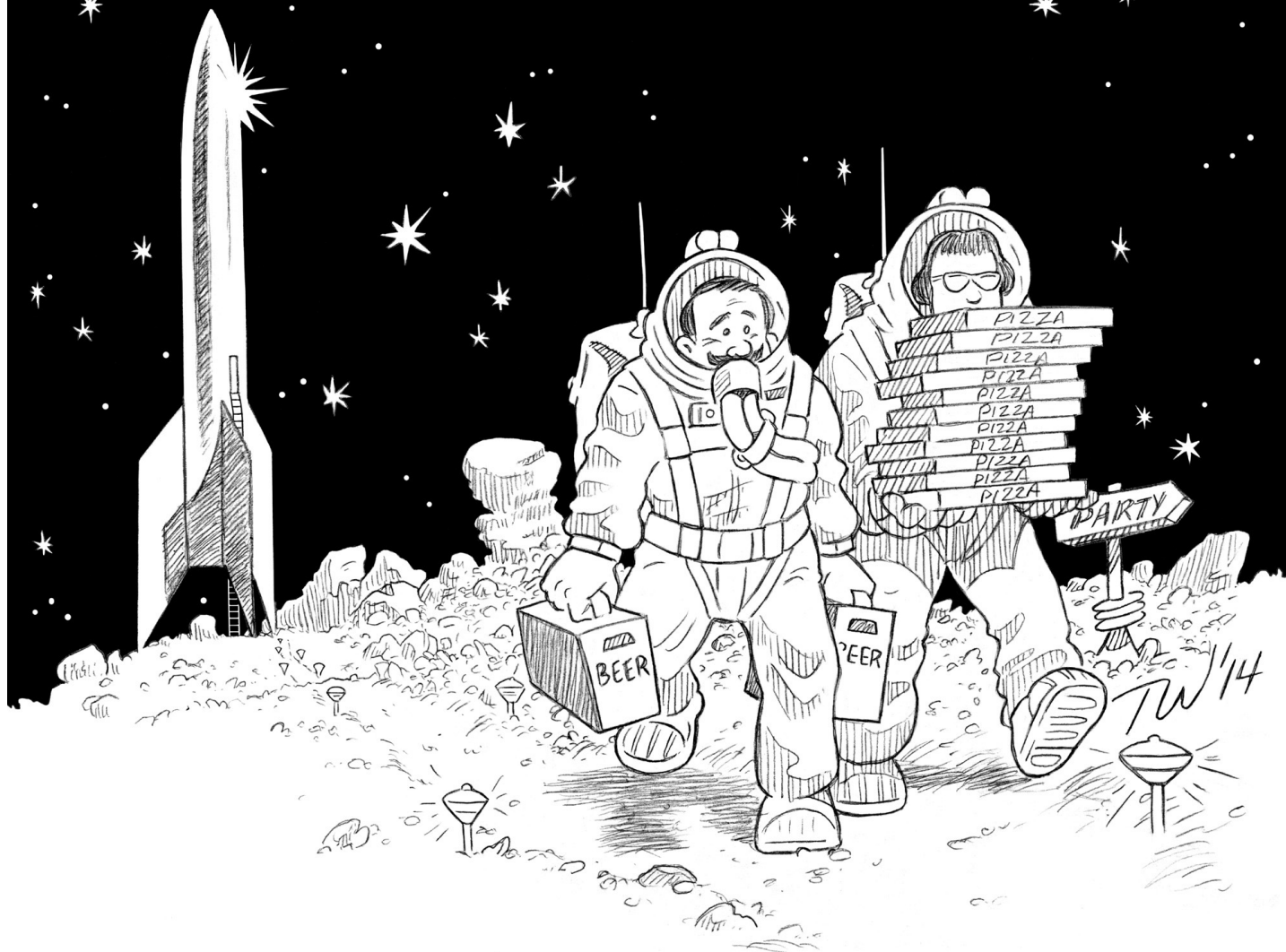


# Dark Toys

ISSUE 75





*Voila! I've begun the second revival issue of Dark Toys (a.k.a. New Toy, Lost Toys, Broken Toys et al ). Issue 75 was finished in late June of 2023, much sooner than I ever expected, considering that the previous issue was published only three months ago. It seems that planning ahead does pay off. I haven't moved from 245 Dunn Avenue, Apartment 2111, Toronto Ontario, M6K 1S6. If you need to talk to me, I'm nearly always at home and can be reached at (416) 531-8974. Kiddelidivee Books & Art 336.*

## Probable Contents of this Issue:

Wheel to Wheel	1	Dark Matters: LOCS	13
Plausible Denial	5	Into the Dark: Joshua Quagmire	18
Rockets Passing Overhead	8	On the Face of It: A Conversation	20

## Wheel to Wheel

### Early April

Rather than make a big production of this, I'm mainly going to paste the relevant journals directly from FaceBook into the pages of *Dark Toys*. I've written myself out on the subject of Traveling Matt's breakdown, and grown tired of elaborating on it. But it *must* be told, since the absence of Matt's electrically powered wheels has dominated my life over the previous month.

Spring had arrived and the sun had emerged from late Winter's overcast. Steven, a friend and frequent visitor, had come over to my place before we proceeded to a local Indian restaurant. There are quite a few interesting restaurants in my immediate neighborhood. Unfortunately, I'm limited to only those that have ramps for Traveling Matt to navigate. The rest are out of bounds. There is a legal requirement for ramps, but it is widely disregarded. You would *think* this would be bad for business.

Luckily, *The Mother of India* is a superb little restaurant, the prices more than reasonable and there *is* a ramp.

When we were ready to leave my apartment, I lowered myself into Traveling Matt, then turned on the power. To my horror, the chair wouldn't budge – only turn in a tight, left-hand circle. Nothing I could do would jar the left wheel into moving. Steven tried shoving the chair, I tried shaking it, but nothing would coax Traveling Matt into behaving. Apparently we weren't going out to eat after all, but were ordering a pizza instead.

This had happened once before, actually. Only a week ago, the *same* left side wheel refused to move, and it gave me a difficult time before it suddenly sprang back into life. Foolishly optimistic, I decided that my previous outing was responsible. I had gotten trapped in a boggy hole, and believed that it was mud dried around the wheel that was the problem. Matt, however, wasn't having any of it this time, and stayed stuck. I wouldn't be going anywhere until I had the chair repaired.

While we waited for the pizza to arrive, we called a number that I have for a repair shop. The same outfit had always worked on Matt before, and I knew that I was likely to be in for a hard time getting action. I won't go into details, but I was proven right in my pessimism. No matter how often I called, I got no action from the company. A woman would answer, "I'll call someone," followed by yelling for Jake or Fred, but then all I got was a recorded message. I left a summary of my problem, and hoped for the best. But no one called next day.

