

BROKEN TOYS 48

Broken Toys 48, © Taral Wayne, 28 March 2016. Direct from my man-cave at 245 Dunn Ave., Apartment 2111, Toronto, Ontario, M6K 1S6. Back issues of Broken Toys are available as free downloads from eFanzines at <http://efanzines.com/Taral/index.htm>, and from Fanac.org at <http://fanac.org/fanzines/BrokenToys/> With this issue there are only two more issues of *Broken Toys* to come. If you have never loded before, your opportunities are running out. Then again, why break a perfect record? **Kiddelidivee Books & Art 307.**

FAAning the Flames

If my watchword about last year's Fanzine Activity Awards was "same old same-old," this year it would be "in-the-balance."

Despite my conclusion that the awards had become rather pointless, by the time it was announced in February that this year's nominations were open I actually didn't feel as nihilistic as I had last year. I filled out a ballot. To my surprise, I filled most of the blanks provided for all categories. Had I *really* been able to distinguish between average and better-than-average fanac last year? Apparently so. Why fight it, I thought to myself, and e-mailed Claire the ballot.

I will not be discussing my ballot, of course. I will only say that perhaps some of my choices might surprise people, as might my reasons for them.

One reason I may be more interested this year is that I will publish Eric Mayer's "Sealed Envelope" in Broken Toys' final issue. The "Envelope" contains Eric's predictions about who and what will have won the FAAn awards when they are announced at Corflu in May. I think it goes without saying that I'm backing Eric's predictions. Maybe not 100%, but even Eric expects a less than a *perfect* score as a mentalist act.

Another reason is that I'm closing in on Broken Toys 50th, the final issue. The five issues that I publish this year will be the last ones that will ever be eligible for the FAAns. If *Broken Toys* is *ever* going to win a FAAn for any reason – Best Personalzine or Best Single Issue – it will have to be for *this* year. After that, it's all over. Shrug my shoulders and walk away – I'll publish other zines and there may be other times.

Those who read letter columns will find quite a bit of discussion of the FAAns there in this issue. So much, in fact, that I see no reason to write anything more about the awards as such.

However, Claire Brialey, who is administrator this year, wrote back to me with news that was a bit surprising. When I sent my ballot in, around the middle of March, she informed me that mine was only the sixth received up to then. Nominations had been open for about a month, I figure, and would remain open until the end of April, so my ballot arrived just a little before half the nominating period was over. At that rate, it seemed to me that Claire might receive as few as a dozen ballots before April 23rd. Let's be a little more optimistic and say fifteen. I think we might also expect a rush to meet the deadline as well, so perhaps the total number of ballots that decide how the FAAns are awarded for 2016 will rise to a staggering 25! Not very impressive, if you ask me.

If the FAAns are going to mean anything at all, they really must represent the opinions of more than two dozen fans! If not, I think it will soon be time that a motion be put forward at a future Corflu to end them.

If you're a reader who thinks the FAAn awards have value and can be made to work, I urge you to vote. If you don't feel that way, then they *aren't* working! Taking a cue from Claire, it would likely be helpful if I explain how the nominations work. After all, many of my readers see few other fanzines than this one, have never been to a Corflu and have no idea of how the FAAns work.

— —

To begin with, anyone can nominate as long as they have an interest in fanzines. We won't get into what a fanzine is because that is a bottomless can of worms, and worms are icky. If you're reading *Broken Toys*, then you at least *might* be someone who could vote for the FAAns, okay?

You do not have to be a member of Corflu, the Worldcon, the Democratic Party or anything! You do not have to include money with your nominations form.

Next, download a form from <http://corflu.org/Corflu33/2015FAAnBallot.pdf> You don't actually need to use this form to vote. You can record your choices in any form you please, so long as they legible, and send them to faansfor2015@gmail.com or FAAn Awards, 59 Shirley Road, Croydon, CR0 7ES UK.

To make the process as simple as possible, there are no separate steps for nominating and casting a final vote. Your nominations are counted according to an incredibly difficult and arcane scheme by the administrator. The magic numbers she arrives at *are* the final results, so don't trouble yourself about how it is done.

You do not have to nominate in every category, nor fill up the five available blank lines. Your nominations must be received by Claire before midnight, April 23rd.

The winners will be announced at Corflu, held May 13 to 15 this year. After that, the results will be reported wherever they may nr ... but I suggest checking at File 770 at <http://file770.com/>

— —

I strongly suspect this could be the make-or-break year for the FAAn awards, and reserve further comment.

Who's Laughing Now?

Rob Ford was mayor of Toronto from 2010 to 2014 – although it seemed much longer. He was one of three brothers born to a nouveau-riche family, and raised as spoiled brats. Both he and his brother, Doug, turned to conservative politics and held seats in city council before Rob ran for the office of mayor. After being forced out of office over a series of misconduct charges, the ex-mayor was diagnosed with a rare and intractable form of cancer. Ford struggled with it for 18 months until he finally succumbed on the 17th of March. The news media made all the sympathetic noises that were expected of them, but I suspect there were more people who, like me, shed few tears for the man.

Toronto's most famous evil clown died at the age of 46, in the wee hours of March 22nd, after a struggle with a rare form of fat cancer that was no doubt made all the more difficult by his impressive obesity. Not to mention his alcoholism and crack use.

It was Rob Ford's crack addiction that began his slide from grace after an upset-victory that made him mayor of Canada's largest city. From the start, saner heads were appalled that Mayor Ford, a spoiled rich kid, bullying loudmouth and populist high school football coach should be installed in city hall by the same species of yahoo that now wants to put Donald Trump in the White House.

Ford was above the law, ignoring city ordinances and committing traffic violations at will, and immediately began to roughhouse reporters. But we only knew for certain what sort of genie we had let out of the dirty bottle when suddenly a photo taken by an alleged drug dealer went viral, showing Hizzoner drunkenly draped over the shoulders of some of his fellow crack-heads at a drug party. Another photo showed him in what seemed to be the act of lighting a crack pipe.

The photos vanished from the Net shortly after, and then rumours emerged that whoever took them wanted blackmail. (Fortunately, I had already saved a copy from the Internet!) Ford repeatedly denied that such photos existed ... and it was months before he was forced to admit it did, and that he had a drug problem. It was also proved that the “gangstas” in the photos were in fact habitual cronies of his, and that ownership of the house in which the party took place was in Ford's name.

Gradually, public pressure built up to remove this malevolent Bozo from office, but he kicked and screamed every inch of the way, insisting that he was the Will of the People, and that Sinister Elite Interests were Out to Get Him. Go he eventually did ... but not without threats that he would run for mayor again. And given that there had been enough fucktards gullible enough to put him in that office once, the threat had to be taken seriously.

Luckily for Toronto, he was diagnosed with cancer shortly afterward, and a form of cancer that he'd be lucky to survive. He would be too busy for politics for years ... and by then, whatever insanity possessed many voters might have passed.

That leaves Rob Ford's brother Doug, however, who is far less colourful but reputedly much more of a naked thug, who was also a city councilor and also has political ambitions that might even go as high as the provincial premier's office.

So far, at least, the Conservative Party appears to want nothing to do with the Fords. The obituary on the CBC WebPage has a photo of Ford from a couple of years ago, before his diagnosis of cancer. It shows him

looking all sweetness and light, a smarmy image of the man that falsely papers over the horror of the so-called "Ford Nation." But *these* are the images I will always remember the man by!



Rob Ford, photographed at a party with a low-life guy who was mysteriously found murdered shortly afterward.

The Mayor Takes Another Crack at it...



off the shelf

My friend Steven visited one day near the end of February. He came by to help repair my ailing bookshelves. To be more precise, he came by expecting to *do* nearly all the work, since my condition prevents me from doing much more than stand-by and provide unwanted advice.

Unfortunately, we were screwed... Keep reading to understand the particular relevance of that choice of words.

To make full sense of the situation, I have to go back to early last year, when Traveling Matt and I first made our acquaintance. On days that I went out, my neighbors would admire the chair, and chat with

me about it. One of the neighbors on my floor, however, was a little too chatty at times. In fact ... she could be a downright pest, especially as I didn't understand her German-accented English all that well. But on this one particular day, much to my surprise, she *actually followed me into my apartment without an invitation*. While she was yattering away at me and I was trying to keep up with the flow of strangely shaped words, I forgot to power-down the chair. I stripped off my hat and coat, tossed them onto Matt's seat while smiling and nodding at the German lady ... and something *almost imperceptible* alerted me to turn around. There, with my coat draped over the joystick, Matt was charging full speed at the free-standing bookcases in my living room! He ran smack into one corner of them, and began to visibly bulldoze the heavily laden shelves into the middle of the room ... and then they began to *tilt!*

I don't know how I managed to get the coat off the joystick, back up the chair and right the tipping bookshelves all at once, but I did it.

Getting the shelves back where they belonged, however, was more than I could manage. Not only do they weigh a ton, but I have all the strength of a new-born kitten. Yet, somehow, I dragged the shelves a few inches back into a straight line, at least, but they were physically displaced from their original location by about four inches. Worse, the upper corner at the other end, near the wall, was sagging ... and as I watched the tilt seemed to be slowly worsening. I found an empty videocassette box to wedge between the sagging corner and the next set of shelves behind it. Luckily, it held!

The ideal way to fix the problem would be to remove all the books ... all 2,000 or so ... and pile them carefully and alphabetically on the floor around the apartment. Next step would be to loosen all nuts and bolts in the affected shelves, straighten the leaning uprights, and snug everything up again. Finally, *reload* all the books. That much work was *way* beyond me. I could only have done it at a rate of a few shelves a day, for a week or ten days, straightened the shelves over the next day or two, then reloaded the shelves over another week or ten days. Each day's session would probably have left me soaked with sweat and shaking like a leaf.

So I did the next best thing. I called my friend Steven, and asked him to come over.

Steven took a good long look and said he thought we wouldn't have to remove the books. Maybe not *any* books.

For some reason, it was several months before we both had the time and inclination to tackle the job. In the meantime, the whole shebang and the 2,000 books were kept from collapsing only by a flimsy plastic case. Each time I looked, it seemed sufficient for the time being ... as month followed month, until nearly a *year* had gone by.

Finally, it came time to get serious. The sag, never good, was looking increasingly perilous and injecting a sense of urgency into my usual complacency. Steven brought over an assortment of tools, some materials and a vast accumulation of experience from his own home repairs. We began with the leg that was bent at the bottom, where Matt had collided with it. The leg had partly caved in, but held. Steven assaulted the bent leg with pry bars and a mallet, but barely made an impression. I took a hand at steadying the unit as Steven renewed his efforts. After about 20 minutes of beating ferociously on the crooked upright, we had something like a straight piece of steel. It was still a bit twisted, but no longer a threat.

The next step was to gingerly straighten the upper far corner, that was against the wall and leaning. We had already removed the dozens of little figurines and toys from in front of the books, and, at the last moment, about a dozen books from the workspace as well. So far, so good. The plan was to drill a series of holes in the wallboard, sink some plastic anchors into them, then bind the bookshelf uprights to the anchors with screws and metal straps. To complicate matters, there was a good two-inch space between the wall and the uprights, which Steven planned to fill with some wooden slats.

Within minutes we ran into our first problem. Something behind the plasterboard wall was stopping the drill. It was hard, extremely hard. My Black and Decker electric drill was spinning the bit in a shallow crater in a concrete structure we knew nothing about. Worse, the concrete stopped the drill at such a shallow depth that the anchors couldn't grip, and no screw would go in. We were in a pickle without a fork! There was nothing to do, for the time being, but quit.

