain by that time and my condition wasn't urgent – I felt well served by Ontario's health care system. The same system

that our Prime Minister believes is thoroughly flawed and would be made better if I had spent a month of two of my budget in return for poorer service.

That too is irony ... but of the same kind as a notice from the taxman that you're due a refund check, just before you are shot by a firing squad.

No, the irony intended from the first is just that all this happened two days before I was due a general check-up. It would never have revealed the kidney stone lying in wait, or done me any good later, when the stone decided to move. It is just a lame, literary irony about fatalism, more like the kind where a pretentious novel about racism ends with the symbolic discovery of a Lincoln-head penny in the bigot's cold, dead hand.

You know, in a way I almost enjoyed my afternoon in Emergency. I had an interesting afternoon out of the apartment. Once admitted to the hospital, I was in little or no discomfort, the surroundings were novel, I enjoyed rare interactions with some pleasant people, the stone would move on its own and, if anything, I felt better than I had in quite a while.

However, next time I really *must* think of a better excuse to get out of the apartment.

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How to Drown in Bed

Some things *should* be full of hot air ... writers, for one. But first and foremost, lungs.

For some time I had been noting troubling symptoms that I meant to take up with my doctor the next time I saw her. I always meant to see her *soon*, but one thing or another would come up and result in putting it off, again and again. Meanwhile, my list of complaints grew.

For one thing, I had noticed a slight swelling in my feet and ankles. It slowly grew worse. I had complained about it to my former, quack doctor three years ago, but he just pressed his thumb into the doughy flesh, watched it slowly rebound, as though it was some fascinating new form of fungus he had just discovered, and said, "You're holding water." Well, duh! I wanted to know what he thought should be done about it. Apparently nothing, since he never recommended a treatment.

Fast-forward three years. By then, my entire left leg was swelling to the knee, and socks left a three-centimeter impression in my ankle that looked like an inside-out doughnut. That was the first thing.

The second was that I was taking a drug for gout – more of Dr. Quack's good work – and I was certain I didn't have gout. I had complained about some pains in my foot that *might* have indicated gout ... except that there was no swelling or redness that is usually associated with gout, and similar pains occurred in other parts of my feet – the small toe, the ball of my foot, and even the back of the other foot – that were even harder to square with a diagnosis of gout. I knew enough about the condition to ask why it had not shown up in blood tests we had done before. Dr. Quack

said there was a slight excess of uric acid in the results, but he just hadn't mentioned it until then. That's when I began to suspect him of lying as well as general incompetence.

As it happened, the odd little pains were manifestations of nerve damage sometimes associated with other autoimmune disorders ... such as the Myasthenia Gravis I was finally diagnosed with.

Not that Dr. Quack was much help in reaching that diagnosis. I entered his office with my right eye all but closed, unable to open it without hauling the lid up with a finger. Without preamble, I stated, "I need to see an ophthalmologist," Dr. Quack deferred to my superior expertise, and said, "Yes, you need to see an ophthalmologist," as though the thought had never occurred to him before. The ophthalmologist, by the way, took about 30 seconds to come to the conclusion I had MG, and sent me immediately to a neurologist.

By then I was already taking the Allopurinol prescribed to me by Dr. Quack for the gout I didn't think I had. I asked him to substantiate his diagnosis and the only answer I got was that it would require a messy biopsy and it would be painful. This was patently untrue, since it was supposedly a blood test that led him to a diagnosis of gout in the first place.

I dropped that dangerous incompetent at last. I had only kept him out of plain laziness, and paid for it dearly in unnecessary pain and disruption of my life. I sincerely hope he gets cancer, and then treats himself for dyspepsia.

Before I was finished with him entirely, though, Dr. Quack managed to inflict a couple of parting blows. I needed paperwork from him for my social worker to process an application for a disability pension and allowance for special diet. Dr. Quack refused to fill out any such papers. I quote him verbatim, "You don't need a pension!" I was supposed to have a job, apparently. What was a little Myasthenia Gravis compared to the Work ethic? My social worker was speechless when she heard this.

In time, I had a new doctor at the bright shiny new clinic down the street, and he filled out the necessary paperwork for my application without a qualm. The government of Ontario apparently took him at his word, since I was in due time granted the pension – and then, later, granted the powered chair I call "Traveling Matt." For none of this do I owe Dr. Quack any thanks.

I have allowed a certain dislike of my previous GP to lead me into the sin of digression ...

The third thing was that I was having greater and greater difficulty sleeping at night. It was hard to pin down at first, and only bothered me some nights. But, gradually, some nights became most nights, and then finally almost all nights. I would lay down, begin to drift off, and then suddenly my breathing would grow heavy and my heartbeat would race as though I had been startled by a noise. It was impossible to sleep. In fact, I often had to sit up to lessen the symptoms. I didn't believe it was sleep apnea, since I had friends who suffered from it, had read extensively about the subject, and what I experienced didn't seem to match what I knew about apnea. I was not gasping or short of breath. I was just breathing heavily and suddenly wide-awake.

Then there was that matter of the laboured heart action. That couldn't be good. I was noticing it at other times too, but ascribed it to the effort of overcoming my chronically fatigued condition.

Both got worse with time. I was breathing heavily and my heart was pounding like a pile driver if I got up from the couch to load the DVD player – a distance of about ten feet. If this was the effect of my Myasthenia worsening, something had to be done.

Fourth, there was that sleepless thing. I experimented with pillows, seeking to elevate my head and upper body, with little success. My sister bought a foam wedge for me, the kind that medical supply houses like to sell for around \$90. She found it in a Sally Anne for ten bucks. It didn't work as well as I'd hoped, but eventually, I found a position on my side that was surprisingly comfortable, with my chest supported but left arm free, using a separate stack of pillows to support my head. It seemed to be my new nighttime paradigm.

But it didn't last. Eventually I was looking for ways to sleep ever more upright. Meanwhile, entire nights went by with me sitting cross-legged on my bed, drowsing as best I could, until the sheer length of time I had been doing nothing useful drove me to "wakefulness." Surprisingly, I was able to function, but it was the sort of life that leads you to question whether it was worthwhile.

Everything was a drudge. I scheduled simple chores like mopping the floor or washing out some jockey shorts in the sink over several days. Sometimes it was more of an effort to eat at the end of the day than it seemed worth, so I'd eat a can of corned beef that didn't need to be cooked, or warm some beans. Usually, I was so tired by the time I finished with my e-mail, Facebook and the rest of the Internet that I didn't feel like watching a movie or any TV. I never finished what I started to draw. If I read, I began to nod off. My heart was pounding constantly, and leaning over to grab the TV remote left me breathless. I had no erotic impulses at all. It was as though I had slid unknowingly into quicksand and never noticed when the dark closed overhead.

I was damned fortunate that I had a doctor's appointment when I did, I guess, because it changed everything.

Dr. Lee is my most recent GP at the Parkdale Community Health Center. I had liked her predecessor, Dr. Fung, but Dr. Lee was young and very cute, and she put me on a friendly footing from the start. Like Dr. Fung, she listened to the patient and was proactive. As soon as I stopped explaining about the gout I didn't have, she said, "Okay, just stop taking the Allopurinol," and that was that!

During the examination, Dr. Lee put her stethoscope to my chest, front and back, and listened intently. I didn't actually see her do a double-take, or tap the instrument's diaphragm in consternation, but I imagine it with no difficulty. She listened some more then took off the stethoscope.

"Your right lung is full of water."

What? "You mean my right lung is full of water?"

"Yes."

Well, that explained a lot!

The reason my heart went ballistic with the least effort was because I was actually not getting enough air; because the space I needed to fill with oxygen was full of fluid instead! As well, whenever I laid down in bed, I would literally start to drown.

The doctor wrote a prescription for a diuretic called Furosemide, and told me to fill it immediately, and take the first pill as soon as I got home. She would arrange an appointment with a cardiologist at St. Joseph's Hospital, about a mile down the street and easy for me to get to. Although she told me not to worry, she also said that if I felt any chest pains or other distress, to call 911 right away. She left me with the impression that while my heart was okay, a coronary any moment was a distinct possibility.

I did as I was told, and sure enough the Furosemide seemed to take immediate effect. I began to feel better right away, and that night I slept the sleep of the just and the well-oxygenated for the first time in ages.

Little did I know that that was *not* the entire story ...

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Prisoner of St. Joe's

11 March

I'm sitting on a hospital bed with an unfamiliar, borrowed laptop, wondering how I got here.

As far as I can reconstruct the last few days, it began with a phone call from St. Joseph's. I had already had a scheduled CAT scan at St. Joe's to verify the presence of water in my right lung, and unexpectedly received the news that the envelope surrounding my heart, called the pericardium, was also filled with water. Thus with two blows I learned the cause not only of my shortness of breath, but also why my heart hammered like a steam-driven pile driver if I so much as bent over to pick up a fallen jelly donut. The water was literally squeezing my heart. A day or two later, the hospital called me and insisted I return for another CAT scan right away -- I presumed to verify the findings, or to explore overlooked details. I told the caller that I already had an appointment with my GP that day at four.

That was all right, I was told, I could come in for the new scan at 11:30 that morning.

I groaned to myself. At best, I might get five or six hours of sleep ... but I agreed.

Bright and early on the appointed Monday, I drove Traveling Matt along Queen Street, marveling in the sudden, Spring-like weather. It was the first day in two solid months that the temperature had risen above the freezing point, and the sun was shining. The snow that had accumulated over two hard, soul-destroying months of winter had magically vanished, all but for a few vestiges lurking like forgotten evils in shadowy corners where the sun couldn't reach ... biding their time.

I couldn't believe my luck. Not then...

It all made sense later, though. I was having my usual, *rotten* luck all along. In the interview with

the cardiologist after the scan, he told me not to worry about my afternoon appointment with the GP. It wasn't going to happen ... no way. Instead, I was being admitted to the cardiac ward immediately!