I called again, and virtually the same scenario was played out. A woman called for Jake or Fred, and then a recorded message would come on. Again, no one called back. I began to wonder what sort of small-time, Maw and Paw outfit was this, and why did they think this was a good business model to pattern themselves after?

Naturally, I was now facing a long weekend...

At this point, I'd had enough. Steven supplied me with a number of URLs from the internet, and using them I began to call around. The first number was long distance, but the second number was local and was answered promptly. I got an immediate and professional-sounding response to my problem, and an appointment was made for a repair man to come by to evaluate the problem on Monday.

I also informed the receptionist at the shop that I needed my exhausted batteries to be replaced.

This was obviously going to cost me dear. The batteries alone had cost about \$700 a few years ago, when they last had to be replaced. Amortized over the last several years, it didn't seem an altogether unreasonable price for the freedom of having a

working set of wheels. Consider the cost of maintaining an automobile: fixing Traveling Matt was petty cash by comparison. I had been putting money aside for just this eventuality for some time, so I would be paying cash.

It had been another difficult, uncompromising winter, and I felt a sense of satisfaction in having the foresight to plan ahead for when everything turned south!

### *A Little Later*

Monday came, and that morning, the repair man arrived to evaluate Traveling Matt *in situ*. He confirmed that the left-hand motor was shot and would have to be replaced. This cost me \$90 for the service charge, which I paid in cash. The man said they'd call me about an estimate for the repair and for new batteries. I didn't have to wait long for the estimate. I got a call that same afternoon, confirming my impression that these guys knew their business. The burned-out motor would cost over \$700, and replacing the worn-out batteries would cost another \$1,000! (It was hardly any surprise that the price was *up* from a few years ago.) Altogether, I was going to be walloped for the sum of \$1,740, give or take a little small change.

This was more than I was expecting, but fortunately I had more than enough cash on hand, and I knew that I'd have another month's pension in a couple of weeks. My mother, if she were alive, would likely be astonished at how fiscally responsible I've grown in my declining years.

### *Early May*

Time is the great leveler of adversity. When it was all over, all I wanted to do was get on with my life ... not write about it. But I felt I owed readers a resolution to Traveling Matt's story, so I finally nerved myself for the task of writing an anticlimax.

There was an uncomfortably long wait for the parts to arrive at the shop, and I had to phone back. I phoned back again, but each time I was told that the new motor hadn't arrived yet. I admit I was beginning to worry that maybe I was now being given a run-around by the *new* outfit. After a couple of weeks, however, they called and told me that the parts had been delivered, and someone would come with a truck to take Traveling Matt away. This was definitely progress.

The man came on the appointed day, and immediately ran into trouble. He couldn't move the chair. It was necessary for both motors to be disengaged for Matt to be pushed, but everything the guy tried seemed to fail: Matt's stuck left wheel would *not* budge. Desperate to get the work done, he called the office, and followed instructions over the phone ... but it was no use. The office told him that someone else would have to come back the next day with a heavy dolly to carry the chair away manually. The guy shrugged and left.

True to their word, at least, an older man appeared from the office early next day with a heavy dolly. He examined Traveling Matt, threw both motors out of gear and had no trouble wheeling the chair out of my apartment. He rolled his eyes and told me that "these younger men never have any idea what they're doing!" Then he loaded Matt onto the dolly and headed to the elevator.

That was pretty much the last setback, minor as it was. The repair work and installing fresh batteries was straightforward. A week later, they called to tell me that Matt would be returned to me on Monday. For parts and service, it set me back an astounding, whopping \$1,740 – enough for a brand new Volkswagen in 1968 – paid on the spot in cash. But at the beginning of May, I was on wheels again.

What have I been doing since, you ask? Much. To begin with, I rushed to the bank to cash my pension check, pay bills and replenish necessities. Through Steven's good graces, I had been kept in groceries, but at first opportunity I added to my stockpile. I also checked Wal-Mart for new DVD movies. Another priority was booking new doctors' appointments that I had earlier postponed.

Not surprisingly, my mood was greatly improved by removing so much weight from my shoulders. I've caught up with old artwork that I previously had no enthusiasm to finish, and even begun entertaining new ideas for drawings. I've written new articles, posted the last three Fraggles stories I'd written on line, and now I'm at work on a new fanzine. So perhaps life doesn't seem as bleak and unpromising as it did a few weeks ago. Here's hoping that my positive outlook continues all summer. In the end, Winter will jump unexpectedly out of evenings that will be growing darker ever earlier, every day ... but I plan to make the best of the sunny months while they last.

¶

## *Plausible Denial*

I can't pretend that I wasn't disappointed by the Faan Awards this year. I had pretty much given up any likelihood of winning one as best artist or writer at any point, but Rob Jackson made such a fuss over the cover I did for him in *Inca* (not to mention the long and difficult bit of fannish fiction), I thought \*maybe\* I've been too pessimistic? Perhaps one day I will finally win a \*real\* Faan Award? But I didn't even come close in either category. I had let Rob fill me with false hope and allowed my own pathetic hopes to lead me astray once again. Obviously, I must never listen to Rob, whose taste in fanac must be almost as fallacious as my own!

Seriously, I've been questioning what exactly I see in fandom.

An even larger question might be, what does *anyone* see in fandom any more?

Of course, I'm treading on ground that belongs by right to Garth Spencer, whose desperate existential cries to understand fandom are legendary. We won't examine those here. My own questioning of purpose lies in the difference between what fandom believes about itself, and what fandom not surprisingly *is!* What fandom *is* can be summed up succinctly as a body of chummy, aging men and women who have known each other for nearly as many decades as it took the Soviet Empire to rise and fall.

What fandom was for many fans in past decades was a study of science fiction and related topics. This is still true for many fans, who still seek the meaning of life in reviewing the latest potboilers by their favourite authors. It is almost as though cosseting the egos of professional writers has greater importance than their own eventless lives. My hat goes off to those fans that have such an exaggerated sense of mission, but I cannot really understand them.

So why do the rest of us publish? At first glance, fanzines are an outlet for creativity. I think that's way off the mark. A quick look at the majority of fanwriting will dispel any pretense that there is much literary experiment, deep insight or self-examination involved. I think the majority of older fans would agree that their writing is mainly a stand-in for their social activities. When you attend a convention; you write about it. When you meet with other fans at a pub; you write about it. If you are lucky enough that you can afford a trip to France or spend a week in a Vegas casino; you write about it. Writing about your fannish social life proves how fannish you are.

This is all well and good, but, *really* ... it's all much of a muchness.