Next week, Steven returned better prepared. Instead of my respectable-but-modest home drill, he brought an industrial juggernaut of his own, complete with heavy-duty battery pack. It not only drilled but *hammered* simultaneously. Steven brought an assortment of metal and concrete bits, as well as different kinds of anchors well suited to attaching boiler plate to damaged locomotives. We were going to punch our way into that wall if it meant bringing down half the building's internal structure to do it!

Using a large level that had been my dad's, we lined up the shelves and began drilling. You could probably have felt the reverberations of the heavy bit slamming into the concrete all the way down to the lobby. Unfortunately, the reverberations definitely could be felt in my neighbors apartment. He was at my door, within a minute. Just our luck, he had his six-foot flat-screen TV mounted on his living room wall, right on the other side of where we were drilling, and he complained that the vibration would knock it down! Steven handled the confrontation beautifully, while I looked for something to sap the neighbor with so we could continue. Steven closed the door and joined me in the living room with a curious expression on his face. "We're screwed," he remarked ... actually, I think he used rather stronger language than that.

After the shock wore off, we managed to think a little. "What if we just drilled, and didn't hammer?" I asked.

"It might work, *but* ... it'll be a lot more effort."

So it was, but Steven was doing the work, so I asked, "What choice have we got?"

To end a long story before it gets much longer, after a while Steven had drilled four neat holes through the plasterboard and into the unseen concrete wall behind it. By some miracle, the neighbor hadn't turned up at my door a second time, to complain that his soufflé had fallen!

It was a fairly simple matter, after that, to sink the anchor bolts into the wall, wrap the strapping around the uprights and screw everything to the anchors. It was ugly. My, yes, it was ugly. The wooden slats looked a fright. The straps had all the elegance of a riveted stovepipe. But the bookshelves were solid. "The building might fall over, but not those shelves," Steven announced triumphantly. It's such a nice feeling when problems are finally sorted out ... even if it took a year to sort this particular one.

I have owned most of those pressed-tin shelves for more than 35 years. They were the cheapest solution that I could find to storing hundreds of books. The upright legs were all the same, the shelves identical, and everything was bolted together with an assortment of identical nuts and bolts and crossbars. Empty, they had the strength of a birdcage made of dry spaghetti. When loaded with books, however, they magically gained the strength of the Rock of Gibraltar! Weight was the key. Once a few hundred pounds of Larry Niven to Roger Zelazny was added, none of the joints would move any more than the Lincoln Monument's right pinky.

Still, in all the years I've used them, I've had nightmares that one day they would collapse. Perhaps it would start in one corner, and the upper shelves would curl over like the surf at Waikiki, and the dead weight would smash whatever was unlucky enough to be under it. Or maybe the shelves would fall flatly, like a wall under the wrecker's ball. Either way, books would be destroyed ... the more rare and interesting, the more likely the spine would explode or the covers be torn and bent!

That nightmare would have come true once or twice over the years, if a deft hand and quick improvisation hadn't averted disaster each time. On this occasion, however, the nightmare very nearly became a reality. It came much closer than I can look back on without a little inner shriek of terror as I relive the moment.

All because of a gabby neighbor without manners! She was looking right at Matt as he charged into my shelves, and not a flicker of emotion on her pruney old face revealed that anything was happening! I gave her short shrift after that, you may be sure. At last the damage to the shelves has been repaired, but it will take far longer to repair the damage to my psyche. Revenge would be sweet salve to my soul ... but unfortunately, running over her gouty toes with Traveling Matt would probably just get me in trouble.



LEFT OVER PARTS:

SESSION 48 ON BROKEN TOYS 47

Joseph Nicholas, excellenceingardening@gmail.com

Thanks muchly for your latest. We're still in Australia, but this time on the other side of the continent – from Albany and Perth (although I don't think I mentioned our location in my previous) to Sydney via Melbourne. Outside, the temperature hovers around 29-30 degrees ... a stiff northeast breeze pushes the breakers in towards Manly Beach ... a slight haze in the distance does not mask the fact that there is not a cloud in sight ... but the UV index is tagged as Very High, so no lying around in the sunshine in next-to-nothing, working on my tan and scrutinising an improving history text. (For some reason, I always read history texts when I'm visiting Australia. Some of them may even concern Australian historical issues.)

I was intrigued by your (reprinted) piece on purchasing toys, because although I remember the old days (many decades ago now) when a toy came in a simple cardboard box which could be opened for examination before the exchange of money, I have no experience whatever of purchasing toys in the here and now. This is partly because I have (we have) next to no room on our shelves at home (those which are not given over to books have other things on them – and even some of those which are given over to books have small items on them as well), but also because I have no interest in cluttering our living space with such items (unless, perhaps, they're very special – but they have to be very special indeed to make it through the stern filters that are applied to the expenditure of money on such things). All that aside, however, I had no idea that modern toys are packaged in such a customer-hostile manner. You may be right that much of this packaging is intended to deter shoplifters, but it seems to me that it may also be there to protect the toy against damage during shipping, to hold it securely in place against the jolting and crashing (not to mention the stomach-lurching swells of the 15-20 metre waves) to which it will have been subjected on its journey from the ~~slave pits / bonded labour farms~~ / minimum wage factories of Southeast Asia.

Security in transit is no doubt a big reason for super-secure packaging, but I think certain precautions, such as stickers that cannot be removed and resealed because some of the printing peels off, can only be explained as means to prevent you from opening the package before purchase.

And of course there is the argument that one should never remove a toy from its packaging at all, because to do so instantly devalues its worth on the future rare toys auction market; an argument with which you will doubtless be very familiar, although none of us, when we bought, were given or otherwise acquired our toys all those years ago could ever have imagined (those who gave us the toys could never have imagined) that a die-cast metal miniature of a popular saloon car of the early 1960s might one day command vastly in excess of the nugatory sum then paid for it. I know that I treated my die-cast metal miniature cars (the two leading brands in Britain at the time were Corgi Toys and Dinky Toys) fairly badly: they were thrown together in a toy box, used in ram races with other kids, pulled along on bits of

string, buried in window boxes and dug up with metal miniature excavators. And, in the fullness of time, disposed of somehow or other – thrown away, given away to other children, donated to a charity shop (I'm sure we had charity shops – opportunity shops, as they are known in other countries – in the 1960s and 1970s, although I have no memories of ever seeing or entering one), whatever. Had I kept them unopened in their boxes – had my parents kept them unopened in their boxes and tried to teach me about capital investments and whatnot – I might have somewhat more capital than I do now. Plus, presumably, a room stuffed with unopened Corgi and Dinky Toys, slowly gathering dust against the day when my heirs and assigns sigh with impatience and get rid of the bloody things because it's just too much trouble to locate a fellow collector to take them away: an outcome to which I'm sure the majority of collectors' collections of unopened toys are eventually subjected. After all, these things are really only worth whatever a third party thinks they might be; toys are to be played with, not preserved in aspic; and most antiques are in the end just second-hand items which have been given a polish and a mark-up. Which is why I really, really can't be bothered cluttering my shelves with stuff, old or new; if an old item has any value at all, it should be in a museum or a gallery for all to enjoy, or else landfilled or recycled.

Except for the special items which have made it through the stern filtering process, of course. Such as the Airfix Napoleonic cavalry figures which got a bit damaged on my move to London some thirty-five years ago, and have been awaiting my attention ever since. Thirty-five years? That's not too long. Indeed, I can consider the repairs as another retirement project!

Eric Mayer, groggy.tales@gmail.com

You conclude your colophon – yes, I read colophons – by saying: "There are only three more issues of *Broken Toys* in your future, so ask yourself, what will you do when the lights go out, and there's nothing to read but zines about science fiction?"

I will GAFIATE!

That's what I want to hear! Apres moi, c'est le deluge!

And speaking of fandom, I see you mentioned my FAAn predictions. Thanks for pointing out that I was not picking from a short list of nominees. I was picking from everyone in fandom who produced high quality work last year and might thereby be in the running. Well, except honestly that isn't true is it? There is a kind of permanent nominee list. More than five per category, perhaps, but hardly encompassing all of fandom. But, we'll see....

I'll be sending out three copies of the "sealed envelope" later tonight, to impartial fans who can verify its authorship in February, and not after the award winners have been announced. But first a carefully rewording your original statement to strip it of privileged information, as you asked. I haven't decided yet who will receive them.

Sorry to read about all your health problems. Old age eventually brings problems to all of us, but you are accumulating more than your fair share. You don't need to collect every damn illness available! Ironically, from what I know, you have lived healthily enough – no smoking, little drinking, exercised when you were able.

Hard to know who or what to blame, since we don't know what causes immune dysfunctions such as Myasthenia Gravis. Despite a deep understanding of how asthma works, we don't know what determines who it will be problem for, and who will never be troubled by it. Other complaints I've had, such as the accumulation of fluids, cannot always be explained, either. We only know how such conditions *might* have arisen. Immune dysfunctions has been the elephant in the room for decades, affecting millions of people in diverse ways – from diabetes, to arthritis, to neuropathic pain, to my Myasthenia ... it may also be the underlying cause of Alzheimer and even cancer. Once we make the necessary breakthroughs in the study of one immune disorder, we may be on the threshold of effective treatments for all the other different forms of immune dysfunction.

Great essay on packaging. This is the sort of thing that I used to love reading in fanzines but which hardly ever pops up these days (unless I've been reading the wrong zines): a humorous look at some trivial subject unrelated to SF, or cons. Robert Bencheley wrote in a similar vein, and such essays were one of my favorite features of fanzine fandom past.

There's still a fair amount around, and when combined with a superior wit and some agility with the English language, the result is surprisingly rewarding to read. But the average Hugo voter doesn't seem to be looking for that – their taste runs more to plot synopses of Gordon Dickson's novels, or commentaries on the Discworld series.

Re: the subject of vegetables: My family lived next to my grandparents, who both grew up on farms and had turned most of their enormous suburban double lot into a garden. Not a mere kitchen garden, either. There were rows and rows of corn and potatoes and enough tomatoes, beans, beets, carrots cucumbers, peas, squash, etc. etc. to fill the shelves covering the cellar walls with hundreds of jars of canned goods every year. So I grew up with vegetables. I always ate them. It never occurred to me not to like them. Brussels Sprouts are among my favorites, and lettuce plucked fresh from the garden makes a wonderful salad. Maybe I would not care for them if I hadn't been eating them right from the beginning.

Oddly, I sometimes prefer canned veggies over fresh or frozen. Fresh garden peas don't taste like what I imagine peas should taste like at all, but more like fresh lawn trimmings.

Loved the essay on your early memories. I've always been partial to personal essays. It seems to me they were more a staple of fandom in the Seventies than they are now, when, as you mention, material on professional science fictions predominates. But aren't people's accounts of their own lives far more interesting than their opinions of other people's books?

Depends on the person, doesn't it? In fact, it depends on both people – the writer *and* the reader.

My recall of my own primordial existence is not as good as yours. My earliest memories are inconsequential. They include:

- My dad in his overcoat arriving home from work, coming in the side door out of the rain.
- Looking out the window into the alley and seeing a kid with a Mohawk walking by below.

– A dark room illuminated by a black and white television screen showing *Willie the Worm*, a local kid's show. [The character appeared in a Philadelphia, channel 10, kid's show, circa 1954. there was a different Willy the Worm on the Soupy Sales Show.]

Unlike many other memories, these stand out to me as authentic because they don't seem to be the sort of things that might have been linked to photographs I saw afterwards and later mistook for real recollections. I am certain I never ran across a picture of Willie the Worm, again until I looked him up on the Internet a few years ago.

