



Broken Toys 47, © Taral Wayne, February 2016. Despite tempting offers to move in with millionairesses who have an extra suite of six rooms for my own private use in their mansions overlooking sunny Bahama beaches, I have decided to remain at 245 Dunn Ave., Apartment 2111, Toronto, Ontario, M6K 1S6. Back issues of *Broken Toys* are available from eFanzines at <http://efanzines.com/Taral/index.htm> and from Fanac. org at <http://fanac.org/fanzines/BrokenToys/> **Kiddelidivee Books & Art 306**. This issue catches up on locs on the previous two issues. There are only three more issues of *Broken Toys* in your future – ask yourself, what will you do when the lights go out, and there’s nothing to read but zines about science fiction?

Grace Notes

Soft Sell

For some time I’ve been talking about writing fiction, and the skeptic might well suggest I talk less and write more. But what if I said that, in fact, I *have* been writing a good deal more fiction than you imagine? What if I pointed out that I had written fifty or more short stories in the last few years ... would you believe it? Well, you’d better, because it’s true. I created a folder just for fiction last year, and have been adding files to it as I come across them in other folders. At first, there were only a few, rather obvious tales such as “The Nametag” (that appeared in *Askance*), “Rock and Yule” (that appeared in *Broken Toys 45*) and “Fly on the Wall” (that was in a previous issue). But then I began coming across little anecdotes that may not have been major epics, but were certainly not based on any mundane reality, either. “Less is More,” “Parable of Temptation,” “God, the Devil and an Irishman,” “Why They Race Horses” and “GoH” are all bona-fide fiction, regardless of having been written tongue-in-cheek, or being about fandom. Then, too, there were more than a half-a-dozen tales written for an anonymous figure who was willing to pay for stories written to his own peculiar requirements. There is even one story, “Cutting Edge,” which for reasons of my own I am unable to show to any but a trusted few. Two or three stories are unfinished ... thus far simply outlines. All together, they do add up just under fifty.

Clearly, the logical thing to do is publish the best ones as an anthology through LuLu or Amazon ... and sell a magnificent print run of three copies.

Sealed Envelope, Part 1

Eric Mayer wrote to me recently to mention that the FAAn Awards are already open for nominations. To remind the reader, there is no final ballot. In effect, nominations are an open vote for whoever and whatever you please. Anyone may nominate anyone or anything we think is a fanzine, fanzine publisher or a fanzine fan. Attempts to define the matter any more precisely are likely to run into perplexing difficulties ... such the same names and zines that now appear in the Hugos turning up in the FAAns too. That would be pretty awkward, because in a real sense the FAAns exist to be an alternative to the Hugos.

Eric made a number of predictions about who would win the FAAns for last year's fan activity. I mostly agree with his predictions, since he justified them well enough that I could find no fault in his reasoning.

This gave me an idea. I have Eric's permission to "seal" his predictions in an "envelope." In May, when the FAAn winners are announced at Corflu, I will "open" the "envelope" and publish the contents in *Broken Toys 50* for the readers to compare with the actual results. I suspect the match will be better than mere chance would explain.

Eric only asks that I withhold his reasoning, inasmuch as some details would betray confidences. Fair enough. Eric has also agreed that I would show his predictions to my choice of three other fans, who would verify, when the time comes, that the "sealed envelope" is authentic. Are we all looking forward to May, for "Sealed Envelope, Part 2?" I know *I* am.

By the way, if enough of my readers have nominated *Broken Toys*, they will prove Eric dead wrong in at least one category.

Lookin' After Business

Doctor's appointments are like cockroaches. No matter how many you "kill," they only reproduce, so that you have even more of them afterward. In my latest round of appointments, I've had to cancel one. I was to have seen the neurologist about my Myasthenia Gravis, but the weather took a sudden turn for the worse. Possible flurries turned into a brisk snowfall overnight, so that by morning the sidewalks looked impassable as far as the eye could see from my 21st floor balcony. I had to phone and leave a message on the office answering machine that I was unable to make my appointment, which was scheduled just three or four hours later. Later that week, I booked another appointment in a more favourable month.

I still had three other appointments to meet. One involved an ultrasound, to continue monitoring a problem with retained fluids. That situation remains good. Another, with my General Practitioner, was also routine. It was the third appointment that led to a flurry of new bookings.

I saw a respirologist, who became interested in my breathing and thought I might be suffering from sleep apnea. I had completed a number of tests for my breathing while at St. Joe's last month, and I was abnormal in some respect that no one could make at all clear to me. I repeated the key test last week, and whatever it showed to the respirologist hadn't changed. He now has me booked for a sleep study in a month or two, to pursue the matter of sleep apnea, but he thinks I may also have a mild case of asthma. This was unwelcome news to me. My view of asthma sufferers had been shaped far too much by memories of "Piggy" in *Lord of the Flies* ... not to mention people I knew who seemed to

suck on an inhaler several times a day, as though it were emergency oxygen in a sudden blow-out in deep space.

The doctor introduced me to something rather different from what I had expected, however. Instead of a small, L-shaped pipe that administers a pressurized aerosol, he showed me a plastic disk-like object that reminded me a little of an ocarina. This was a Dry Powder Inhaler. Its use was similar, but maybe more fool-proof. It counted down the doses administered, so that you couldn't run out without knowing it. I took the prescription and filled it later that day.

The problem for my peace of mind is this: now I have *two* possible explanations for my trouble falling asleep. Maybe I have sleep apnea, but maybe I have an asthmatic condition ... or do I have both? Naturally, only more tests can determine the answer!

Like I said: you can swat 'em off your calendar, but they just keep multiplying.



AITH AND ANTASY

There comes a time when you realize you should get off the bus. That time came for me a little while ago when I saw a post on FaceBook. It was a cartoon animal that the poster borrowed from somewhere ... it didn't really matter where. Over the cartoon he had crudely lettered some life-affirming mantra that ended with the sentiment that if only people would learn to accept him as a furry, what a wonderful, wonderful world it would be.

The gorge leapt up my throat.

I have nothing against role-playing, costuming, or even riding a hobby to a degree that most people would think indicates an unbalanced mind. God only knows ... I'm as unbalanced as they come who can still stand on their own two feet. But there was something about placing "furry" on the LGBT spectrum, as though it were as basic to the human condition as one's sexual identity, that was simply *wrong*. I don't care how seriously you take your fantasies about being a Hobbit, Klingon, Steampunk, Vampire Hunter, Jedi, Brony, X-Man, Wiccan, Muppet, Smurf or Powerpuff Girl, it is still just a goddamn *hobby*! You are not any of those things. You are a regular person with an active imagination and desire for something out of reach, which is understandable ... but you must not lose sight of that.

If you do, people *will* look at you little funny, but not because they are imaginatively constipated, hate-mongering bigots ... it's because you probably *are* a little funny.

Having said that, I think having way-out fantasies has a great future. What is there about believing you are the chosen of God, who will be levitated into heaven at some future date, to live forever in bliss with other spotless beings, that seems any more likely than turning into a magic pony and living in a land of perfect sisterhood? Not much, in my opinion.

The significant difference is that with Faith, you are forced to believe your fantasies are real. In fact,

you are expected to defend this absurd proposition, perhaps to preach it to others and help spread to every other living person on Earth ... and condemn the rest. Faith also comes with a set of rules which you are required to follow to remain a member of the Faith community. Breaking those rules can, in some cases, led to one being cast out ... or worse.

Fantasies, on the other hand, make no such requirements. You can be a Klingon or Brony on weekends, and never once have to believe there really *is* a Chronos or Equestria! You need not be offended when skeptics laugh ... because there *is* no Neverland or Gotham City! The unbelievers are no threat to you, and you no threat to them. Nor can any Mufti or Medicine Man order you around, criticize your interpretation of the Holmes canon or punish you for being too tall for a Munchkin. You pick your fantasy because you feel comfortable being a part of it, and it's nobody's business but yours. *Not* believing is the freedom of a fantasy ... unlike the Faithful, who are puppets of their belief.

In time, I hope to see Faith passing away from human civilization like a fever that has lasted far too long. There may still be people attracted to the sacrifice of Christ, the pact Moses made with Jehovah, or the stern austerity of Mohammed. But, like Oz or Miskatonic University, it will be because the fantasy is suited their temperament and imagination ... not because, against all reason, they believe such places, people or stories were ever real.

Maybe that's what annoyed me so much about that FaceBook plea to pay someone's "furriness" the same respect someone deserved for being gay or transgendered. It was that one step too many beyond healthy fantasizing, to something that had all the clueless self-importance of Faith.



Baggage Claim

It was the hour when the double suns touched in the sky, and began to merge. The next seventy-two minutes was a special time in the day, when the blistering heat dropped to a balmy 98 and every living thing breathed easier. Steven and I sat in a mega-air-conditioned bistro with perspiration-jeweled glasses of chilled Sambuco, contemplating the alien vista through the insulated picture window. While we discussed the last mad emperors of the crumbling Mer'kin Empire, Steven was reminded of a minor incident in his interstellar travels...

Or so I'd like you to think. The truth was a lot more mundane. Steven and I were just talking across a small table in a Neapolitan Gelato joint not far from his home. The only vista we could see through the window was College Street's nighttime traffic, both pedestrian and vehicular.

I think I had just confided to Steven my suspicions that there was a malignant entity at the Post Office which carefully sifted through my mail, removing only those envelopes that contained cash or something of value. I had lost too much important mail lately for it to be mere coincidence. As though on cue, Steven began telling me one of his amusing stories ... this one about a suspicious loss of his own.

He had been flying on one of his periodic trips to the States, to get away from work ... and from his *job*. It was bad enough to put in eight hours, Monday to Friday, at the office where he provided

computer tech-support over the phone. But when Steven got home, as often as not, his mother or his sister was waiting at the door with a list of chores in her hand. If it wasn't to move the stove or clean the central heating vents, it was a trip to Wal-Mart with Mama to shop. Weekends were scarcely any better. So, when the pressure got to be too much, Steven bought tickets to New York or Halifax and put himself beyond reach of his taskmasters.

"The flight had been uneventful," he recalled, "Unfortunately, I can't say the same when I tried to reclaim my luggage. I only had a single bag, but I put a rather high value on the little I thought worth bringing with me for the weekend. So, I had a rather stout lock on the zipper. You know the kind – a steel hasp, with a combination. When my bag came around on the moving belt, I grabbed it and right away saw the lock was gone. Just gone! At the first opportune moment I opened the bag and went through the contents to see what, if anything, had been stolen."

"Be funny if there was nothing missing but you found some rubber balloons full of white powder," I commented.

"There *was* nothing missing! At least I saw nothing at first." There had apparently been nothing of importance in the bag, just a couple of changes of clothes, toilet items, a book to read and not much else.

"It was only later, when I had time to inspect everything at greater leisure, that I noticed a package of disposable razors that I bought the day before and hadn't opened. It was open now, and precisely one cheap, disposable razor was missing from the pack!"

I thought I'd misheard him. "Someone stole your electric razor?"

"No! Just a throw-away plastic razor you can buy three-for-six-dollars!"

"You mean someone tore open the bubble pack and extracted a single razor, leaving the rest?"

"Exactly!"

"But why? If the thief needed a shave, why not take them all ... and the shaving cream too?"

"I don't know. That's why it's a *mystery*, isn't it?"

It was. But Steven's story didn't end there.

"A friend of mine works for an airline," he said, "and, when I told her about this, she had an explanation ... of sorts. She said that there are some baggage handlers who make a habit of plundering the passengers' luggage, looking for anything valuable. Usually they take laptops, tablets, electric razors, prescription painkillers ... that sort of thing."