It would be an act of hubris to delve into this too deeply. I should, however, be able to speak about my own motives with some authority. In fact, over the last couple of years I've increasingly wondered *what they are*. Why do I write for fanzines? I'm pretty sure it isn't for the vast amounts of respect or admiration that shows up in letter columns. I put in a huge amount of effort every year, writing thousands and thousands of words in the hope that someone will read them. The response can hardly justify it. A few published comments that are a few words long, about articles that took me a thousand times the effort to write, seems a waste of time. It's like carving the Ten Commandments on stone tablets only to see a post-it note stuck to the end later.

So why do I publish fanzines? I harbor a dirty little secret; that I read very little of them. I browse the pages looking for hooks, names or egoboo, but for the most part I don't feel any real interest in the thoughts fans have about the latest episode of *The Silmarillion*, the upcoming Chengdu worldcon, or even Moshe Feder's list of the best

bagels in New York City. I sometimes *mean* to get around to the reading *some of* the contents of the fanzines that I religiously download from the eFanzines site ... but I almost never do.

So, yeah ... my dirty little secret is that I almost *never* read fanzines.

In fact... I've begun to suspect that *most* fans who publish fanzines don't read them, *either!* I believe they publish because they have to write, and - to write - they desire an audience. That's certainly what's going on in *my* mind when I conceive an idea, and open a new word-processing document. Never mind what might be found in the pages of *Beam* or *Spartacus* ... *I need to write!* And I need to publish what I write. When I can, I send my latest opus to a favourite editor, but often there's no suitable alternative to publishing myself.

It's true that any half-decent writer can always be published, somewhere. But any half-decent writer is likely to be concerned to find an audience that is both sophisticated and numerous. I'm sure that there is a My Little Pony webzine that will be happy to publish anything even slightly pony-related that I send them, but what satisfaction would that give me? As older fans seem to be less and less active in their publishing, I've seen fewer and fewer zines that I'm likely to contribute to. In fact, I may be down to only two or three that I'm eager to see publish my future material.

*Banana Wings* had been one ... but it has been well over a year since the last issue, and I've yet to see any feedback on the long, ambitious article that I wrote for the last one. There was *Beam*, a fanzine to which I have only ever written locs too - quite some time ago - but I'm not sure why nothing more. Was it something I said? Did I take some imagined slight? Don't know. I've mainly contributed reviews of animation to *Alexiad*, though none recently. I seized upon *Portable Storage*, but that fanzine is already history. I was a heavy contributor to *Askance's* twice-yearly schedule until recently. The list is looking ominously short and provisional, however. The best option I've had recently as been Rob Jackson's *Inca*. Comments by Rob are what began these speculations, of course.

Once again I ask... what does fandom do for me? What does it do for anyone? Of late, I look at fandom and what I see is not merely a bus full of senior citizens on their way to a casino to waste their pension checks. Rather, I see a fandom which no longer has anything to prove, is content to sit back with its memories and go through the motions of being a fandom. If other fans are like me, they are not really interested in the self-centered posturing that appears in fanzines - they are self-absorbed in their own posturing. They seek attention ... but not very ardently. It is more a more

gentlemanly sort of attention-seeking that no-one takes very seriously as long as they get their chance at the Karaoke mike.

To see fandom as it really is, there is a telling simile. We are a tribe of Indian chiefs, without warriors. Each takes the pipe in turn and tells his tales, then hands the pipe to the next chief. But he isn't listening... he is planning his next turn at the pipe. There are no war parties, no buffalo hunts, no trophies for brave deeds. That was in the bygone days of the Wild West, and now we are more concerned for our bedtimes and fading dreams...

□

## Rockets Passing Overhead

Quick, now! What is your list of the ten best adult animated cartoons of the last twenty-five or thirty years? If you are like most people, your list will likely include a number of popular favourites such as *The Simpsons*, *Family Guy*, *South Park*, *King of the Hill*, *The Venture Brothers*, *Futurama*, *Dilbert*, *Batman the Animated Series*, *Rick and Morty* or *The Adventures of Tintin*. There is plenty of room to debate whether this series or that belongs on your list. Adding *Undergrads*, *Invader Zim*, *Tripping the Rift*, *Clone-High*, *Harvey Birdman* or *Mission Hill* in place of a one of the more obvious choices is *more* than a defensible position – it is half the fun.

But I'll wager that your list of favourite adult cartoons of the last three decades doesn't include *Captain Star*. Perhaps it should.

*Captain Star* first appeared on television on 1997, a joint production by ITV in the UK, and by Teletoon in Canada. It was never shown in the US, an inexplicable omission considering some of the appalling crap that has appeared on the Cartoon Network's Adult Swim. (Is it really *necessary* that I mention *Squidbillies* or *Ripping Friends to explain* how questionable it was to air *either* of those cartoon shows?)

My first reaction to *Captain Star* was that it was typical of adult-oriented cartoons in the 90s. The production was limited and the art often so crude that it begged the question of whether it was done on purpose, to demonstrate a disregard of traditional animation values. Much about late-90s animation leaves no question in *my* mind that this was *exactly* the point. "There are more important things than art or production," so the thinking goes. What matters most was the director's or the writer's *existential surrealism, pertinent social commentary...* or some other such art-school rot.

But first impressions led to a second look, and in the case of *Captain Star* I found that I was drawn despite my initial reluctance. I had never seen an animated style quite like it before, yet the bright colours and naïve draftsmanship grew on me without seeming simply inept – as many such cartoons do. Still, I wouldn't have given *Captain Star* a second look *unless* the writing and characterization hadn't stood out almost immediately.



Over the next couple of weeks I turned in to Teletoon after midnight and eventually viewed all thirteen episodes. *Only* thirteen! Unbelievable!

Jim Star is the captain of a gigantic spaceship called *The Boiling Hell* – its mission “to discover new worlds, name them after himself, and *sell* them things.” In effect, the ship is a huge interstellar warehouse and sales room. Star’s mission comes to an end unexpectedly when he is ordered to a forlorn planet called only “The Nameless Planet” at the Ragged Edge of the Universe, where he waits for orders from Mission Control.

“And waited, and waited... and waited.”

While he waited, his crew settled into new lives on The Nameless Planet. The Science Officer is Scarlett, a no-nonsense, practical scientist who constructs a laboratory as soon as they land, so that she may conduct scientific investigations without unnecessary emotional distractions. Her work clothes are a pragmatic leotard with crossed utility belts.

Navigator Black is a fussy and mild-mannered man who has difficulty with directions, despite his assignment as a navigator, given to him at birth. With little to do while stranded on The Nameless Planet, he opens a restaurant next to *The Boiling Hell*. His real passion isn’t the kitchen, however. It is an excuse to raise fish, really. He adopts a conservative, grey business suit and black tie, and by and large he has little interest or clue about his official duties.