I might have included the terrifying memory of the open stairs leading down from the second floor porch. Between the gaps, which appeared large enough to allow for the passage of a small child, you could see all the way to the concrete below. However, I recall having nightmares about falling from those stairs, and it might be the dreams I remember rather than the stairs themselves.

How do you separate memories of dreams from real memories, unless the dreams are about the endless skull-littered plain behind the closet door or the alien tripods looming up over the familiar houses on the street? And, from a remove of sixty years, does it make much difference? Is the residue of reality any different from the residue of dreams?

I do, in fact, have a lot of memories of dreams that are more vivid than memories of real things that happened in my life ... indeed, I'm not always sure which are which. My dreams are very much my other life to me, and often a more interesting one. However, it begs the question of whether living in the dream world would be as satisfying as real life, if it was all you had. The disconnected events, inconsistency, lack of resolution, impermanence, mutability, and other characteristics of dreams may only be magical by comparison with waking life. If you had to live that way all the time – unable to finish anything, find things where you left them, make sense of events and be unable to emotionally connect to things in any sensible way – it would likely turn out to be nightmarish.

Brad Foster, bwfoster@juno.com

So, the countdown continues inexorably to issue 50. (I've always loved saying the word "inexorably." it rolls around so nicely in the mouth and over the tongue. Too bad it's usually used in a kind of "sadly inevitable" way, such as here ...)

Good to see that you have been finding all those stories in your files. You ask if others would believe you had done so – my recollection is not only that you had done so, but that many of us have recommended this is something you continue doing, after *Broken Toys* has run it's course (and before you start up whatever fannish project will next follow it, because, you know, its not only in your blood now, it's in your damn DNA!). And not only take stories and self-publish, but send them out for others to publish to a different audience. Maybe even (gasp!) a small paying market here or there. Yes, you'll soon be leaving us all behind in the wake of your new literary career. We'll be sad to see you go, hoping for the occasional letter from "out there," but like proud parents, pleased you are moving on with your life.

It will be a difficult habit to break... but I'll manage it all the way to the beach, with a pina colada in one hand and a gorgeous beach babe hanging onto the other. No ... don't think of it as an "end," but as a

“change,” from frustrated fan to frustrated “millionaire playboy” and “costumed crimefighter” by night.

Like the idea of seeing how well Eric did in handicapping the FAAn awards, though a bit saddened that we will not be able to share in the reasoning on *how* he arrived at his conclusions. Have you thought to try your hand at your own list beforehand? Then you can see which of you got closer. Of course, having been privy to his thought processes, you might be swayed by that, and your list be pretty much his repeated. On the other hand, if you disagree strongly with any of his predictions, that could be fun, too.

I can and will give Eric's reasons along with his predictions, but one or two of his original remarks were privileged information between the two of us, and will have to be omitted.

Doctor's appointments. Had my couple of days of EKG monitoring here at the house, then went into the bowels of a hospital a week or so later to be slid into a tube and have people stand around outside and bang drums and cymbals for half an hour (I think that is called an "MRI"). All that was left was to go back to talk to the doc who subjected me to that, and see what he had to say since neither test showed any problems or abnormalities. The thing is: did you know that doctors can sometimes get sick, too, and miss appointments? It's true! We've been trying to reschedule for about a month now. I had hoped we could just do this over the phone – see no reason I need to be physically sitting there if it is just a meeting to talk over things, even told them would be happy to pay the full "visitation" fee (not happy, so much, but you know what I mean), if we could do it this way. But nope, wants my butt in a seat there, evidently. Oh well. (And, like your still not being able to pin down the source of your sleep problems, getting these "good" results from tests in no way helps in figuring out why I have had the odd memory-loss moments. Ah, the miracle of the aging human body ...)

The tale of your buddy Steven having the single disposable razor stolen from his bag, and the explanation of it having been done "for spite," reminded me of a similar event for myself ages ago. Back when I had my first apartment after getting out of college, I came home from work one day to find things looking a bit ... odd. What really caught my eye was the power cord to my stereo was draped over a stack of records to one side of the table it was on, rather than neatly hidden behind them, as it usually was. I didn't do that. Went into the bedroom, found that the slim little window in the back corner was broken and open. Barely wide enough for someone to squeeze in, but they had. I'd been burgled!

Thing is, I really couldn't find anything missing. How odd. Still, called the police just to file a report. Cop showed up, and first thing he asked me was did I keep any blank checks anywhere, and if I did, I should check them. Glad he said that – found the box in the closet right where I kept it, it was certainly full of blank checks still – but the packet on the very top was now upside down. Looking through them all, found that whoever had come in had opened the box, then reached down to remove the *last* group of blank checks. If they hadn't noticed they flipped over the top group before closing the box, I would never have known those others were gone. Called the bank immediately to inform them and put a hold on any of the checks with the numbers I now knew were missing.

Still, nothing else gone, and why the lifted power cord? I worked that one out for myself. I figured they had wanted to steal my stereo, but something had prevented it. I crouched down as they must have to reach and pull out the cord ... then looked up to my right, and saw that the only other window in my

place had a key-lock on the inside. Plus my front door had a bolt lock that also needed a key to open from the inside as well. The only way they had to get back out would be through the tiny bedroom window, and none of this equipment would have fit through there. Then I let my hand drop onto the records while I was looking at all this and figuring it out in my head, and for some reason looked at the records there. Being the anal-retentive organizer I am, I always kept my records in alphabetical order. And I could see that a couple were missing. Indeed, it seemed that exactly eight were missing, in just the spot where they let their hand drop, noticed they would *not* be able to get out with what they wanted, so simply gripped a handful of the records right there, and took those instead. Not what they came for, but gosh-a-rooty, they were going to take *something* for all their troubles!

An old friend, Bob Wilson, and his ex-wife Janet were burgled in their third story apartment once, many years ago. The police thought it was more likely kids with a sharp eye, who noticed the fire escape led right up to an opening window in the back, and broke in by forcing the latch. What I recall is that they only took a large number of records, and possibly the stereo, since there was little else of value in the place. (Except Bob's typewriter and manuscripts, but what would a teenage punk know about "real" value?) A pro would probably have taken one glance at the place through the window and not even bothered to step inside.

Excellent analysis of the ongoing increase in "security packing" for toys over the years. Here's a thought: is there any correlation between the mania for "mint in box" and "unopened in package" collectors who never actually have enjoyed their toys, but simply accumulated them, and the increase in pure difficulty in getting to them without having to rip apart said box or package? Just a thought.

But which is the cause, and which the effect?

Okay, enough of this, back to the drawing board for me, see if I can get a few dots on paper today.

Paul Skelton, paulskelton2@gmail.com

First of all, apologies for going on about the FAAN Awards again, but you *did* start it...

As long as I'm not being blamed for something...

The "Sealed Envelope" idea looks like it might be intriguing, though depending on where Eric obtained the info on which he based his deductions, he could actually end up a bit off-base this time around. That's one of the problems with the FAAN awards. There are actually a lot more of us than you might imagine ... well, OK, probably not more than **you** personally might imagine, but each of us, off in our own little backwater, might forget just how many fanzines there still are out there. That's fanzines as we would be happy to include in the traditional "concept," of course. But, we don't see them. They aren't sent to us, and we don't go looking. Case in point...Eric himself. Back in the day, I used to love Eric's fanwriting. Still do. Eric is the only fanwriter for whom I felt a need to publish a 'Best Of' fanthology (see *Desert Island Eric*), which I did without even asking his permission (I think he forgave me). Eric is also the only fan about whom I wrote a piece of faan fiction (based on an imaginary first meeting). He emailed me a copy of *Vexed*, which I LoCed, but I never went onto *efanzines* and checked out his other stuff. That was all 'old stuff' and could be checked out at my leisure.

But I still haven't taken the time. It's all still out there. It'll still be out there whenever I get around to it. Efanazines is a wonderful thing (in theory), but there is no personal involvement. You published 38 issues of *Broken Toys*, some of which I looked at on efanazines, but you emailed me issue 39, which made me feel personally involved enough to respond. Until then ... nada.

The problem is fanzine fandom has always been extremely balkanised.

There isn't really an organisation that covers all of fanzine fandom, except of course Corflu, the convention of fanzine fandom. That's why it does the scutwork for the FAAn awards. There isn't any buggler else. But, it does not 'outreach.' To get involved you have to know to go to the Corflu website and then go to the FAAn Awards. But who tells you this? My initial answer was "Nobody", but I suppose that technically the answer is "Corflu," though of course you already have to know this in order to find it out. Then again, the question of Corflu's applicability could be called into question. Lloyd Penney pretty much LoCs every fanzine that is published. In theory you could not find a fan more a 'fanzine fan' than Lloyd ... but I'm sure I read somewhere that he attended one or more Corflus and did not feel 'welcomed' there.

Now I do not know which Corflu's were involved, or whether I was in attendance, but it's quite possible, because I do not do personal interaction very well. I can strut my stuff in letter columns, but when it comes to personal interaction I tend to plead the Fifth. I know, for instance, that I have been in Lloyd's presence a couple of times, but I have never had the confidence to initiate any involvement. I was in Walt Willis' presence a couple of times too, and never spoke to him either. On social occasions I am not particularly ept.

But all this is beside my main point, which is ... if you like something, you can vote for it. Providing, that is, that the option is available. I suspect that most people don't realise that it is. The main gripe, lately, is that it is always practically "same old, same old"... that they are dominated by a "Corflu clique." I tend to agree, though I think this a simple result of human nature rather than some sinister conspiracy. I think that, simply, what is needed is that **every** fanzine should highlight the FAAn awards, unless of course they think they are a bad idea. I also think that folk shouldn't worry about not being sufficiently "involved." Don't worry about what you don't see. If you like something, vote for it.

But of course in order to vote for something you need to know how to do it ... and I don't think the "How to Do It" is sufficiently explained in the background detail. *Broken Toys* should be telling people how to vote. *Opuntia* should be telling people how to vote. *The Reluctant Famulus* should be telling people how to vote. That's not "what" to vote, that's "how."

Put simply, the awards need a broader voter-base. I think one of the problems is that faneds don't want to come out and say "Vote in the FAAn Awards ... and here's how to do it," because they feel it may seem they are touting for votes. What I think is needed is for the Corflu person responsible for the voting to officially ask them to do this – to positively reach out to a broader electorate.

Normally, I can atomize a loc into smaller chunks than this, but you've taken the topic from the very start and analyzed it seamlessly through to the very end, even anticipating much of what I might have said. Thus I'm forced to permit the loccer the huge expository lump above.

On the whole, I agree that the principal problem with the FAAns is that the voter base is too small. In fact, it is so small that it happens to be very nearly the same size as a single, Balkanized circle of fanzine fandom. So perhaps it isn't so much that there is a Corflu clique, as that Corflu is similar to a bottle that can only hold one clique. It doesn't necessarily follow that all the contents of that bottle *are* from a single clique ... however, it may be more likely that a single clique does fill most of it in the way that a single foot fills a shoe. Or is that too many metaphors?

In any event, the best remedy would be to expand the voter base, so that no single group can dominate the vote. Ah, but there's the wub ... said Elmer Shakespheare. Very few fanzines talk about the FAAns. I can only speculate about the reasons for that – perhaps in an era of the annual fanzine, few fans want to bother with news that easily dates before press time? How many zines discuss fan news at all? Isn't that what the *F770* news site is for?