"Sure," I said. "Why steal someone's boxer shorts or shaving gear? Unless someone needed a change in an awful hurry? I don't suppose that Gremlins grow beards?"

“Whoever forced the lock on my bag was looking for something to steal, all right. But I had nothing worth the effort of peeling a piece of tape, much less breaking open a lock. My friend thinks that whoever it was stole the razor out of petty spite – just to show that he’d been there and had violated my security.”

“Huh! Why bother? I’d at least steal the entire pack and not take the time to open it.”

“It was symbolic. The pettier and cheaper the thing stolen, the more contempt.”

Yes, I suppose. I couldn’t see doing it myself, but then I also couldn’t see myself using a pair of bolt cutters to burglarize someone’s luggage. Maybe a thief really does feel scorn for a victim so poor that they have nothing worth stealing? Really, a *mystery* shouldn’t have such a disappointing explanation. Still, if Steven’s story has taught me anything, it’s that if I don’t want someone to steal some worthless crap from my luggage, I should leave a \$100 bill prominently placed on top of my clean shirts and socks.



LEFT OVER PARTS: SESSION 46

LETTERS ON BROKEN TOYS 45 – THE CHRISTMAS ISSUE

WAHF: **Darrell Benvenuto**, who was once my publisher in comics. **Garth Spencer**, who wondered if I had ever thought of doing comics! I think he meant on-line. My answer to that was that no matter what anyone tells you, drawing stories is ten times harder than writing them. There ... I said it! Compared to comics artists, science fiction writers are all a bunch of lazy bums! **David Redd**, who wishes me a “blwyddyn Newydd dda o Gymru.” I plan to see my doctor just to be sure I don’t come down with it, whatever it is! **Dave Haren**, who admired my diabolical scheme to make *Broken Toys* genuinely impossible to respond to in time. **Garth Spencer**, who plans to leave his family a digital archive of his art and prose when he departs the Earthly Plane. **William Rogers**. **Terry Whittier**. **Tom Sadler**. **Ro Nagey**, who tells me not to beat up on myself so much for fudging deadlines ... I’m doing swell.

Paul Skelton, paulskelton2@gmail.com

I hope you weren’t pointing any fingers in the direction of Stockport in your “Season’s Bleatings.” I will admit that I have never been described as “uber-cool” or even “sophisticated”, but when it comes to fan fiction I am very much an even-handed grumper. This of course is not 100% accurate as I will admit to detesting fan fiction about fannish fandom rather less than fan fiction about *Fraggle Rock*, on the grounds that I am interested in fannish fandom (among many other things) whilst I have absolutely no interest whatsoever in *Fraggle Rock*. The professionals who put it on TV failed to interest me in *Fraggle Rock*. The presence of a magnificent actor like Jon Hurt failed to interest me in

Fraggle Rock. Even the presence of the fucking Muppets (OK, Muppet-type characters, if we are being pedantic), which I adore, couldn't interest me in *Fraggle Rock*. The Muppets are doing adverts at the moment on UK TV for Warburton's crumpets, which are quite magnificent. What? No, both the adverts and the crumpets, actually...but that's beside the point. So, good writer though you are, Taral, I am not going to read your *Fraggle Rock* fiction. Colour me 'limited'.

I'm afraid you weren't even in my thoughts! Although British fandom was perhaps uppermost of my mind when I said that, there were enough American and other fans that shared the same prejudice against fan fiction that I could generalize about fandom as a whole. As I'm sure I said, it's a prejudice I largely share. Writing that is passable as a review or con report usually falls flat on its face very quickly when it comes to a work of fiction and let's face it, there's plenty of professional writing that I have no interest in either. I am not a fan of Ellison, Ballard or Pratchett ... doesn't make them bad writers, yet I'm under no obligation to read them.

I could not fail to be delighted however when, paging through the story to see if there was anything else further back, to come across the line...

"What if Gobo doesn't come back in time?"

Why, carry on without him, obviously. Everyone knows the sheer pointlessness of waiting for Gobo. I am assuming of course that this was deliberate on your part.

Gobo is a character from the TV episode that I didn't name. Had I wanted to make a joke about "waiting for Gobo" I would almost certainly have laboured it more.

By the way, Adobe Reader has, more than once during the reading of this issue, advised me that it cannot find or create the font "Ice Caps" and hence some characters may not display or print correctly. As to whether or not they are displaying correctly, I cannot say, though I am finding no readability issues. What did not display correctly is the above quote which I tried to copy from your fanzine and paste into this LoC, but all I got was garbage. Oddly, the next attempt, from your remembrances of Christmases past, worked perfectly...

As I recall, you read from a hand-held device? From what I've been able to discover, that would be the source of the problem with fonts. Kindles, E-Books and other proprietary devices each have their own library of fonts, and can have difficulty with files containing unfamiliar characters. There are only two solutions to this. First, I can stick to oh-so-familiar typefaces and not have as much fun with my fanzine. Or, people can read them on their computers with Adobe Reader (or similar software), and give up the precious ability to read fanzines while standing in a crowded bus or in the office.

[Paul wrote later to say that he encountered the same problem using MS Word on his laptop, not just his Android tablet. I cannot explain this, only speculate that the file had been somehow altered by that time, or the version of Word was impaired or perhaps very old. Or there is a malevolent imp who has made it his life's mission to torment Paul Skelton.]

"I usually felt a little embarrassed by the presents given to me. After all, I could only give my sister's family the best I could find in thrift shops, or marked down at Wal-Mart."

As I am sure you will long ago have worked out, what you did for them by helping put together a home for yourself and your mother, which then enabled you both to put the family back together again, probably meant so much more to them than any amount of subsequent Christmas Present Imbalance could ever begin to chip away at. They would simply be counting themselves fortunate in having you for a brother and rejoicing in being able to express their love and gratitude by helping you out with a few useful gifts you might have struggled to afford for yourself.

I'm almost embarrassed to say that, no... it never occurred to me that anyone was in debt to me for whatever I contributed to keeping the family together when I was a young man. It actually took one of my loccers to acquaint me with that point of view. When the family fell apart, I had no plans of my own, anyway, and had always credited the way things worked out mainly to my mother's determination. I could not have gotten my sisters away from Children's Aid on my own. Only their mother could have. Nor was I able to provide reliable paychecks after their return. My job situation was very unstable in the 1970s... and, frankly, I gave up regular employment for self-employment near the end of the decade. I felt that if I was going to make shit wages and have only intermittent work, I might as well be an artist.

Brad Foster, bwfoster@juno.com

End of the year, and another rush to catch up with things once more. (Okay, that's lie. It's the beginning of the new year. But, since I've been at this for a couple of days, I'll pretend it's still the end of 2015, and that I am, actually, "catching up.")

Looks like I will have to take down the Christmas lights outside the house by next weekend. Much as I would like to have everyone have bright colored lights all over their houses all year long, I seem to be in the minority on that. If I leave our full stretch of lights up beyond a week or two after the new year, it might not be socially acceptable. I will, however, continue to leave two strands up, and turn them on every night, for the entire year, as I have been doing now for decades. A little glimmer of color each evening in our corner of the *cul de sac*.

Somehow, the idea of Christmas lights in Texas just doesn't work for me. They don't seem to belong in a flat, semi-desert environment, anymore than surf boards and a palm-leaf cabana fit the ambiance of a frozen lake in Canada.

I did make out like a bandit on the Christmas haul. Managed to convince folks that, really and truly, all I want for Christmas is some new reading material, nothing else. So now have a nice stack of over a dozen books to get me through the next couple of months. Plus I gifted books to a few folks, with the caveat that, once they finished reading them, I would love to borrow them back to read myself. Ah, my clever plan is coming together nicely....

How did you get them to buy you the right books? What if you'd gotten a dozen novels by Dan Brown, Tim LaHaye and Vox Day?

Good to read you are feeling more confident now to do more writing outside of the zines. Go for it!

Philip Turner, farrago2@lineone.net

It occurred to me that maybe you should have numbered the latest *Broken Toys* as No. 44a. But maybe you're in a rush to get the full 50 out of the way and you're taking pity on future archivists by not leaving them puzzling over 51 items but only 50 numbers.

Back in the '70s, I might well have done something like that, but now that I'm a seasoned veteran of fan publishing and an experienced archivist of old fanzines, I see no reason to deviate from simple whole numbers.

Xmas in Romiley: no snow, no inclination to go anywhere. Thursday Night Football on TV went on to nearly 5:30 a.m. GMT on Xmas day before the Raiders saw off the Bolts. And so to bed. With no need to go out to buy a copy of the *Daily Mail*, because all the shops were shut, it's a wonder I bothered to get out of bed again before Boxing day.

Your remarks about not writing SF got me looking at a list which needed updating. Of my first 100 short stories (1975-1996), 27% were SF. Of the next 71 (1997-2015), 34% were SF. No. 108 should really be excluded from this list as it developed into a short novel some 49,000 words long. The conclusion? Mostly, I don't write SF.

Sadly, the *Fraggle Rock* story whizzed straight past me. The name seems vaguely familiar but I know nothing about the cast of characters -- apart from what was in your story, like some of them have tails.

They all have tails, actually. Except the Silly Creatures who live in Outer Space ... which are us Humans. But that's okay. If you had never seen Star Trek the Next Generation, you'd have no idea that Data was an android, or what was wrong with Worf's forehead, until the plotline was forced to recapitulate.

Happy Easter! I went to my local supermarket yesterday and there were Hot-X buns parked next to the check-outs.

Lloyd Penney, penneys@bell.net

Aw, nuts...I am two issues behind again. I try not to, but I do give myself a big workload to respond to every zine I get. Can't use the excuse of the holidays anymore, so here's a loc on two sets of *Broken Toys*, issues 44 and 45.

There was only three weeks between those two issues, so the odds weren't in your favour...

44...We had once wondered if our own apartment was a fire hazard, for it was packed with stuff, especially papers. We had to be a little ruthless with our collections, and we did recycle a ton of stuff, but there are still tons left. We have two lockers across the hallway (we should only have one, but we do have a sympathetic superintendent), one of which contains my fanzine collection. The room is dark and dry, so all should be well with it. We did take some old electronics (printer, radio, camera) to the North Etobicoke disposal site on Disco Road a few days ago.

I usually vote in the FAAn Awards...I am sure there will be a reminder of open nominations soon, if they aren't already on. I should check...

I had been doing so for several years, but last year I just didn't see any point. Maybe this year... maybe not.

Having an accessible parking permit is a great thing, if the reasons for having one aren't. Yvonne's mother used to have one when Yvonne would pick her up, and they would use it in our car for any event the two would be going to, or even for just going for groceries.

Karno is right, the Internet, especially social media, is eroding away loccing. There are more than a handful of fanzines now where I am the only one responding to them. Some of them even print my letters, and some of them do not. That doesn't stop me. I would think most people would like a little feedback when they are doing something like this, and perhaps my locs keep some fanzines going. My vanity, perhaps, but that keeps me going, too.

Most fanzines I couldn't loc even if I was intent on doing so. New zines seem usually to review books and talk about writers, something I have as little interest in as I do about mollusks or Buddhist philosophy. I'm convinced that my interest in contemporary fanzines will end long before the fanzine is an extinct art form.

The mention of *My Little Pony* ... a few times now, I have seen listings for MLP conventions, and about half of the people going to these are male, Bronies they are called. Every group seems to be insecure enough to look down on another group. *Wall-E* was a great movie, a cautionary tale of what might happen if we're not careful, even though we are already turning into the bulbous creature you see in the movie.