More peculiar still is literally scatter-brained “Limbs” Jones. Jones suffered a freak accident early in his career as Stoker on *The Boiling Hell*. His job was to shovel “atomic fuel” into the huge, furnace-like atomic motor. Unfortunately for Jones, one of the miniature suns that he was shoveling into the atomic furnace *pushed* him off balance ... and the heavy shielded door closed with the stoker inside! When the crew gathered to see whether Jones had survived, they discovered that he *had* ... but had also grown six arms and nine heads. Moreover, each of the nine heads had a subtly different personality ... all nine of which, however, were naïve and trusted his Captain implicitly. His eccentricities scarcely ended with his multiple personalities, and included keeping an endless number of cats, each consecutively named “Sputnik.” Sadly – one way or another – each came to an untimely and preventable end.

Captain Star, of course, is the most fully scripted character. Like his shipmates, Star was born on the same day of the year as his shipmates. They were predetermined to be raised in their respective careers as Captain, Navigator, Science Officer and Stoker. By extrapolation, everyone in their century must be born to be insurance adjusters, scalawags or Indian Chiefs. When Jim Star was a young lad in school, he met another future Captain named Bloater. He was the most “unpopular boy” in class, and was barely noticed by Star, by far the *most* popular boy. Years later, hoping to finally impress Star – by now the greatest hero who ever lived – Bloater schemed to steal *The Boiling Hell itself!*

Of course, everything came easily to Jim Star! He was apprenticed to Ned Nova at the age of 12. Nova – who up until *then* had been the greatest hero in the universe – discovered 115 planets and named them after himself as *per custom* ... a record never broken until it was finally broken by Star himself. Named captain of *The Boiling Hell*, Star saved the galaxy countless times, rescued Mission Control, discovered the famous missing “29 Captains” and even rescued Ned Nova himself! Without a doubt, Jim Star is “The Greatest Hero of Any World Ever Known.”

Personally, Star is rather a cold fish (with all due respect to Navigator Black). Although he is given to impulsive, heroic action and bold decisions as Captain, he possesses a deadpan and unflappable manner. He is unquestionably fearless ... yet he is filled with uncertainty about his future. Suspecting that his fame is fading, even though his birthday is a legal holiday throughout the universe, he is distressed when it appears that it has been forgotten! It is only when he learns that Mission Control has advanced his birthday by one day – in order to organize special celebrations – that he is reassured by a flood of congratulations that are delivered to The Nameless Planet by the regular postman.

Curiously enough, Star is not simply an egotist. True, he fully realizes his enormous, exaggerated self-worth and is certain of his deserved stature in the galaxy, yet he is not blind to the value of others. He believes in his crew, despite their failings, stands by his Science Officer when she is abruptly promoted to the rank of Captain in command of *The Boiling Hell*, trusts Jones to make repairs when it seems that the ship is hopelessly stranded (by a “broken sluice spring,”) refuses to give up on Navigator Black when he mistakes crumbs on his radar screen for asteroids, and never once gives up his conviction that Orders will someday arrive from Mission Control. Then he will finally be able to return to his duties in “beloved Space.”

Despite maintaining a rigid poker face, Star is sometimes moved by unexpected sentiments. On occasion, he disobeys orders or gives unexpected help when he believes it is the right thing to do. He does what he can when it appears that his first officer, Scarlett, will be promoted to command *The Boiling Hell*, and that he might be reassigned to a far lesser ship, *The Blubber Raft*. All the same, he maintains unshakable faith in his Science Officer, despite her own faltering confidence.

For a cartoon, *Captain Star* achieves an unusual level of self-referential complexity. During the episode “Galaxy of Stars,” the captain agrees to take *The Boiling Hell* on a short excursion to the “Convention Planet,” where a massive “Captain Star” convention will be held. Not only is Star “The Greatest Hero That Any World Has Ever Known,” but he has his own television show, which chronicles his own adventures in fictional form. The actor who plays Star is a self-centered ham named Kenneth Shed, who fancies that he is more Star than Star himself. His make-believe exploits are magnified grossly, and his crew-mates depicted as hapless dummies, much to the dismay of the actual Scarlett! Jones, on the other hand, is perfectly happy in his admiration of the completely fictional Star.

Shed has even convinced himself that the real Captain Star admires the actor! Basking in his attention during the convention, he arranges to rig a look-alike contest to see who most resembles the real Star, with Shed as judge. What he doesn't know is that Star has been talked into attending the convention with his crew. To their consternation, no-one believes that they are really who they are! Shed picks another contestant as the best look-alike, passing over the *real* Star.

As the episode winds down into chaos, actor Shed loses his control of the audience ... *as well* as his toupee!

Self-references multiply in the form of frequent flashbacks into Star's past, in happier days when his crew were properly uniformed and functioning as a disciplined team, when they saved the galaxy on a regular basis and made record sales to newly discovered planets.

Stoker Jones reflects on his favourite felines, all named "Sputnik," and reflects on their untimely ends by their number. He even sings a funny little shanty about the accident that gave him his multiple arms and heads. But if the past holds many memories, the future appears to offer nothing.

What happened? Why *did* Mission Control send Star and his crew to The Forgotten Planet, and to the Ragged Edge of the Universe? It is never explained. Although Star leaves the planet from time to time, for one reason or another, he always returns to his post where he waits... and waits... and waits for orders that never come.

Speculation suggests that Star's time is over, that Mission Control wants him to retire, but cannot simply give him a gold watch and a rousing send-off. As the universe's greatest hero, *he is too important*. So he is swept under a bureaucratic carpet, to be conveniently forgotten – very much as Star's own hero, Ned Nova, had been in *his* day!

It can hardly be said that Star's days are empty. Although he spends much of his time watching the stars, waiting for his orders, there is a constant stream of visitors to The Nameless Planet. Android salesmen introduce a living carpet, whose microscopic life forms reproduce and overwhelm the planet. A famous collector of freaks attempts to abduct Jones, and exhibit him as the only "Nine-Head" in the galaxy. Alien teddy bears complicate the finding of the missing Twenty-Nine Captains (who are missing a second time). A mail-order Best Friend arrives by mail for Jones, but nearly succeeds in *replacing* him. Bloater, the unpopular old classmate from Captain's Academy, abducts Star's ship, then by covering it with a clever roll-on plastic disguise, claims it is his own. Ned Nova, lost for many years after his forced retirement, is found on The Nameless Planet, frozen in the solidified vomit of a giant space worm!

Visitors to the Nameless Planet are odd lot, but the planet itself is even more remarkable. There is a Low Flying Moon that becomes jugged out of its orbit. A Traveling Sea is followed by stilt fish. On one occasion, a vent is blocked that leads to a potentially

explosive expansion. The edge of the observable universe is marked by a very prosaic black curtain.

