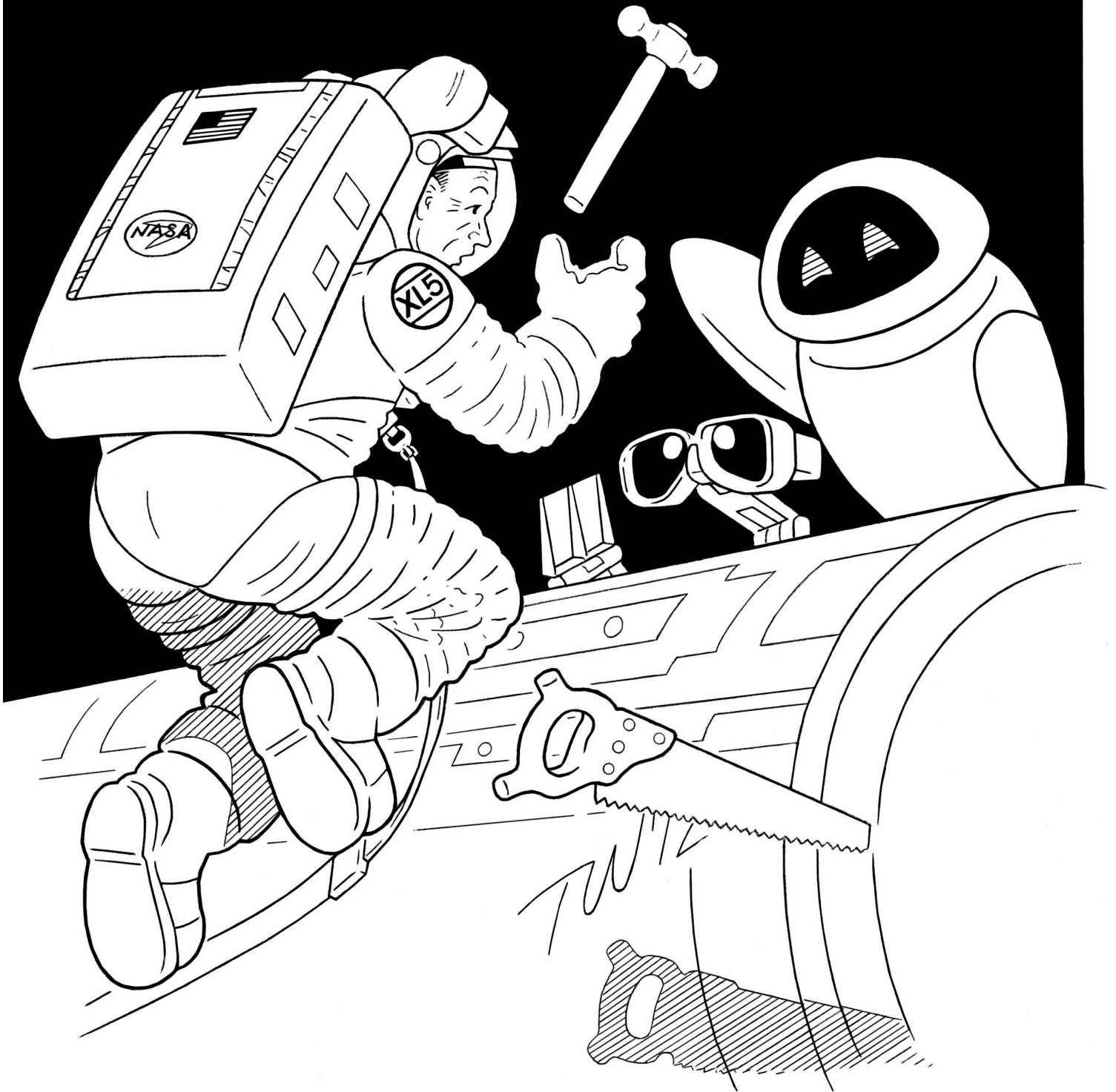


Dark Toys 76





Issue 76 is optimistically dated October 2023. The center of the universe is still 245 Dunn Avenue, Apartment 2111, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M6K 1S6. Some people are under the mistaken impression that it is either British fandom or New York City, but they are mistaken. The true center is here, in front of my keyboard and computer monitor, where I manipulate reality with impunity! Phone (416) 531-8974, or TaraI@bell.net – Kiddelidivee Books & Art 336

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Life in Motion:

Good Things Must End ... Badly

It had been a quiet month. Of course, it couldn't last. The hot weather returned, along with record humidity. So of course, my air conditioner began acting up.

I thought I was prepared for it, so whenever I resorted to turning the AC on, I carefully drained the reservoir and emptied whatever was in it down the sink. Oddly, there was little water visible. I thought nothing more about it, and at the end of my day I went to bed. Sometime in the middle of my sleep, I got up to use the bathroom, and discovered a literal river flowing through the living room and half way down the hall, on its way to escape under the front door! Crap. As on previous

occasions, the obvious source of the water was from under where the AC sat. The water wasn't coming from the tank, so it was escaping from somewhere else. I also couldn't fathom why the delay of three or four hours after turning the unit off. I drained it before bed, so why did the reservoir seem empty at bed time, and *only* leak out when I was asleep? Where was the water coming from if not the tank? Where could it possibly be stored if not *there*?