Naturally, I had made no preparations for this eventuality. I did a quick summary of my assets in my head. Having thought I would pick up a few things on the way home, I had put money in my wallet, and always carried a card with vital addresses on it. There was a pen, and a half-finished book in my backpack. In my pocket, a tube of lip-gloss ... more useful than you'd imagine, really. Then I cast my thoughts back on the apartment. Locked. No lights left on. I had picked up the most recent mail on the way out -- perfect. Still, I envisioned a long, boring incarceration.

The first day at St. Joe's is already somewhat of a blur. Aside from the CAT scan, I recall being led up to the Cardiac Care Unit in Traveling Matt, then exchanging my civilian clothes for the traditional prisoner's garb -- a single-piece gown that tied at the back and left nothing to the imagination. Then I was wired up like a Christmas tree with electronic sensors that registered my heart beat, respiration, beard growth and lord knows what else. Of course, I couldn't be a guest of St. Joe's without having a large IV shunt jammed into my arm. Periodically throughout the rest of the day and that night, a nurse came by and pumped a small amount of blood out, and sterile saline solution in, to keep the shunt flushed. Oddly, at no point did anyone ever actually use it to inject me with anything. The sole drug I've been injected with so far was something to thin the blood ... and that was administered into my abdominal muscle!

Indignity followed injury. I was ordered to lie on my back while a nurse struggled manfully to pull a pair of elastic stockings up my legs. My Gawd, they were uncomfortable. Trying to lighten the situation, I had to ask her if this was how it felt when women put on pantyhose. "Not quite so bad," she said. So far, there is no hint when I'll be allowed to remove them. I'd be lying if I said they got more comfortable, but I *have* gotten more used to them.

The theory behind the elastic socks is that the pressure they place on my legs will help force fluids in the tissues back into the bloodstream, where they can be carried away to the kidneys to be excreted. So far, there has been uncertain progress on that front. My left leg is still bloated.

But not my right. That little detail perplexed my cardiologist mightily. Edema due to congestive heart failure ought to affect both legs, not one or the other. He ordered another ultrasound, this time of my swollen leg. Results are still pending as of this writing.

I enjoyed one small bit of luck. All the poking and prodding was over in time for dinner. It was a very small bit of luck, indeed. While it is hard to complain about a free dinner, it consisted of a small piece of turkey with mushroom gravy, mashed potatoes, diced squash and weak tea. Knowing that I was not likely to fare better and could well starve in this place of healing if I didn't eat what was put in front of me, I girded my loins and swallowed the loathsome meal. I don't like mashed potatoes, don't cotton to squash, hate mushrooms on anything, and wouldn't wash a leper's feet with tea. To be honest, the meal wasn't entirely bad. The dessert of grapes and a small cup of fruit juice went down well. And my menus are now marked, "doesn't like mashed potatoes and squash." They know to serve me coffee rather than tea, as well. Still, next morning's breakfast didn't start the day well -- cream of wheat in a cup. It was like eating mucus. Dinner that night was mac and cheese ... something new to add to my list of "don't likes."

All in all, though, some bit of every meal is just fine. The fruit and juices make up for a lot, and I can ask for a "snack" before bed -- so far that has amounted to a turkey or tuna sandwich, and fills one of the empty corners of my stomach nicely.

I have to admit that the staff has been pretty good. They're been cheerful, helpful and uncomplaining. Did I need a razor to shave? They found one, and lather as well. (I could have shaved with warm water, or soap, but lather was better to be sure.) Did I need hand cream? A small squeeze bottle of it appeared on my nightstand. Did I want another pillow? Two pillows? Four? I had them. Did the confounded sensors detach themselves from my chest and send the monitor into a fit of booping and bleeping? Someone appeared promptly to tape the fool thing on again. And when the phone next to my bed rang, but went unnoticed amid all the high-tech sounds of a modern hospital in full swing, Joseph or Irene or Meagan appeared at my bedside and told me to answer the bloody telephone! I insisted on going to the patient washroom myself, though, refusing any help with that damned bottle.

Did I mention that the old metal bedpans and the Melmac piss-pots have been replaced with recycled paper products? Or that I'm fighting the urge to wear one of the paper pans like a funny Panama hat?

Once I was settled in for the night, I removed the card with my vital phone numbers from my wallet, and went to work calling. To begin with, I realized that about half the numbers were no longer good. Also, some were for people I hadn't spoken to in years. When I got out of St. Joe's, I was going to have to revise the card drastically. To be perfectly honest, though, there weren't many people who needed to be informed of my whereabouts. I may know a couple of hundred people, but it wasn't urgent they be contacted for days ... even weeks. So, I narrowed my list down to a few close friends: Bob & Sharry Wilson, Steven Baldassara, Hope Leibowitz, and my sister Christine. I talked with each in turn, and asked Hope to leave a brief message on FaceBook. I gave them each of them the number of the phone next to my bed.

The second afternoon of my incarceration, Catherine Crockett phoned, using the number from Hope. She asked if she could drop by, and offered to bring a laptop I could borrow. St. Joseph's had Wi-Fi, and Catherine thought I could use it to connect to Facebook and my groups. I wouldn't be able to do e-mail, though, since I didn't have any addresses, but having access to the Internet would in itself be enormously liberating. When she arrived, she showed me the ropes -- it was running XP, which had been my previous platform, so there wasn't much to learn. Catherine thought it would also play music or even run a DVD.

Much to my astonishment, Catherine brought a few flowers in a vase, a touch I would never have thought of.

I was also expecting Steven that evening. Although Steven is perpetually busy, he agreed to come by and pick up my house keys. I had made a long list of things I wanted from home, and Steven would bring them to me. I asked for my battered copies of *Lord of the Rings*, a work I can read all week if I have to, and that I never grew tired of. I wanted some extra underwear, my fuzzy slippers, my heavy coat in case I have to return home when the weather grows wintery again, a number of my pencils and pens, my drawing board set, some unfinished work I had in a docket, my reading glasses, a gym bag to carry all that crap in, and -- perhaps most important -- the recharging unit for Traveling Matt. The batteries are not likely to run down even if it sits unused

for a week or two, but if by some mischance they *were* to run down, I'd have no way to get the 300-pound electric behemoth of a chair home!

I also asked for one of my USB memory sticks. It had somewhere between two-and-three-hundred albums saved on it that I could play on the laptop. It was also the best means to take home any writing I did – such as this.

Steven preformed his mission almost flawlessly. He stayed a little while, and tried to make a connection to St. Joe's Wi-Fi server. Unfortunately, he met total defeat in his effort. We never did discover the cause of the problem, but Steven was able to connect with the server without trouble using his cell phone, so we knew the problem wasn't on St. Joe's end. It was with the laptop. Steven thinks the aerial might be damaged, or else the software isn't configured properly for St. Joe's server.

Since I'm sitting here on the third day, writing "Prisoner of St. Joe's" for the next *Broken Toys* while listening to Dire Straits on headphones, I have little cause for complaint. Perhaps I can get further word of events to Hope, to post on FaceBook as needed.

Otherwise it seems the day will be uneventful. There will be another ultrasound, to see if there are any obstructions in the circulation of my swollen leg, but there will be nothing to mark the passage of time except scanty meals, one after the other, and the succession of pills.

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17 March

Just as my imprisonment at St. Joe's was unexpected, it seems totally appropriate that my release came as a surprise as well. On the morning of my 4th day, the cardiologist revealed that the ultrasound had found no obstructions in the blood vessels of my swollen leg. As well, he was satisfied that I was making progress toward removing the fluids from my lung and heart with the diuretic he had prescribed. He was also permanently taking me off one of the legacy medications I have been taking. In the effort to control my blood pressure, Dr. Quack had put me on Adalat. When that proved ineffective, he added still more drugs, without experimenting to see whether or not it was useful to continue the Adalat. It apparently wasn't, since my blood pressure had not risen at all during my stay at St. Joe's. It seems, too, as though one of the side effects of Adalat is that it can cause *fluid retention*.

I could leave as soon as I collected my gear. The near future still holds many more appointments with doctors, who will continue to monitor my condition. I will continue taking the diuretic as long as I'm told. I *was* warned that if the fluid does not entirely disappear, it might be necessary to drain it by more intrusive methods. Drilling, but hopefully not fracking. Once again I asked about my ticker, and was once again reassured that it was fine.

I must have made a fine sight, roaring down the halls of St. Joe's aboard Traveling Matt, with my backpack, a large gym bag full of necessities and a computer case strung around me and the chair like a one-man expedition to explore Outer Mongolia! Once out on the streets, heads turned there as well.

Home again, I look around at familiar walls and don't quite sense they are entirely real. I often

have this disassociative experience when I've been away from home for any length of time. One day I am in Los Angeles or Montreal, and the next day back in Toronto ... yet I am somehow in both places at once. Or maybe neither. It is almost as though there were some deeper layer of reality behind both, but my eyes cannot tear away the veil of illusion. Then I go online and all that philosophical rot is laid aside.

All that that really matters is that I can get up for a cup of coffee without the threat of an impending coronary, and that I can get a good sleep at night.



What was I thinking? Have I sold my integrity for a free book? Couldn't I have held out for cash?

A while ago, I got an offer from Fred Patten for a review copy of his latest book. It's called *The Furry Future*, and that pretty much describes the contents. It appears to be a print-on-demand publication, published via the Internet.

The thing is, I have never made a habit of reading fan-written fiction, and doubly so fan-written *furry* fiction. It isn't hard to guess why. While the skill to string words together isn't uncommon, the larger issues of construction, plot, logic, imagery, characterization, style and theme occupy higher dimensions that few amateur writers are even aware of, much less able to navigate. I have enough trouble overcoming my suspicion that a *professional* short story might be a waste of my time. Sadly, fan fiction almost comes with a guarantee of that.

So whatever possessed me to undertake to read *nineteen* furry fan stories and review them?

As I noted, "free" is a powerful appeal. But I think I was also a little flattered. Fred and I are worlds apart in our opinions about furry fandom, as I think Fred is aware. It is a bit surprising that he was willing to entrust his latest brainchild to my blunt analytical tools. When I wrote back to accept the offer I made no promises, but said I would do my best to be fair.