Not only have I seen Craig Charles on *Coronation Street* and of course, *Red Dwarf*, I have also heard him on BBC Radio. He's an occasional DJ on BBC 6Music, and sometimes on BBC Radio 2.

I have won two Auroras, once in 1994 for chairing Ad Astra 13, and again in 1998 for fanwriting. I have been nominated and appeared on the ballot about 20 times since, but have never won again, and I usually finish in last place. Good enough to go on the ballot, but not good enough to win. Besides, few in this country see what I write, and those who aren't in fanzine fandom but know what I do don't really care that much. The fan awards seem to go not to fannish types who do fannish things for fans, but to fannish/neopro types who do fannish things for pros.

The way I put it is that in modern fandom's parlance, "fan" means "semi pro" or "attempting to be pro," and what we used to mean by "fannish" – networking, self-reference, and self-expression – is what one goes to conventions to do. A fannish fanzine must seem like a puzzling contradiction to them. Why would anyone write about their goofing around?

Right now, Yvonne and I are planning to go to England in August, so lists are vital. We can't trust ourselves to think of everything in a short time, so making lists serves as a reminder of what we need to do or should do, or not to forget. Lists serve me well.

My loc...I found out a short time ago that employers can simply dismiss you out of hand, and they are

under no obligation to you or any level of government to explain why. I thought there was an obligation, and I don't know why this has changed, unless it was hidden in an omnibus bill in Parliament. Anyway, the job hunt continues, the resumes flow out, and some interesting opportunities have presented themselves. I don't like job hunting, but I've gotten awfully good at it.

45...Happy New Year! One must write what one knows, and you know *Fraggle Rock*. I wish the CBC or another cartoon channel would run them. I know that at the CBC Museum at the broadcast centre, there are Muppets from *Sesame Street*, but I am not sure if there are any Fraggles, Gorgs or Doozers.

*There's a CBC museum here? In the Harper era, I assumed that if our taxpayer dollars built any such thing, it would have built it in Ottawa, as a showpiece for the Conservative Party regime ... not for me to ever see. A few years ago, though, I recall there was a fire in a CBC warehouse that destroyed the sets for *Fraggle Rock*.*

Family ... mine have gone to the four winds. My mother passed away about four years ago now, my father lives somewhere in rural New Brunswick, my brother Steven lives somewhere on Vancouver Island, and my brother David ... I have no idea where he's gotten to. We don't seem willing to tell others where we are, and where we can be reached. Christmas was always a hassle for all of us, but they are much better with Yvonne. She is my family, and all the family I need.

I guess this is the downside of not raising a family of one's own. However convenient it is for most of your life not to raise kids, eventually you end up alone.

A very enjoyable O. Henry-ish story, and thank you for that. Family is the best present around Christmas and New Year. (See the last line of the previous paragraph.)

You've said that issue 46 would have a sizable local, so here is my contribution to that. Many thanks, and see you with that issue.

Steve Jeffery, srjeffery@aol.com

Thanks for this Taral, even if I don't share (or even understand) your enthusiasm for *Fraggle Rock*.

*If we all had the same tastes, there would only be one soap opera, one sit-com, one police drama and one game show on TV. I don't expect many of my readers to be fans of *Fraggle Rock*, or even very familiar with it. I'd be content if they just found pleasure in reading the stories I write. However, it's not unexpected if they don't. I'm entirely indifferent to Steven King, Terry Pratchett, *Dr. Who* and *Star Wars* ... despite the millions of people who are dedicated enthusiasts who probably couldn't understand why I'm not, even if I spent all day trying to explain it.*

My best Christmases were the period when my nieces and nephews were in their pre- or early teens, simpler to buy toys and presents for, and the whole family made an effort to come together at Christmas - or more usually Boxing Day. It doesn't last. They grew up fast; affordable toys gave way to expensive electronic gadgets and games and phones which they seem to be permanently welded to, they had had their own friends and started to make their own plans for Christmas. It's been quite

a few years since the whole family has come together in one place, and I realize I miss that now since we don't see a lot of each other through the rest of the year.

Richard Dengrove, RichD22426@aol.com

I can't keep up with you. I think I'm about three issues of *Broken Toys* short of being up to date. When I finish one, another pops up. What is a leisurely reader and writer to do – write a LOC for the three zines I have received, and hope you see fit to publish that letter. I can understand if you don't. You want all your readers up-to-date and gung ho. ...Or is this the pace you have to go at? Are you on a roll?

I've been publishing more or less monthly from the start... but make no demand that anyone loc every issue. Every third issue would be peachy. Some never loc at all... (If they weren't old friends, I'd cut their fat asses right off the mailing list.)

BROKEN TOYS #40

If I were you, I wouldn't worry about complaining too much about your health. For one thing, at this point in our lives, when we old farts get together with other old farts, we talk a lot about our health and lack thereof. How many times have I mentioned having dentures rather than teeth, my relatively mild arthritis, and my prostate operation. In exchange, I let others prate on about their baldness, their cataracts and their general hopelessness. Thus, you have that much more right to complain: you are suffering what looks from outside like a terrible fate, myasthenia gravis. In addition, your problem is for all to see. Thus, you have every right to scream to the rafters – which you're not doing.

Being a sufferer from Myasthenia Gravis is not a happy lot, but it is not usually life-threatening. Christopher Milne, who was the model for Christopher Robin in the Pooh books, lived with Myasthenia for the last 20 years of his life and ran a bookstore.

On the other hand, others with aging bodies can't accept that fact. Nor that they are being displaced by younger men and women. Many older fans have decided that they still remain the kings of fandom when, in the normal order of things, they have become irrelevant. For instance, take the Fanzine Hugo. They believe it belongs to them. Nothing has changed over the years. They can't see that as the reason old-fashion fanzines have had such trouble winning. The consolation is that old-timers are so desperate that they are willing to see the old fanzine in a manifestation of the new. The last fanzine they praised as genuine can only be accessed on the Web.

Very rationally, you suggested to Lloyd Penney that new categories be given the Hugo, which better reflect the younger generation. The older will have none of it. I myself suggested that there be a Hugo for both the Old Fanzine and the New Fanzine. The young zinners in the new media would be sure to turn up their noses at the Old Fanzine Hugo; and we old farts would have no competition for it. That idea went off old fans like water off a duck's back. For them, there could be only one fanzine.

I take it you mean something like a Web page, or blog Hugo, that features updated material instead of discrete issues? That would be my solution, as well as to distinguish between contributors to one or the other. I don't know who blocks this option at Worldcon

business meetings, since it seems a popular one ... but I don't go to Worldcons and can't see for myself what goes on at meetings.

On the other hand, I can't say I have been too prophetic. You mention to Milt Stevens how you turned up your nose at EC comics. I was a wimp as a kid, so I was scared by EC and other horror comics. Now they are celebrated as classics. Thus, I missed the boat. Of course, you're right the tales were formulaic. As you say, people were perpetually coming back as ghosts to take revenge. Nonetheless, for now, people have accepted EC horror comics as classics. With so many people nostalgic for heads being cut off, you and I are prophets crying out in the wilderness.

The same people are apt to be huge fans of cheap horror movies too, so it's no surprise.

However, we are both like everyone else in one way: we love a good conspiracy theory. In the back of your zine, you have fashioned a cartoon strip to lampoon fannish conspiracies, where the home team or birds of a feather reserve all kudos for their own. However, you have added a conspiracy theory touch: they go so far as to use time travel for that purpose. I wish I could compete with you in turning our petty animosities into a full blown world view. I can do one thing, though: pass around a great conspiracy theory about the Kennedy Assassination. It is too good a joke not to have its adherents. According to Arthur Hlavaty, Joe DiMaggio killed President Kennedy because he had Marilyn Monroe killed. Not only that, but Arthur Miller drove the getaway car.

BROKEN TOYS 41

We go from conspiracies now to open warfare. You mention a novel entitled *Operation Shatterhand*. In that alternate history, the Navaho and the Hopi defeat a Nazi invasion of the Southwest. What puts the title in an even stranger light is that Old Shatterhand was one of Hitler's favorite characters. In a series of novels by a Karl May, Old Shatterhand served as the friend and blood brother to the American Indian Winnetou. They romped in an Old West a Karl May imagined for a German audience. By the way, had Karl lived long enough, he probably wouldn't have become a Nazi. In point of fact, he was a pacifist. What I gather Hitler liked about the novels were the moral teachings they spread. The Nazis haven't been the only ones either. In fact, a Bulgarian told me they still read that series in Bulgaria for its moral teachings.

That's actually all explained in the Jake Page novel, Operation Shatterhand.

Karl May's personal beliefs would not rank as the "drink Kool Aid" type, which you mention to Bob Jennings. However, I have an anecdote surrounding the origin of the term, Jim Jones' temple in Guiana. My mother encountered a member of Jim Jones' temple who didn't take the Kool Aid, Larry Layton. Larry missed the Kool Aid because he was busy shooting Congressman Leo Ryan, who was investigating Jones' group in Guiana. How did my mother meet him? She, a courtroom sketch artist for NBC news, had been sent to Guiana to sketch his trial.

Kool Aid is a cheap item. Comic books used to be an even cheaper item. Unlike you, in your reply to Eric Mayer, I remember when comics were ten cents a pop. Of course, neither item would be as cheap taking inflation into account. Someone claimed that, taking it into account, those comics would cost \$2. On the other hand, actual comics sold now cost \$3 to \$4. Of course, they're being made for adults now, and, in particular, for collectors; and the comic book moguls believe that

collectors are made of gold.

No, I remember ten-cent comics all right! They made an abrupt jump to fifteen cents in the early 1960s, but there was so much complaint about the expense that they dropped to twelve cents after a few months. Within a few years, the price of comics began to rise again, this time for good!

On the one hand, we have fanatics like Jim Jones' minions. On the other hand, we have people who don't care enough to vote. In answering Paul Skelton, you wonder if our form of government can be called democratic if only a few people vote in an election. If, for instance, only 74 Canadians voted for the prime minister. Definitely. The 74 were the only ones who cared. Why should people who don't care have to vote? In fact, it may show that things are going so well it doesn't matter who gets elected. On the other hand, it may also show that a demagogue who could appeal to fed up non-voters, like Donald Trump, hasn't come along.

It may be democracy, but it wouldn't be a functioning one.

BROKEN TOYS 42

Sometimes we take ourselves to task for not having initiative like those 74 voters. We regret all the projects in life that will go by the boards. In "Life in Free Fall," you criticize yourself for that. Less and less I'm criticizing myself for it. I have a vast project that may never get finished; not at the speed I am going. It is a history of extraterrestrials. I haven't actually gotten past writing about the Ancients and their ideas concerning extraterrestrials. However, it would not be a total bust if I never finish it and the public never sees the fruits of my research. The reason is I enjoy writing the book, although I wish I could extricate myself from the perfectionism that is slowing the writing.

Enough of the life of the near-dead; how about the dead? Namely, Ned. Should I be that flippant about Ned Brooks' death? The skeptic I knew would probably not protest. And, yes, we were friends: I had an email round robin with him for fourteen years, more on than off. Once I didn't get a reply from him. I thought one or both of our email systems had a glitch. No, it turned out he had died. I first heard the news on the Southern Fandom e-list. It took some time to sink in, and to be sad. However, I finally did the manly thing, and felt sad. In addition, I feel sorry that, with all those claiming a close relationship with him I felt it necessary to prove my friendship with him. So I should take some comments down I put up on the *File 770* website.