I went out to investigate and promptly slipped in the slick film of water, going down like a ton of government paperwork. I'd never done that before, water or no water, but perhaps it was because I had ventured out without slippers. And it was ***deep!***

To make a long story short, I fell three times in as many minutes, each time knocking things around and, in the end, accumulated a number of minor injuries. Although I hadn't felt a thing, at the end of spill number-three I found splatters of blood whose origin I was unable to guess. Eventually, I found the injuries were not as bad as they first seemed, just scratches on my legs. But then I also discovered a bloody scrape along my side that was oozing blood. Fortunately, it was not as serious as it appeared either, and the flow soon stopped. Despite the gore, it actually was quite superficial.

Meanwhile, I had knocked over a ton of collectibles – from my Muppet display to the Sgt. Peppers Beatles figures, from the Star Trek models to my Ghostbusters figures. Several work trays on my desk had been disrupted during one of my falls, and it seems that the tin, bottom book shelf may have to be hammered out again. Worse, the *one* thing that suffered any real damage at all from the splatters of blood was, *of course*, a drawing I was working on. Nothing else. Of course.

My first action after gingerly getting to my feet was to phone downstairs. The building I live in has an office for a pool of office social workers who care for the tenants, mainly elderly and disabled occupants like myself. I explained that I was deep enough in water to drown the cockroaches. A couple of the women, who look after aging old geezers like me, came to my apartment and mopped up. After that, she said I shouldn't turn on my air conditioner. This went without saying, regardless of the heat and high humidity. But she also mentioned that someone would come up next day to advise me.

The worst case is that whoever comes tomorrow will just re-iterate that I shouldn't use the AC, and if I want air conditioning, I'll have to spend a shit load of money repairing the useless piece of crap that was forced on me by the city when they decided to replace everyone's window-mounted original with a bulky, inconvenient floor-mounted model. In a dream world, the city would actually acknowledge their fault when they made me swap my own unit for theirs, and fix the damned thing! I'm not holding my breath.

To be honest, I had doubts even before the leakage that the window-mounted AC

has ever been worth the money. It barely kept the area immediately where I worked a little cooler, and a fan I have does the job almost as well. The new floor model sat on the floor where it blew all the cool air on the floor, and where little good was done at head level! Not only that, but I had to regularly drain the water reservoir. On particularly hot and humid days, it was a daily chore. Even before it began leaking, it was a difficult operation. The drain was so low that there was almost nothing that would fit under it to catch the water, and getting it out from underneath without spilling any of on the way it was nearly impossible. I had to tilt the entire AC to carefully draw the plastic basin from under. Next, I had to carry the basin through the living room without spilling any on the way to the bathroom. This is not the easiest thing to do at best, but when it is difficult to walk fifty feet, it is *more* than an inconvenience! *That* was the case of a well-functioning floor-mounted air conditioner.

The new reality is the prospect of a costly repair job that might result a bill similar to half to two-thirds of a brand new AC! Is it any wonder I'm wondering if I shouldn't cut my losses and junk the fucking old clunker on the floor I was stuck with *now*, and just do without? Of course, it would just be *better* for the environment if old people died of heat prostration, *wouldn't it?* For the time being, however, I had to hope that there'd be better news tomorrow when the AC was inspected.

The building handyman came to my door next afternoon. He was no expert in air conditioners, just the guy who replaces light bulbs and fixes the tap. After I explained what had happened, showed where the AC leaked, where the water went and all the rest, he simply confirmed with me that the city's replacement was a piece of cheap junk, and I should never have been forced to swap my original outside unit and the entire program of swapping had been a waste of taxpayer money, forced on everyone by a politically active committee of tenant do-gooders. Unfortunately, there was nothing *he* could do about my AC. I was stuck with the good intentions of busy-bodies. In short, I was screwed. Repair it, buy a new one that complied with the city's rules against outside units, or do without.

I have since learned that learned that my mysterious flooding events were likely from a build-up of ice in the unit while it was operating. There was no sign of a problem until two of three hours later, after I had gone to bed, when the built-up ice had had a chance to melt. My question after that was, "*why* does *ice* form in a air conditioner working in a hot room?"

No News Is Just Bad News

It's been almost exactly a month since my last update about the troubles with my air-conditioner... I think understandably, since it didn't have a happy resolution. For some time, I didn't even want to talk about the damn AC. At first, it appeared that a very simple solution had presented itself. The AC had a long, flexible plastic tube

that exhausted the hot air through the window outside. I discovered that it was beginning to deteriorate, and I was patching it up with duct tape. No amount seemed enough, and it looked like most of the upper end had been wrapped around and around to keep the entire thing from falling apart. My friend Steven found that I could buy a replacement for the flexible plastic exhaust tube rather cheaply, and installed it for me. We had hopes that this was the end of the problem of icing and subsequent flooding.