I can discuss my own reasons. Part of my reluctance is that I'm not by nature a booster. I don't join parades or campaign. I don't even campaign for myself, though I've been told that when I was nominated for an Aurora once or twice, I should at least have *mentioned* it in *Broken Toys*. But, as a nominee, I feel it is somehow unsporting to try to persuade people to vote for me – if I win an award, I want to reflect public opinion, not just demonstrate that I'm more persuasive or have more friends than the runners-up.

And sometimes I'm not all that confident that awards are a good idea. Some awards are justified as means to evangelize fandom ... or fanzine fandom. But when the devil did we become a religion? Fandom may be a time-and-resource consuming hobby like almost no other, but it is still a hobby ... *not salvation*. Other times, awards are justified as a harmless way of celebrating our sub-culture and its outstanding achievements. But does it? Or do we get protracted arguments about whether a Star Trek-oriented podcast is actually a fanzine or not? Does it make Steve Stiles or myself "happy" when year after year, unknowns pop out of the woodwork, cop a Hugo without ever having done fanzine art, and disappear from our ken almost as suddenly? Awards have their downside too.

So, will I be promoting the FAAns in *Broken Toys*? I don't know. It would be ironic, indeed, if I were to take your advice and instruct my diverse population of readers in the background and purpose of the FAAns, carefully explain the voting procedure and encourage them to cast their ballots ... *only to win one of the things and have people blame me for encouraging non-fanzine fans to stuff the ballot box on my behalf!*

But enough of that - there is so much more to *Broken Toys* 47 and I have already waffled on too long. In 'Faith & Fantasy' you write, as an aside...

"In time, I hope to see Faith passing away from human civilization like a fever that has lasted far too long."

Pass it may, but not in any time when you could hope to see it. For some, the promise of eternal life in Paradise is just something they cannot turn their backs upon. The fact is, organised religion has had two main purposes throughout history. The first is to keep the peasants in their place and make them put up with lives of appalling drudgery with the promise of "jam tomorrow" or rather "jam in the next life." The second was to provide its 'officials' with a cushy number and no need to go out and get a real job.

Despite all this, its adherents continue to believe the most absolute tosh, even in this so-called enlightened age. Frankly, I see little hope for Humanity.

I'd be more optimistic, except that we don't have a lot of time. The climate change clock is ticking, and we are probably too late to avoid a world of pain as it is. If we were working on the problem and had 50 more years, we could mitigate what's coming ... but we are only working half-heartedly and there probably isn't 50 years in which we can make substantial change. Still, there's only do what we can, or do nothing. And we know for certain that doing *nothing* will result in the greatest amount of damage to the environment and the biggest risk to civilization as we know it. So I vote that we *act* ... and hope for the best. Maybe that is a fantasy, though? The way the corporate sector and most politicians talk, they obviously not only won't act, they will positively obstruct those of us who wish to.

My own take on the modern packaging of *Anti-Theft Device Included* was back in the day when three young grandchildren would open piles of presents round here on Christmas morning. A large pile for Zach, because he and his mother Deborah used to sleep here on Christmas Eve, whilst Adele and Savannah needed several presents each so as not to feel **too** outdone, even though the bulk of theirs were back at home. After all this, I had to spend ages chopping up vast amounts of moulded plastic packaging in order to get the detritus into a manageable amount of bin-bags.

Thus contributing to the emissions of CO2 derived from fossil fuels, adding to waste management problems and perhaps ending up in one of those giant plastic whirlpools choking our major oceans, right? They never mention this in television Christmas Specials!

Enjoyed *Time in a Bottle* too, and the neat photos to accompany it, but have no startling insights or personal reminiscences to share.

On to the letters...I agree with so many things you write in response to Arnie Katz, whether it be the fact of most fanzines appearing to exist in their own bubble universe or the lack of interest of much of the stuff on *efanzines* (I know I wrote I don't normally go there, but the paucity of issues of many of the zines I do get has caused me to go looking) This also bears on your comments about frequency, which is especially important because of what fanzines are and embody ... *interaction*. You can't achieve critical mass with interaction if you only come out once a year.

I don't believe this – first I am the *alpha* and the *omega* in the letters section of the most recent *Banana Wings*, and now I am the *alpha* and the *omega* in the latest *Broken Toys*. Am I in danger of being typecast here?

Or merely apotheosized?

Cas has just been in say dinner is almost ready. It's only home-made soup - vegetable though, so you should be proud of me. Gotta go.

MILT STEVENS, miltstevens@earthlink.net

In *Broken Toys* #47, the topics of faith and fantasy cover a lot of territory. I think we absolutely need some degree of fantasy. In some cases, we might call it hope. It would be hard to have objectives

without fantasizing about those objectives. Psychological problems arise when your fantasies and your objectives get too far out of sync. You fantasize about being the world's greatest bullfighter while in danger of becoming a bank president. Of course, it would be just as bad the other way round.

I suspect most people get their fantasies from movies and television. Nobody thinks much if their son wants to be John Wayne or their daughter wants to be some glamorous female star. Years ago, the opposite situation would have created some concern.

It might still! However, I think it is generally acceptable for a son or daughter to run out to be Jeanne Wayne or David Bowie, which is nearly the same thing.

I've joked about wanting to grow up to be a character in an Oscar Wilde play. That's not even mostly a joke. If I was going to be an actor, I'd want to be Cary Grant. If faced with danger, I'd probably run like hell. If faced with anything else, I'd come up with witticisms. In years past, I've fantasized about being a literary gentleman in the country. That's pretty much what I am these days. Sometimes, fantasies don't go all that wrong.

Cary Grant would be good, though I learn more to Gregory Peck, myself. Or maybe Audrey Hepburn. It would be nice to be sylph-like rather than potato-like.

These days, large parts of science operate on faith. If you can't disprove something, then it will be treated as if it is true. That's faith of a sort. I recall a Rotsler cartoon from years ago that dealt with this situation.

Professor: "We can't prove the existence of the particle, but we must have faith."

Rotsler character: "Hold it, whatever happened to the old-fashioned atheist scientist who didn't believe anything he couldn't prove?"

Professor: "He didn't get a grant."

Some years ago, it was pointed out to me that I couldn't give a mathematical proof that one plus one equals two. That fact really doesn't worry me. There are a few things in life I am willing to accept on faith, and that is one of them.

I defer to the humour ... however, scientists really shouldn't take that attitude. When they can't prove an unavoidable tenet of a theory, they proceed *as though it were true* ... but it is only a pragmatic necessity. That other parts of the theory have been shown correct may also lend credibility to unproven details. But scientists are not entitled to certify the unproven as true until they *are* proven.

David Williams, dbwillyumz@tds.net

With regard to issue 47, I heartily concur in your remark, "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."

In fact, Classical Fandom began its death spiral way back in the early 1970s. That's when conventions replaced fanzines as most fans' primary form of fanac. I see it as an issue of recruitment. Where do new fans come from? In Olden Tymes, you wrote a letter to a prozine and your name and address appeared in the letter column. Other fans wrote to you or, more often, sent you a copy of their fanzine. Or, you saw fanzine reviews in a prozine and sent your dime for a sample copy of what sounded interesting. The last fanzine reviews in a prozine appeared in the 1970s, in Ted White's *Amazing* and *Fantastic*.

Today, in Postmodern Fandom, the first question would be, "What's a prozine?" Then maybe, "What's a letter?" Today's recruitment occurs via conventions. Someone interested in *Star Trek* or costuming or gaming sees a flyer advertising the local convention at a comic or game shop. He attends because of his special interest, and is swept up by the subfandoms that most attract him. He may join the local club which sponsors the convention. But he has been recruited without ever encountering a fanzine. That's why Hugo rule-makers and voters don't know the difference between a blog and a fanzine. Just in case any of those people are reading this, *Broken Toys* may be distributed via the internet, but it is a fanzine, not a blog. It has numbered/dated issues and appears in an invariant format; every issue is the same, forever and ever.

The tipping point came in the 1970s, because that's the decade when the prozines, the gateway to fanzines, disappeared and local and regional conventions proliferated. After that, it was just a question of repopulation. Because fanzines were now out of the recruitment loop, they no longer helped to replace old and tired fanzine fans with neos. Now new fans come from conventions, and they have a complete disconnect with Classical Fandom. It will be awhile before the last Classical Fan dies; maybe he will still be publishing his fanzine. But no one will know or care.

Arguably, the tipping point came earlier ... in fact, as early as 1934 or '36, whenever that first SF convention was held. Our doom was inevitable from that moment! But that would be stretching the meaning of "tipping point" rather far, I think. In fact, I suspect that even in the 1970s, it was not yet possible to see how this would play out. True, convention fandom was growing like undiagnosed cancer in a coal miner's lung, but fanzine fandom was arguably at its peak for literary sophistication, production skill, numbers and diversity, and that peak would persist through the 1980s before it noticeably began to falter and loose ground to convention activities. But the writing was certainly on the wall, by that time. Fans through the '80s and '90s argued about the necessity of recruiting for fanzine fandom if we were not to grow old and increasingly marginalized. But there was little that could be done – too much organization and selfless labour is about as against the faannish grain as you can get. (That mindset is more like soulless minions you see stamping badges at convention registration tables!) In any case, science fiction itself was becoming more mainstream, and attracting people who were not necessarily offbeat or violently individualistic. It was inevitable their numbers would grow faster than Old School fandom could attract its customary misfits, eccentrics and malcontents. Cons, too, were more immediate fun. Most newer fans could enjoy themselves without any deep commitment of time or effort ... if that was their choice. Under the circumstances, it was inevitable that the Force Was Not With Us.

What would be ironic is if the Force is not with convention fandom, either. After all, it takes a lot of work and self-sacrifice from those who run conventions to see that the rest of fandom has a playground to play in. What if there was something easier? Somewhere anyone could go and set up their own play-pen and be Jedi or Bronies or Steampunks, without hotel contracts, organization, guests

of honour or the risk of thousands or hundreds of thousands of dollars? As it happens, there is such a place. Perhaps in twenty more years, convention fandom will be aging and bitching about how the good old days are over, because modern fans only want to cosplay or stream on the Internet! If I'm still around, I will laugh until my artificial spinal implants and cardio augmentation overload.

LLOYD PENNEY, penneys@BELL.net

With a new month comes another short pile of zines, and *Broken Toys 47* has risen to the top. I will put some commentary down with electrons, and see if they make any sense once I am done.

Years ago, I would write short stories, and see if I could get any useful feedback on them. Nope ... most of those I would approach were fantasy novelists, and sometimes, the most constructive thing I could get out of them was "That's nice." I eventually did start sending them to the professional markets of the time, with the predictable results.

I'm not sure how people get started in the genre anymore ... and Bob can't tell me because he got started 30 or 40 years ago, and he says everything has changed since. The picture I have is that you get published in semi-pro magazines or on-line for a few years, for no pay or very little, and then if the editor of a real pro magazine or some other paying market such as a Baen or Tor "Best of the Year" happens to like what they've read, the hand of God descends from Heaven and summons you. Otherwise you stay in the semi-pros for life. Whether or not some real editor takes a liking to you may be largely arbitrary. People of our age have no time for this.

I should get on with various voting and nominating, but this year, with all the manipulations over the years, it is tough to care enough to do it. As you say in the essay following, it is, and always has been, a hobby, and while many keep going with the FIAWOL mantras, it is just as easy to say DILIGAF, and go on to other things. We've always enjoyed SF&F, but have never, ever thought everything was real! We suspend our disbelief while we enjoy SF&F, but we return to that disbelief once done, and real life takes over in its usual dull way.

I feel somewhat more like voting for the FAAns than I did last year ... looking at the downloaded form, I don't have a clue what I want to nominate. My interest in zines has waned quite a bit.