The fact is that I'm very aware of my own status as a writer of that widely despised genre, fan fiction. Some of my stories have been mercenarily inspired fetish writing for whichever fetishist would foot the bill. A good deal of it has been stories set in science fiction fandom – fan fiction *about* fans. And I think at least a couple of my stories are genuine fiction, rather than some form of fanac. The one thing

they all have in common is that they have not been published professionally, and therefore don't come with whatever guarantee the names Tor, Ace or Doubleday nominally confers on a work of fiction.

That being the case, how dare I cast aspersions upon the fan fiction of other writers?

Because I *can*, that's why.

I do like to think of myself as an exception, of course. Unlike those other amateurs, I have decades of experience behind me, and have probably written a couple of million words. I am also widely read, and have thought carefully about what I am doing.

Unfortunately, I doubt that makes me as unique as I like to think I am. Other fan writers have also read thousands of books and written millions of words, too. No doubt, they have also given their efforts deep and prolonged thought.

And so, ultimately, I'm reduced to sputtering, "But I *am* better, I *am*!" Perhaps ... I do have the word of a couple of professional writers that I have some style, and have written passages that they admit possess a certain poetry. A retired magazine editor thinks I have the "write stuff."

But the point here is that I am highly skeptical of fan fiction, and at the same time well-aware of the irony of my own membership in the despised class of fan fiction writers. To the extent I'm capable, I approach the task of reviewing *The Furry Future* with unaccustomed humility. It will be useful to compare any flaws I perceive in the collected stories in this volume with my own recent writing, to see whether or not I commit the same sins!

This, by the way, is not the review of *The Furry Future* which I intend to write. For that, you will have to wait until I either finish reading the book ... or fling it across the room in the uncontrollable rage of a betrayed reader.

[The finished review can be read at *File 700*, here: <http://file770.com/?p=21524>]

There is trouble with the FAAns this year, I think. Participation is low – I had read that, only a week or two from Corflu, a mere 30 ballots had been collected. The Administrator, Mike Meara, sent an e-mail to encourage voting, and hinted that he would like to forward useful suggestions to whoever is Administrator next year. I can't say I'm terribly surprised by the slump in interest.

I wrote back to Mike: "*I'm one of those people who decided to give the FAAns a pass, and have been saying as much for some time. "I have no grievance – it's just that the rather predictable results from year to year have grown boring, and seem pointless. Maybe fanzine fandom is too small to support even an in-group award? Or maybe too many people don't vote, allowing those who are most dedicated to set the agenda? If the later, my withdrawal this year will hardly help ... but neither did my participation in previous years really assist in supporting a vibrant and exciting form of peer recognition.*

"I have a lively private correspondence, and it's been clear to me that I'm not the only one feeling that the FAAns are in the grip of some sort of malaise. Something does need to be done if they are to remain meaningful."

It will be interesting to see what changes, if any, are made to the FAAns ... if they are to survive.



WAHF: RON KASMAN, who seems to have his hands full with a newborn... I'm a little unclear whose, though. REESE D'ORLYCOTT, who as usual, is shy of public exposure. DALE SPEIRS, who says that there is no need to marvel at the province of Alberta's amazingly slow rate of political change. Although the same party has ruled in Alberta for 43 straight years, it *has* changed tone slightly from decade to decade. JANET WILSON, whose computer churlishly won't open the files! RON KASMAN, who was on his way out the door for diapers. WILLIAM BREIDING, who brings his fanzines home from work, but forgot his USB flash drive that day. JOHN PURCELL asks that I run his COA : askance73@gmail.com DAVE REDD who was disturbed that his high-quality reproduction of the Smurfette was not painted in authentic, life-like, blue skin tones.

ERIC MAYER, GROGGY.TALES@GMAIL.COM

You and Ned were first under the post, as usual.

I wrote Chris a note of congratulations on his 400th issue:

"When I learned of the existence of eFanzines back in 2005 I took a peek purely out of nostalgia. I had no intention of sticking around or participating, but a few names from the old days, and a few zines, caught my fancy, prominent among them *Drink Tank*. Here was someone younger, with a passion for zines. It proved there was still some life left in fanzine fandom, that it wasn't totally fossilized, that it was, therefore, worth getting involved in. I appreciated that you always did your own thing with *DT* too. Isn't that what a fanzine should be? Something personal, not based on a worn template from previous generations."

It's a nice art gallery [in *DT* 400]. But where are *you*? Considering you wrote 100 articles (is that right?) for *DT*, I would've thought you were entitled to more of a nod than being mentioned once in passing in a list of *DT* artists. Why didn't he ask you for a written bit and why none of your art?

I think my "omission" was just Chris typically rushing toward publication without much planning. Before issue 399, he told me that I could contribute anything to number 400, but 399 was a Superman theme. I concentrated on brushing off that old Superman number from *File* 770, fixing it up a little and having it proofread. I then thought I'd have a couple of weeks, AT LEAST, before I needed to write

something for issue 400. After all, you might expect Chris to take a little extra care in his final issue ... and two weeks is hardly a lot of time even for his usual schedule. To my surprise, and a little disappointment, Chris published issue 400 within TWO EFFIN' DAYS! I never had a chance. It didn't occur to him to warn me of this, or offer more time. But Chris publishes largely on impulse, I think. Oddly enough, issue 300 was much more of a landmark issue.

I have been wondering for a little while now if we aren't seeing fanzine fandom move imperceptibly into its terminal phase. The mainstays up to now are beginning to fade out of the picture. We see much less of *Banana Wings* than before, *F770* is annual, *Trap Door* is annual, *Challenger* seems to be unofficially annual, *Drink Tank* has ended its run, *Flag* and *Askance* (after promising starts) appear to have faltered. *iE* is gone. A few regulars remain, but they tend to be more sercon than interests me. The only "new" zine that I care much for is *Vibrator*.

I started loccing *DT* with issue 11 and for a few years I locced pretty often. After a while I wore out and, I see, I didn't loc after issue 331, but that was partly because last year I didn't write any locs except to *Broken Toys*. Well, also because over the years it focused more and more on cons and SF (and SF movies) and became almost impossible for me to say anything about. All in all, I wrote almost 100 locs to *Drink Tank*.

Broken Toys 35 LOC: Terrific logo for *Broken Toys* 35. I am finding that I can see either the title or the picture behind it by changing my focus. Gives me a way to pass these long winter nights.

Not to mention actually reading the text following the logo. Christmas? Did you have to remind me? I thought I was done with all that for the year. Okay, just kidding. I am an old Scrooge, though. We don't bother much about the holidays around here. No tree any longer. I approve your decorating scheme. Plenty of lights, ornaments, tinsel on any tree looks great – real, artificial, big, small, crooked, sparse. Yes, like a Parisian tart (as you say) in those neon lights. Wait, do they have neon lights in Paris? Of course after she's gone you notice her needles strewn all over the floor.

Or, in this case, snips of green mylar plastic from the artifical "needles."

Sounds like your chair zips along. What's the top speed? As for the breeze, you don't need a blanket, rather you need some big old steam punkish goggles. If you had a propeller beanie the breeze would turn the propeller. Quite impressive! But you'd better be careful about the cold, it'd be a shame if you needed more speed to cross the road and your call down to the engine room was answered with "The crystals canna take it!" Maybe you could rig it so your propeller recharged the battery.

I'd guess about five m.p.h., but there's no speedometer. From experience, I know it will go faster than most people walk.

If it is recommended to subject the batteries to temperatures under 18F there'd be plenty of days here that you wouldn't dare go out. A couple nights ago we went to 8F below zero.

No, no! It's recommended I *not* expose them to temperatures under 18 F (or minus 8 C).

You mention paying bills. We had trouble getting bills paid in the winter, since we often can't get out to the Post Office, until it dawned on us that most of them can be paid by electronic transfer. Cuts down on our mail too.

Like you, I'm not sure what I ought to do next. Probably ignore what's left of fanzine fandom just as it has always ignored me. I sent out *Vexed* (the collection of apa stuff) to exactly those few people I wanted to see it and the response was tremendous.

There you have it. Simply posting to eFanznes.com isn't enough to generate response. You *must* have a direct-mailing list.

Those were exciting close encounters with the Blue Angels. About the most "exciting" sighting I ever had was when I saw the Concorde make an unusual, and publicized landing, at the airport in Rochester. From a few miles away it looked like the tiniest miniature imaginable, but I could definitely see that distinctive shape, unlike Neil Young, who I supposedly saw from a hillside at an outdoor concert.

I've never seen a Concorde in flight, but one time when I was taxiing out of Toronto's Pearson International, I did a double-take at something I saw out the window. It looked exactly like a British Airways Concorde parked outside of the maintenance hangers! There was no Concorde service in or out of Toronto, so I couldn't believe it. I later learned that indeed Concorde's do land here on special occasions – bringing the Prince of Wales or the French President, for instance.

The *Weird Tales* editor hasn't read your story in a year? That's ridiculous. If you want to publish stories professionally there are an awful lot of online sf/fantasy mags that actually pay and even qualify for SFWA awards.

I've begun to think I'll have to look into an alternative. *Weird Tales* is so obviously the "right" place, and still publishes a paper edition I could give friends and relatives (instead of a despicably cheap URL). I wrote to a friend who sells short stories to magazines, and he suggested that the situation is so bad, now, that two-year waits are common. I wonder if the genre isn't becoming a "closed shop" after so many decades – no growth in the readership, so no new writers are needed either. On the other hand, my friend Bob writes novels, but cautions me not to jump to conclusions – the internet magazine is virtually *terra incognita* to the likes of us, and he doesn't have any more clear idea how a newbie gets started in the modern age than I do. My worry is that as newbies go, I'm getting old and probably don't have 20 years to get a toehold.

Broken Toys 36 LOC: Thanks for the Halloween issue, even if it is late. Or is it early? Really is there any time of year that isn't a good time for Halloween? I guess with all the snow we have on the ground this wouldn't be a good time for Halloweening.