But, the next time the weather was hot and humid, there was yet another flood. This time not as bad, but clearly the new exhaust duct had not solved the basic problem. As before, I had drained the reservoir that night, and found it completely empty. The flood only occurred after I had gone to bed, but when I got up, there was a slowly moving tide creeping down the living room floor. So it looks like a cheap repair hadn't been enough ... I need an *expensive* repair. On none at all. The question now is whether spending a lot of money to the AC to be taken to a shop for professional repair really makes sense. If it will cost as much as an estimated \$400 to repair an air conditioner, and I could buy a brand new one with a warranty for \$650, is *repair* sensible? I don't know.

I've been living through this summer near a number of fans, where I spend most of my time, and actually I've gotten along perfectly fine. As well, summer has faded into fall, so it seems there is little need for me to make up my mind in a hurry. But I might as well try to make some inquiries into repair, and see if more information will help me make up my mind. In the meantime, the weather has been more moderate, so I've only turned the AC on for brief periods, and flooding hasn't been a continued issue. So far, so good. But clearly this is not a real solution to the problem.

Calling the Kettle Black

Recently, a few comments have been made in print that the interest in fan awards has grown less over time. Judging for myself, I have no doubt this is true. American fans in particular seem relatively apathetic. The reasons for this are many and elusive, and any list of them is likely to include divisive and contradictory opinions – of who these awards represent, as well as their purpose. Fans who are obviously less apathetic have tried to clarify the purpose of such awards, filling endless pages with discussion. But with little agreement.

Probably no one has said more on the subject than one fan who is probably more involved with the conversation and is more active in its running than any other – it seems redundant to mention his name.

To clear the air, if only for myself, my interest in awards comes and goes. I prefer not to keep my ear too near the ground, but it seems just as unnatural to be completely clueless. Maybe there is no right attitude to have to awards? Whatever

my position, doubtless others will have more to say on the subject as long as there is a fandom. Meanwhile we try our best to act normally... Which is *what*, actually?

God is Dead and Doing Well in America

Friedrich Nietzsche famously said that “God is dead.” Is he? Was he ever alive? It goes without saying that most Americans fervently believe in the Son of God, the Crucifixion and the Resurrection, but a billion people on this same planet have also believed in thunder gods, gods who rule over the underworld, or gods with animal heads, and if you are the average European or American, you have no reason to take any of this seriously. So why do so many Westerners believe in Jesus, though there is no more reason to believe in one god than all the others?

At first glance, there *was* a Jesus. But *was* there? What evidence do we have? The conventional answer references the Gospels, which is like proving the existence of Santa Clause, because so many films about him are released around the 25th of December. Similarly, we have no evidence that Jesus was born on the said day.

In fact, scholars have debated the actual date that Jesus was born for as long as there has been biblical scholarship, with the consensus being that he would have been born anywhere between 4 BC and 7 AD, depending on different textual references. There is as much uncertainty about almost everything else concerning the life of Jesus, and the common narrative has been largely written in order to be simple.

The only sensible way to view the existence of Jesus – assuming that a real person has been loosely described in the New Testament – is that the real Jesus was a populist preacher. He was likely from Galilee, an area well north of Jerusalem and heavily Hellenized in Roman times. Assuming that he preached in Jerusalem, he was not a member of the Jewish priesthood, and the tradition that he was well educated is open to question. In fact, it’s my guess that his ministry was centered on the countryside, rather than the big cities around the Decapolis, because the highly educated elite in the cities would have laughed at any country bumpkin. The bible says Jesus was well versed in Jewish teachings, but once again that’s like quoting from *Miracle on 34th Street*. All we can reasonably know is that he was a stump preacher, who made his living traveling from village to village and drawing a crowd. He likely told the audience what they wanted to hear – about opulent priests and sumptuous synagogues, with perhaps the occasional miracle alluded to.

Before long, Jesus came to the attention of local authorities. He got into trouble with the king or with local Jewish authorities who didn't like upstarts stirring up trouble, and so he fled south, to Jerusalem.

In Jerusalem, he immediately got into even more trouble with the local authorities. More on that, later.

Very little was ever written down about the early years of this Jesus. His name was *Yeshua* – not the Greek version you are familiar with, nor the Greek word *Christos*, meaning The Anointed One. For about 75 years he was remembered only by word of mouth among his believers, and only then did any of those believers write down the story of Jesus, and that is *all* that we know at first hand. In that interval, a huge number of mythological stories seem to have been attached to this Jesus, which borrowed from older myths ... and it's mainly these older myths that make up Christianity as we know it today.