I've seen a lot of that in fandom. Someone dies, and apparently he or she had hundreds of close, intimate friends. When I die, I expect only about ten close friends to speak up for me, maybe another two dozen to claim any sort of casual friendships. The rest will be just following social conventions... That is, if my absence from fandom is noticed at all by the the millennials.

We go from Ned Brooks to Dave Harren's comment about jet fighters. It sounds totally unrelated to Ned Brooks; but it isn't since, in life, Ned worked for NASA.. Thus, Ned's job was close enough for government work to fighter jets. You suggested that Elon Musk might make one based on induction if batteries proved too heavy. I was told, up till now, batteries could not hold enough charge to power a jet fighter; so Musk would have to use induction. However, I was told there is hope yet because the size of a charge is no object with the Vanadium Ion battery. Another Ned connection exists here

because Ned pointed that out to me. How heavy the Vanadium Ion battery would be, I have no idea. For one thing, progress has been made on it, and the size as well as the capacity keeps changing.

Rate of discharge is also a relevant issue.

Finally, we get to the end of all the Ned connections, and on to a new connection I don't wish to touch too much. I frankly don't believe that the movie *The Da Vinci Code* ended that way in the director's cut. It's not that I consider it bad taste not to let sleeping dogs lie; and pretend Christ's marriage to Mary Magdalen proved his divinity. Which it can't. It's that I don't believe whoever directed that movie could have filmed a scene like that. We are dealing with a production crew which had the depth of an olive, or believed the audience did. The movie handled the novel in too-heavy handed and literal a way, and it lacked all introspection. In fact, you had to have read the novel to understand the movie.

I considered reading the novel, but got no farther than page one. I found Dan Brown's prose style to be no more competent than most fan fiction I've read.

With my wisecracks about *The Da Vinci Code*, that's it for this LOC. We started with help, and ended with pseudo-history. Or was it insanity we ended it with. I don't even think the Vanadium Ion battery we have so far developed could carry enough electricity to make that movie interesting. Ned Brooks would have called it simply foolish. EC comix, in its most formulaic moments, outdid it.

Arnie Katz, crossfire4@cox.net

It's amazing. It sounds so reasonable when I prattle on about stuff like schedules, page-counts and publishing frequency. Yet it somehow seems a little bit overheated when *you* write essentially the same thing.

That's why I recognize your dilemma and sympathize with your struggle to find a solution.

Seriously, I consider size and frequency very important factors in creating a fanzine. That said, you've kept *Broken Toys* a model of consistency and regularity for a fairly long time.

I think we'd all forgive an occasional departure from *BT's* timetable. I also think most of us would like you to be more forgiving when circumstances necessitate such deviations.

I suppose when you try to articulate anything as inherently inconsequential as the angst of fannish existence, it's bound to come off as overblown, self-obsessed and melodramatic. After all, what does it matter whether one pub's one's ish only on a Tuesday, or at precise 37-day intervals? In fact, if one sobers up too much, it becomes obvious that fandom itself doesn't matter, and it would be better to spend the time planning a retirement portfolio. Yet that way lies the realization that it also doesn't matter one whit to the universe if you step out of a 20th story window... You choose what matters to you, and in fandom the game of existential life has been developed to a fine art.

"Size and frequency" are indeed important factors in the creation of a popular fanzine, to

which I'd add a better than average level of intelligence and wit, as well as a lively letter column. There is an almost indefinable "other" quality – call it personality – that many otherwise fine fanzines don't seem to achieve. What may be the most important factor that goes into a popular fanzine, though, is the sort of fandom that can support it.

It's in this area that I've been having my greatest doubts, lately. Like global warming, I increasingly think that Old School Fandom has passed a tipping point. We have grown too small, too tired and too preoccupied with other things to function as the fandom we once were. Each fanzine that survives seems to be its own bubble-universe, existing all by itself and perpetuated almost entirely by the willpower of the editor. As soon as that willpower ebbs, the fanzine fails... as this one will ultimately fail when I'm too tired to go on.

I might have carried on longer if there had been more synergy available, but the fandom of 2016 isn't the fandom of 2005. When I go to eFanzines I rarely see anything to excite me. Yes, there are as many posts as there ever were, but the mainstays of the previous decade that I enjoyed so much are few and far between today. What remains mostly seems to lack the charisma of what makes a fanzine great.

Anti-Theft Device Included

*Reprinted from Drunk Tank 242,
Editor, Chris Garcia, May 2010*



If you're a fan, likely as not you never grew out of wanting toys. Of course, "toy" is a matter of perspective. For some grown-up people, a "toy" is a Nissan 350Z "Nismo" or a Mustang GT500. For other grown-ups, a "toy" is a 60-inch plasma-screen home entertainment system. Fans are more likely to collect books, models from *Star Trek*, action figures, bubble-gum cards and videos. To that list you could add coins, fossils, toy soldiers, and a myriad other things I'm forced to plead guilty to collecting myself.

I'd have to go farther, and say that my interest in acquiring new toys of almost any kind was a prime motivation for getting out of the house at one time. I had long ago explored every nook and cranny of my neighborhood. As I get on in years, it becomes more difficult to walk two miles just to leave behind the familiar streets and shop-fronts before *beginning* to see fresh sights. I evolved into a new

pattern of behavior. Instead of wandering aimlessly, my walks became purposeful. I had a goal. That goal had a name.

Wal-Mart.



The toy section had a brisk turnover, so every couple of weeks there was sure to be something I hadn't seen before, that might be affordable even on my restrictive budget. It was a poor week when I didn't find a 1/64 die-cast of a 1937 Studebaker pick-up truck with opening hood, or an action figure of Atomic Betty. The politically correct won't shop at Wal-Mart, for entirely good reasons. But I was willing to compromise so long as nothing I bought was marked at the Manufacturer's Suggested Retail Price, and it didn't take business away from local retailers.

In the old days, when you bought a toy it was a simple matter. You looked at the box, you opened the box and looked inside, then you decided whether or not to buy it. If you decided you could not live without a 1/24 replica of the Munsters Koach or a cap pistol that folded into a fake 35mm camera, then you paid for your discovery and took it home. Boxes in those days were simple. Four sides, two ends, a painting or photo on the outside and perhaps a cellophane window. There was never any trouble opening a box, either in the store or at home. If the store had perversely Scotch-taped the lids shut, a thumbnail was sharp enough to slit the tape to look inside, despite the store's precautions. You *did* have to keep a sharp eye out for the salespeople, who would likely as not raise hell about shop-lifting and throw you out of the store. I just told myself I was "only looking" and did it anyway.



Of course, now that I am all-grown-up, a paid-in-full member of adult society, I can open packages brazenly. Nobody is going to accuse me of opening a box with a crappy \$2.99 replica of a motorcycle inside because I might pocket it. These days, I inspect toys that arouse my curiosity as thoroughly as I like – removing rubber bands to peer under the hood, peeling away tape, undoing twist-ties, and tearing plastic bags with as much self-assurance as someone who had as good as purchased the thing. This is much the same principle by which most leading members of society – financiers, politicians and other confidence-artists – live. Act as though you *have* the right, and you *do*.

In response to the increasingly assertive tactics of buyers such as myself, packaging has improved enormously. A typical \$1.99 toy today is protected by at least two layers of plastic, each bonded to a cardboard backing by an adhesive originally created to glue re-entry tiles to the Space Shuttle. Once through the inner and outer plastic bubble, you face anywhere from three to six lengths of coated wire securing the toy to the cardboard backing. These are not ordinary twist-ties, but heavy-duty wire, twisted twenty or thirty times, doubled over and twisted a dozen times more just for good measure. There may be screws or bolts as well, just in case the product is subjected in transport to g-forces considerably in excess of mere *human* endurance. Various grommets, fillers, spacers and brackets are sometimes also encountered in penetrating a package.

Where on the box does it say, “bolt cutters and acetylene torches may be required for removal?”

As often as not, security doesn’t end with physical barriers. The Pharaohs were buried after a process of mummification hardly more complex than modern packaging. And, like the mummies of the Pharaohs, unwrapping a modern package brings disquieting surprises into view. Not magic talismans or sacred scarabs to warn of dire curses should the looter proceed in his desecration. Rather, strange little strips of rubbery material stuck to the plastic or cardboard. You find them in the packaging of DVDs and CDs, as well as in most toys.

They can be peeled off... with varying degrees of difficulty. On the back, you’ll find an adhesive strip, and inside is either a tiny circuit sensitive to radio frequencies, a strip of magnetic tape or a tiny bit of metal foil. Try to remove the packaged item from the store, and something like a Klingon battle-alarm will sound at the door – often, even when you attempt to leave with a purchase made previously – resulting in much embarrassment.



Of course, all this inconvenient nonsense is the legitimate response to the efforts of generations of dedicated shoplifters, who have evolved cunning and ingenious methods to open a package before surreptitiously removing its contents. I don’t know how many times I’ve seen a bubble-pack hanging on its hook in the toy section of Toys-R-Us, with nothing in it. I once found an authentic 1/72 LCM3 U.S. Navy landing craft with every part intact ... except for the three crewmen who were supposed to be impossible to remove. They *had* been removed ... somehow. Why? I don’t know. But I took advantage of the situation to show the toy to the manager and demand a discount on damaged goods, thus saving three dollars on an item I was prepared to buy in any case.

I wonder whether the war between shoplifters and packagers might not finally go too far one of these days. Computer chips, embedded in the cardboard or plastic, will use remote sensors in the store to appraise management of your intentions as soon as you lift the item from its shelf. Depending on your subsequent actions, other sensors will follow you from department to department. On the least

suspicion, a cool, dispassionate silicon intelligence may make the decision to summon the police – or taser you from hidden sites. For his part, the shoplifter may bring into play some high technology of his own. A key chain, from which an innocent-looking Pikachu dangles, may jam Radio Detection Identification systems. A simple pair of nail clippers might in reality be a carbon-steel wire-cutter, capable of exerting a force of up to 350 pounds per square centimeter. Configured differently, it might also loosen eight different kinds of screws.

Where does all this leave the innocent toy collector, such as you or me? Probably gasping in frustration at home, as we struggle to open our legitimate purchases. Perhaps, for the benefit of us who actually pay money for our toys, the makers would be so good as to print instructions for opening on the back of the box? But that would only make it easier for shoplifters. It seems as though there is nothing left but for the retail outlet to give printed instructions for opening each individual package at the checkout counter.

Failing that, we could fall back on time-honoured practice and just use our teeth.



LEFT OVER PARTS : SESSION 47

LETTERS ON BROKEN TOYS 46 – THE ISSUE AFTER

WAHF: Albert Temple, Eric Mayer, Bruce Gillespie, Garth Spencer, Dan Skunk, Darrell Benvenuto, Dave Haren, Richard Wright, Neil Jamison-Williams.

Fred Patten, fredpatten@earthlink.net

Sorry, but your experiences at St. Joseph's Hospital seem trivial to me. I have been paralyzed and bedridden in San Fernando Post-Acute Hospital in the L.A. suburb of Sylmar for five years now. I am in a small convalescent room with two other patients, both of whom play the television at top volume all day and into the night. It's mostly *Gilligan's Island*, *Gunsmoke*, *The Andy Griffiths Show*, and *Bonanza* reruns.