Back in the Eighties when my kids were watching the Fraggles I wasn't drawn in, for whatever reason. The concept of various exotic intelligent life forms living in an underground world is certainly interesting enough.

But even without knowing anything about Fraggles I enjoyed your story. And as I sit here in my small house, awaiting the next predicted round of brutal sub-zero temperatures, I can certainly sympathize with Darl's pleasure at having relocated. For someone eking out an existence living in a

shabby hole in the wall in this world, living in a comfortable hole in the magical world of the Fraggles does sound appealing.

Mind you, I doubt I'd get on well with a tail, uncoordinated as I am. Probably I'd be forever knocking things over and getting my feet tangled up in it. Would my tail be strong enough to let me hang from anything? I would probably have to do some Richard Simmons workouts. Hmmmm. Imagining Richard Simmons with a Fraggie tail is not a good idea.

Worse. Arnold Schwarzenegger's tail – it would look all pumped up, like a big hairy salami.

I liked all the invention, of customs, and creatures, and underground landscapes. The subterranean maze where every cavern can have its own distinct character is cool and reminds me a little of the old cave crawls in 80s computer games. You never knew what would be around the next bend in the twisty passage -- often a treasure or a menace. Some of your descriptions are really excellent.

To me the poems worked as song lyrics. They read as if they could be set to music. And quite nice too. The rather melancholy lullaby for the dead was touching really. And yes, you could probably rework the main idea sans Fraggles and call it "Lullaby for the Dead" come to think of it!

I have thought of it. If I ever write an entire cycle of these stories, I might revise them to remove references to the Henson universe, and substitute my own names and creatures. I could cast House Gamins as sort of malign Doozers, for instance. No giant Gorgs, but we Humans in an alternate world would do as well. And I even have a sort of woodlands creature called a Xspirit that could take on the role of Fraggles.

I liked the idea of the holes having naturally running water. There are aspects of the Fraggie universe that don't appeal, however, like radish coffee. Well, I suppose if there was enough caffeine I could get used to it. The taste of those Doozer sticks also does not sound very mouth-watering. What is the mortality rate amongst Doozers from being trod upon accidentally?

*I later invented "bitter root coffee" because coffee made of radish would badly suck. I don't really know what Doozer sticks would taste like – they *look* like rock candy, and I imagine they might have a peppermint flavour. But I thought it would be funnier if they tasted more like horse radish! After all, how could Doozer sticks be made from radish, yet taste like peppermint candy?*

It's a shame there's no market for this sort of thing, unless, I suppose, you work for Disney and they decide they need to monetize the Fraggles more aggressively. Presumably a modest e-zine will slip under their radar and you will not find a gang of Legal Killer Gorgs breaking down your door.

Sorry ... there's someone pounding on my door ...

MERRYSTAR, MUPPET WIKI, SUPPORT@WIKIA.ZENDESK.COM

Hi Taral. What a great story! Although I am a bit disturbed that the only color of paint was red (the Fraggles are just so generally colorful...) I liked the idea that they also have spirits abroad on Halloween, and also that their spirits like music :)

And your drawings remain incredible. Thank you for sharing – it brightened my week :)

.....

BOB JENNINGS, FABFICBKS@AOL.COM

Received issues 35 & 36 of *Broken Toys* today. We are right in the midst of a protracted two-day snowstorm, the latest of the 2014-2015 Winter Season (collect them all, I know I am). With thirty-six inches already on the ground and another twelve inches predicted to settle in by Tuesday morning, this seems like a perfect opportunity to read fanzines and catch up on some fanac.

I read the issue but didn't see any particular reason mentioned as to why you are sending two different issues out at the same time, but hey, it's your zine; if you want to jack the numbers up it's your business.

It's not rocket science. I had conceived a Halloween issue that consisted mainly of the Fraggle story, and the covers, and didn't want to shove it all into one huge regular issue. Of course, I could have switched the numbering around – make #35 into #36 and vice versa. It wouldn't have changed anything.

Gee, I dunno; in every recent *Broken Toys*, including both of these, you mention how you find fandom much less appealing, that you are going to do new, different, non-fannish related things, then you turn around and cough up another issue of *Broken Toys*. Should anybody really wonder about that?

So issue #35 is one more than any other fanzine you ever produced; so what? If the mental anguish is that awful, then start a brand new fmz title and begin at number one again. The way to deal with these mental quirks is to out-quirk the glitches, trick the mind so it can bridge the chasm without cracking the foundations of your sanity, as it were. *Tortured Toys* could even begin with #1/2 if you want. Maybe you could alternate issues with *Fetish Toys*, say; one using half numbers and the other using whole numbers, which would mean you wouldn't get to the dreaded number 34 again for years and years. Just a suggestion.

It is *Broken Toys* itself that I'm trying to change ... not take up professional bowling, or study the Kama Sutra. And I think a change has been slowly asserting itself as my interest in writing about current events or fannish subjects dwindles, and I become more interested in the fictional form. However, as I've always had mixed interests, this may be less apparent to you. Whatever my intentions are, I won't suppress a fannish article I *want* to write, and write something else instead. I don't want to be governed by a Plan.

It may seem to you that the Canadian Mint strikes some ridiculous coins, including your gift 99.9999999% pure silver Snow Person double struck token, but I'm sure the government doesn't see it that way. Those baubles are designed to separate speculators and the gullible from their money, and they succeed wonderfully well in their purpose. Outfits such as the Franklin Mint and the postal

systems of most countries have been artificially manufacturing faux collectibles for generations, so why shouldn't government get in on the deal too? If our letter delivery systems have been raising tons of buckos by cranking out zillions of commutative stamps, surely government Mints can do the same with "special" coins – stuff that collectors find uniquely interesting which might, sometime in the far distant future, become valuable when the explorers from Galaxy 581 sift through the crumbled remains of our extinct human civilization.

That may be so, but I swear that the Royal Canadian Mint just goes too far. For instance, there's one .999etc% silver coin that shows a baby's feet ... purportedly to celebrate newborns. Another I think I remember shows a wrapped gift and balloons ... to celebrate birthdays. My bias against this sort of claptrap is common among collectors. My favourite dealer calls it "flash & trash." Now and then, the mint produces gimmicky tokens that do possess some interest – Canada has a series of large silver coins with different dinosaurs on the reverse, picked out in coloured holograms. They are a bit garish, but infinitely better than, say, a coin commemorating Lorne Green as Ben Cartright of *Bonanza*.

Your Hobbit story was short of a decent punch line. I realize you aren't trying to create great literature, but this kind of story virtually demands a second sub-plot or at least a come-back riddle from the cowboys that the hobbit can't guess; preferably something involving a pun. Something along the lines of "What's short, snotty, and doesn't breathe, even though air circulates freely thru his lungs?" Answer, a smart-ass hobbit with two 45. slugs thru his chest—BANG! BANG! "Goddamnit Jake, now you'll have to clean that revolver and reload, and ammo ain't cheap either." "Yup. Best ten cents I've spent all summer."

At the end of the day, I expect there will be different opinions on the piece. But it seems to me that to add a capper to the switch at the end is milking the material just a bit too far.

As for books to give somebody as an intro to science fiction, I would recommend almost any novel by Jack Williamson. From almost the first until the very end of his long productive writing career, he turned out stories that easily stand the test of time and are always interesting, with story plots that pull the reader right into the story and don't let go until the final pages. There may be other science fiction authors who have remained consistently excellent throughout their writing careers, but I can't think of others offhand.

What, not even Milton A. Rothman? Or Raymond Z. Gallun?

Rodney Leighton is correct that there aren't that many fans out there willing to do LOC any more. More and more it appears to be an acquired habit, one that most new fans don't seem interested in developing. With the tsunami of material available for free over the Internet (the place where most fanzines, including yours, show up these days), it is easy to just read and move on. Comments, if any, can be short and pithy. Most fanzine editors don't even bother to reply to the LOCs they receive, so the two-way communication that was the core basis of fandom in Ye Olden Days is broken completely. LOCing seems to be the province of older fans acquainted with the older traditions; people who have actually commented on print fanzines in those prehistoric eons and still retain the habit. New fans can't be bothered. Maybe they'll twitter a backhanded comment if they happen to recognize the editor across the room at some local convention during the costume contest. Or not. Writing anything is just so ancient old school, you know, all 20th century-ish; who has time for that stuff any more?

Me, for one. U B Old Skul, Dude.

An article about a Roman emperor you would most like to have dinner with? That could be interesting, but considering how little we really know about most of the Roman emperors your choice would probably be less than comprehensive. The basis of the article also has to assume that the Roman emperor would take the time during the dinner to actually speak with you. My suspicion is that the emperors had very few meals with one-on-one fans or potential historians, and considering the always volatile political mixture they lived thru, I sincerely doubt that any of them would be particularly honest or even forthcoming with their opinions or their answers to any questions you might pose.

We know quite a bit about most of the "Twelve Caesars." At least we think we do. We have a number of histories written by first century historians who had access to the imperial archives, so we probably know about as much about Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula and all the way up to Domitian as we do about Henry VIII or Shakespeare. Of course, those ancient histories were written with considerable bias, and faced imperial censorship ... moreover, there was no coherent historical methodology either, so credulous omens and prophecies are sometimes mixed in with scurrilous hearsay. But that's been the case in the study of history no matter what era. Even in the modern age, official accounts of the Kim family in North Korea probably resemble Tolkien more than they do the lives of American Presidents. My assumption was that I would arrive as a dinner guest in some sort of splashy time-machine, establishing from the start that I was someone whose company was worth cultivating.

Or perhaps you just want to witness how the head honcho actually behaved at a dinner. That would be interesting in itself. Thirty-course meals, jugglers and acrobats and amateur magicians entertaining thru most of the meal, political cronies and opponents making sly comments to/about each other, wine flowing into lead cups and drained frequently. It might be more interesting to imagine how Marcus Aurelius behaved drunk at eleven o'clock in the evening, or how loutish Macrinus really was.

Hey, there were some nice lines there in your issue-ending Quote Book pages. I may swipe a few of those for use in some of the newsletters I edit. Who knows, I may even give you credit. And a happy February to you too.