American fans of the CFL ... at one time, the CFL tried expansion into the US, and there were four franchises, Sacramento, Las Vegas, Baltimore and Shreveport. One year, the Baltimore franchise actually won the Grey Cup, the only American-based team on that trophy.

Vegetables ... I never got the taste for them. I didn't like them as a kid, and when I try them again as an adult (yeah, right), I still don't like them. Aw, Moooooom! I will eat asparagus, and I do like Caesar salads. Yes, I know it's good for me. I just don't think they are good ... tasting.

I like Caesar too, for some reason. Maybe it's the creamy tartness masking the nasty vegetable flavour? I also add two kinds of beans and bacon bits. By the time I'm done with my version of a Caesar salad, there's hardly room for the green stuff.

I think I may know who "Smegg" is ... he used to come up from New York to Toronto for conventions,

and I thought he'd go home to NYC...until I spotted him in the subway here one workday morning many years ago. Creepy, indeed, and used to sell furry porn on DVDs, if I recall.

You know him, and he *was* a New Yorker, but he was living in Toronto all the time. He arrived in the early '80s.

100 Florence Crescent ... I know where that is, for I grew up not far from there, on the southern side of the tracks, in the Warren Park/Varsity Road area. I was in kindergarten at Warren Park PS at the bottom of the Varsity Road hill, and when I was 5 (in 1964), my parents and I lived at 4070 Old Dundas Street, which also happens to be where Yvonne and I first lived when we got married. Apt. 103 when I was 5, and Apt. 108, across the hall, when Y and I were married.

Time to move this ... took me three days, actually, to get it all done, and I am falling behind yet again. What else is new? Many thanks for this issue, and we will all move closer to issue 50.

CLARE BRIDLEY, faansfor2015@gmail.com

This single-issue response after 47 issues of *Broken Toys* doesn't even make a dent into the number of times I should have thanked you for the fanzine, never mind actually engaging with the ongoing – and nearly gone – discussion. Nonetheless, I'm not letting that stop me from responding to “Sealed Envelope” (Part 1), since I'm administering the current round of the FAAn awards and this gives me a very useful hook to further encourage people to vote.

This isn't intended directly as a spoiler for you and Eric Mayer, since I obviously don't know what Eric's predictions are. I've had some fun myself in the past with sealed envelopes (I was completely right about the whole short-list for the novel category in the 1939 Retro Hugos, run by the 2014 London Worldcon; but I get worse and worse at predicting the winner of the Arthur C. Clarke Award, even when I only have a short-list of six books to choose from and have read them as well). On that basis, I think I'm also looking forward to 'Sealed Envelope' part 2.

But the more people who vote, the more that could confound any predictions – and my aim is indeed to make sure that as many people as possible who enjoy SF fanzines know that they're eligible to vote on the FAAn awards and how to do it. That's all set out on the Corflu 33 Website at <http://corflu.org/Corflu33/faan2015.html> - which in turn gives me an opportunity to emphasise that voters don't need to be a member of this or any other Corflu; anyone interested in fanzines can vote. Corflu provides the time (on Sunday 15 May) and place (Chicago) for announcing the results, and I'll provide more details of voting breakdowns after that.

The Web page includes both an overview of the awards and a downloadable ballot form, which itself includes more information about the award categories and how to vote. Votes need to be with me – by email to this address (faansfor2015@gmail.com) or by post to 59 Shirley Road, Croydon, CR0 7ES, UK – by Saturday 23 April. If anyone's got any queries about voting, those should also be sent to me at either address, although even more so than votes it would be great not to leave those queries until the last minute, please!

I'm also seeking any constructive ideas about the future of the awards and getting more interested people involved, while being aware that previous administrators have tried that themselves and yet here we are.

If anyone is struck by an inspiration, please do get in touch with me at the same address.

Meanwhile, I hope you continue to enjoy your final three issues, and I look forward to reading them too.

I have to admit... I was nearly shocked to get a loc!

Anyway, I agree that most of what ails the FAAns is that not enough people vote. Even given the diminished size of Old School fandom, there are probably enough of us to give the awards the diversity of opinion that they arguably lack. But, how do you get fans to vote?

In my case, I feel uncomfortable prompting the voters because about half my readers are people that wouldn't be recognized by the rest of fanzine fandom. People like Ron Kasman (comics), E.T. Bryan (manga), Joe Strike, Bob Guthrie (animation), Shirley Meier (writer), John Douglas (editor), Andrew Greene (gunnie), Darrell Benvenuto (publisher), Grant Schuyler (poet), Kjartan Aarnorson (cartoonist), Steve Muhlberger (historian), Mltch Marmel (furry), Rebecca Jansen (folk music), Richard Wright (biker) and friendly strangers I met on Facebook make up as much of *Broken Toy's* mailing list as the regular bunch of idiots ... I mean fans. Yet I'm certain that if any number of them decided to vote *Broken Toys*, I'd come under a lot of criticism for ballot stuffing. Possibly their votes would be refused. Not feeling comfortable with such thoughts, I've not actively promoted any awards.

That's partly why I wrote to you! I'm writing similarly to several other fan editors who publish more frequently than most of us, so that individual editors don't have to risk criticism that they're just drumming up support for themselves rather than publicizing to a broad readership the chance to vote overall. (Maybe I'm over-sensitive to that sort of criticism, but it's been much easier to write about the FAAn awards this year having ruled myself out.)

I'm trusting individuals to decide whether they count themselves as 'interested in fanzines' if they only read one or two. Entirely personally, I think that if I hadn't got some second and third places to award as well as first place votes, I might consider I wasn't interested enough. But who am I to know everyone who's out there reading and enjoying fanzines?'

After the final issue of *Broken Toys*, I'll be in no better position to publicize anything than you are. I'll be publishing infrequently at best.

Since the end is approaching fast, I think I'll break a rule and hint in heavy-handed fashion that these last few issues *Broken Toys* will be the last eligible for a FAAn. After 2017 it will be too late for regrets.

David Redd, dave.redd@hotmail.com

Re: Jesus/stump preacher/myth, the four Gospels, despite obvious axe-grinding, describe enough of Jesus' personal irascibility, contrariness and sometime failure to work miracles – rather than being unbroken catalogues of the Messiah's superpowers – to convince me that something real was their basis.

Personally, I am more intrigued by the sense of *something* in that part of the world trying to bubble up into reality with Akhenaten, Ashoka and Jesus, all of whom had their teachings swept away from the common rabble for centuries, not least by the Catholic Church. Also, Elijah/Elisha to me resemble an

earlier prophet/Messiah pair which couldn't quite break through. (Pity the Old Testament seems to have lost a book or two which might have thrown more light on Elisha.) Maybe my lack of knowledge-in-depth is a factor here.

But people can obstinately restate opposing attitudes on such things for millennia, so having explained my own interests I will simply note your views, and finish. Thanks for your note.

My own thoughts on the matter have evolved to thinking there might have been a real Jesus (or Yeshua ben Yosef, to be more accurate), but that he was one of many country preachers wandering around the Roman province of Palestine at the time. Due to a very persuasive book I read, that argued that no reliable evidence exists for the existence even of a mortal Jesus, I've grown to believe that the bible says almost nothing reliable about the man, if he existed. He may have lived, but it seems certain that nearly every detail of his life follows the pattern found among all mythical heroes, and that casts the entire story into serious doubt. If he lived he taught some form of a more humanist, end-times Judaism, perhaps. Then he disappeared from history, executed as a trouble-maker, or perhaps just fallen into obscurity, like most of his contemporaries. More than that resembles fiction too much.

There may be a reason why so much religious thought has come from the Middle East, and it's a rather prosaic one. Religious ideas certainly existed everywhere else, but tended to be very localized. They didn't spread across continents. Instead, the sacred stories would change, name by name and detail by detail, as you traveled, until at some point the local beliefs were quite different from where you started. That was probably the way it was in places like Gaul and Germania. However, the populations of the Middle East, Egypt and northern India were always dense, and urban. New ideas spread quickly and consolidated into huge institutional religions like the worship of Ra, Zoroaster, Ishtar, Jehovah, Serapis, Mithras, and finally Jesus. Because there were so many people in those parts of the world, it happened again and again. It's almost like asking why so many Broadway plays open in New York ... because the audience in Peoria is too small.

Also, excellent letter of yours in *Vibrator* 25 on the currently fashionable topic of "We're doomed." As a fiction writer (former/blocked) I've been considering many of your points (except the space travel) about sustainable Hobbit-style economy and the very wealthy getting their own way to destruction. For years I've been failing to express these ideas in a 20,000+ word story, and you've said it all in about 500. Nice job. (Although, I'd guess a sustainable human population of sensible people as no more than half a billion ...)

I also like to add that there is an inverse relationship between our individual "footprint" on the environment, and the number of people who can make a footprint. In the *Star Trek* universe, it seems clear that the individual footprint is enormous, even compared to ours. Then again, the application of advanced technology may act like an additional variable, reducing the impact of the footprint through increased efficiencies or more abundant resources. Still, one suspects that in Captain Piccard's day there are perhaps only a billion human beings on Earth ... otherwise it's doubtful they would be able to support a 24th. century standard of living.

Hah! Should have written that to Charnock. See it here instead.

Oh, well, Graham will be reading it soon enough!

Jefferson Swycaffer, abontides@gmail.com

****OOPS!**** I missed commenting on the last few *Broken Toys*. That makes *me* a broken toy! Wah! But put a new mainspring in my gearbox, and I'm good to go!

I'm delinquent myself. I early gave up any notion of producing a March issue, so that I could catch up on other things. It's been rather a relief to let weeks go by without any formal writing. The itch is only just beginning to be noticeable. I still have drawing to do, however.

Speaking of wind-up toys, do you remember "Zoids?" They were remarkably high-quality snap-together toys, with a little wind-up gearbox that powered them in all kinds of motion. They were supposed to be robot fighting vehicles, in various "animal" shapes, but with guns on the outside. The spider and the scorpion were particularly cool, as was the snail, which "gooshed" along very cleverly. The engineering that goes into toys is sometimes pretty remarkable!

Missed those. There's an entire era of novelty kits that I more or less missed out on. But my taste runs to authenticity anyway.

I think it's great you're doing more writing. You've clearly got a first-class, top-notch imagination. If you can bring life to your characters in prose as well as you do in drawings – and I've read enough of your prose to be confident in that! – you'll be excellent at it.

My only regret is that I have little hope of more than a small number of readers – possibly as few as a dozen, and no more than a few dozen. There's no market for my subject matter or style in an era in which markets are becoming narrower and more commercially pigeon-holed all around. then again, with my past debts, the only people I'd enrich, if I was the next J.K. Rowling, would be my creditors ... while I went on living hand-to-mouth for life. In a sense, it's liberating to be completely fucked. You can just do what you want and not worry about "success."

"Faith and Fantasy," yeah, speaking as a furry, I'd say that wanting public acceptance on that basis is pretty close to meaningless. It's like asking for the public's acceptance because I listen to Vivaldi, or drink decaffeinated tea. it isn't an element of my core identity, just something I like. Faith doesn't bother me a whole lot, especially when it takes its rightful place as a kind of personal preference, as opposed to a rule-making body of organized leadership. As Thomas Jefferson said, "But it does me no injury for my neighbor to say there are twenty gods or no God. It neither picks my pocket nor breaks my leg." I think that religious faith needs to move into the realm of "tastes," like furry art, or various cuisines. If you like really fiery super-hot death-to-the-gringo chili, and I prefer something a whole lot milder, which of us is really "wrong?" With tastes, there can be no disputing. Faith belongs in that context, not in the realm of really big churches having influence over legislation and imposing rules on the rest of us.