Obviously, my problems are trivial ... although certainly no reason for good cheer, they mainly are a nuisance. Writing about them in Broken Toys is how I keep in touch with people, however ... otherwise they would have no idea what was happening to me unless someone tipped off Mike Glycer and he ran a one-paragraph obit. As far as possible, I try to make my little stories entertaining, though I suspect I'm pushing the limits at this point. One trip to the hospital is an exciting adventure. Two trips to the hospital are an eventful life. Three trips are just a pathetic downward slide to oblivion...

In my generation of fandom, the casualties every year have been rising steadily, until they

have begun to be quite worrisome. We're all getting to be over 60, and there's not going to be any letup until we're all gone. Whatever philosophical view you take of life, there's not much you can do about it.

Still, I can't complain. The food is relatively good; quite good, I'm told by those experienced with hospital food. My sister Sherry, who has brought me this MacBook Pro laptop computer that I'm using to get your *Broken Toys* on, tries to take me out in my wheelchair to watch a movie about once a week. We just saw the 2015 Chinese *Monster Hunt* at a theater in Burbank. I've reviewed it for *Flayrah* over the aforementioned laptop; <https://www.flayrah.com/6405/review-monster-hunt>. I am lucky enough to be near four large public library systems: the Los Angeles Public Library, the County of Los Angeles Public Library, the Burbank Public Library, and the combined Glendale and Pasadena Public Libraries. I can keep track of their new books (and there are almost no commercial hardcovers that one of these libraries doesn't get) through their online catalogues, request that they be sent to me at their nearest branch, and my sister picks them up for me.

I also write and edit books by e-mail. (<http://furplanet.com/shop/item.aspx?itemid=770> and <http://furplanet.com/shop/item.aspx?itemid=810>) And almost ten more since I've become permanently hospitalized. Plus writing a weekly column on animation for the Cartoon Research website, (<http://cartoonresearch.com/index.php/forgotten-japanese-ovas-part-3-angels-egg-1985/>), and lots more. This laptop is my lifeline to the outside world. It may not be fun being paralyzed, but I keep busy.

Keeping busy is one of the saner responses to the increasingly narrow range of options that growing older brings. I'm a little fuzzy on my goals at the moment, but I'm sensing the need to find new ones to replace being a Big Name Fan ... that seems to be a dead end, once jet-setting to several conventions every year is ruled out.

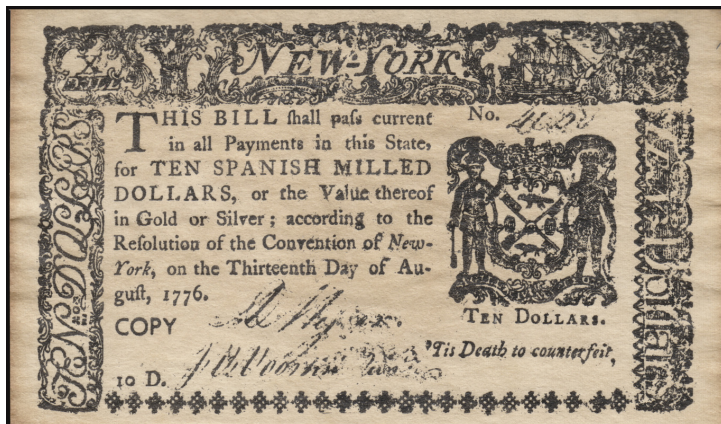
I also read Mike Glycer's now-online *File 770* every day on my laptop. SF fandom seems to have evolved so much since I became paralyzed and cannot go to Worldcons and the like any more. *File 770* online today reports in much greater depth than the paper early issues; I love it. And Mike announces it when I have a new book published.

It's on my list of things I look at ever day when I go online, but I don't read most of the posts – Dr. Who can go off the air forever, and there might never be another Star Wars or Marvel superhero movie for all I care. Nor do I waste attention on lists of winners of awards I never heard of. The fact is, I don't even follow the literature that closely, let alone all the media – there's just too much, so I focus more on my own efforts than on all the white noise around me.

Your comments to Bob Jennings and Andy Porter about coins make me cringe for the U.S., still adhering to old-fashioned “one color” coins. We don't even have any of the two-colored bimetallic coins that most other countries have at least one of, like Canada's twonies. This is another respect in which a computer is a godsend. Back about the 1960s, numismatic journals and books about old coins and banknotes were mostly long un-illustrated lists. Today almost everything has a full-color close-up on the Internet. Have you ever seen a 1777 New York \$7.00 bill? During our Revolutionary War the 13 American colonies were expected to each print their own money, resulting in the expression “not worth a Continental.” Yes, nobody accepted one back then, either. The \$7.00 bill

looks crude and easy to counterfeit, which the British did.

I have some imitation colonial banknotes printed on fake parchment (for no good reason). One might be the New York \$7 bill, but I don't remember. There were denominations in dollars and pounds ... I almost expected Pesos, too, and fractional amounts like \$2.50.



Broken Toys #46 is full of good reading until #47 arrives.

Thanks for the note ... it takes honours as first received this time.

David Redd. dave_redd@hotmail.com

Thanks Taral - I'm amazed that you do keep them coming, given everything else that's happening to you as described, sleeping and hospital etc. Hope things improve. I liked your Pompeii trip report and am glad you provided such a fine array of photographs.

With Brian Wilson's *Smile*, I downsized it after some hearings, but kept the CD double-reissue of *Smiley Smile* and *Wild Honey* as a much better option; I find myself more sympathetic to even the loopier parts now, and of course "Heroes and Villains" and "Good Vibrations" are there.

Coin forgeries - as Church Treasurer, I notice great variation of colour etc in the pound coins as I count them, but to keep my life simple I pay everything into the bank and let them do the checks. (The oddities could always be normal manufacturing variations I suppose, especially with the metal composition changing over the years.)

Even coins that have the same composition, and are struck the same year, will turn out slightly different looking. Trance contaminants from the environment - grease from your hand, salt in water or soil - will influence a coin's colouration.

Joseph Nicholas, excellenceingardening@gmail.com

You've been sending me electronic copies of *Broken Toys* since at least last November, and I've been dutifully marking them in my in-box as to be read Real Soon Now. But it seems that it's only when I get to the other side of the world - nominally on holiday, but equipped with electronic devices to

keep abreast of what's happening; supposedly free of the day-to-day pressures of home, but driven by the imperative keep up with them – that I finally do find the time to read your fanzine. The final prompt, perhaps, being the arrival of issue 46 on 26 January, Australia Day, when the white colonialists celebrate the theft of the country from its original inhabitants. (Obligatory politically correct remark.)

I've been sending BT to some fans since the first, despite little or no response ... a sheer stubborn desire to see them in the hands of the "right" people, I suppose. Now that the final issue is so close, there's no point in cutting anyone off the mailing list.

"The United Kingdom buys all major coin finds on British soil, and pays the finder market prices," you say in response to Bob Jennings. Not quite. Under the Treasure Act, finders and the owners of the land where the find was made (not always the same thing!) are obliged to offer finds which fall into certain categories for sale to a museum at a price set by independent valuers; only if museums aren't interested, or can't raise the money, can the owner retain the item(s) and/or offer them for sale elsewhere. This can result in the items being purchased by overseas interests and thus lost to the UK, as happened with the Crosby Garrett parade helmet; alternatively, if the government (formally, in the person of the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sports) decides that the treasure is of exceptional national interest or importance will an export bar be placed on it until funds can be raised to equal or exceed the auction price paid. Admittedly, this course of action is usually pursued with respect to paintings by Early Modern masters and manuscript letters from authors such as Jane Austen rather than hoards of coins, but to my knowledge no significant hoard of coins has ever been offered for sale in this way, or its purchase refused by a museum. (Finds of individual coins aren't covered by the Treasure Act, so although their recording is required under the Portable Antiquities Scheme -- administered by the British Museum but largely a voluntary reporting system; ergo, some finds will go unreported, especially where nighthawkers are involved – there are no controls on their sale or subsequent disposal.)

I'm obliged to you for the details. Around here we don't need such an act since there's generally nothing to find that's much more than 100 years old. I can buy fairly cheap coins or artifacts that are much older than anything I'm ever likely to find, and not have to worry about corrosion or damage either. There are some First Nations artifacts, here and there, but in the Toronto area they have only been found in a handful of places that have been thoroughly excavated ... nor am I that keen on collecting broken pots or misshapen beads. What I want is a good Viking sword, Roman sandal or Medieval wine cup.

Looking at your photographs of the Pompeii exhibition suggests to me that it may have been a repeat of, or closely modeled on, that hosted by the British Museum in 2013, focusing on the lives and deaths of the citizens of Pompeii and Herculaneum and notable for not including anything relating to the cities' public buildings: the forum, the theatres, the amphitheatre, the temples, the baths were all excluded in favour of a focus on the domestic: people's houses. That struck some as odd, but struck me as a valid and unique way of presenting the catastrophe, and indeed one that gave it a shape to which viewers could more readily relate: we've seen or read about amphitheatres and temples, and watched films about gladiators and Roman legions, but these give us no very clear idea of what ordinary people did in their ordinary everyday lives. Having said that, though, I wonder if yours was the same exhibition, with the same focus; the exhibition material seems to have been provided by the same authority, the Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Napoli e

Pompeii, and included many of the same artifacts (the cast of the contorted dog; the furniture and kitchen utensils; the carbonized loaf of bread; the sculpture of the satyr penetrating a goat), but the inclusion of gladiatorial weapons – which were absent from the British Museum's exhibition, since they have nothing to do with domestic life – suggests not. Even so, nothing really beats visiting the sites themselves, irrespective of how badly the Italians actually care for them (on the one hand, the houses were never intended to last very long, and but for their burial by the eruption(s) wouldn't have lasted anyway; on the other, the Italian archaeological authorities have been gripped for decades by a near-permanent paralysis which has left them arguing over how to allocate their funds instead of actually spending it on conservation and restoration).

The exhibition was a tour, and perhaps it was the same tour as passed through the British Museum, with one or two changes to the display. The only gladiatorial material I saw were a helmet, greaves and shoulder piece in one glass case ... and two small terracotta figurines.

But I'll keep this short, and stop here rather. I have read the previous three issues, numbers 43-45, but it seems fairly pointless tracking back over them in search of things to say when others have already done so. You'll probably have plenty of material from others with which to fill the letter column in your next issue, anyway....

It's true. At present I have more locs than I can print. Shameless flattery and mindless adoration are always in short supply, however.

Perhaps I shouldn't say anything more, as it will only add to the amount of text that you have to cut. But I do have a comment on Ben Bova's *Mars*, on which you wrote a couple of paragraphs in *Broken Toys* 46. You remarked that his "manned expedition to Mars is supported by a sophisticated network of space stations, shuttles, tugs, inflatable habitats, manned rovers and remotely piloted aircraft -- technology we aren't within 20 years of achieving" and that Bova "appears to think it possible to develop all this infrastructure in a mere 15 years." I would dispute your assertion that this infrastructure is another twenty years away, since it is technologically and technically within our grasp right now (what are drones but remotely piloted aircraft?), but that in fact points to the principal flaw in Bova's science fiction (and indeed the science fiction of other writers of his ilk): the assumption that because it is technologically and technically possible to build "space stations, shuttles, tugs, inflatable habitats and manned rovers" then they will be built, and that the question of whether there is actually the political will to do so can be ignored. Which of course it can't be; which of course is why so much near-future-set science fiction is blatant wish-fulfillment by people who grew up with the Apollo moon-landings and are choked up (with fury? sadness? something else?) that space exploration did not continue to be funded at the same high level, and with the same concentration on crewed flight rather than -- as we have had for the past three decades or more -- robot missions. (I discount trips to the ISS, which is in low Earth orbit and of no real utility.) But as Stephen Baxter pointed out in the afterword to *Voyage*, his alternate history of a manned mission to Mars in the 1980s, had crewed spaceflight continued to be funded at Apollo levels, then it is likely that there would have been few if any robot missions to the rest of the solar system, and that in consequence we'd now know just as much (or just as little) about the outer planets as we did in the 1960s. Robot missions are cheaper and easier (no need to drag along all that air, food and water, for a start), and always will be.