JEFFERSON SWYCAFFER, ABONTIDES@GMAIL.COM

Can't say much to the Hallowe'en issue, as I've never Fraggled. I don't grok Fraggles. Never saw the show, don't know the characters. I did read the first issue of the recent comic book series...and came away uncomprehending. Doesn't seem to be my cuppa. So, this isn't a criticism of your story, only that it depends on a universe I've never visited.

It's a pity, but understood. I was slow getting into it myself, but when I had seen enough episodes I recognized a subtle but serious vein running throughout the lighter kiddy material. What other kid's show sings about friendships as losing the petals off a rose, or shows how to deal with self-doubt, loneliness or the death of a friend that is both entertaining and touching?

Re: Roman Coins, have you read *The Last Coin* by James Blaylock? The concept is magnificent: the plot revolves around the last of the 30 Sestertii that Judas was paid for betraying Christ. The actual writing? Um.... Kinda dull, alas. Someone else needs to write an Urban Fantasy novel with the same McGuffin, and do it right this time.

Yes, many years ago! I still have my copy and have frequently considered re-reading it, since I can't remember the first thing about the story! I have had vague notions of coins under a curse, but although they were the 30 pieces of silver paid to Judas, the coins were much older and were evil even before Judas' betrayal. A vast non-Christian metaphysics is strongly implied.

Congratulations upon the acquiring of your "Traveling Matt!" Mobility and freedom are Good Things, and I'm happy you have them again. Technology at its finest!

A "Traveling Matt," by the way, is a technique of adding a moving frame into the film. All those Tie Fighters in a Star Wars movies were "traveling matts" before c.g.i. made it easier. "Traveling Matt" is also the name of a character's uncle in Fraggles Rock.

I *loved* "High Plains Halfling!" Superb riddle! I did not solve it, but, like all great riddles, I saw it instantly once it was explained. That's a delight!

Take that, Bob Jenner! (See previous loc.)

(Frodo and Sam sailed off into the West. So did Viagra...just to the *wrong* "West!")

They were supposed to stop when they got to Ellis Island, but kept going all the way around Florida and then up the Mississippi to KC, then hired a wagon train.

David Redd: Super nifty cute little Smurfette figurine! I've got a Gadget Hackwrench near my computer: she's standing at ease, leaning on an open-end wrench that's nigh as tall as she is -- she's under two inches -- "actual size!" I like to think of her crawling around inside my computer, fixing whatever parts can be fixed...with a wrench.

Lately, I've taken to the silly pastime of printing out pictures of characters on good-quality photo paper, then trimming them with scissors and mounting them to stand. The "paper doll" equivalent of Action Figures. Well, so far, no one has released a Red Sonja action figure, and I wanted one. This'll carry me until someone finally markets one.



That's what I did with one of my own "House Gamins" -- she's a paper cut-out that I coloured and created a simple stand for, way back in the 1980s. That is a real sapphire she's holding, though.

Milt Stevens: I've played Diplomacy once...and reffed it for a play-by-mail twice. It's a very interesting game, but you really do need to make sure you play it with people who understand, from the start, that there will be lying, backstabbing, oathbreaking, conniving, deceit, and foul play. Never play it with people who aren't able to check their sense of honor at the door. It's vital to comprehend that it was the Prime Minister of

France who promised he would support your alliance, and not me! My brother-in-law doesn't have this ability, and always gets ticked when there are betrayals in this sort of game. When he plays, he makes promises *in his own name* and *on his own personal word of honor*. It's funny, but, to my way of thinking, *that's* cheating! The whole point of "shifting alliance" games is...shifting alliances!

He does get along well with Cosmic Encounter, God only knows why. It, too, involves breaking alliances and backstabbing.

Fascinating idea of the Turks and Caicos Islands joining Canada! Personally, I love it! It would make Canada the "tallest" -- north to south -- country in the world. (If it isn't already? I'll have to try to figure this out...) I'm certainly grinning at the idea of incorporating them into Saskatchewan! (Doggone, that's harder to spell than Massachusetts!)

I loved, "If you can't say anything good about a person, post it on Facebook." Wise advice, followed by millions daily!

Hell, following my own advice is the only reason I ever talk to half the people on FaceBook that I know.

Agreed with the note about progressive income taxes preventing malignant accumulation of wealth. There's a bit on this in Michener's *Hawaii*, where one guy observes that the gigantic land-holding estates in Hawaii -- where some 500 people owned *all* of the land -- was absolutely going to be broken up. It was historical destiny: the imbalance of riches was intrinsically unstable. The only question was whether the estates would be broken up by taxation...or by revolution.

Wise words then...and wise words today.

But, then, I'm a bit of a Wobbly...

My head is screwed on a bit loose too. ;)

ROSS CHAMBERLAIN, ROSSWORX@COX.NE

I have pulled up your last couple of *Broken Toys* -- You certainly do have fun with your covers... I'm sorry I've not been doing well with LoCs, to you or anyone. I keep promising myself *This* time... So technically my broken promises haven't actually been to *you*... (or to Andy Hooper or to anyone else among the few who still aim a zine or so at this black hole). FWIW, I've enjoyed all of yours, for the most part -- it's sometimes hard to get through some of the bitterest parts, but you write so well, about so many things, that I admire what you can do. And I remind myself that I remain lucky so far that I can usually hold my own on paper (or FB) and, physically, that I can still act as caregiver for Joy-Lynd reasonably effectively.

BRAD FOSTER, BWFOSTER@JUNO.COM

So, it's a two-fer mailing with both issues 35 and 36 this time. Onward then.

BROKEN TOYS #35: So, according to your opening comments in this issue we should be able to perceive some sort of change of direction in how you are doing the zine. Since you mention wanting to do a Halloween issue before this, but have had to delay it, yet it will be numbered to

carry on the sequence, rather than saving the issue number that it -would- have been, I can only assume that time travel is one of those changing directions. (See, it's "travel" and that's like a "direction" and ... oh, never mind!)

The big clue, I think, was all of issue 36 ... which was a work of fiction from beginning to end. Having pretty much used up a lifetime of ideas for fan articles, and gotten tired of writing about politics, I'm getting more interested in just making shit up.

We got our tree up for Christmas this year, though with so much going on, didn't fully load it with all the weird little ornaments we've accumulated over the years. I let Cindy handle all the hanging, 'cause I'm so freakin' anal retentive, it would take forever to make sure each one was "just right." As the saying goes, I know I have problems, but I've learned how to deal with them. My big Christmas thing is to string up lights all around the house. I love lights on houses at Christmas. Indeed, I think we should all have extra pretty lights on all our houses all year round. Indeed, there is one small corner section of our house where I do just that, leaving up a double-string of lights that come on ever night, all year round. The neighbors across the alleyway from us put a lot of lights up into their trees this year, and I am pleased to see that they are -still- turning the lights on in one of those every night now. I'd like to think

I had a small part in inspiring that!

Alas, the tree I used this year was so small that I couldn't hang the usual bulbs – they're much too big. I had too many lights, as well, and had to leave two strings off the tree. I'm hoping that for next year I can find a tree just a little larger, but I can't really complain about the one I had. It was easy to decorate, looked okay and only cost me \$3. In past years I had other decorations for the apartment – nothing very fancy. No outdoor lights, for example, or animatronic Santas and reindeer. No inflatable elf maidens with "comfort zones," either. But this year I was happy just to have a tree up again.

Nice list of swag you got for Christmas. We've gotten it down now where most of my family just exchange cards – everyone makes much more money than I do, and none of them really *need* anything for Christmas. And they've given me gift cards in the past, which is another way of saying "I've no idea what you like or want, so here...". It wasn't really any fun, and we've all agreed if we can just get together in person once a year, that will be the treat. Cindy and I, plus her sister and her boyfriend, do still get together and exchange gifts, but then we're all weird and have fun with them. I got a couple of odd robot toys and mostly books, but then that is really all I ever ask anyone for, and so that is fine with me.

I've said it before, but it bears repeating, that my family is all grown up and want adult toys that I can't possibly afford to give them. Rolex watches, tablets, spare tires, things like that. It was more fun when my nephews were six or eight and they tore open the packages and broke the cheap robot inside, two minutes later. So I bought each of my sisters' families a panettone, and to hell with them. Merry Christmas to all and hope you all choke on it.

Loved reading your tale of "going round the block for the hell of it" with your new rocket chair. I do try to keep in mind how lucky I am, the older I get, that I am still able to get about and such. I don't want to take that for granted, now that I'm seeing so many friends reaching the point where they *can't* do that. Glad you now have more freedom of movement, and don't feel so trapped as you did in the past. I like the part about zipping along so that it is almost feels breezy – you need to make yourself a scarf to wear, but wire it up so it looks like it is blowing back straight out over your shoulder, as you "whip" past

the mere walkers on the sidewalk!

Or maybe a banner to stream behind me, that says, “Swoosh!”

BROKEN TOYS #36: I wonder if anyone will notice that this is the first issue of *Broken Toys* to have non-Taral contributions book-ending your story, with the illos by Ken and myself?

If this was a subtle reminder that I neglected to give credit due, I freely concede that I goofed it. Chalk it up to habit ... it's not the first time I've had other people's material in *Broken Toys*. Just a couple of issues ago there was Jim Mowatt's TAFF report, and I recall a bit of doggerel that Walt Wentz and I collaborated on, around issue 20. But it's so uncommon that I'm not in the habit of thinking about a list of contributors. I just hope I don't forget to correct my oversight in the next issue. (I nearly did!)

However, I think it is plain that neither cover was my work. Ken Fletcher's style is quite distinctive, as is yours, and both pieces have the artist's signature on them -- though yours is so teen-tiny that I almost didn't see it. I actually think it more likely that people will not notice that I *coloured* Ken's piece ... fans can be absurdly unobservant. We'll probably all be lucky if anyone noticed that there *was* any art in those two issues.

Your introductory notes here made me realize what it *really* means for someone to say they are a “fan” of something. Of the really different layers of commitment that small word covers, and the depth of involvement it can take for different people. They come across things created by others that they like so much, and that they want to have more of to enjoy, that they end up creating that “more” for themselves.