*Captain Star* was the brainchild of a British artist and writer, Steven Appleby. I've only seen a few isolated strips of the original comic, which are noticeably more crudely drawn than the animated version. As well, a number of small changes appear to have been made to the comic to adapt it to the screen. The little I've seen strongly suggests that Science Officer Scarlett has been made less abrasive for the animated cartoon. In the original, she may, in fact, have held Captain Star in *very* low esteem. Navigator Black also appears to be a little different, with a fussy little mustache. Captain Star seems much the same as he does on TV, as does Stoker "Limbs" Jones. There also seem to be other, unnamed crewmen in the comic, but they are little more than nameless, faceless figures, and don't appear in the animated cartoons.

Appleby published his *Captain Star* comics under the title *Rockets Passing Overhead*, a title that echoes Star's own planet-bound condition. The original comic strips were published in various magazines, including *Punch*, and then collected together in the *Captain Star Omnibus* ... of which I can say nothing, having never seen it.

Appleby sold the idea of an animated series to a Manchester studio, Cosgrove Hall Films. Given the absurdist nature of the material, it couldn't have been an easy pitch. The show was picked up by ITV for British distribution, and – significantly – by Teletoon in Canada. It seems likely to me that history would have overlooked *Captain Star*, otherwise.

Given that there were only 13 episodes, one can only guess what other wonders might have been in store if the series had been renewed for a second season. Worse, it is almost impossible to view even the one season of *Captain Star* that *was* broadcast! Only a single videotape, containing a mere three episodes, was ever produced for commercial release. By the time DVD's, Blu-Rays and streaming videos over the Internet became a thing, *Captain Star* was already a fading memory.

*Captain Star* is *not* entirely lost, however. I taped it myself on videocassette, and I still *have* a video player. Assuming, that is, that the tapes haven't degraded over the years since I recorded them. If still intact, they may in fact be superior to the digital copies on my hard drive that I acquired through fan connections. (Thank you, Chuck Connor.) Finally, you can find all 13 episodes on YouTube. But neither the digital copies on my hard drive, nor those posted on YouTube are of particularly high quality. If interested in viewing them, you probably have no other choice other than those relatively poor copies.

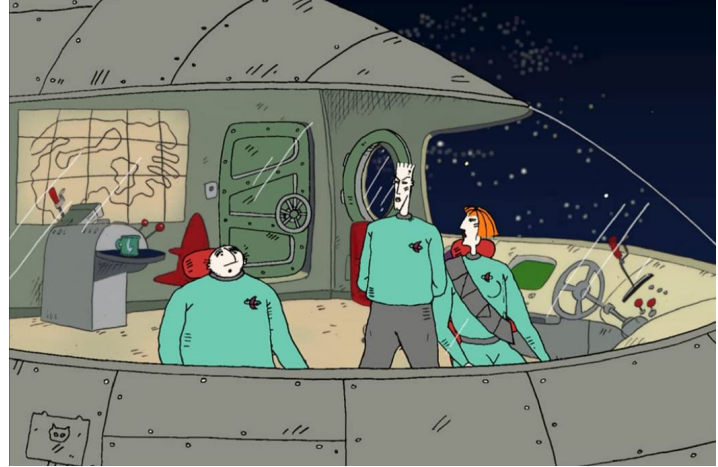
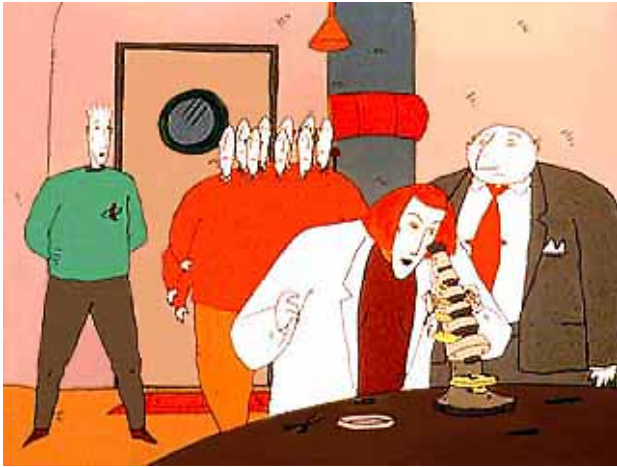
I've listed the URLs for the first three episodes in correct order. The rest you can look up online if your curiosity is piqued.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3zaP312rXXw>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H-dFHBc-qrg>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JvbLfE3fjHc>

It's my hope that someday the omission of *Captain Star* from our video history will be corrected, and all 13 episodes of *Captain Star* will be released in high-quality digital format for everyone to see. But if the corporate short-sighted obsession with immediate profits is anything to go by, I may wait a long time. I console myself that at least I *have* copies, *regardless* of recording quality. There is no question that I'll expect to return again and again to *Captain Star*, and the strangely compelling wistfulness and pervasive sense of disappointment that is life on The Nameless Planet. At those times, I feel that I live my *own* life on a Nameless Planet, and – like Star in his reassuring wheelbarrow on a lonely cliff top that overlooks *The Boiling Hell* – wait for orders that never come.



*[Footnote. As I checked my facts for this article, I only learned that Steven Appleby is trans, and calls herself "she." I'm not entirely sure what this means, since I suspect that it means different things to different people, but it really matters little to this discussion.]*

## Dark Matters:Locs

**Kent Polard – [kentpollard@gmail.com](mailto:kentpollard@gmail.com) – 9 Apr 2023**

Hi Taral, Sorry to hear that Travelling Matt has had such a rough month, and you with it. When I was more actively advocating for the MS Society, I once suggested to our city council that they should try spending a few hours in a wheelchair or scooter, including at least one grocery stop. I also particularly suggested crossing the street from a grocery store to a department store in a newly constructed suburb with pedestrian lights which do not change unless a button is pressed, and the button was put on an island with no curb cuts. I didn't even think of winter. We don't attempt to get Victoria in her chair anywhere other than building-to-building by van. Our nation is not friendly to people who don't have easy access to vehicles.

We haven't checked out *Strange New Worlds*, though we wanted to. It wasn't anywhere we had access in a live fashion, and we passed on our disc player and discs to friends living in a remote part of the province with no TV to speak of, so that is no longer an option for us. I'm sure it will show up at some point, but it might be better if I don't invest energy in it until we see if it lasts long enough to find its way. We are enjoying *Picard*, though not as much as the previous seasons. I'd have been happier if they didn't do the whole crew reunion arc this year.

I just finished Season one of "The Peripheral," and was pleased with that, and we liked the reboot of "Quantum Leap," though on the whole my video watching has dropped precipitously in the last few months.

I haven't even tried to see the last season or two of several things I was following avidly in the past, including "Expanse." I am looking forward to the second series of "Good Omens" as we both greatly enjoyed the first. I'm also keen to see the second season of Asimov's "Foundation," so I guess there's still plenty of TV in my life.