Much of the technology for Bova's space-infrastructure exists, but we are short in experience in using them, so they lack real reliability in some areas. The biggest example is the ISS,

which is routinely supported from the Earth. It would be folly to pack off a vehicle to Mars, stuffed with concentrated food and some sort of hydroponic garden, because we don't really know how it'll fare over three years without outside support. Things break down, too. The ISS is in need of constant repairs.

The other big obstacle is zero gee. It ruins the body's health. It is true that astronauts have been in orbit for over a year, but they return to Earth in a mess that takes a long time to recover from. We have no idea what three years in space will do. I believe we need to build ships that can spin – and Bova actually addressed this issue, hitting on the solution I did, spinning two masses tied together with a tether. He had two manned vessels on the tether, while I envisioned the second mass being the propulsion unit (and winching it in for use). It would take 10 or 15 years alone to build such a thing and test it, I think. (The US can't even make the F-35 fighter plane work, despite spending as much money and time on it as the Apollo project!)

Finally, there's radiation. We have some proposals to protect the astronauts from a solar flare if one should happen, but nobody has tried any of them in space.

With enough money, and international cooperation, a manned Mars mission could be set as a goal and perhaps met in 20 years without undue haste, but it isn't going to happen, I suspect. The Orion capsule, under development as we speak, is not a Mars vehicle. It can only carry four and gives them about as much space to live in for two or three years as a mini-van. It seems more suited to a near-Earth asteroid encounter, and a return to the Moon.

Eric Mayer, groggy.tales@gmail.com

I'm a bit late locating this issue because I've been pushing for the past few days to get through some legal editing work. It's the one, rather large, job I've retained on my way to complete retirement, maybe someday real soon now. My enthusiasm for the work is waning. I just wanted to get this portion of it out of the way.

As is often case, I'm not sure what to say without reiterating what I've already said in private correspondence. However, if I just add a few short remarks it should suit your desire to cut the loccol down as well as my desire to minimize my presence in fanzines!

Although I'm happy the doctors found nothing new wrong with you (relatively speaking), the idea of four days in hospital horrifies me. Luckily, the chances of a US insurance company allowing anyone to be put into the hospital for four days of tests is more or less nil. Patients in this country come out of anesthesia at the bus stop.

I have never got on with needles. The sight them tends to reduce me to the sort of gibbering terror that most people reserve for the sight of the Great Old Ones. It's gradually dawned on me, getting an occasional flu or tetanus shot, that injections don't hurt like they did when I was a child. I'd like to think I have matured, but I suspect it is the needles that have changed. I still hate having blood taken, though. The idea of a needle probing my vein. During the past few years, I have steeled (oops, bad word choice) myself to actually set foot within the abattoir and endure having my blood drawn when

the doctor requests it, rather than ignoring the request. Being prodded futilely until my arms are black and blue is not anything I care to contemplate.

Your skin may have become less sensitive with age, also. Anyway, don't question your good luck! I've never minded needles, but multiple attempts to draw blood are another matter.

To be honest, I actually like Kraft macaroni and cheese. Then again, as soon as I was out in the world on my own, my tastes devolved to the level of my cooking skills. Basically none. Well, I can open a tin without slicing my fingers off, if that counts. But what caught my eye was the lime Jell-O. On its own I find lime Jell-O palatable, or at least edible. Or anyway, I did as a kid. However, I rarely saw unadulterated lime Jell-O as a kid because at some point, somebody (Betty Crocker) came up with the bright idea of putting grated carrot in it. WTF? What sort of flavor combo is that? I don't recall the carrot lending much flavor to the concoction. It just made the Jell-O somewhat solid. Perhaps fibrous would be a better word. And more or less opaque. And in my opinion about all Jell-O has going for it is that it's transparent and wobbly. Not many foods can make that claim. There's a certain amount of entertainment value in food that wobbles. Anyway, back in the '50s and early '60s I kept having this Jell-O with carrots shoved at me as a dessert treat. Pretty much set me against all forms of Jell-O ever since.

I read an interesting article about that, one time. Apparently, Jell-O molds were all the rage in the late 1950s and early '60s, due to increased demands on housewives' time and a fad for quick, light meals. This was the heyday of the dinner consisting of meatloaf, potato chips, Seven-Up and a Jell-O banana-radish-sardine mold. Some concoctions got at least as unpalatable as that!

Jell-O may even have sold housewives on the idea that Jell-O molds were a kind of fruit or vegetable dish! I made up the banana-radish-sardine idea, but I've heard of some that were not very much better, with things like asparagus spears or hot chilies in them.

Nice to tribute to Mike Glycer and *File 770*. Eight years old? My computer is older than that! Still, as you point out, Mike does a very difficult job very well. I guess he's been recognized for his writing in past, but I think fandom has forgotten just how fine a writer he is. I guess that's what comes of being a familiar fixture. After a while you are taken for granted.

Wow. Twenty-five-year-old strawberries! Neat. It reminds me of how my grandmother's preserves dwindled away after she died. They were all eaten, though, and maybe had to be, within a few years. Kind of sad. Something of her still lingered in those canned goods. Then the rugs she braided gradually wore out. The last cat she took in as a kitten lived to twenty-two and died. What's left? Nothing very personal except a few of her letters to me. But seriously, what's next on the menu? Woolly Mammoth? Fossilized dinosaur eggs? Good thing you couldn't get at that carbonized bread from Pompeii.

I have two or three turkeys, the oldest of which may be 20 years old. They are shrink-wrapped, though, and may be fine. All that happens in meat that is frozen too long is that it becomes desiccated and the cell walls break down, making it unpalatable. People have eaten thawed mammoth meat that was 15,000 or 20,000 years old without harm!

I agree with you, in your comment to Philip Turner, that fonts are fun. You seem to manage to employ a lot of exotic fonts to good effect, but that's hard to do. It's so tempting to use every kind of weird font you see and end up with a mess. I do enjoy browsing through free fonts, although I tend to come across ones I consider neat but can't think of any use for ... well, back when I was publishing, that is.

Hey, Philip Turner got in the *Daily Mail*. Cool.

In your comment to Milt Stevens you mention the cops from *Car 54 Where Are You?* a big favorite of mine when I was a kid. Knowing Milt only from his fanzine writings I find it hard to envision him as a police officer. But then police officers don't strike me as faanish material. But maybe Toody? I can see him as an enthusiastic neo. And maybe Muldoon could be a sercon fan. I dunno. Between Toody and Muldoon, who's the fan?

Officer Muldoon did look a little like H.P. Lovecraft.

Milt mentions the awful white letters on a black screen that some early computers featured. I started using a computer station monitor with green letters on black! Whose idea was that?

I enjoyed the article about the Pompeii exhibit and your photo exhibit, but I've already commented on that so I will only add that I don't recall seeing a statue of that vintage with remaining pigment. Classic Greek and Roman cities with all the marble painted bright colors and lifelike colored statuary would surely have looked different than what we imagine from the bone-white ruins. Kind of the difference between living civilizations and dead ones.

I suspect that the austere vision we have of ancient Graeco-Roman civilization is wrong in many ways, not just in sculpture and architecture. If we could be transported to the Roman forum in 100 AD, what we saw would probably seem a lot like standing in a traditional marketplace of Mombai in 2016. I've often thought that the Hindu religion and its culture is the only survival of ancient times that was not eradicated by the big mystical religions – Buddhism, Christianity, Islam and their offshoots. Of course, there's Judaism, but its ancient character has been much changed by the last couple of millennia. Among other things, there are no sacrifices at the temple. What we see is not likely what it was.

Bill Plott, wjplott@aol.com

I marvel at your consistent output of *Broken Toys* and my inability the past year to get around to commenting on any of them. Finally, a little breathing room and an opportunity to express my appreciation for what you produce.

It's the occasional shot in the arm like that that almost makes me regret that I'm hanging up my keyboard with issue 50. However, I have begun to feel the toll of being on the constant lookout for new material, and then the hard slog of putting the words together. By no means do I want to publish issue after issue of my minor health problems and coin news! As well, I've had trouble finding time for other pursuits, such as drawing, messing around with my toy cars and watching TV!

I enjoy your rambling adventures with Traveling Matt, although regrettably far too many of them seem to involve doctors and hospitals. But at least "Pompeiii and Circumstance" was a pleasant exception. I don't know if it was the same traveling exhibit or another one, but we had the Pompeiii experience at the Birmingham (Alabama) Museum of Arts a few years ago. It was an extraordinary thing to see. While the jewelry, armor, kitchen utensils, etc., were interesting, nothing quite prepared me for the plaster casts of Pompeiii's victims, their final moments forever entombed for modern-day gawpers, as you put it. There was a marvelous documentary (maybe public television, maybe History Channel) some years ago that explained how the smoke and ash engulfed everything with astonishing speed, thus leaving those final moments immortalized.

It likely was the same tour. There was an interesting novel about a government official who lived through the destruction of Pompeiii by crawling through the underground aqueducts during the eruption. It was called simply Pompeiii, and was written by Robert Harris just a few years ago.

Since I am not a coin collector, I can't respond to your friend Robert's assertion that the coins were not original to Pompeiii. I wonder, though, could not the corrosion from sulfuric gases have been cleaned prior to their display? I'm not a chemist either, so maybe not. Of course, the Vespasian denarii is a different matter.

Hot corrosive gases would certainly affect silver and bronze coins, and would reach too deep below the surface to clean without damaging detail. Gold coins I'm not so certain of, since Gold is a "noble" metal that is not supposed to be susceptible to chemical changes. On the other hand, those coins were only about 93 or 94% gold, and the rest was copper or silver, and it may be those impurities that underwent discolouration at Pompeiii.

Eric Mayer's comments on "the Oxford comma" remind me of my days as a journalist. It was stylebook requirement to drop the comma before "and" with items in a series. When I was writing my book on the Negro Southern league, I had to kick my brain into academic mode and retrieve that comma. Now, I'm so disoriented, I'm likely to use it both ways in the same paragraph..

I think Bob Jennings's advice on how to deal with fandom is good. Just go with the flow and enjoy what draws your attention. I am back in fandom after a 40-year absence, and I have found a happy niche with the DeepSouthCons and the Southern Fandom Press Alliance apa. In no way do I feel left out and unappreciated in the larger scheme of things. You should not sweat it either. You have plenty of cred for your years of involvement.

Although I've not been "ambitious" in the classical sense, I am goal-oriented, and have wanted to accomplish certain things in fandom that I was never able to. I understand the reasons – and won't go into them here – but it has left me unsatisfied in spite of a solid reputation and plenty of creds. It's very frustrating to be dissatisfied when on the face of it I shouldn't be! I'm able to put the past behind me, however, and look to the future. Unfortunately, I don't see anywhere to go from here. There seems nothing I could want to do that I haven't done.