Unfortunately, and I know this might sound like blasphemy to you, I don't recall ever having seen a complete episode of *Fraggle Rock*. Since it was on one of the pay channels, HBO, it was not something that was ever in my budget. I know it went into syndication on some channels after the initial run, but didn't see any of those. I did see bits and pieces, short clips, usually as part of the shows talking about the Henson empire. But don't really know much about it, and so am in no position to comment in any way on your handling of it all here. Going by your past such fannish writing, though, I would guess it is pretty damn well done. (Not to mention the note you got back from the *Fraggle* folks themselves who seemed impressed by it!)

Tempting as it is to burn everyone on my mailing list a pile of pirate DVDs of *Fraggle Rock*, I couldn't possibly afford to do it. The next-best thing, of course, is tell you to watch episodes on YouTube.

MILT STEVENS, MILTSTEVENS@EARTHLINK.NE

This is an LoC on *Broken Toys* #35. I thought I should make that clear since #35 and #36 arrived at the same time, I could have written an LoC on both issues together or even on #36 before #35. I don't like to think about the latter possibility. It might tie space-time in a knot and might also disrupt my filing system.

I don't know whether schools still credit Balboa with discovering the Pacific Ocean. Since he was going westbound, he couldn't very well have avoided it. On encountering a new ocean, he immediately claimed the entire thing and all lands adjacent to it for the King of Spain. You couldn't fault the man for lack of ambition.

I suspect, too, that his Indian guides were probably telling him every step of the way that he wasn't going to get very far because he was going to be up to his hip waders in the Great Water Where the Sun Sets before he knew it. I wonder what he would have said if after declaring it all for Spain, someone had pointed out that an explorer for the emperor of Japan had already done so? Better still, the emperor of China had claimed Spain for himself just by looking at an old map and seeing that nobody civilized owned it yet.

Thinking about new oceans, some say global warming could cause the return of the Kansas-Nebraska Sea. At the moment, Kansas is noted for being very flat and producing grain. Nebraska isn't noted for anything at all. Adding a lot of beachfront property might be a big improvement for the entire region.

If the seas rose and filled much of the American heartland, covering the low plains and coasts, no amount of gerrymandering would save the Republican Party— "red" states would suffer from inundation more than "blue."

While I've never decorated for Christmas myself, a few months ago I had an idea regarding Christmas decorations. How about a holographic tree. You could add various programs for angels flitting about and elves doing various things among the branches. I'm told the idea is impossible, because you can only view holograms from one angle. I then wondered about using a large cube with images on five sides. Then again, maybe you could use a rotating image on a wall-sized TV. If you couldn't do the entire tree, maybe you could animate individual decorations. You might have a ball with little reindeer running around the equator. You might have small devices that looked like 3" x 3" mirrors. If you looked closely, you would see an entire scene inside the mirror.

I actually had a good idea, that would be marketable. A soft plastic mat with a tree printed on one side, possibly in low relief, and LEDs for lights. Hang it on the wall and plug it in. After Christmas, roll it up and store it away. Only \$19.95 ... order now and you get a second tree for free!

I like the interlinos. I particularly liked "Inside every old person is a dead person waiting to eat brains," and "If you can't say anything good about a person, post it on Facebook."

Most of them were actually written on Facebook, where they appear to have been totally ignored.

R-LAURRAINE TUTUHASI, LAURRAINE@MAC.COM

My bucket list mostly comprises travel destinations. I decided to start with the most expensive. I have reservations for an Antarctica cruise next January. I couldn't find anyone to accompany me, so I'm going solo.

When I was younger I collected all sorts of miscellaneous things. Most of those collections were thrown out or sold long ago. The collections I still have are skunk things, commemorative quarters, and selected

stamps. I've mostly stopped active collecting. I've reached a time in my life when I'm more concerned about the disposition of my possessions. I've done some preliminary enquiries about the slides and videos I took at conventions. UC Riverside may be getting those.

I did watch *Rio 2*. While I agree with you mostly, I did think the last bit saved it from being total dreck. The movie highlighted the real dangers to the Amazon from reckless logging.

JASON BURNETT, JASON@JASON-BURNETT.COM

I'm finally getting caught up on reading the fanzines I've accumulated since last summer. I'm glad to read in the opening pages of *BT#29* that things seem to be going well for you. I'm very hopeful that this has continued to be the case – I suppose I'll find out as I get to subsequent issues.

I'm guessing the air conditioner is not so very useful right now, but I'm sure its time will come again. How is the new chair handling the snow? I'm hoping it's able to handle it, but fearful that that's not the case – wheelchair designers (even of expensive power chairs) seem to somehow be stuck with the delusion that people in wheelchairs will never want to go anywhere that's not smoothly paved or on anything other than a very gentle grade.

I have already written an article detailing what happens when you take a power chair out in the snow, and if you read this issue in the order I've edited it, you've already read the piece. And another about my surprise kidney stone. And will have to write yet another about discovering that I had one lung full of fluids! That's why this is the Unofficial Broken Health issue.

Your experience rereading *Huckleberry Finn* was interesting. It's been probably about 10 years since the last time I read *Huck Finn*, but I pass through Hannibal on pretty much a yearly basis while driving to visit relatives down south. One of these years I'll have to set aside the time and money to do some of the touristy things there – maybe when Logan (my son) is a little older and so would appreciate it more.

The Saladin coin is beautiful – I've never had the urge to collect coins, but I always enjoy reading about your collection (probably because you collect coins outside of the "this is a 1976 penny, and this is a 1977 penny, and this is a 1977 penny from a different mint..." sort of collecting that a lot of collectors engage in). If you haven't seen *Kingdom of Heaven*, I'd recommend giving it a shot. It's not totally historically accurate (what movie ever is?) but it gives a good feel of the Crusader Kingdoms and you get a good portrayal of Saladin – he comes across as much more civilized than any of his opponents.

I've seen *Kingdom of Heaven* – fun film, but takes liberties, as you say. For one thing, the Crusader Princess refused to have anything to do with the hunky French knight, as I recall. And Saladin didn't entirely keep his word about the inhabitants of Jerusalem, either. They lived, but many ended up in slave markets. But as far as people in the 12th. century went, Saladin was almost a rational humanist. Of course, Mussolini also compared well to most leaders of the 12th. century.

JOHN PURCELL, ASKANCE73@GMAIL.COM

You know, I could pull a Lloyd Penney and comment on your latest two additions at efanzines.com, but then I thought, "Naw. That's been done." So here's a brief comment about the latest one.

I really don't see a problem with producing a fanzine in February that was meant to be published for the preceding October. Heck, I've done that myself. All you need to do is revise the publication dates on the document, switch a couple other notifications/items here and there, and *voila!*, you have just published a fanzine. It's not late, just merely postponed.

The Fraggles you've been writing is getting remarkably good, Taral. So good that I'm beginning to wonder if there's a market for this kind of fiction. It wouldn't surprise me if there was. After all, one of my students this year is active in My Little Pony fandom - they're called "bronies", of all things - and he's shown me pictures of other bronies at their conventions, provided a listing of bronie websites, and so on. He is a nice kid, definitely a fan (he'll be attending the upcoming AggieCon next month), but sometimes his interest in My Little Pony is disturbing. And here I thought my interest in science fiction fanzines was odd. Just shows to Goya that there is always something or someone in this world that can make you look a whole lot better.

Don't get me started on Bronies! Every second furry fan has turned into one!

There's no market for Fraggles that I'm aware of. Disney owns Henson Studios, and if they decided there was money to be made publishing young adult fiction in the Fraggles universe, they'd just hire some of the script writers they already use, or a familiar in the fantasy genre, and I'd never get in the front door. As it happens, people do write Fraggles fan fiction - the little I've seen of it isn't promising. So I may well be the world's best nonprofessional Fraggles fiction writer. But if there was any hint of making money or a reputation from it, I'd be sued to perdition.

So, if I ever finish the projected cycle of stories about Darl & Kiki, it'll have to be after all the names have been changed and the circumstances altered enough to avoid the scrutiny of a very jealous corporation.

As for your Fraggles inspired artwork, it's really good. I had no idea that Fraggles could be so - shall I say - alluring?

There were two ways to go with that. Most fan artists stick to the puppet design. I could imitate it, but not really work with designs that had ping-pong balls attached to the top of their heads for eyes. It works well on TV because the puppets moved and spoke and created a convincing illusion of being living creatures. But drawings don't have that advantage, so I decided upon a more realistic look, instead.

I had better stop there.

Aw, why? Madness was just ahead!

KEITH SOLTYS, KEITH@SOLTYS.CA

I finished reading *Broken Toys* 35 earlier this week and enjoyed it. I can't say much about 36 other than that I liked the cover because I didn't read it – not my cup of tea.

You mentioned WheelTrans and the PATH. To use WheelTrans, you have to register with the TTC. I think they interview you, but I can't imagine them denying you since you got the power chair. You have to book rides about a week in advance and the fare is the standard TTC fare. I don't know what the hours are. If you are just going with a walker they may send a taxi, otherwise it will be one of the vans. Nancy has taken many trips with her mother and can probably give you more info. Feel free to call. Also there is a section on the TTC web site.

Planning ahead that much is not really my forté, though. Maybe I can adapt ... but then maybe WheelTrans won't fit into my plans anyway. Depends on where I'd want to go ... or come back from. SFCOntario, for instance, is not a convenient transit for me, especially since I can only get the roller on most cars and buses, not the chair. And sitting helpless on a chair on an empty street at 2 a.m. doesn't appeal to me for some reason... But if Wheel Trans runs late enough, that might make the difference between one day at the con ... or none.

As for the PATH, most of the major buildings between Queen Quay and Dundas, Yonge and University are connected. (Not the Trump Tower, though – they didn't want the unwashed masses in their basement). You can also connect to the subway, though not all stations are accessible. If you ever make it downtown during the week, I'd be happy to give you a quick tour at lunch hour or after work. Mind you, it's just a big shopping mall, but it does make getting around downtown a lot more convenient.