Studies have shown that comparative mythology accounts for almost all the features of other mythological figures such as Osiris, Mithras, Dionysus, Isis, Sol Invictus, Tammuz and many others. Lord Raglan devised a 22-point comparison of the Heroic Archetype in 1936 which all but dismisses most of the supposed life of Jesus. In summary:

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1. Mother is a royal virgin | 12. Is victor over king, giant, dragon or beast |
| 2. Father is a king | 13. Marries a princess and |
| 3. Father often a near relative to mother | 14. Becomes king |
| 4. Unusual conception | 15. For a time he reigns uneventfully |
| 5. Hero reputed to be a son of a god | 16. He prescribes laws |
| 6. Attempt to kill hero as an infant, often by father or maternal grandfather | 17. Later loses favor with gods or his subjects |
| 7. Hero spirited away as a child | 18. Driven from throne and city |
| 8. Reared by foster parents in a far country | 19. Meets with mysterious death |
| 9. No details of childhood | 20. Often at the top of a hill |
| 10. Returns or goes to future kingdom | 21. His children, if any, do not succeed him |
| 11. Has one or more holy sepulchers or tomb | 22. His body is not buried |

Of course, there are other accounts of the life of Jesus, but not many. The historian Josephus wrote several books on Jewish history, including one about Jewish War of 66 to 70 A.D. Despite being the most extensive authority of that war that exists, Josephus has *very little* to say about Jesus. Almost nothing. In fact, it is suspected that the little that Josephus said about Jesus was merely an interpolation added by later Christians. Inconsistencies in style argue that they those references are not part of the original text. Moreover, it seems inconceivable that Josephus would have said anything at all about a Messiah that neither he nor the Romans believed in.

The other significant reference to Jesus is the Roman historian Tacitus, written in 115 AD. All that the historian has to say is that a man named *Christus* was executed by a Roman governor named Pontius Pilot. At best, this only meant that Christians in 115 believed there was a real Jesus. But it has also been argued that *Chrestus* (with an 'e') is a known Latin name, and the man was a local rabble-rouser, and not the Jesus of Jerusalem at all.

Not even Pontius Pilot, the Roman Prefect of Judea, is proof of a historical Jesus. The problem is that there are two different views of the man ... maybe even three. His existence is in no doubt, as there are surviving Roman inscriptions of edicts in his

name. But his life is extremely sketchy. We don't even know his praenomen, or first name. But he must have been of equestrian rank and had military experience to hold the post of Prefect. His actions while he was Prefect are largely unknown, since he was a relatively low-level administrator of an unimportant post, and subordinate to the Governor of Syria. It is only his judgment over Jesus that anyone remembers today, and the only record there is of the trial is in the Gospels. Once again, we have only the word of *Miracle on 34th Street* that Santa Claus exists.

One Pilot is the actual Roman governor, who I very much doubt liked the Jews – many Romans didn't, since the Jews of the first century were stubborn, unruly, apt to rebellion ... and irreligious. Yes, *irreligious*. To the Romans, *Christians* were also irreligious. To the polytheistic mind, believing in a single god was the same as denying the reality of *all other gods*. Mind you, some *Romans* didn't believe in gods either ... nevertheless, it was thought it harmed the state if proper form and custom were not followed, *particularly* when it came to important social contracts such as burial, inheritance, marriage and ritual ... the very foundations of Roman society that Christians completely rejected.

But we were talking about Judaism. Pilot likely didn't like the Jews, and wished he were posted anywhere else. It was also likely that he wouldn't have cared about a Jew brought before his court for causing a ruckus. Justice could probably not have come into the equation. One trouble-making Jew, more or less, wouldn't matter. Upholding Rome's control over Jerusalem and Judea did, however. If Jesus had existed, and any of the events depicted in the New Testament can be believed, than Jesus would have been something of a thorn in Pilot's side. Fortunately for Pilot, there was a simple solution to his problem. People were executed by the Romans every day in Jerusalem, and soon forgotten.

The second Pontius Pilot was the one found in Christian texts, which is highly sympathetic to the Romans. The authors of the Gospels were thoroughly indoctrinated in the Greco-Roman world-view, and pretty much blame the entire incident on the conservative elders of the Sanhedrin. In the Christian account, Pilot was reluctant to execute Jesus, saying that he had done nothing to warrant death. Yet it *was* the Romans who crucified Jesus in the end, even if only because of the Sanhedrin's insistence. The Jewish establishment didn't have the power to put Jesus to death for the crimes that he was allegedly charged with. Only Pilot did. So, to remove a trouble-maker, Pilot had to be persuaded to use his authority to do their dirty work for them. Again, that's the *Christian* story ... I don't believe it myself. Anyone claiming to be king of the Jews would be a threat to Roman rule, and they wouldn't have needed any persuasion. Unless Jesus was a Roman citizen, the mere accusation from the local establishment would have been enough.

The third and final narrative is from the point view of the Jewish elders and lawmakers – who never believed that Jesus was the Messiah – but did know that a

trouble-maker was a trouble-maker, and they wanted him removed from the tinder-box that was Jerusalem in the time of the emperor Tiberius. In retrospect, this was rightly so. In the two centuries that followed after Jesus' death, there were three *tremendous* uprisings in Palestine that ended in the destruction of the temple, repeated appearances of other "Messiahs," murderous wars that likely killed hundreds-of-thousands of Romans and Jews alike, and culminated in the Diaspora.

So who is to blame for the death of Jesus? Maybe it was his own heedlessness; for pointless provocations that were never going to change anything, and that got him needlessly crucified. In Christian belief, it was a sacrifice of God to himself to forgive sin. But surely God could have orchestrated it differently *if had he had chosen?*

I doubt that Christianity would ever have caught on with the majority of Romans, regardless of its growing popularity in the empire. Religions are never voluntarily accepted by 100% of any population. *It takes force. Persecution. Terror.* That force in the early 300s AD was the new emperor Constantine, who had just defeated all of his rivals through war and murder. After victory, he gravitated to Christianity for reasons that are still debated, and increasingly favoured the Christian church. Interestingly, he held off from baptism until he was on his death bed.