As well, fandom has aged. We are mostly wrapped up in ourselves and our own little corner of it with our mates, and don't pay much attention to other circles. The alternative seems to

be a cog in the much larger sub-culture that modern fandom has become, with committees of dozens of people managing crowds of thousands and responsible for hundreds of thousands of dollars in revenues. But even that fandom is in reality a topological nightmare of different circles overlapping in complex ways, atop of which a tiny elite of worldcon chairmen and such hobnob with the "gods" of prodom. I saw that fandom emerging in the 1970s, and wasn't attracted to it then. The cozy fandom of dark corners in pubs is not really my ideal environment either, though. Not really fitting in anywhere is probably why I live in my own imagination so much.

Steve Jeffries's note on where Craig Charles of *Red Dwarf* is these days brought back pleasant memories. Alabama Public Television carried it for several years (as well as *Dr. Who*). My youngest daughter and I enjoyed watching both together.

The new Canadian Football League logo is pretty lame. I always enjoyed the CFL and followed with great interest the career of Dieter Brock. Two other Alabamians – Conredge Holloway and Billy Shipp – also had long careers in the league. And sometime in the '90s, when they made that ill-fated jump into the U.S., we had a team in Birmingham.

It seems very weird that people outside of Canada talk about the CFL. I thought people just followed football as it came. If you lived in Canada, it was the CFL. IF you were in the US, you followed NFL or AFL teams. British? It never entered my mind they ever followed anything but soccer (or "football," as you seem determined to call it). Now the league is even trying to market itself south of the border. The differences between Canadian and American style football are miniscule, too. If they were species of gnats or buffalo, Darwin would say they couldn't co-exist exploiting the same environmental niche ... but they do.

Keep 'em coming, Taral. I always print them out so I can read them when I'm doing my time on the treadmill at the YMCA once or twice a week.

Someday I'll have to print out my own copies... I have none.

Lloyd Penney, penneys@bell.net

I've got *Broken Toys* 46 here, and thanks to buckling down and responding to a whole lot of zines, I can now respond in a fairly timely fashion. A lot of comments are likely to follow this paragraph.

Getting a pile of locs is a good thing, but if they keep piling up, you might need an issue 51, just to print all the locs over the past issues. There has to be a conversational cutoff somewhere.

*In my nightmares that's exactly what I have to do! However, my plan is to put the locs from the final issue into *New Toy* 4, when it comes out sometime closer to the end of the year.*

Health? I have a sore foot from too much walking on a particular day a couple of weeks ago, pain slowly ebbing, and otherwise, I am fine, apart from the usual cereal-like noises my body makes when I rise. Fingers crossed that it stays that way. I wouldn't recommend giving pints of blood as a way to lose weight or act as a diuretic. I also take prescriptions for high blood pressure and cholesterol, and I

have my own blood pressure and blood sugar mechanisms, check BP and blood sugars every day now.

I don't check out the online *File 770* as often as I should, and what I have seen lately has been about assorted Puppies or who's died recently, but as a journalism student from a ways back, Mike has been reporting it all, good or bad, and that's what such a newsletter, e- or otherwise, should be doing. I think up next for my loccing is the issues of *File 770* issued at the end of last year. I cannot see anyone else taking on the onerous task of letting the remains of fandom know about its own news, so long life to Mike, and may he do this job for as long as he wishes to.

The local ... I still get a ton of zines, and respond to as many as I get. However, I am not pursuing new zines as much as I used to. I've got enough to do, plus other interests to devote time to.

Most of the newer zines seem to be reviews and other genre centered stuff that usually doesn't interest me, so I mainly just glance at them.

If the UK buys all major coin finds and pays market value for them, is archaeology a profitable field these days? If shows like *Time Team* find them, I guess the coins found could help pay production costs. I do collect coins to some extent, but it may be for my own amusement, and not for any hopes for an increase in value. We've been buying Victorian pennies lately.

I think most archeology is funded by universities or museums these days, and isn't for profit. The days of amateur explorers with titles, who scoured the jungles and deserts for lost civilizations and treasures they could bring back for bragging rights at the Explorer's Club, are long over, if they every existed.

Derek Carter kept his SFnal connections quiet in his professional life, and I gather Barry Kent Mackay did much the same. In a radio interview, many years ago, on CKEY, I think, someone called in to ask about his involvement in fandom, and that call was quickly shut down.

*I talk with Barry now and then, and he's as friendly as ever. I'd say that he isn't personally embarrassed by his association with fandom in the 1970s, but that he worries about what people who know him will think. He told me that one time an issue of *Holier Than Thou* was brought to him by his mailman. I think it was the 20th or 30th issue, and had a wrap-around Brad Foster cover of a space orgy. The envelope had burst, permitting full view of the contents. Barry took the zine from the postman trying his best to project an aura of "I don't know what this is, or why anyone would mail it to me," but terrified that the mail carrier had already jumped to the conclusion that Barry was some kind of unheard-of-until-now sex pervert. Derek, I think, didn't like most fans, who didn't strike him as grown-up as his pub-crawling cronies.*

An app on my phone that writes my locs for me? No, but recently, we bought a tablet with MS Word that has resident on it voice recognition software. A few days ago, to see if I could do it, I dictated a loc, made a few corrections to it by hand, and sent it out. Gollygee, Sarge, what'll they think of next? We truly live in an SFnal era.

Fonts are indeed a lot of fun, and can add moods to whatever document you're producing. I use Times New Roman, Verdana, Calibri, Arial, or other general text font, but I have a wide range of other fonts I can use, and I am always looking for more. I will not mention that font in *Swill*.

*For most texts I use Calibri, Adobe Caslon, Georgia, Palatino, Bookman, Cambria, Candara, Leelawadee, Constantia, Garamond, and Times New Roman. The may look similar – either serif or sans serif – but the subtle differences prevent the text from becoming stale, and help separate one article from the next. Only then do I begin to enter the territory of **FANCY SCRIPTS!***

I checked my collection, and I do have a copy of Bova's *Mars*. The Bovas have a daughter, and she was living in Toronto; I am not sure if she still lives here or not, but that's the reason Ben and Barbara (RIP) would come up to Ad Astra most years. The novel has not dated well, with reality foiling the basic plotline, but I remember it as a good read, and for me, that's good enough.

Time to go. Thank you for this issue, and looking forward to the next.

Andrew Porter, aporter55@gmail.com

Actually read the issue, and making this response. Wow, comments on two issues in a row!

Food at hospitals: After seeing how New York-Presbyterian Hospital (where Danny Lieberman was treated for his leukemia) packages their food – sandwiches on white bread, in plastic wrap – in 2011 I ended up writing a glowing letter to the Food Service head at Memorial Sloan Kettering, and here it is:

"Just over four years ago [now 9 years] I had [an operation] at MSK, and I'm happy to report that I remain cancer free. But that's incidental to what I'm writing about.

"As I sit here, I have the Room Service Menu in front of me. The one I have is from 11/2006. I was actually looking at it last night, before I went to bed. Yes, out of all the stuff I collected before, during, and after my stay there, I've kept this.

"Why? Because the menu represents some of the best, tastiest and likely most nutritious foods I've ever eaten. I have to admit that I'm single, just turning 65, live alone, and my diet hasn't been the best at times. Now that there's a Trader Joe's nearby I go there every several days, and am now eating a much more balanced and nutritious diet than I used to. When I got out of MSK, I weighed 200 pounds, and I'm happy to say that I still weigh that today. I weighed as much as 265 in the year 2000.

"It's almost—okay, not at all—worth getting sick again to eat from your menu. And I do remember how things tasted—they were *delicious*! The fact that gravely ill people in MSKCC can look forward to people who actually look like waiters delivering their food is a bonus. Yes, presentation is a large part of the dining experience, and you do it so well.

"I suspect that you don't get too much fan mail about the quality and presentation of your food, but I hope this e-mail helps."

To have food delivered, you have to call the equivalent of Room Service on your phone, and choose from menus designed for 1800, 2000, or 2400-calorie meals. I have to add that the presentation enhances the way the food is prepared. It's served on real dishes, with silverware and napkins, and brought to the rooms by people dressed to look like waiters. The food itself is under metal domes, so when you lift them off, the steam and smell rise into your face.

I wonder how much the presentation of the food at MSK contributes to the patients getting better?

I used to have a review copy of a gladiator in a plastic holder, complete with outfit, and never took it out. It was pretty cool. I gave it to a kid in my building a couple of years ago.

But I'm holding on to my unopened Jessica Rabbit doll.

"I'm only drawn bad."

Paul Skelton, paulskelton2@gmail.com

You're a braver man than I am, eating those strawberries, but I suppose nothing fazes the kind of guy who'll eat Brussels sprouts. In the interest of "full disclosure" I have to admit that I was surprised to discover, shortly after moving in with Cas, that Brussels sprouts were actually edible, but even this discovery was insufficient to overcome all the childhood engrams caused by my mother cooking them until they turned into slimy sludge balls. Besides, they're green. Mankind was not meant to eat "green", as it's basically chlorophyll, which we can't process. Well, that's my take on it. Don't even mention "lettuce" to me.

Long ago I observed that as much as I protested against all vegetables, the ones I most disliked were almost always the ones that were force-fed to me by my loving parents. (At least they didn't actually tie me to a chair and wire my mouth open, but I do recall gagging on cold canned peas on one occasion.) I wonder if this observation might not be true for almost everyone? Since then, I've discovered that there were, in fact, some vegetables, at least in some forms, that I not only tolerated, but also enjoyed. Brussels sprouts were one of them. To my surprise, I learned from British sitcoms that they were almost universally loathed among our Old World cousins. I don't know if they are as often on the dinner menu here, and don't think they have the same unenviable cachet.

I also like broccoli, cauliflower, and snow peas, and have learned to enjoy salads, despite being quite unable to eat most salad contents on their own. The secret was salad dressing, you see. If every forkful of greens is generously smothered in ranch or Caesar dressing, you can barely taste the bitter green pepper, lettuce, carrot and onion. Add baby corn, tomato, garbanzos and red kidney beans, and I think it's less a salad than a kind of casarole. Naturally, with that much dressing, it's not good for you. Nothing tasty is ever good for you.

Actually I may have overstated my antipathy to vegetables. Raw, I pretty much love all of them.

Onions, white winter cabbage, carrots, celery, bell peppers, sugar-snap peas, moulli radish, carrots, tomatoes (I used to make an awesome salad involving most of the foregoing, plus chopped hard-boiled eggs, chopped ham, grated cheese and chopped fish sticks, seasoned with cumin, coriander, ginger, paprika, salt, pepper, lemon juice and lashings of mayonnaise, that was to die for. Sadly, my appetite has deteriorated so much that I can eat only a fraction of what I used to eat, and so many ingredients would result in only mass wastage.

What I'm not very keen on is cooked vegetables.

Judging from my relatives (who have English backgrounds), the Brits have a tradition of horribly overcooking vegetables. You should be able to spear a properly cooked veggie with a fork, but it should not go in as easily as a hot nail through petroleum jelly, which was about how soft my Mom's "boiled everything's" were. I presume that's why Europeans make such fun of English cooking and their boiling.

Mind you, your entire meal (steak, sprouts & fries) was like a major expedition that I'd take months to plan, then be forced to cancel owing to not being able to switch the cooker on. Way back when I was more adventurous, when Deborah & Nicholas were very young and still watched *The Clangers*, I made them "Blue String Pudding". I put blue food dye in when cooking the spaghetti, a food which they normally ate without demur. I thought they'd be thrilled, but no, they wouldn't touch it. I took this as the clearest possible indication that kitchens and me were not meant to exist in the same continuum, and have stayed out of them ever since.