I have gotten so used to the PATH that it seems odd when I visit other cities and find that they don't have a local equivalent. Montreal does, and Calgary does (although it's mostly above street level). I was in Atlanta a few years ago and was surprised at how limited the connections were between buildings. I guess people don't mind going outside in the winter there – although they may be regretting not having a PATH system this year.

I recall going through parts of PATH when the New Derelicts spent a lot of time wandering around downtown. I just didn't know it had a name. I would expect that it's expanded a lot since the 1980s, when foot-festing began to fall out of our repertoire for one reason or another. I remember the underground tunnels in Montreal, during Anticipation. Some sections were impassible with a wheelchair, roller or power chair, forcing you to go around the obstacle, often quite some additional distance. And, here and there, you were forced out into the street.

We got to see some of the Air Show this year at the CNE, mainly the Snowbirds, who were as impressive as ever. There weren't any US military teams due to budget cutbacks. I would have liked to have seen the Blue Angels again, or the F-22, which the loudest plane I've heard, other than perhaps the Concorde.

Stealth? Who are they kidding? I saw one in flight during the CNE Air show once, from my balcony three or four years ago, I guess. It was so noisy that you'd hear it coming while it was still over the border in the next country. Big, too. But I guess they don't plan to get close enough to other fighters

to risk being seen. Get a fix on the radar, launch a missile, and return to base for a beer. At least, that's how it is supposed to work in theory. Other country's fighters are getting to be a match for America's best and have the same game plan in mind. Should be an interesting 2020s.

I do hope the Snow Birds get some retired F-18s to fly. The Tudors are just so wimpy!

LLOYD PENNEY, PENNEYS@BELL.NET

Many thanks for issues 35 and 36 of *Broken Toys*. I also made sure I had the revised 35. Time to get a loc to you for nextish.

35 ... Congrats on getting past the 34th issue. Years ago I was in TAPA, and my own zine, *Yeggs 'n Picaroons*, went for 84 straight issues, and that's as far as I've gone for any fannish publication I've worked on.

Grand Marnier is wonderful stuff. I could also say the same of Bailey's Irish Cream and just about any other sweet liqueur. I know I have some Bailey's tucked away, but I don't know if I have anything else. In our living room is one of those ugly globe bars...we didn't buy it, but it was here when we moved in 15 or more years ago, and we needed someplace to store our booze...

Christmas no longer has the child-like excitement for me it once had, to no one's surprise. When you want something, you're an adult, you go and get it. It gets tougher for Yvonne to buy me presents and vice-versa, so now, we ask what we can get us. And Yvonne still buys me the big box of licorice allsorts I like every Christmas...maybe there's still some excitement left.

Rodney Leighton's loc...actually, I did loc Rodney's *Fanac* 1 and 2, on December 5 of last year, according to my records. If [he] didn't get my loc, [he should] let me know, and I will relay it to [him]. Might have gotten caught in [his] spam trap, perhaps...

In fact, Rodney doesn't have an Internet connection. Like John Hertz and Marc Schirmeister, he seems to be one of those far-reaching intellects and prophets of the technological future who refuse to use computers for fanac... It is actually the UK's Chuck Connor who is Rodney's gateway to the fandom, and whose spam trap may have bushwhacked your locs.

There are times good sleep is mine for weeks on end, and then I have such sleeplessness, not even melatonin will help me.

Catalogues...for 8 years, I worked on the Sears Canada catalogues, and we worked on the Christmas catalogues around April to May. So, I knew what SF-oriented merchandise was coming our way, and often had an idea about upcoming movies long before the first trailers were released. I was able to tell friends that *Star Wars* Episode 6 had Teddy Bear characters called Ewoks in them because I'd seen the related sheet sets.

Keith Soltys is right, old paperbacks seem not to have any value any more. Last time we had a pile of old books to get rid of, and there wasn't a store that would take them, so we took them to one of the local

cons and dumped them on the freebie table. Gone in less than an hour. Value is subjective, I guess.

I'm beginning to think that may be the only way to cut down on the number of unwanted SF books that I have – but I'd have to find a willing drudge to take them away. I'm unlikely to attend any local cons at all, and certainly not while carrying any significant number of books.

My loc...as you say, I should put those stories together in one volume, get some illustrations from fan artists, and see how it would do either as a paper fanzine, or just put it up on eFanzines, and see what the response is.

I suspect that if you just post the zine, you will get **zero** response. Create a direct mailing list and you should have better luck. On my advice, Eric Mayer did that with *Vexed Annual* and was surprised by the response. His previous zines, posted on eFanzines, had received almost **no** feedback.

It's been some years since we'd go to the Ex to enjoy the airshow. We'd sit on our balcony and enjoy the planes as they flew past, but we live on that part of Highway 427 where two sets of condo buildings have been built, looking suspiciously like the Gates of Mordor, and they have effectively killed our view of Humber Bay.

36, the Hallowe'en Issue...already told you about meeting Henson and asking about this new show called *Fraggle Rock*. I think in the CBC building downtown, in their museum I think there is a Fraggles, but can't remember which one. Kiki is right – any excuse for a party is a good one. Madame Trash Heap...I've seen people in costume at cons. They were supposed to be some airy princess of some kind, but they looked like mobile compost piles. Much like Madame Trash Heap, I imagine. A great story, and I am familiar enough with the Fraggles to know that would have made a great seasonal episode, if the Fraggles were still on the CBC.

I understand that the props and backgrounds for *Fraggle Rock* were destroyed, some years ago, by a fire in a CBC warehouse. A fire destroying a cave ... it would be funny if it weren't rather tragic. I intend more stories about Kiki and Darl. I've run out of ideas to write about fandom, so my readers had better get used to my eccentric new subject matter.

I am done for now, and I am making another catch up with all the zines I get. The whole field may be dying, but it is still providing me with more than enough to do. Thanks for all this, and I hope another issue will be around soon.

A little while ago I looked at eFanzines and realized that over the last three or four months there were hardly any zines posted that I gave a rat's ass about. There were some new titles posted, but none that appealed to me. Like many older zines, they were about the genre – I have very little interest in book reviews, articles on Australian SF novels, overviews of Keith Laumer or Ian Watson, interviews and other SF or fantasy related subjects. I looked for fannish, or at least "mixed fannish" zines like *Challenger*, *Askance*, *Trapdoor*, *Banana Wings* and so on, and found that – counting all issues of *Drink Tank* as just one – there had only been fewer than ten fanzines posted since New Years that I really gave a damn about. Even then, it didn't mean I cared enough to read them. If this is just the old guard changing, I defer to the necessity ... but the new guard seems to have a lot in common with the bottom feeders of the old guard – fanzines such as the N3F's. I never paid them attention in the past, and don't propose to begin.



I wonder if I can get snow tires for my power chair? Or perhaps chains?

There have been precious few opportunities to take “Traveling Matt” out for a spin since I got it. A few days ago, the mercury rose to a comparatively balmy minus 5. To American readers, who find Celsius measurements a bit arcane, that’s about 23 or 24 Fahrenheit. That’s about as warm as it’s been in Toronto for most of this year so far, with wind chills some nights plunging down to regions of the thermometer where the difference between C and F begin to matter little. So minus 5 was practically an invitation to hit the streets.

It had snowed heavily a couple of days before, though. The roads had been cleared and the sidewalks on Queen looked fine from my 21st floor balcony. The side streets were another matter, though. Some stretches looked clear enough. Others appeared to be dicier propositions. I didn’t plan to use the side streets, so I decided that the uncertainty didn’t matter. I wanted some fresh vegetables for salad and a couple of small items from the hardware store, and this looked like the only likely window of opportunity for several days.

I discovered pretty quickly that appearances were deceptive. The short stretch of Dunn Avenue that led to Queen had been shoveled the entire length, but in places the path was only wide enough for a single person. Needless to say, a power chair is wider than a single person. Inevitably, there were places where one wheel rested on concrete and other in about an inch of trampled snow, resulting in erratic progress, with the chair weaving drunkenly even at moderate speed. Still, I arrived at the corner light without a problem.

One of the things I wanted from the hardware, oddly enough, was a bicycle lock. I had a heavy, U-shaped lock, but there seemed to be no practical way to use it on the chair. It simply wouldn’t fit through the small spaces between the wheel spokes. Even if it had fit, what then? The steel hasp was too short to go around a tree trunk or parking meter as well as the spokes. What I needed was a flexible steel cord and lock.

Home Depot was happy to oblige me. I looked ruefully at the plain steel coil and felt vaguely unhappy about it. It was not quite what I had envisioned. Then it struck me – the lock was a separate piece, a padlock. I wanted one of the type that had the lock built into the end of the coil, so I wouldn’t have to fumble around with a loose bit. I asked if they had one like that. The girl at the cash showed me three

on a card that were exactly what I wanted. The plastic coatings were brightly coloured, so I selected the red one to match “Traveling Matt.” It was more expensive, but I decided to splurge on what I wanted rather than save money on the next-best thing. For some reason I didn’t notice the girl sticking all three locks in the bag. I handed over the money and discovered that I had bought all three only when I got home.

In a sense, I guess I actually saved money. Individually, the locks I wanted were cheaper than the plain cable.

I finished the rest of my shopping well before the sun was even near the horizon, so decided to make the best of it. I picked a side street I hadn’t been along in ages, and drove myself down to King Street.

I had thought the short stretch from my apartment lobby to Queen was a little tricky in spots, but there was a quite unpleasant surprise ahead of me. The sidewalk was shoveled, but the clear areas often consisted of long narrow passages. Once again, it was impossible to keep both driving wheels on concrete, and the chair weaved from side to side like a palsied donkey. I finally came to one spot where the snow on one side was more than half an inch deep.

The chair lurched violently to the right, hurling itself smack into a snowbank and almost into the street! Worse, it wouldn’t back out. For a long moment “Traveling Matt” seemed unwilling to budge, then slowly gained a bit of traction and began to back out.

Then swerved in another unpredictable direction entirely.