Take care, and I hope your transportation stabilizes quickly in a good way.

– Kent

*A bylaw in Toronto mandates that all stores have wheelchair accessible ramps when there is a step in the entrance. Such a ramp can be made by any number of places around the city for a couple of hundred bucks – they are very simple and only made of wood. But you'd probably only a third of the places that ought to have ramps have bothered. You'd think they would realize that they are potentially losing business, but it doesn't seem to occur to anyone.*

*I've seen season one of "Foundation," and had mixed feelings about it. Anything that I was able to relate to the original seemed to have messed it up badly. The introduction of too much family background and love interest seemed positively at odds with the clinical, emotionless vision of science as glamorized by Asimov in his day. But whatever was actually original seemed quite interesting – the visualization of Trantor, for instance, and surface-to-orbit tube, and the expansion of the lives of the cloned emperors Cleon, were compelling. – TW*

### **Ken Fletcher – [kenfletch@comcast.net](mailto:kenfletch@comcast.net) – 10 Apr 2023**

I did not go to the Minicon sf convention this weekend. However, I am going to a small start-up gaming convention next weekend. "DaveCon" says it is celebrating Dave Arneson, one of the co-creators of fantasy role-playing gaming, and co-creator of the Dungeons & Dragons game. (I am not that active a gamer, but I am interested in the history of "wargaming" into "fantasy role-playing". I did work for a few years doing graphic art for some gaming companies in the 1980s

– Fletch

### **Eric Mayer – 11 Apr 2023**

It's disconcerting to see my name in a loccol after so long. I stopped writing locs about eight years ago, soon after my e-zine died along with the rest of Arnie Katz's *TePe Apa*. Since then I've read your fanzines and corresponded with you privately and that's been about the extent of my involvement with fandom, until now.

Unfortunately, trying to write a letter that might be seen by someone other than the recipient has given me stage fright. Kind of weird because in the days when I cranked out multiple locs every week, I rarely composed my locs as if they were mini essays. I simply wrote off the top of my head, as if I were dashing off a letter to a friend. I treated locs as communications to editors rather than as material meant for publication, which did sometimes get me into trouble for expressing myself imprecisely or saying things I shouldn't have said. I figured that in thanking the faned I'd fulfilled my obligation and I always enjoyed having conversations about what had interested me in the zine. I actually remembering reading articles about what constituted a "good" loc, To me a good loc is any loc which is written and sent. So that's my elaborate excuse for this rather uninspired reply to *Dark Toys 74*, your first major zine in quite awhile.

*I didn't think it had been that long. But the date on the document in early December, so I guess it's been five months. Despite how winters seem to drag out for \*years,\* 2023 has actually been flying by at surprising speed!*

What leaps out at me are your Traveling Matt troubles. Just awful. And I'm surprised you'll need to cough up \$800 for new batteries. Sure, that would be a given in the USA where medical providers' profits count

more than peoples' health, but in Canada? What use is a mobile chair if it won't move for lack of batteries? What about people who need such a chair but don't have \$800?

*Unfortunately, I have no comparison to go by. The city or province does have an emergency fund for hardship cases, and it was the government that paid for Traveling Matt I and II. After five years, it may pay for Traveling Matt III. But they don't pay for batteries or repairs! I can't offer a rationale for why government does anything, or how it does it, and have to abide by whatever I'm given as an explanation. However, a friend has drawn up a list of alternate companies that may be able to repair Traveling Matt more expeditiously ... maybe not as ruinously expensive, either. Since the bastards I contacted did NOT phone back after the long weekend, and twice leaving messages, I think I'll be shopping around tomorrow.*

I wonder if the defective wheel was damaged when you got stuck in the pothole or if you got stuck because it was already not functioning properly?

*It may already have been malfunctioning, but it was mostly because I was stuck in the mud.*

It's heartening, at least, to know that at least in your country and neighborhood passersby were willing to assist. I have problems getting my car up a muddy right-of-way across a neighbor's property and out to the road. Bad weather can prevent me going out, just as it does you. I know how frustrating that can be. But once I can get to the road I'm fine. I don't need to worry about getting stuck all along my route. I might be too stressed to go out at all if I had to face that very often.

Star Trek...I don't recall seeing any of the television series except for the original, probably because I never cared for the original even when it was a big deal to have a science fiction show on TV. Why, I can't say. It just never grabbed me. I have seen some of the movies which I liked better but not enough to make me curious about the subsequent series. Yes, I am kind of an anti-trekkie. I seem to have been born with a natural immunity to Star Trek. At one time that might have earned me bonus points in Trufandom.

*It's true... there was once quite an animus against Star Trek among fans in the early days. It wasn't "real" science fiction, just TV action-adventure. It was derivative of 1930s and 40's pulp fiction. It was championed by hoardes of young Trekkies who threatened to swamp established fandom. Since then, most SF fans have learned to transfer their animus to the true enemy – Star Wars.*

Still, I know enough about Star Trek to recognize that scene with the boulder and the crag in the background of your striking cover. Also I can discern Dr Who's call box, the H.G. Wells Martian and the monolith from 2001. Also isn't that the Fireball XL-5? I suspect there are references that go past me. Although I do wonder about the amusing flat crawling creature which reminds me of the aliens in Hal Clements' an excellent old school SF book.

*From left to right: Tintin in a spacesuit that is a disguised mimeograph machine. Kirk and the Gorn, skypad apartments from the Jetsons, Fireball XL-5, one of the Star Bugs from Red Dwarf (or as Lister puts it, a "Star Boog), Australopithecines from 2001, a Martian tripod, a shuttle craft from the Enterprise, a Sand Crawler from Star Wars, the Jupiter II, a tardis, a Mesklinite from Hal Clement's Mission of Gravity, and finally a Solenoid robot from the Roger Ramjet cartoon show.*

I can commiserate with your Internet problems. I've already described to you my own horror story from last year when, during a storm, a falling tree brought down the utility lines and I ended up without phone or Internet for almost two weeks. I was not alone out here in the sticks either. It was a common story. The Internet provider has been flooded with complaints and is under investigation because it simply did not employ enough people to deal with repairs. In this county they employed only a single contractor. I ended up playing the solitaire games that come with Windows. First time ever!

As you say, you don't realize how much you depend on the Internet until you lose access. Not only to keep up with and communicate with the outside world but it also serves as a kind of enhanced mind. Unlike my own feeble brain it remembers everything and knows everything. And it's right here all the time. Incredible! I can Google some forgotten bit of trivia faster than I can rack my own brain for it. (As a kid, if I couldn't find an obscure fact in the World Book Encyclopedia my parents had bought for me, I'd have to walk to the library to search Britannica.) However, around here, all this depends on one thin, vulnerable phone wire!