Re: Toy Collecting, I was once in the middle of a lovely dispute – much too friendly to be called a fight – regarding keeping toys in their original packaging. One friend said, "This isn't a toy store! Open the package and play with the toy!" The other friend said, "The minute I do that, I kill the value of the toy as a collector's item." I'm kinda torn: I do a bit of both! Many of my toys are still in the plastic clam-shell and backing board...and many are open and have been played with enthusiastically. I'm not a "serious" collector anyway, so... Is there a "right answer," or is this one of those things where I just have to listen to my friends fight over it without taking a strong stance of my own?

And the new Canadian "Bluey" – lord'a'mercy that's *pretty!* I'm fond of the various series of U.S. quarters, with national parks, and state landmarks, but two-metal coins are really, really lovely. I hope someday the U.S. will have the grace to experiment with them!

I've been collecting the US quarters – thanks to a U.S. correspondent – but they have mostly been too fussy, too cluttered to be really beautiful. A few of the state issues have been gawd awful. The national parks and monuments series have been generally better.

So, congratulate me, as I just finished a novel. I have to tell you how it ends. The last line is, "They stole everything that wasn't nailed down. The ____." I've always been fond of the cheesy variants of "(Not) The End" and "The End?" and the like, so now I've made my own contribution to this micro-genre.

And, oh, fudge! I just realized today is March 14. "Pi" day! I missed pi hour and pi minute. Is it too late to go out and have a slice? Not yet midnight!

The following loc arrived literally tonight, while I was assembling this issue, but nicely finishes up on an even page, so it is included.

Rich Dengrove, RichD22426@aol.com

Rich Dengrove, once again far behind. This time *Broke Toys* #43. Of course, you said it was not a big deal that I wasn't keeping up with your monthly e-mailings. So I am taking my usual time, and commenting on my usual number of hooks. Forget about writing quickly. Instead, I'll take my time and get less done in my life than I would have with more speed.

Not only should I not expect too much speed, but we also shouldn't expect too much from Magazines of Yore with the Great Names. I gather that *Weird Tales* has gone from one editor, who couldn't make a go of it, to another. In 2011, Wikipedia says one editor sent rejection slips, saying that the inventory of stories had to be whittled down, and to try again in nine months. Now it is clear would-be authors should have [dismissed that promise.] Now *no one* responds to you. It's not only the "canaries" who are in the dark.

Rich's loc is five issues behind, so the reader can be forgiven for not appreciating his little joke about the canaries. "The Canaries in the Dark" was the name of the short story I wrote, that was published in *The Yellow Booke*, vol. 2., My thoughts about publication inspired Rich's comments on the difficulties confronting new writers ... young or old.

With such responses, we should expect to be the troubadours of Weird Literature, and not expect money for our efforts ... much less "fame and fortune." If they come, fine; but we shouldn't expect them. Such expectations have been built on the example of the wealthiest few writers of the '40s or '50s. Sending to a big name editor used to be how you got fame and fortune. Not any more. In the '80s, the big publishers told writers to send their submissions to agents. The situation is now *worse* than that. As far as I can tell, sending to agents is a chimera. I have only *once* heard of a book sent to an agent that was accepted by a

big publisher – my sister’s. Unfortunately, the management changed at that publisher, and they decided not to publish her work after all.

“Chimera?” A red herring, perhaps?

Right now, the best way to “fame and fortune” appears to be what you did. Send it to a small, unknown publisher. You could get lucky and it will sell well – and the small publisher will make a deal with a big publisher. Reading the blurb biographies of recent famous writers, it looks like they first submitted to small publications also; and when it proved they could sell, they graduated to high paying markets. That was what Tom Clancy did. Are the odds equivalent to striking it rich by winning the lottery? While the answer is yes, the chances for wealth and fame penning fiction were never high.

That’s for sure. Did you know Ayn Rand wrote a sequel to *Atlas Shrugged* where all the talented Arts people went on strike? A year went by, then two, but nobody noticed. After that the world went on as normal by watching re-runs and reading reprints and all the creative people rotted in the camouflaged hole they dug for themselves, somewhere. I think it was called *Apollo Sulked*.

We go now from a comment on the Sisyphean market for writing to the rough and tumble world of politics. As with fiction, I cannot say politics doesn’t take imagination. In fact, sometimes its sole constituent is imagination. Look at Donald Trump. Also like writing, you can’t say politics doesn’t take hard work. Of course, you can sometimes *delegate* the work, as the Bushes have done. Finally, you can’t say politicians aren’t [artists]. A lot of people plying the politicians’ trade have had no success whatsoever.

Much to the good fortune of the rest of us, no doubt.

With my comment on politics, I am going to discuss your response to Eric Mayer. While I spoke of politics, and he of ethics, Eric also spoke of politics by mentioning Dick Cheney. Eric wondered why good people die, and evil people thrive. Specifically, Cheney. He wonders why, since Cheney made a pact with the Devil, he has had so many Evangelical supporters. My answer is Cheney may have made pact with the Devil but it wasn’t the Evangelicals’ Devil.

Nor is the Evangelical God one I could ever look up to, since I think he bears more resemblance to *my* notion of the Devil.

With my Seven League Boots, I go from politics to neat automobiles. Something that has its own politics. In your comments to Steve Stiles, you talk about your love of the Chrysler Airflow from the ‘30s. Another car that has its own legend is the ’57 Chevy. Boy, does it ever have a legend! Someone claimed that one of the designers stole the template for the car and produced ‘57 Chevies until 1968. The Wallechinskys, in the People’s Almanac, vouched for it. Apparently, it’s not true. What is true is that the ’57 Chevy was a wonder car to many. Converted to racing, they won 26 NASCAR races. Furthermore, over the years, many companies started selling restoration and reproduction parts. Under that circumstance, that someone was making the complete car may not have appeared fantastic.

There is a company that makes a car based combining what they call Chevie’s three best body designs, the ’57, ’58 and ’59. NO2Alike bases the custom body on a Corvette chassis and engine. The N2A 7-8-9, as they call it, is hot retro stuff indeed! You can take more of a look at it, and other models, here: <http://n2amotors.com/789-1/>



Having talked about the '57 Chevy, I am going back to high intellectual stuff ... Existentialism. Milt Stevens thinks it was in Existentialism you got to choose your own purpose. I thought it went beyond that, that there was no way not to choose your purpose. Even what is normally regarded as purposeless has a purpose. I gather even the character Meursault in Camus' novel, *The Stranger*, had a purpose – even though he was emotionless throughout the novel, and committed a purposeless murder. Later, being more logical than any real person is, he cries out at all the people who try to give him a purpose.

Back to more trivial talk, although how trivial can you be when a fellow fan, and great friend, dies? You tell Lloyd Penney that you don't mind where the Ned Brooks' family sends his books as long as it isn't to *you*. Before that, you give us your reason why: you describe his book collection as house-sized. Definitely, *house sized*. I went to his Atlanta, Georgia house twice, and saw it. He purposely purchased a large house to hold it. That did not mean that he had no order to his collection. Everything was neatly arranged in a subject classification. In addition, the house not only held a book collection it also held a typewriter collection, and a mimeo machine collection. All organized.

Now we veer away from a community tolerant of [oddballs such as] Ned, and go to California, Florida, Paris, Hong Kong, etc. for more regulated ones. There, the Walt Disney company, presumably established communities for their employees. I have to agree with Eric Mayer. My take on Disneyland and Disneyworld is that while the communities for their employees might be well run, they are run in an authoritarian fashion. As Eric says, "Holy Gated Communities, Batman!"

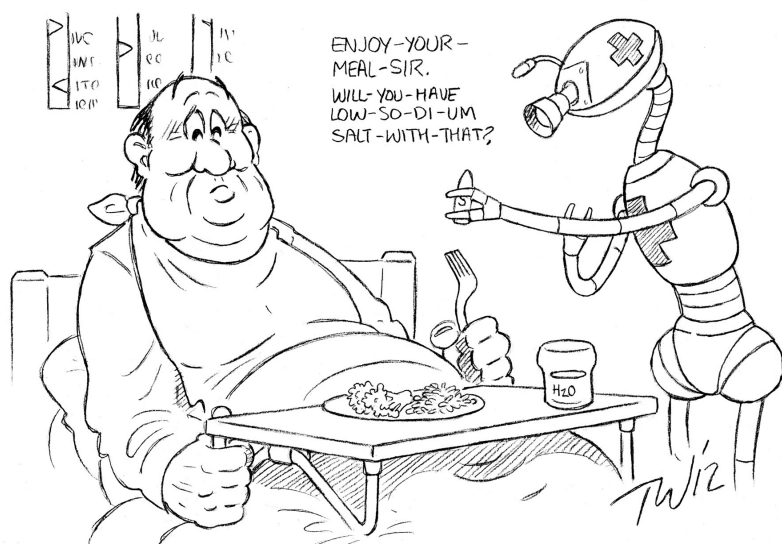
There are communities that are well-run but you should watch your Ps&Qs. Then there are communities that were abandoned. I remember Allaire Village growing up in New Jersey. Originally, it was a community of abandoned houses. I remember seeing an old-fashioned automobile parked somewhere, and its light hanging from the wires. Local people, including my family, visited the place – but only to gawk at how it had been abandoned. Finally, the cops told people not to do that because some of the homes were dangerous to walk around in.

Now, things have changed. New Jersey long ago declared it a state park, and all the buildings have been

razed, or gutted and fixed up. Eventually, it had the theme of early 19th Century, and became totally sanitary. Fortunately, no one has seen fit to start their own social experiment with the employees. It has not reached the height, or the depths, of Disneyland or Disneyworld yet.

With a ghost town turned into a tourist attraction, I end this letter. The subjects, of course, were commented on as I found them in the zine: making a mint from writing (tee hee), politics, classic automobiles, Ned Brook's collections, and the Disney jackboot. Now that I have finished this, I can get to #44. Maybe someday I will compile my letters and I will be as rich as Karl May got from Westerns.

...Not likely.



Bedside + Manner

*A reprint from Eric Mayer's
E-Ditto 16, Nov 2011*

The patient is Steven Baldassarra. He's not only a friend of some years' standing, he's a fount of amusing stories, and he doesn't in the least mind my stealing them. Some of my best humorous articles have been based on his anecdotes. Yet, I can be a little slow catching on to their potential. I don't think I realized that I could profitably steal this one until I'd heard it twice, perhaps even three times.

Steven had been at the receiving end of one of *my* medical tales the other day. When it was his turn, he told me *his* story, and a little light came on in my head. I listened to Steven a little more closely this time, knowing that it would have to be repeated word for word for all my readers.

His story begins with a visit to the doctor's office for a physical examination. This was a new doctor. They had never seen each other before. To the physician's trained eye, it seemed obvious why the patient was there. Without even the common civility of a "Hello, have a seat, now what can I do for you?" he told Steven, "You're obese."

"I *am* overweight," Steven admitted.

"No, you're *obese*."

Truth be told, this is so. Like many of us, Steven carries a great deal more weight than he should in an ideal world. And, like many of us, he's tried to do something about it, achieved temporary success and then backslid, retaining only modest gains... Or, more to the point, only modest losses.

"I did lose a significant amount of weight a while ago and feel much better for it," Steven said, defensively. "But you know how it is. You have no time for group sessions and work-outs. Moderating your diet just isn't enough."

"Moderating *your* diet hasn't been enough."