It was a little while before I was back where I wanted to be on the sidewalk, and felt in control of the situation again.

Meanwhile, an apprehensive-looking young Oriental woman and her little boy – standing a few yards away – were witnesses to my wreck. She looked at me and said, “Could you use a little help?”

I shook the snow off my shoes, then smiled with more confidence than I actually felt, and reassured her that the mishap was a fluke. It wouldn’t happen again.

Damn right it wouldn’t. I inched out of the snow trap at fractional warp. If the chair was going to make any more sudden maneuvers like that last one, I was not going to be moving any faster than a slow amble. If I had time to react, I reasoned, I would avoid going off the sidewalk again.

I had a couple more near-losses of control on the way back home, but none so violent or sudden that I couldn’t just back off the throttle and bring everything to a stop ... then inch forward again. It was a rather unsatisfying ending to my afternoon adventure.

So what have I learned? Mainly, that even half an inch of snow can rob “Traveling Matt’s” wheels of traction, but it’s particularly dangerous if one wheel is spinning and the other driving full tilt. Maybe I should stay off side streets until March or April. Perhaps even until May. Not so much to be safe, you understand. It’s just that it would be embarrassing to call the CAA to tow a chair.



The Fifty-Cent Monster (By an Old Crank)

For the first time since 1974, I have no means to publish my ish. For around 40 years, I have carried a Gestetner Model 66 with me wherever I lived, and have used it for about 20 of those years to publish my fanzines. When I first moved into Parkdale, one end of a tabletop in my living room was reserved for the duper. A couple of years later, it was retired to a closet, to make way for other things. Finally, to make room in the closet, the "Fifty Cent Monster" (as it had been dubbed by Janet Wilson because of my penchant for publishing mischief with it) was relegated to a corner of the balcony outside, wrapped in a tarp.

The time came when I began to realize I was mortal and wouldn't be protecting this outmoded form of publication forever. Either I had to find a home for it, or it would sit on the balcony until the time came for my sister(s) to take over my estate and throw it to hell out. I asked around, and Colin Hinz agreed to add the 66 to his own collection of mimeographs.

Today, he and Catherine came over with a hand truck to carry the 66 away. It left a trail of deep reddish-brown debris, much to my amazement. Although it had been wrapped in a tarp, water had apparently gotten into it and rusted away much of the bottom. Still, the cover that doubled as a carrying case still held, so hopefully the damage was superficial. Colin returned for another load, and took away three boxes of mimeo paper, a sheaf of typing stencils, another of blank electrostencils, a box of brand new bottles of stencil adhesive and correction fluid, also some unused ES nibs, and, finally, all my remaining inks, including some very rare hues.

"The Fifty Cent Monster" had originally belonged to Phil Paine and Bob Wilson. I recall an odd story about them buying it in an auction, but it's hard to imagine this as literally true. In any case, it somehow found a permanent home with me, and saw considerable use in the 1970s. For at least a couple of years, it was how we published everything – OSFiC clubzines, apazines, flyers, everything. Even when Victoria bought

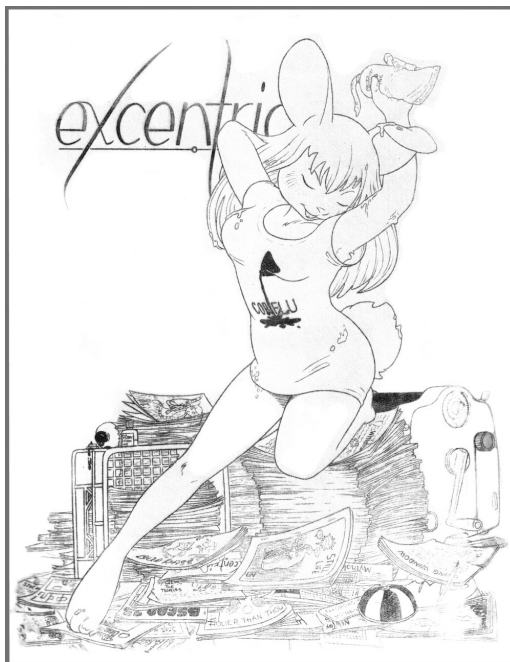
her own top-of-the-line mimeo, "The Fifty Cent Monster" remained in constant use. I used it for almost all my own fanzines, despite the option of Victoria's 466.

Primitive though it was, with patience, hard work and skill, it was possible to perform magic with its drums and rollers! But gradually my old mimeo, my old mimeo saw less and less work, as the ambitions of the local fanzine editors grew and they took their stencils to Victoria to run on the 466 instead. The blooming of Toronto fanzines began to die back in the late '70s, and, in 1978, Victoria and I collaborated on *DNQ*. It was by default Toronto's focal point fanzine. To keep up with our demanding schedule, we used the electric mimeo. I ran some of the early issues of *Typo*, the *DNQ* letter supplement, on the 66 ... but then I gave in to expedience and even that was run on Victoria's 466.

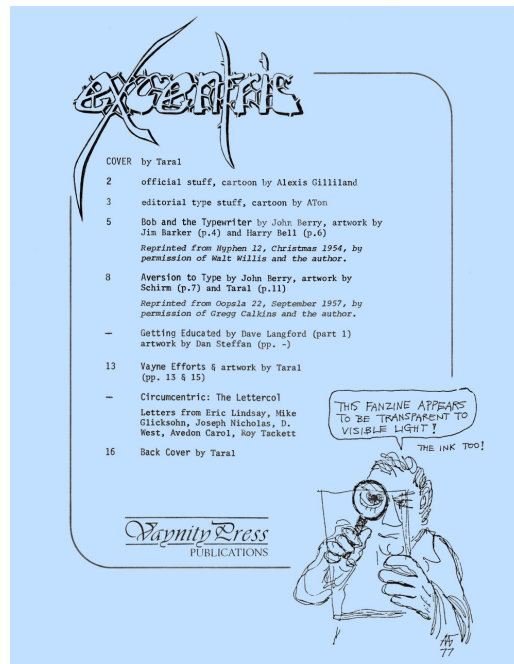
I think the last jobs I did on "The Fifty Cent Monster" were my Rowbrazzle apazines, *State of the Art*, in the late 1980s.

Among a few things I decided to keep when Colin and Catherine came to collect the Monster were some stencil styluses and letter templates, but there was also a folder of very old stencils. The manila folder was brittle and began to fall to pieces in my hands. Inside was all that remains of Victoria Vayne's last fanzine, *eXcentric*. The title followed the "X" tradition, begun by Bill Bowers' *Xenolith* and Mike Glicksohn's *Xenium*. Unfortunately, *EXcentric* was never to be. She abandoned the zine before it was finished, leaving me with the typed stencils and all the art.

The contents page lists a number of articles, but the ToC is deceptive. "Bob and the Typewriter" is a reprint of a John Berry piece from *Hyphen* 13, 1954. "Aversion to Type," also by John Berry, is from *Oops!a* 22, 1957. The only original work appears to have been Dave Langford's "Getting Educated" ... but I'm morally certain that it saw print at a later date. Victoria also wrote a rather workaday editorial for her first issue. And, of course, there was a letter column. Presumably the locs were on the last issue of *Simulacrum*, but, as they appear to be lost, I can't say. All the art for the issue had long since been returned to the creators, but either photocopies or electrostencils were all accounted for in the folder. It would have been a typically handsome Vaynity Press production.



Scanned from the electrostencil
and tweaked considerably...



Scanned from typed paste-up
(blue paper colour added)

From time to time, I considered finishing the issue. Why not? I had the typed stencils, and it would have taken very little more effort to finish the editing. I even wrote my own editorial for it. What stayed my hand was always what it would cost to mail the copies. What point was there in spending a great deal of money on a zine that wasn't even mine, and had no material in it that (by then) hadn't been published somewhere else? So the stencils languished in a box in the closet for years. Half the time I wasn't even sure if they still existed. But they do. I eventually incorporated both editorials into an article called "Ghost Writing From the Glades of Gafia," that appeared in Tim Marion's *So It Goes 17*. The stencils continued to tantalize me, though ... and, like the Beach Boys' "Smiley Smile," maybe *someday eXcentric* will see the light!

The old machine was still good for an amusing story or two. One of the best stories was about getting Catherine Crockett out of her knickers. I was still living in the basement in Willowdale when Catherine asked if she could bring some stencils over to run off. I forget what they were, but they were a messy job for whatever reason. The rollers must have become flooded; the stencils were floating dangerously on a bed of ink that was squirting out around the edges. The wax would tear at any moment ... or perhaps it did, and that was what precipitated the crisis. All that matters is that we had to wipe everything down if we were to have any hope of going on. For some reason, though, there were no old rags at hand. I always had them for just such contingencies, but not this time. I no sooner mentioned the lack of useful rags than Catherine hiked up her skirts, and pulled down her panties. "Here. Will these do?" As a matter of fact, they did splendidly. And that was about as close as I ever got to one of those wild fantasies where the model seduces the painter, the student her teacher, etc. Just as well, really. Mimeo ink does *not* wash out well.

Returning to reality, it didn't take long for Colin to pack up all my old keepsakes and truck them out my apartment door. He came back a final time to sweep up the trail of rust for me, and then he, and a big part of my fannish past, were gone.

It was like watching an old friend leave, never to return. But I look at all the empty space in my closet and the swept-up corner on the balcony, and know I did the right thing.

By rights I would live forever in a big house, and in the attic would be a room that I only entered once every five or ten years. In it would be my original, glorious fanzine collection, chairs and tables for collation, a workbench with two or three mimeos, each in a different colour, an electric typewriter, and cupboards full of mimeo supplies. I would never use any of it, but it would be *there* ... part of me ... all the same. I guess it will have to part of me only in imagination now.



Bob Wilson on the crank of the Monster 66 at a DNQ Printing Party at Victoria's Eglinton Ave. 2nd floor apartment, circa 1978 or '79.



Amanda Bankier & Janet Wilson at the switch of Victoria's Gestetner 466, in her Lauder Ave. basement, circa 1977, running off Orca.