With Internet outages and jerks encountered in stores, plumbing disasters, broken shot glasses and cut feet, and transportation problems this is an exciting issue but maybe it would be better if, next issue, you don't have so much material to work with. Hopefully you will encounter so few disasters that you'll have to scratch your head and wonder what news there is to write about.

– Eric Mayer

**Garth Spencer – [hrothgarweems@gmail.com](mailto:hrothgarweems@gmail.com) – 5 May 2013**

What has happened to you in the past month? Did Traveling Matt get fixed or replaced? You seem to have more than your share of tedious irritations and frustrations. Some of those are pretty serious, given your mobility issues. There are moments, while trying to get repair services or social services, when you have to wonder which country or decade you're living in, aren't there?

*It's been an on-going story that isn't quite finished yet! Briefly, I gave up on the original contractor. I phoned them twice, got someone who didn't know anything who said they would call back, but both times never called. I gave up on them, and phoned a different company. From the start, the new outfit behaved in a far more professional manner, and I had no trouble being in constant touch with developments. A man came to diagnose the complaint, and I was given an estimate for repairs a day later. The problem then was that they didn't have the parts. They were on order. I phoned a week later, but still no parts. But they did schedule a date to remove the chair to their shop. On the appointed day, the service man arrived, but discovered that he couldn't **move** the chair! There are brakes on each wheel motor. One wheel wouldn't work, but then the working wheel wouldn't disengage so that both would be free-wheeling. After a while, the guy gave up and phoned the office. They said they would bring a dolly next day ... which they did. The new guy said the first one didn't know his ass from a hole in the ground, promptly disengaged both brakes properly and wheeled the chair out of the apartment! Then today, Friday, I got a call from the repair shop to say that they've done the work, replaced my aging batteries, and will deliver the finished work on Monday. So that's what I mean by saying that it is a tale not yet finished! Cost of repairs and new batteries? \$1,740!*

Not that this is news. I have frequently had the impression that I was somehow transposed to Bizarro World, or at least another timeline, where people do things almost but not quite entirely unlike the social norms I learned. After a while it just isn't worth it to try to keep track.

*I never have the feeling that I don't understand what's going on in the world. Instead, I just have the feeling that everything is going **horribly** wrong!*

As to the annoyances and even life-threatening conditions represented by an Eastern winter, I can only conclude that we should fill in Hudson Bay to prevent Arctic weather patterns from encroaching on our continent.

Now, I know what you're thinking, but filling in Hudson Bay actually makes sense! Consider the advantages: by eliminating this intrusion of the Arctic Ocean and encouraging climate change in Canada, we could finally push the limit of settlement northward, and finally expand our population and economy enough that Canada could deal with other nations from a position of equal strength. We might even live up to our NATO and



peacekeeping obligations! And prevent Eric Mayer's heating woes, and solve some of the immigration employment problems Rob Jennings points out.

*It's a clever scheme, but it won't work. Nature will see to it that any attempt to fill in Hudson's Bay will go for naught. Global warming and rising sea levels will drown any landfill faster than we can fill it.*

The Adventure of the Shattered Shot Glass is a familiar and common experience. Not so long ago I had a remotely similar experience, while replacing an overhead light bulb: the glass bowl covering I was putting back slipped in my hands and shattered. Now, I have a cat, and keep her indoors, so I try to keep the indoor environment safe for her: one more reason to keep the floor free of sharp and unhygienic obstructions. But after scrupulous sweeping and mopping I was still discovering itty-bitty shards in inconvenient places. This is bachelor life.

Eric Mayer's comment on Lloyd Penney is apt. He has been such a prolific loccer that I sometimes wondered if he were the secret love child of Harry Warner Jr. by Georgina Ellis. Given his current editorial responsibilities at *Amazing Stories*, though, he will have to slow down. – Garth Spencer

**Lloyd Penney** – [penneys@bell.net](mailto:penneys@bell.net) – **June 2023**, (1706-24 Eva Rd. Etobicoke, ON M9C 2B2)

That cover looks so familiar...Graeme Cameron's Faned awards from what seems aeons ago. The Jupiter 2 up above, along with Fireball XL5, the air tank on the astronaut is a Gestetner, looks like Tintin in the suit, one of Roger Ramjet's Solenoid Robots at the hotdog stand, looks like the Jetsons' city in the distance, a 2001 black monolith back there, plus a TARDiS, and a Star Wars Jawas vehicle, too.

Hope you can get your chair fixed soon. Our ability to move at will is something we don't appreciate until it becomes difficult or impossible. – Lloyd Penney

*If you've read the previous letters, you'll know that I can walk-back-and-forth in my apartment, but any father is extremely difficult. It means I'll not likely ever go anywhere that Matt's batteries won't carry me and still get home on my own. I won't be chancing any flights, or even spending time at local conventions. Basically, my world ends at a distance of about three miles when batteries are new.*

*Here I thought that Lloyd had undertaken his editing at Amazing Stories simply because there weren't enough fanzines being published anymore to keep him adequately busy... There were a couple of reasons why I re-used that art for the cover on this issue. The main one was that it is almost certain that almost no-one ever saw the art. The award was a pet project of Graeme Cameron's and I don't think it ever made much impact on fandom's awareness. It didn't help that the awards were essentially dictated by RGC for the first three years, and then abandoned by him after a couple of more years. The other consideration I had was that every year I subtly changed a small detail in the art. When I decided to re-purpose the work, I edited all the small background details into one single design.*

I always thought I could make a contribution by loccing, but these days, a zine can simply be an expression of the faned's life, and no commentary is needed. Not everyone wants the correspondence or the communication. I haven't cut back on loccing so much as I do it when I have the time, like right now as I type. I have been the editor-in-chief of *Amazing Stories* for 8 months now, and I am still hoping to get a full grasp on things, but seeing we are only putting some pretty good short stories on the website, I feel like we are just idling. If we can ever get enough cash to actually print, that's when I will get super busy.

The treaty you and Bob Jennings mention as being between Canada and the US when it comes to refugees has been described as being unfair to refugees, but just the other day, was described as mostly legal and

within the constitution by the Ontario Superior Court, with some provisions. There are times when people are the last thing considered by government legislation, and this is one of them.

*I still haven't entirely made sense of this issue in my mind. Everyone acts as though it were the most inhuman thing imaginable if the country doesn't throw the borders open to anyone who walks in, without asking their name, thinking of how they are going to find work or where they are going to live. Yes, it's all very moral, and all, but Canada has grown from a nation of 18 million people to 40 million (as of today's CBC headline!) in my own lifetime ... and I'm not even dead yet! It is a big country, but a lot of it is uninhabitable, resources are no limitless, climate change will likely reduce some resources further, there is a housing shortage that we can't keep up with, and the major cities are expanding into essential farm land in order to build more new households! Everyone wants to play We Are All Human Together, but I wonder if we are not beginning to see the lifeboat rocking, and if the entire boat might founder if too many refugees are pulled from the water? And so far I haven't actually talked about the treaty or the constitution. I simply don't know **what** to think.*

When it came to the Picard iteration of Trek, we did indeed see Daniel David once again play Professor Moriarty, even if it was only for a few minutes as part of a security program.