The doctor said this in a tone that implied Steven's everyday meals included an entire roast pig, several pies and pastries and a one-litre carton of ice cream, and that Steven had "moderated" his diet only by removing the wedge of cheddar from one slice of pie. "You're still obese. There's no excuse for it."

By this point, Steven was feeling more than a little abused by the doctor's woefully defective bedside manner. But he found the self-control to hold his tongue and bring the subject around to the business at hand – his annual exam.

The doctor wrapped a rubber cuff around Steven's arm, pumped it up until the arm was lobster red, slowly bled off the air off watched the needle on his sphygmomanometer. "Well," he said, "that seems normal enough – " then added ominously, " – for the present."

Taking an ice-cold stethoscope out of the freezer, he listened to Steven's heart. Then he looked in Steven's ears and down his throat with a speculum big enough to look up a bull's bum. He poked Steven's ribs hard enough to leave bruises. He held the patient's tongue down with a depressor until he choked. He did everything except kick Steven's tires, but refrained from it only because the patient didn't have them. Then the doctor took blood. It wouldn't have been entirely unexpected if he had used fangs instead of a syringe.

"You realize, of course," he harrumphed, "that, being obese, you run a much greater risk of cardiovascular disease, hypertension, stroke, cancer, kidney and liver disorders, sleeping irregularities, mood changes, allergies, eczema, cellulite and people calling you 'Fatty'?"

If I had been Steven, I might have retorted, "it *has* crossed my mind" – but Steven wisely kept his silence.

"I'll have to have this blood sample sent to the lab to be worked up," the doctor continued, in a tone that implied he was sending a note from school to the patient's parents. "The results should be in before your next scheduled appointment. I won't be at all surprised if the report shows there's excess cholesterol in your blood, an enlarged heart and that you have a galloping case of type II diabetes. Meanwhile, try to lose some *weight*, for God's sake!"

— —

The doctor was equally civil during the second appointment. "I see you haven't lost a pound," was his greeting.

Steven shrugged. What was there to say? He hadn't exactly stuffed himself with pâté de foie gras and mince pies, but neither had he subsisted on cress and bottled spring water over the previous month.

“I don’t understand this report at all,” the doctor grumbled. “By all rights, you should be on death’s doorstep. I expected to read that the diseased state of your pancreas was well advanced, and you were severely diabetic – but there’s nothing abnormal here. Despite all odds, you seem as healthy as a horse.”

Steven gave his sweetest, most cherubic smile.

“This is nothing to be complacent about,” the doctor scolded. “No one as obese as *you* has any business being healthy! If you don’t do something about this, you may go on being obese long after the day they put *me* in the grave.”

I can imagine that Steven’s smile grew sweeter, more cherubic than ever. Then he said, “And on that day, Doctor, I will celebrate.”

The doctor’s reaction is not on record.



The coin show happens three times a year. There is another, different coin show in Toronto, but I prefer this one because my favourite ~~bookie~~ dealer is always there. So deep is my addiction to ancient coins that I attend the show as often as I’m able. Fortunately, I have mostly been a very warm winter. This particular February weekend, the temperatures atypically ran a few degrees above freezing. The downside of unusually warm winter weather is usually rain, but neither did it rain. I dressed warmly and braved a still rather unpleasantly stiff breeze to drive Traveling Matt to the Hyatt Regency downtown.

Robert was at his table in the usual corner. He said “Hi” as I rolled up and parked right in front of one of his glass cases. He’s a good egg. He never complains about having to wipe my fingerprints off the glass after I’ve pawed it. He even lets me open the cases and handle the coins. It makes a big impression when you hold a small metal slug in your hand and realize that it’s worth as much as a decent used car. And then you count how many similar coins there are in that one single case. Robert has *three* cases of extremely valuable coins, as well as less expensive ones in small tray. You could pull off a major felony, worthy of headlines in the newspapers, just by holding up this one dealer ... while the contents of the room is worth many millions. But I only lick my lips and wish.

There are Greek coins struck in such strong relief that you can’t stack more than two. Even then, the top one is apt to skitter off at the slightest vibrations ... if, say, you jingle the change in your pocket. The Greek coins portray mostly gods and goddesses on one side. On the reverse, the city that struck the coin

is represented by a traditional symbol. By far the most well-known is Athen's owl, but there are also man-bulls, doves, crabs, porpoises, shields, bees, anchors, gorgon's heads, stags, boars, mussels, cups, lyres, baskets and a hundred other things. Thank goodness ... otherwise we wouldn't have any idea who issued them! Coins of that era rarely named their cities of origin. But coins such as these, if they were from any place that mattered in history, are pricey in the same way that new, hand-stitched upholstery for your Ferrari is. I glance over the Greeks quickly.

Celtic coins are, as a general rule, quite crude-looking. But they are also mostly quite rare, and in great demand due to the recent wave of Celtophilia. Anything better than a sliver of silver or drop of bronze with a blobby shape on one side – sometimes both – tends to run \$100 or more. I don't spend long looking at the Celts, either.

The case of Roman coins is no better, really. There are exciting silver coins by short-lived emperors who had little time to mint them, such as Pertinax or Bulbinus! There are handsome bronze Sestertii the size of old silver dollars, that provided skilled die makers the room for Rome's most splendid imperial portraits. And there is g-o-l-d, shiny and yellow and just meant to rest warmly in the palm of my hand. I pass over this case more slowly, but pass over it I must.

The third case is mostly Medieval and Renaissance. There is much there to drool over as well ... Henry I, Bloody Mary, Henry V... out of my reach for now, but maybe some other day.

In fact, I hadn't come to buy at all. I had *already* bought, and was here to pick up my purchase and leave behind an unbelievable amount of money as merely another installmen on a coin I'll be paying for until midsummer.

You wonder why I would make such a foolish purchase? Believe me, it wasn't an impulse buy. I had been agonizing over that coin since it first appeared on Robert's Web page. In fact, one reason I began to consider buying it was my surprise at seeing it still unsold after more than a year. After all, my fortunes had improved quite a bit since I began to receive a disability pension. I was used to eating cheaply, didn't care what I wore, hardly ever went anywhere, and, frankly, my apartment's furnishings are mostly junk that I'm perfectly at home with. Under those circumstances, a big cash outlay might not be as much of a problem as you might think ... as long as I don't do it too often. In the previous couple of years I had already bought a much-needed air conditioner, and a new computer to replace the dying one that ran XP.

There was one other incentive. As I said, the coin had gone unsold for a surprisingly long time. No doubt the stale economy and sudden plunge of the Loonie had something to do with it. I asked Robert if he'd give me a special price ... and he offered me a deal impossible to pass up! I'm paying only a 70% of the full price, a discount that represents a considerable amount of money in its own right!

There are not many coins that excite me to the point of spending a lunatic amount of money on them. But this one was rather special for a number of reasons. For one, it was struck by Claudius. Largely thanks to Robert Graves' two novels about the emperor, *I, Claudius* and *Claudius the God*, as well as the BBC television production, Tiberius Claudius Caesar Augustus Germanicus is perhaps the best known of the Caesars. In the popular imagination, he has become a misunderstood, modern man, catapulted to the purple unexpectedly, and reviled by contemporaries who saw his unconventional thinking as mere idiocy. It would be hard to relate to a Nero or Caligula, but you could imagine a long, heartfelt talk with Claudius at a dinner party, in which you might possibly discover many things in common.

Or so you might think! The fact is, Claudius was not altogether an attractive personality. Although unconventional, he was also a traditionalist who was very much into reviving old forms and rituals. He wrote in a formal, overly-correct style that was erudite to the point of pedantry. Contemporary critics described him as learned to a fault, but a literary bore.

Although the reign of Claudius was no more secure than most, he apparently did not deal well with the ceaseless danger of assassination. He was described as fearful by Seutonius, the imperial biographer of the next century. Where Graves wrote of a Claudius who was repulsed by bloodthirsty games, the real emperor loved them, and held games more often than he strictly needed to. He enjoyed watching gruesome executions, as well. Claudius also drank heavily, gorged himself regularly, slobbered his food, told off-colour jokes at inappropriate times, habitually gambled at dice, womanized and, according to some, was manipulated by his subordinates. Of course, compared to his predecessor (his nephew, Gaius Caligula), and successor (adopted son, Nero), Claudius unquestionably held himself to a much higher standard!

But what most puts the lie to Graves' account is that Claudius never in his life espoused a return to the constitutional Republic! No, far from it; when he was discovered cowering behind a curtain in the palace, in the aftermath of Caligula's murder, he was quite willing to be proclaimed emperor by the Praetorian Guard. Meanwhile, the Senate debated what to do, and among the options under discussion was to restore some semblance of the Republic. When Claudius heard of this, he sent a squad of soldiers to say thanks, but the matter has been settled. *He* was Emperor – there was nothing more to debate. Claudius held it against the Senate for the rest of his life that they had even *considered* an alternative. Does that sound like the attitude of a dedicated Republican? It is a charming plot twist on Graves' part, nothing more. Once the real Claudius lowered his scrawny behind onto the curule stool, he never looked back. He was only too glad to hold the supreme power. Considering his life up to then, he was probably safer as emperor, even with the predictable assassination attempts,.

None of this detracts from Claudius's solid accomplishments – he worked long, hard hours during which he oversaw the construction of the harbor at Ostia and two new aqueducts to bring fresh water to the City. He invented new letters for the Latin alphabet, wrote books on Etruscan history and language, began draining the Fuscine lakes south of Rome (to rid the area of a malarial swamp), and added Britain to the Roman empire ... all of which is to his credit. I'm only sayin' you might want to reconsider that dinner invitation.

Although Claudius had a long and productive reign – 13 years – there is surprisingly little surviving silver coinage from his time. Of course *all* silver coins before Nero are relatively scarce, but I have managed to acquire denarii by Augustus and Titus, which tend to be only moderately pricey. Only Caligula is really difficult to come by, which is rather natural – he was emperor for less than 3 years, and afterwards *nobody* wanted to remember him! But why would it be difficult to find silver denarii struck by Claudius? So far, no one has answered that question for me.

I've had to find my own answers.

For one thing, Claudius appeared to be rather modest as emperors went, and produced fewer different types of the standard Roman coins. Emperors like Hadrian or Vespasian fill pages and pages and pages of different types listed in coin catalogs. The coins of Claudius only fill a couple of pages. From what I've seen at coin shows, he mostly produced practical coinage and few commemoratives – bronze quadrans and asses that can be bought at quite reasonable prices. I even bought one badly worn sestertius, a large bronze coin worth four smaller asses, or sixteen quadrans. But I have *never* actually

seen a dime-sized silver denarius of Claudius with my own eyes! Never! I believe that limited production could only explain some of this scarcity, however. *Plenty* of bronze coinage by Claudius survived. Why not *silver*?

To answer that, we have to consider the reign of Nero.

Nero was the adopted son of Claudius. He and his mother, Agrippina, almost certainly poisoned Claudius to put Nero on the throne before his time. The reason for such a hurry was that Claudius had a younger son, Britannicus, who might be named joint or perhaps even *sole* heir. So Claudius was fed poisoned mushrooms, and Britannicus conveniently died of “epilepsy” a few months later...

In any case, Nero was acclaimed Emperor by the somewhat skeptical Senate, which warmed up to Nero no better than it had to any of his predecessors. In point of fact, Nero may have not at all been the monster that has been painted by later Roman historians, who tended to represent the Senatorial view that the unchallenged rule by wealthy Senators was the noblest of all possible forms of government. Hence, Nero’s position was not very secure. There were, in fact, serious plots against his life from the start.