Whatever Constantine's sincerity, he raised his three sons to be Christians, and left them empire to rule in partnership. It only took a few years for two of the sons to be eliminated by war or murder, and leaving Constantine II as sole emperor. All three had been fervid Christians who gleefully imposed their beliefs on a pagan Rome.

With a total of 70 total years of Imperial terror, visiting all the horrors of official persecution that Christians had sometimes suffered under pagans, revenge must have felt sweet. Christians tore down temples, ravaged holy sites, burned sacred texts, forbade rituals and executed those who spoke out. Not surprisingly, eventually the empire became Christian. The Chinese Communist Party could have learned a thing or two from the triumphant Christian church on the best methods to use fear to subdue a society until it submitted entirely. There was the brief intermission of the emperor Julian II, (the Apostate,) but he was soon murdered – *possibly* by a Christian soldier, but more likely an enemy arrow – and then there was a restoration of Christian emperors, destroying temples, burning books, and overthrowing statues of the gods. At last – a miracle! The people were won over to the True Faith if they knew what was good for them!

Christianity did eventually learn to value the ancient works that survived their initial vandalism, and even adopted many of the virtues of humanism. In the end, however, it really wasn't faith that was the salvation of Christianity, but backsliding from its initial absolute control. If we still believed what the Church Triumphant taught, we would still be in the Dark Ages. Fortunately, most people believe whatever they want to believe, relying on their conscience just as people did in

Roman days, and only pay lip service to what the Bible demands they believe.

[If you don't know who Schirm is, shame on you. He has only been brightening the pages of fanzines for more than 50 years, but has done it in a unique and unforgettable style that owes nothing to anime or the covers of Analog. While justly notorious as fandom's wackiest artist, he is also just as eccentric as a writer. The sad truth is that Schirm writes all too little, and it me years to eventually squeeze him until he finally consented to allowing this little gem to be published. Enjoy. – TW]

marc schirmeister

Mad Mensch:

Remembering Mad Magazine

Mad Magazine died in 2018, age 66. Since then, it had been resurrected, first as a reprint zombie, and then rebooted as an unfunny clone, both only available in comic book shops, a sad fate for a magazine that once had a newsstand circulation of over two million readers. I bought my first issue of *Mad* in December of 1963, and I'd buy my last issue in the summer of 1970. I loved *Mad*, though my parents, both grade school teachers, disliked it, which was one of the reasons I loved it. They groused about my reading *Mad*, but thank Ghu they didn't try to stop me from buying it. *Mad* made me laugh, and that laughter helped get me through the zit-awful ordeal that was my adolescence. No matter how shitty things got, there was always *Mad* to lift my spirits. *Mad* was my refuge, my after work martini, my shield of humor against a shit-storm of adversity which also helped me develop my cartooning chops and taught me the art of being funny.

There were other things that I read, watched, or listened to that helped develop my sense of humor, but *Mad* was a major influence on me, which made my outgrowing it bittersweet. The problem was that by 1970 I was bored with *Mad*. It was stale, its format and contents not having changed much since 1963. Oh, it was still funny, but funny in the same way issue after issue, predictable, with no surprises, and when *The National Lampoon* came along, I immediately switched over to it. Unlike *Mad* it was printed on slick paper in four colors, and every issue looked different. *The National Lampoon* was unpredictable, exciting, and raunchy, and it took chances that *Mad* would never take. It was also crude, cruel, gross, and I could never shake the feeling that its penchant for nasty ethnic humor wasn't so much a commentary on racism as a disguise used to get away with it. *Mad* never stooped to bigotry or utter tastelessness to get a laugh, but

then *Mad* had moral values beyond *NatLamp's* "It's all bullshit, fuck it!" hipster attitude. Still, *NatLamp's* nihilism was what people wanted back in the decadent '70s, and for a while it was highly successful.

But even at the height of its success, *The National Lampoon* never achieved stodgy old *Mad's* circulation, which hit over two million by 1973. And in the end, *Mad* outlasted *The National Lampoon* the same way it outlasted all its other competitors, with the exception of *Cracked*. But then *The National Lampoon* burnt itself out, where *Mad* just chugged along and stayed consistently funny.

That was *Mad's* strength – it knew how to be funny and make people laugh out loud, and it's odd to me how some rivals and most commentators miss that point. Sociologists like to point out that at best *Mad* taught the Boomers to be honestly skeptical, to question authority, to look for the lie hidden behind the bright facade, at worst to be cynical and trust nothing. *The National lampoon* pretty much did the same thing itself, but with much more emphasis on cynicism and misanthropy. *NatLamp* could be hilarious, but it usually just made you chuckle and nod in agreement. *Mad* made you laugh out loud. Hard. That's why my parting with *Mad* was bittersweet. *The National Lampoon* was exciting, but didn't make me laugh out loud. *Mad* was unexciting, but made me laugh out loud. Also, I was growing up and my tastes were changing. *Mad's* satires seemed juvenile to me while *Natlamp's* looked adult, or at least what passed for adult at the time. Did I want to stay in the safe past or move into the uncertain future? And did I want to say goodbye to an old friend that had helped me get through my troubled teen-age years? Well, it was a trade-off, and all of life is a trade-off of one kind or another, so I chose the future and left *Mad* and that part of my youth behind. Over the decades I'd occasionally look at random issues of the latest *Mads*. The format was still the same, with the same old contributors doing the same old schtick.