*It seems as though the trailer I saw was misleading. But, to his surprise, The Critical Drinker claims that the third season was actually quite good, and recaptured some of the ST-TNG excitement.*

I have seen pictures of British coins, 50p pieces with Charles on them, but that's been it so far.

*I'm also searching for the new Canadian toonie with the blacked-out Queen Elizabeth. I'll be on the look-out at the upcoming coin show, and will likely find a couple as a last resort.*

I have seen a few episodes of *Prodigy* and *Lower Decks*, but *Lower Decks* moves too fast, and *Prodigy* was moved about on television so that I couldn't tape the episodes. We saw the first episode of the second season of *Strange New Worlds* the other night...I think they forgot a lot of the good things they learned in the first season. I hope things will improve.

*I haven't seen SNW season two... this doesn't sound good, but I'm not surprised. Though I liked season one in general, I thought there were nagging problems that could easily grow worse.*

**WAHF David Redd – 13 Apr 2013 [dave\\_redd@hotmail.com](mailto:dave_redd@hotmail.com)**

---

## *Into the Dark – Joshua Quagmire d.2023*

Dylan Thomas warned us all not to go gently into that good night, but rage, rage against the dying of the light.

The comic artist Joshua Quagmire has died. He appears to have had been actively working on new artistic projects when he went into a Santa Monica veteran's hospital for treatment of continuing health issues, but collapsed suddenly just as he was due for release from rehabilitation.

Walt Wentz is a friend of mine who had known the artist for more than 40 years, and was concerned when he lost track of Josh. He contacted me a week ago in case I had heard anything. Unfortunately, I had not had any contact with Josh since the early days of *Rowrbrazzle*, and the little I had heard in intervening years had been sketchy at best. He had been retaining excess fluid and complaining of low energy, but still managed to update his current project (a

webcomic title “Bunz and Katz”) while at the VA hospital receiving treatment, and later in a rehabilitation center.

Then, on May 28<sup>th</sup>, Josh suddenly stopped communicating, and Walt feared the worst. I wasn’t able to add anything that Walt didn’t already know ... in fact, even less. In the end, Walt was right to fear the worst; shortly afterward he sent me an email saying that Josh had passed away. All that Walt was able to discover that the artist had died in a Santa Monica hospital – when or why, the hospital operator couldn’t or wouldn’t say.

A very few more details have leaked out from various sources, chiefly Josh’s three sisters. They informed Walt that the artist was active and at work on his website and new projects up until the very end. He was scheduled to be released from rehab on the 30<sup>th</sup>, but then an internal infection suddenly went critical, and he was transferred to the hospital, where he died of multiple organ failure in the Intensive Care Unit.

I had known Josh reasonably well for a while in the early 1980s, when we corresponded. He sent me copies of many of his comics that I read with interest. But then I got caught up in some absurd feud that Josh was conducting with the cartoonist *apa*, *Rowrbrazzle*. I was a member at the time, and freely reported to Josh some things that I overheard. However, when I realized that he was using my revelations to conduct his feud, I stopped feeding him the ammunition he sought. After that, I was dismissed for siding with the other members. I've mostly forgotten what most of this was about.

It is hard to dispute that Joshua Quagmire was a difficult person to get along with, judging from the number of people who had gotten on the *wrong* side of him. For what it’s worth, it is easy to make a layman’s snap judgment that he had a personality problem of some sort. On the other hand, there is ample testimony that Josh also had many friends who he never fell out with, right up until the end. Nevertheless, it seems that Joshua Quagmire preferred to keep some distance from fandom as a whole.

Josh earned a high degree of respect from his peers in the early days of independent comics, particularly in furry comics. His best-known book, *Cutey Bunny*, ran for four issues during the early 1980s. It was one of the best known black-and-white, independent comics, along with *Albedo*, *Omaha* and *Yosagi Yogimbo*, before the implosion of furry comic titles.

Unfortunately, I lost touch with Josh after the *Rowrbrazzle* debacle. Now and then I would hear a little about the artist from my friends Walt Wentz and E.T. Bryan, who remained in touch with him. Did he have any surviving family? Gradually, it emerged that he had three sisters who lived in a different part of the country. Did he have a will or anything to leave? No idea. What were his plans? The sisters who posted the news on Facebook have registered a vague desire to keep Quagmire’s website and comic strip alive. Apparently some scripts remain that make it possible that “Bunz and Katz” could be continued, given the right collaborators. About the only thing more that I can add is that his birth name was Richard Glen Lester II, and that he will leave a somewhat fragmentary legacy, with many projects only begun, and many more that only lived in his active imagination – now lost to the world.

*(It would have been impossible to publish this article without the input of Walt Wentz, Brian O’Connell and several members of Rowrbrazzle who added many needed details to the life of Joshua Quagmire, and to the circumstances of his death. <http://www.cuteybunny.com/>)*

# On the Face of It : A Conversation With SaaraMar

Well, Boss, I was really quite exercised about the "face on Mars" business. Since I could trust neither cranks nor scientists – indeed, with ideas such as "dark energy" and "branes" floating around in legitimate science, I wasn't sure I could tell the difference – I asked an expert in matters concerning space travel.

"Saara," I said, "what about the face on Mars?"

"I didn't do it," she said from behind a book.

"I know you didn't, but is there one?"

"Alright, I did draw one. But just a little one, on the side of a cliff, that looks a little like William H. Macy. It was supposed to look like Johnny Depp made up like a Ferengi, but you're the artist, not me."

"You drew a face on a rock on Mars? Why?" I asked her.

"It seemed like a funny idea at the time ... what with a face on Mars being in all the tabloids."

"But Saara, what about the face in Cydonia that was photographed from orbit? The one formed by an odd geological formation? It is just an optical illusion, isn't it?"

"Now really... what do you think?"

"It's an illusion."

"Don't be silly, it's an illusion," Saara replied, putting down the book she had been reading.

"That's what I said."

"Are you sure? You've never been there, have you?"

Well, of course she had me there, Boss, so we're going to look. Be back with the news as soon as I can. Don't wait up, it's about 62,000,000 miles each way at the moment. I'll sent a postcard if I can find four million one-cent stamps.

[]

*[I have the feeling that I published this once before, perhaps in an early issue of Broken Toys. In any case, I needed to fill some space, and the ending has been very slightly changed. And that's another issue.]*

**Endit**