Food colouring never bothered me. I once made a clam chowder (based on canned chowder, but with added ingredients), and coloured it bright blue. I had no problem eating it, but it did not go well with the other guests. I knew from reading that such stunts tended to turn most people off, but it was hard to believe until I actually tried it.

Moving on to the letters (and by the way that is one ugly font you used to introduce each letter writer) I would sort of disagree with Eric Mayer over the "Oxford comma". As I understand it, its use can avoid ambiguity (in which case I would use it) or in some cases create ambiguity (in which case I would eschew it), which seems to me a far more sensible approach than being arbitrarily for it or against it. Of course you can't actually take my approach and have it remain technically an 'Oxford comma'. Maybe we could campaign to have it replaced by something called the "Oxbridge comma", or even the "Eudora Wiggins School for the Daughters of Gentlefolk comma." Yes indeed, who could be so churlish as to argue against something so named?

"Ugly font?" Well, if it's the one I think, it was rather more quirky than some I've used, and I don't intend to use it again.

But enough already! I enjoyed it all but, in deference to your editorial groveling that we not respond too vigorously, I have restricted myself to this easily WAHF'd little squib. No need to thank me – that's just the kind of guy I am.

My groveling will be coming to an end all too soon! Treasure it while you can.

That's just about all there is to be said at present, but there will likely be plenty of time in Smegg's future for more sordid details to emerge. What there may not be in Smegg's future are many options. When I asked where he saw himself in ten years, he said "dead." He is only 56.

But in a wider view, Smegg is not a unique case. He is not an entirely bad person, but simply an irresponsible individual ... undisciplined, lazy, unrealistic and unable to control a bad temper – as was evidenced by a thick pad of scar tissue on one arm where he constantly bit himself when frustrated. He was *not* a criminal mastermind or violent psychotic. In fact, he is intelligent, and generous to a fault. He would literally share his last twenty bucks with you by ordering *two* pizzas. Is prison necessarily the best thing to do with people such as Smegg?

Oddly enough, the answer may be "yes" ... if by "prison" we mean a facility for restricting the freedom of people convicted of crimes in Norway or Sweden. I remember a documentary about their penitentiary system, and it was hard not to mistake their prisons for summer camps. The inmates had private cubicles in quaint little bungalows beneath the canopy of a mighty northern forest. They wore ordinary street clothes, as did the guards. There were no arms, fences, gates, razor wire or searchlights. The inmates were fed in pleasant cafeteria-style surroundings and had plenty of free time that they were encouraged to spend in sports, hobbies and reading. That having been said, their time was structured around waking, bedtime, meals and certain scheduled jobs, but it was hardly a boot camp or sweatshop. Yet the rate of recidivism was very low.

Doubtless there are more rigorous facilities for the violent or incorrigible, but most people who do time in Sweden do it in this humane environment.

It is hard not to wonder if Smegg, too, would benefit by a similar regime ... no abuse, but rules to which he must conform that would instill self-discipline and familiarity with routine, yet with plenty of personal time to himself. When his time was up, it might be easy to imagine Smegg refusing to leave three square meals a day, a free bed and all the other emoluments of civilized life. Knowing Smegg, though, he would leave as soon as possible ... and likely be in the gutter the week after.

What if he had no choice, however? For that matter, what if *all* misfits were relieved of the choice, whether or not they had broken a law? The problem with prescribing such an anodyne for all the world's oddballs, ne'er-do-wells, queer ducks, losers, weirdoes, malcontents and square pegs (who can't or won't fit into society's round holes) is that after institutionalizing Smegg, the caretakers would undoubtedly come looking for *you and me!* I don't think I want to spend my life in a lock-up ... not even a *nice* lock-up that's *good* for me! I don't know why, exactly, but I seem to value the many ways in which I've fucked up my life.

It's a disturbing thought that perhaps it is the Smeggs of the world who foot the bill for our freedom.





Extempore: There is a small bungalow on Florence Crescent, at the corner of St. Clair Avenue, near Jane, and next to the tracks. It was where I lived in 1957, when I was 5 1/2 years old. I only have two photos of the place, both taken from the back. In one, my mother walks a German shepherd. In the other, I'm sitting and the dog has its paw on my shoulder in a very friendly way. But the fact is that I don't remember the first thing about the animal. What I remember far more vividly is the bare yard of compacted earth that had never grown grass to my knowledge, and that was frozen hard as rock that winter. I didn't spend much time in the back yard, since you couldn't so much as dig in it. But one day I happened to notice one end of a toy electric train's gondola car frozen in the dirt. I had to ask my dad to dig it out, since the dirt was so hard that it bent the spoon I tried to use.

I recall little of what was inside our home on Florence Crescent: a couple of sticks of furniture are about all. One is a heavy set of wooden shelves in my closet where I keep my tools today, and some drawers in the bathroom. Both have been repainted so many times that I don't know what their original colour was.

For Christmas that year I was given a pedal car; a massive metal fire truck with ladders. Surely, it couldn't have been green, but that is how I remember it ... and my first instinct was to play in the box. The truck itself was a heavy bugger, hard to pedal more than ten feet before exhaustion put the brakes on. I remember trading it to some other kid on the block for another toy, probably one that weighed less than 75 pounds, and my mother marching me straight back to the other kid's house to swap it back. I wonder what happened to it? I suspect I didn't use it much since it left so little impression in my memory.

I remember losing a toy soldier ... and making a self-conscious prayer to find it. At once my head was

filled with the idea that it was in the flower garden out front. I rushed out to paw through the dirt and miraculously found it, just where I had imagined it would be. For some reason, doubt entered my mind at the same moment. Perhaps I had thought about the flower garden all by myself? That act of begging the Supreme Being for that trivial favour was probably the last time I believed in God with any certainty. By age eleven I was a hardened atheist who knew the house odds.

While living in the Florence Crescent house, I posed on a pony for a photograph. I still have the photo, though the pony has long since been rendered into that awful-tasting glue on the backs of stamps.

I also began grasping that my mother and father's relationship wasn't what it should be. My old man worked for the railroad and would be away for days at a time. "In Montreal," Mother would say, or maybe somewhere else, laid over until the next train back. Other times she hinted that he could be back sooner, if he wanted, but preferred to carouse and play cards with his friends as long as possible. Whenever he *was* home, I sometimes saw him dressed in his pinstriped working duds, with a striped hat. I wasn't sure what he did – brakeman or yardman? He wasn't an engineer. Did I ever see him in conductor's duds? I'm not sure. There's no one to ask, now, but I do still own the brass turnip watch he used to carry at work. He didn't work with the railroad long ... nor does the watch work anymore.

The house was one door from the corner of Jane Street, a major route, but all the view to be had was a dark, ten-or-twelve-foot-tall wooden screen, made of old blackened, creosote-soaked railroad ties. On the other side of that barrier was the major railroad artery for the west end of the city. Sometimes I'd hear thunder coming, and see a huge plume of smoke rushing toward me – all that was visible of the furious steam locomotive behind the screen. My mother would rush out of the house to bring the drying laundry in before a snowfall of dirty, greasy soot from the passing train ruined her washing: a black Christmas.

On lazy summer days I sat on the porch, watching a "tank" my father made from an empty spool of thread, a bobby pin and an elastic band. It didn't look much like a tank, but he wound the elastic around the pin in such a way that, inserted into the spool, it somehow made the "tank" scoot across the porch like a frantic beetle. It was something his dad had shown him, and dated from the First World War. At the age of six, it seemed like the cleverest thing in the world. My father also played musical spoons, a skill he was unable to teach me, and sang "I've Been Working on the Railroad." My utter lack of musical aptitude must have begun early in life.

When I tired of winding up my toy "tank," I looked up from the painted concrete of the porch to watch the puffy white clouds drift by in a perfect blue summer sky, the sort that are frequently seen only in places where there are scorpions under the bushes, and sweated from the unaccustomed heat. "It must be a hundred degrees," I guessed out loud. "Maybe," Mother said. More likely it eighty or so, she thought, which was about as hot as any summer day in Toronto got when I was so terribly, irretrievably young.

I learned to be crafty at Florence Crescent, however. One time my mother was cross with me because I insisted I take my new toy rifle to bed with me. It was a Western repeater of some sort, like a Winchester, made entirely of "realistic" brown plastic, and my greatest pride and joy. I just

couldn't sleep without cuddling it. So when Mom went away, I left bed and took the rifle from the toy box, returned to bed, and wrapped it in a woolen blanket I called my "wooly." Mom was accustomed to me having it in bed, and so never suspected my toy gun was hidden inside.

Beyond our backyard was a field of weeds that had once been an abandoned trunk line for the railroad. A few hundred feet farther was a derelict station, just like those in Western movies – a small, peaked hut with a small platform at one end under extended eaves. I was warned not to play in it, because the wood was so rotten that I might fall through the floor. I took the warning seriously, but took my chances on the platform to peer through the windows, wondering if ghosts were real. Inside, there was nothing but dust, and stillness so profound that ghosts would only enliven it. I passed the derelict station every day on the way to my first school, and usually gave it little thought. There is no trace of it now, of course. The site is likely under some stretch of what is now Esposito Crescent, or else the huge new leather emporium.

Even my first school appears to have been razed to make way for a newer, undistinguished modern building. Indeed, almost all my past before the age of ten has disappeared.

When I left the place at 100 Florence Crescent after about a year, I never went back, but I had the address engraved in my memory. For the longest time, I had no idea in which part of the city Florence Crescent could be found. Gradually, I became aware that it was not even far from other places I had lived. But there was also something more pressing on my mind, so that I never had time to look into such old memories. As I get older, though, I have discovered that there is often more of interest in the many years gone by than in the few that are left. With Google Maps it was easy to find the exact location of my onetime home, and, to my gratification, I noticed that the row of bungalows at the end of the street look much as I remembered them. Almost everything else in my early childhood has disappeared utterly ... but this, my humble home of 1957, has so far not been swept away by the powerful current of time.

Having waited this long, I hope I'm not tempting fate by waiting another few months before taking a trip to Florence Crescent to see the old place again with my own eyes. I'm tempted ... very tempted ... to knock on the door of number 100 to see if I'm in, along with Mom and Dad ... and ask just what the hell that German shepherd's name was.



As it was in April 1957, from the backyard.



Mom and me and Whosis.



100 Florence Crescent today.

There is only a little space to fill, so I'd better not have much to say. As noted at the beginning of this issue, the call is out for nominations for this year's FAAns. While I have nothing but praise for Bill Burn's excellent eFanzines site, and have voted for it most years, **this** year I would like to remind the readers that Alan White's new fanart site, *The Zine Artists*, is also eligible. Although I have had quite a bit of input to the site, it is still Alan's page and not mine, so I don't at all mind promoting it. *The Zine Artists* is imperfect, but nonetheless has begun what I think is a very worthwhile project, one that Alan deserves all encouragement to continue. It would also help to prove a point ... that fan art *does* matter.

From time to time, I read about a new Canadian \$5 Coin, like the one shown to the right. To set the record, the Canadian Mint has no such plans that I know of, however the illustration is not the artifact of anyone's imagination ... it is a real coin. It is a special silver and niobium collector's item the mint produced in 2012. Although it's face value is given as \$5, that pretty much is a figment of the imagination. Struck as one of four in a set of "full moon" themed mint products, the entire set is currently priced at about \$90US/\$122Cdn on the mint's Web page. It is a very attractive design, however, and it is possible that one day the mint will want to produce a regular \$5 coin. Let me be the first to Christen this the "*Bluey*."

FINIS