It was only in the last twenty years that *Mad* changed, and not for the better. Al Feldstein retired. Bill Gaines died. He was the main reason *Mad* became a magazine coelacanth. Old contributors dropped out and new ones came in, people who did not understand what made *Mad* great to begin with. So, *Mad's* contents became humor-shaped. That's cartoonist Milton Knight's description for something that looks like it's funny but isn't. The new *Mad* was humor-shaped. I'd look at an issue and sometimes I couldn't help wondering if I was missing something. Had age shriveled up my sense of humor to where I couldn't recognize what was funny anymore? Or had I become a reactionary, preferring some so-called golden age of comedy to modern humor? Screw Robin Williams, give me Jonathan Winters. Weird Al? Pfft, Spike Jones could kick his ass. Lenny Bruce would crush Denis Leary like a glass ampoule of methamphetamine!

That's not the case, though. I still know what's funny or not, and the new *Mad* wasn't. And that just wasn't my opinion. *Mad's* circulation was steadily declining.

and it couldn't all be blamed on the internet. Frankly, the new version of *Mad* stunk. Readers stayed away, and in the end *Mad* expired. So, *Mad* is dead, long live *Mad*. for a humor magazine it had a good long run, and it made its readers happy and laugh. And maybe that's its best epitaph – *Mad* made people laugh. And to quote a line from Preston Sturges, "There's a lot to be said for making people laugh. Did you know that's all some people have? It isn't much, but it's better than nothing in this cockeyed caravan..." – **marc schirmeister**

Dark Matters: LOCS on Dark Toys 76

Brad Foster – 28 Jun 2023, jabberwocky2000@hotmail.com

Thanks for *Dark Toys 75*. I've been hit-n-miss on replying to zines, but will try to hit this one. Going to do this in real-time, as I read though, and see how that works.

Many people talk about how great it was, as they got older and no longer would drive, to be able to stop having to deal with all the problems of taking care of a car. But looks like the more complicated mechanical wheelchairs like Traveling Matt can step in to take up some of the slack on that.

Well heck, I wrote that clever observation after reading just the start of the first piece, and now I come to where you talk about comparing the problems to the cost of maintaining a car. Damn it son, you beat me again to a clever observation!

Oh, yeah! An electric wheelchair is simpler and cheaper to operate than a car, but you can only go about 4 miles, and only when the batteries are new and will hold a full charge. After three years of use, they have about a third of that endurance, and a run up to the local mall would leave me running out of juice before I get home. On top of that, I really can't reach most of the city, much less leave the city. No traveling to cons, alas.

Nice to read that, after all those hassles, you are feeling creatively juiced again, and looking forward to finishing some new projects. I'm still trying to find the spark that used to burn hard every day that kept me at the drawing board. It flares up now and then, and I get some work done, but those great days of drawing 18 hours a day seem to have passed. Bummer.

I've been drawing a little again, but not very much. Part of the problem is that I feel no great need of art in fanzines anymore, and get little satisfaction from just being published in them either. Swiping stuff from online seems all anyone needs.

Your thoughts on our little fandom had me thinking my above aging and slowing seems to kind of parallel how sf fandom, at least zine fandom, has gone from when we were younger. I guess everything has its time – born, grows up, fades, dies. I look back at my "career" such as it is, and compare what I was able to do then with

what, if I was starting out now, I would have to deal with, and figure I was just lucky to have been born in that time period. Sorry it is passing, but at least got to be along for a little of the ride.

As artists we've passed the torch to "presenters" and "influencers" online, and it's time we stopped fighting it. Our skill sets are no longer needed.

Nope, never heard of *Captain Star*. But now I have, and a quick search shows most if not all of the episodes are available on YouTube, so I will try to check them out later. (And now we see again – writing as I read – that if I had gotten to the end of your article, you had already linked to YouTube for me!)

I was sorry to hear of the passing of Joshua Quagmire though, like you, had not really had any contact in ages. Saw some other notices in FB from artists about this and, like your notes here, almost everyone noted have some vague recollections of Quagmire always being upset with people about one thing or another, that no one could really understand why. That is pretty much my own feeling too—exchanged some letters, then he seemed upset about something that I could not figure out, and he cut off writing. Oh well.

Okay, I really do need to try to get at least – something – drawn today, so will “draw” this to a close (see what I did there?), and wish you and Matt many happy travels to come.