Not surprising, the 18-year-old emperor was quick to criticize his predecessor, “Uncle Cl-cl-claudius,” as a blundering fool. How *fortunate* for Rome that Nero was at hand to rectify the old coot’s mistakes! It may have been from the very beginning of Nero’s reign, then, that Claudius’ silver began to disappear. Nero was highly motivated to erase his uncle’s memory.

If it was not that, there was plenty of cause later, when Nero’s heavy expenditures drained the treasury. These expenditures are usually ascribed to the emperor’s own lavish lifestyle, and there is some truth to the charge. However, in 64 AD, a great fire destroyed a huge part of the city center, which Nero undertook to rebuild out of his own pocket. Some of the rebuilding *did* include the infamous Golden House, Nero’s own palace and the most extravagant structure to rise in Rome up to that time. But most of the reconstruction consisted of temples, fountains, market places, halls and tenement buildings to house the displaced population. Nero also finished draining the notoriously swampy area south of the city, and attempted to dig a canal in Greece that would have cut hundreds of miles of travel by sea around the Peloponnesus. The canal was a failure, but the swamp yielded many thousands of acres of new farmland. More importantly, these and other civic projects created *employment*. It is usually taken for granted that Nero’s economic largesse caused a financial crisis ... but there is just as much evidence that it was the other way around, that Nero’s spending attempted to provide a stimulus during an economic downturn.

Whatever the truth, so much spending led to debasing the currency. The Roman denarius had been almost pure silver up until that time, but the percentage of the silver was reduced to 93.5% in the new coinage. (Imagine a dollar only worth 93.5 cents.) As well, the weight of the denarius was reduced from nearly 4 grams to under 3.5 grams. (That dollar is now down to around 82 cents!)

There is something in numismatics called “Gresham’s Law.” In brief, bad money drives out good. Whenever the state issues coins of lower intrinsic value, older coins with higher silver or gold content become worth more than their face value. Then, two things happen. First, people hoard old coins. Second, the state recalls old coinage, to re-mint in debased form. In Nero’s case, he was able to recall four old denarii and mint as many as five new, lower-weight denarii with the same metal, creating more purchasing power for the state from, apparently, nothing. Of course, as soon as people realize that there is more money in circulation than before, it becomes devalued – prices go up – and the trick fails.

Inflating the currency to meet the government's expenses only works in the short term, and then everything comes into balance once more ... but at a new status quo.

And this is what I think happened to Claudius's silver coinage. Nero called it in, first to destroy the memory of his uncle, but – more crucially – to stretch his finances.

The official recall didn't bring *all* the silver in. Plenty remains from the reigns of Augustus and Tiberius, for example. Although it is not at all cheap, it is nevertheless a great deal more affordable than Claudian silver. I acquired several early silver denarii by Augustus and Tiberius without suffering undue pain to the pocketbook. Therefore, I think there may still be some piece of information missing from the picture. I think Claudius simply *may not have struck as many* of the high-value denarii as his predecessors. Despite his faults, Claudius was a pragmatic man who may have preferred to strike coins for day-to-day use in the streets, rather than high-value specie for big spenders.

How was it that the coin *I* bought managed to avoid being melted down to serve a later emperor's vanity or prop up his weak finances, then? It was mostly luck, I suppose, but it may be relevant that the coin is not a denarius issued from the Roman mint.

Instead, it is a *cistophorus*. By Claudius's time, coinage across the empire was mostly standardized. However, there were some major exceptions among the provinces ... for instance, the tetradrachms of Alexandria. Judea had its distinctive circulation coin in local circulation, and an assortment of bronze Assaria and various silver drachms or didrachms were common throughout the far east.

Another local type were the *cistophorii*, struck in the Asian city of Ephesus for the Kingdom of Pergamon. They were distinctively large silver coins, about the size of a loonie or half-dollar. They first appeared in the first half of the second century BC, and were named after the basket of sacred snakes depicted on one side. Ephesus, along with much of Pergamon, passed into Roman hands in 129 BC. During the Republic's second civil war, the rivals Octavian and Marc Antony, recognized the value of propaganda, and began for the first time to strike their own portraits on Roman coinage. Antony held the eastern empire, and quickly adapted the oversized *cistophorii* to show his hook-nosed, lantern jawed visage to the masses.

Perhaps because it was such a splendid canvas, the *cistophorii* survived as a local coinage for more than another 150 years, coming to an end only during the reign of Hadrian.

Cistophorii are not only rather large, they are thicker than Roman denarii, and in the far east were valued at four drachms, the standard silver coin throughout much of the Hellenistic World before the Romans came. *Cistophorii* were not four times the weight of a Roman silver coin, however, so were valued at only *three* denarii.

Why were such a successful series of coins discontinued around 160 AD? Hard to say, but the city of Ephesus, where they were minted, had been in steady decline for most of the time it was in Roman hands. Trade routes changed, sidelining the city and making the circulation of its distinctive coinage less and less vital to the local economies. Or maybe it was just the centralizing instinct of the Roman hegemony, which by the time of Hadrian was uncommonly stable and secure, and perhaps no longer in need of an obsolete propaganda device.

Such changes may seem mysterious, but are far from unnatural. The United States has minted *two different* three-cent coins, believe it or not. There was a three-cent silver "trime" that lasted from 1851 to 1873, and a three-cent "nickel" struck from 1865 to 1889. Silver dollars have appeared on and off again like a flashing neon sign! In Canada we have finally eliminated the penny. Despite costing much

more to produce than its face value, it is still produced by the U.S. mint ... but for how much longer, who knows? And why-oh-why does either nation still mint half-dollars when they don't seem to be circulated at all, only offered for sale in annual mint sets? Although the American attitude toward money seems to be that it is a fundamental part of nature, intrinsic and unchanging, the fact is that money is merely a marker – no more “real” than the little green plastic houses or red hotels used to play Monopoly.

For whatever reason, the long and varied history of the cistophorus finally came to an end. Those that were not hidden from the tax collector, or hadn't been lost down the sewer grating, must have gradually ended up in a melting cup, to be re-issued once again as sparkling new denarii – perhaps bearing the smirking face of Domitian, or the grim visage of Septimus Severus, or even the boyish charm of Gordian III – but as they were recycled, cistophorii became more and more scarce, and finally disappeared from circulation altogether.

And that, speculative as it is, is the best explanation I can give for spending what was, for me, an outrageous sum of money on a single silver coin with a bust of a long-necked old geek with big ears on it.

Are my ambitions in coin collecting at an end? No ... hardly. I would dearly love to own a gold aureus from the early empire. The gold solidii from the 4th century and later are simply not the same – they are Greek, Christian, the emperors effeminate-looking, and the coins smaller by a third. The real McCoy from when Romans were really Romans are unthinkably expensive, however. Several-thousand-dollars-each expensive! If I have that much money stuffed in my mattress when I lay dying, with only months to live, I *may* consider it. But, realistically, my aims are much more modest. I have no Medieval pennies by any number of British monarchs, for instance, and although they are not cheap, they are not altogether unaffordable, either! If I found a King Stephen, I would have completed a span of over 170 years, from 1135 to 1307, that included six Plantagenet kings! That's two more than Four of a Kind!

That's the beauty of coin collecting. It isn't just the pleasure of having a small piece of metal in the palm of your hand that grows in value, and could someday be sold for more than you paid for it. It's the enormous historical narrative that lies behind the coin that I love. I want to know who made it, why, and what happened to him. I want to understand the broader issues within that society which led to the coin being what it was. A genuine artifact from 2,000 years ago is an emotionally moving affirmation that the past is not just an entertaining story ... but as profoundly real as you and I today!

There is also the fun of pretending you are a time-traveler, and tipping the surviving gladiator for putting on a good show. I won't lie to you about which of many motives has most inspired my coin collecting – it's the make-believe, *of course!*



THE DEVIL IN THE DETAILS

Post & Comment from FaceBook

Robert Charles Wilson

I caught the movie *The Summer of '42* on TCM yesterday – it reminded me of the early 1970s, when I was young and haphazardly employed and occasionally found work as an extra on Toronto movie sets. The Canadian union rules were a little more lax in those days, and production companies often ran help-wanted newspaper ads to recruit extras. It was a great way to pick up pocket change when I was between jobs.

No, I wasn't in *The Summer of '42* – I was in its rather more obscure sequel, *Class of '44*, filmed on the University of Toronto campus. My star moment: standing in a cafeteria line. What I learned from that experience: Prop masters get upset if they give you a dollar bill to pretend-pay for pretend food and you forget to hand it back. I also remember overhearing actor Deborah Winters insisting that her name be pronounced De-BOR-ah. (She went on to star in *Tarantulas: The Deadly Cargo*, among other cinematic landmarks.)

That same year, I spent a day on the set of the Jack Nicholson film, *The Last Detail*. A bunch of us were bused all the way to the Canadian Forces Base Camp Borden (CFB Borden, located, as Wikipedia reports, "on a glacial moraine west of Barrie"), which was standing in for a US Army base. It was an especially lucrative gig – because I carried a trombone in a pretend marching band I became a "special business" extra, which came with a pay bonus. What I learned there: take off your damn hat when you enter the mess hall.

Strangely, I gave up all this glamorous Hollywood stuff for a career in writing. Go figure.

Tara Wayne

I vaguely remember our old fan group sitting around Victoria Vayne's TV, something like 40 years ago, because *The Last Detail* was the late, late movie that night. You had told everyone that you were an extra in it and we wanted to see you without a beard. The television had one of those lavish wood cabinets that looked something like the temple of Jupiter must have in ancient Rome. Victoria's leatherette couch sat three. No doubt Victoria herself was on the piano bench, and a couple of us must have been spread out on the broadloom. We watched with growing expectations right up to your scene – when the marching band went by – and we missed you completely. It was then that you explained that you were marching in the back, and all that could be seen of you was a dark navy-blue shoulder behind the guy with the tuba! We had been swindled.

Strangely, I once did something very much like that scene in real life. It was the year that I belonged to a Navy summer program to employ students, in hope they might enlist when they were older. I just wanted the \$75 a week, which was pretty good money in 1970 or '71. I got to march with my squad

through the Canadian National Exhibition Stadium in full fig – navy blue wool uniform, leather boots and peculiar English-style, hard white cap. Alas, the old stadium – where Paul McCartney, Victor Borge, The Who, The Three Stooges, Jimmy Durante, Danny Kaye, Pink Floyd, Queen Elizabeth II, Duke Ellington and the Scottish World Festival Tattoo all did their things – no longer exists, having been demolished to make way for a modern, godforsaken, spartan soccer field. Marching under the massive bleachers wasn't as intimidating as I had feared, though, even with several thousand eyes staring down at me. But was it *really* necessary to step right in the horse dung just to keep step? Apparently, yes. I was told explicitly to do so, should it be necessary, even before entering by the gate. And such was the necessity that, under those several thousand eyes, that was exactly what I did! You cannot buy priceless memories like these...



Scene of “pretend marching band” at Camp Borden, Ontario. Bob is in there ... somewhere.

Closing Words and Update: Although I’m sure we’re all tired of long, long articles about the state of my health and various hospital stays, I have a bit of space and there have been a few developments of some interest. After my last doctor’s appointment, new tests showed that the Fluvent inhaler had done me no good whatsoever. So I have been switched to a new type, that works a little different and delivers a different sort of drug. Strangely, I had been feeling a little better, which may or may not have been all in my head. Yet the trend has continued. I feel better almost day by day. A couple of days ago, I went with my friend Steven to a rib place by car, and had to walk some distance from where we parked to the restaurant door. I did the distance straight and tall, and arrived at the entrance scarcely winded at all. Other signs have been positive as well, but delicacy forbids that I go into details...