- Brad

David Redd – 30 Jun 2023, dave_redd@hotmail.com

Many thanks for *Dark Toys 75*. I'm glad to know you sorted Travelling Matt's problems, albeit at a cost, and was interested in your musings on the current state of fanac (your final simile of passing the pipe may be all too relevant.) *Captain Star* was a thorough piece of archaeology, and you were kind enough to provide links for further follow-up. A good issue. Sorry I cannot manage more than this short note, but my writer's block seems to be extending itself into letters now. Reading and writing on-screen is an effort. However I wish you well.

- David

The cost of putting Traveling Matt back on its wheels was mostly expected. There are no such things as permanent cures or fixes in life, and I was prepared for this.

Rebecca Jansen – 7 July 2023, rebejan@shaw.ca

Sad to learn of 'Joshua Quagmire' passing. In my opinion he was a truly great cartoonist even if some of what he lavished the most attention upon could seem counter-productive commercially. He credited the *Fun With Pencil Book* by Andrew Loomis for a lot of his knowledge and photocopied many pages from it to send me when I was trying to understand some things related to drawing. I understand he turned down some opportunities that would've paid well because they'd involved drawing what he didn't care about, yet he did do a thick Betty Boop comic once for a

larger publisher. We corresponded and occasionally spoke via phone over a long time, but I guess the last time we communicated was in the early '00s. Yes, he could be very prickly, seemingly needlessly so, but for a few the positives outweighed the negatives? Thanks for continuing to send your e-zines. Why are the toys “dark,” though?
– Rebecca

Why Dark? Well, my thoughts do seem to run that way a lot, but also it was one of the few titles I hadn't already used. I mean, "Sex Toys" isn't quite the message I want to give, and "Radish Toys" would be absurd ... Fragglish, but absurd.

Jefferson Swycaffer – 1 July 2023, abontides@gmail.com

Thank you for sending me the latest *Dark Toys*. I don't know if I like the title better than “Broken Toys” or not...both are really good titles for a fanzine! Intriguing history of the trials, tribulations, and repairs of Travelling Matt. Messy. Life is never simple, is it? There are always complications that get in the way of what we would much rather be doing!

Fun review of *Captain Star*. I'm on the longish list of people who have never heard of it!

I presume it's because you a part of the Great American Audience that was sheltered from British humour that is shared by Canadians.

And I am dreadfully sorry to learn of the passing of Joshua Quagmire. He was a *fun* cartoonist, and he could write really movingly funny material. He could make you laugh, and that's a rare and precious talent.

I met him three or four times, at the San Diego Comic Con. He and I got to a “nodding acquaintance.” I did my best to praise him, and he did his best not to listen. The first time I met him, he was in the middle of a nasty, bitter, snarling argument with someone, and, alas, he seemed to have issues with “just getting along.” He always seemed to have a grievance. What a truly remarkable difference between the creator and his creations! *Cutey Bunny* was always very hot, very sexy, and very darn funny. She was a master at “breaking the fourth wall.”

More recently, Quagmire had been delivering a truly hilarious serial, *Bunz and Katz*, with two feckless aliens trying to destroy the earth, and, of course, getting themselves deeper and deeper in gluey situations of their own contriving. It allowed Quagmire to play the Swiftian game of Social Satire, and he did it with remarkably jovial humor. He also gave us “Rudie,” a red-nosed reindeer, who was hotter than a two-dollar firecracker and clever to boot.

Of all of Quagmire's creations, I've always liked (and had the warmies for) Vicky Feldhyser, aka Ashtoreth, who was a villain half the time and an antihero the other

half. Also don't forget the Space Gophers. Oh, yeah, you can *try* to forget the Space Gophers, but it's futile.

I'll close with a brief remembrance of one of Quagmire's earliest endeavors, a serial strip called *Ria*, featuring a title character who *was* a rhea – a bird – a living in the era of dinosaurs. It was a warm and friendly strip, published in the old C/FO newsletter, and it was an inspired bit of wit and whimsy.

On a totally different topic, I just read Joe Strike's *Furry Nation*, a quick sociological exploration of that magnificent fan phenomenon, Furry Fandom. You were mentioned! And I was not named, but alluded to! (Craig Hilton and I each hold that the other was the first to use the term "Furry Fandom," in a British fanzine in 1983. Fred Patten vouched for this origin of the term. But it wasn't me! It was Craig! I was saying "Fuzzy Fandom" at the time!)
– **Jefferson Swycaffer**

Honestly, I don't think anyone coined the name Furry Fandom first. It was always used, because what else could you call it? Funny Animal Fandom? Yeah, it was, but that fell flatter than my wallet after the bills are all paid. For once, I think Fred was wrong about that. However, I was mentioned in Joe's book. Also, I was originally going to do the cover of the book, but the publisher talked him out of it. He thought a photograph of some randomly chosen "fursuiter" would be more appropriate. By complete coincidence, the publisher had a girl-friend whose suit would look great on the cover. I didn't quit tear up the sketches, but they were never completed.

Eric Mayer – 4 July 2023, groggy.tales@gmail.com

Thanks for the new *Dark Toys*. The cover is spectacular. Since I've commented on most of the contents in our correspondence I'm going to confine this loc to commenting on your "Plausible Denial" disappointment with the FAAn awards. There was a time I would have written a detailed, closely argued article on the topic, but really, I just can't get excited enough to bother. No one much cares. So I'm just going to jot down some thoughts that come to me.

I've just been through one of those weeks when I can't face the task of composing a sentence, even for a letter. Although I've composed an awful pile of sentences in my lifetime I've always had a kind of love/hate relationship with writing. I was never the sort of person who feels compelled to write. If I could go orienteering or draw a mini-comic instead of struggling with words I was happy to do so. I think the reason I wrote so much is that it was the only thing I found I was (arguably) good at. Which is why I "loved" writing, yet I hated it because I was never as good as I wanted to be.

Part of my frustration arose from my own perception of my efforts and part from the world's reception of them. Like you I was particularly disappointed by fandom's reaction to my work. Weirdly enough my professional fiction was much more warmly received than my faanish stuff. But maybe that's not so weird. The FAAn awards aren't really artistic awards per se but rather awards for contributions to

fandom, and fandom is primarily (as you point out) a social group rather than a creative group.

So really my disappointment with fandom – and perhaps yours as well – has nothing to do with fandom itself but rather with my own misconceptions about the hobby. And maybe not just misconceptions, but also wishful thinking. I wanted to believe fandom was a hobby that suited me, when it obviously did not. I've always been an arty sort who likes to labor away in solitude on creative projects, not a person who could endure, let alone enjoy, traveling to large (or even small) social gatherings.

There's a lot to unpack and perhaps its best to let most of it go, and just agree that perhaps some of my disappointment is due to not understanding that it was just a group of people who like to party and schmooze, and imbued it with more significance than it really had. Fandom as a place for creativity is only an afterthought.

A question I ask myself though is to what extent fandom has changed since I discovered it in the early 1970s? Of course the part we're concerned with – fanzine fandom? – is much smaller. But is the creative component even less important than it was fifty years ago? It seems to be the case but with fanzine fandom being so much larger back then maybe it was just easier to find a few like-minded fans who were motivated mostly by creative impulses. There was still room in 1970s fandom for fans like me.

Given the rise of science fiction in media, the change from paper communications to the Internet and the aging of 1970s fans, it isn't surprising that fandom has shrunk. I do wonder if fandom would nevertheless be larger and more diverse today (and not basically on its last legs) had our generation of fans taken a more welcoming and inclusive approach, as the previous generation had, at least in my experience. It strikes me that too many fans were looking for ways to exclude would-be fans, to limit fandom to those they had known for years and saw at conventions, to the point of actively discouraging anyone who was "them" rather than "us". Look at KTF [*Kill the Fucker*] reviews which so delighted a segment of fandom. What could be more off putting to a newcomer? Who would want to join a hobby that applauded that sort of nasty crap?

I guess today's remaining fans are happy to be an old timers club. And maybe there simply aren't any young people who would be interested in any form of fanzines but it might be fun if there were some young fanzine fans and fanzine fandom was still large enough to accommodate a more diverse range of interests and approaches. But I guess that's just me.

– **Eric Mayer**

I honestly can't see fandom as we knew it lasting beyond our lifetimes. Who would spend the effort on producing anything as old-fashioned as a magazine when you can post the same material on a website, with half the effort, and look far slicker? Almost

anyone can make a website that would make Void or Outworlds look sick by comparison? And yet, I can't work up the same enthusiasm for a website. Not, at least, unless the same high standards are met as were in the best old fanzines. What has changed is that, today, even complete drivel can look like a corporate website for Lucas Film. Worse is to come, when fans won't even have to write for their material, but merely make vague suggestions that their AI can use to create their sites for them.

Ron Kasman – 5 July 2023, ron.kasman@gmail.com

Too bad about the award. I am aware that you have been nominated for Hugos more than ten times and haven't won. That's the way it goes.

One must count ones blessing as they are... but I think I would have traded half those nominations for one win.

There was a local award for SF that I imagine is still going on. I don't remember the name of it and I am not trying to be coy here. What I do recall is that it seemed clubby and that you had to be part of the club to win. One year they started to have nominations for comic artists and it was very apparent that they had no idea of what they were doing and it could have been that they didn't care much. The important thing was to keep it in the club. Still, winning one of their awards seemed to establish a person's position as an important local SF fan.

You're probably thinking of the Auroras, formerly the Caspars. They are ostensibly for Canadian fan activity, but – as you say – are extremely “clubby.” There was one year in which one of my zines, or my fanart, was on the list of nominees, but only that one time. No win. Otherwise, you would imagine that spend my time on Mars, and Canadian fans had never heard of the Hugo. So far as I can figure, the “club” consists mainly of fan groups out west ... with a branch in Ottawa. What I think makes them a club is that they are organized. Nationally, most of Canadian fandom has been unorganized

I have won two awards but both for teaching. One was province wide, for educational journalism, and only one is handed out each year. However there aren't that many people eligible – maybe twenty-five to fifty people. You get a plaque. The other one was for "creativity in education" and seven were handed out the year I won. About two thousand teachers were eligible. Some of the awards, including mine, were given to groups of people. You can win one, only once in your career. Let's see, seven awards times 35 years times on average two people per award comes to 490. Let's say 2000 people are eligible. So, that gives you about a 1- in-4 chance, using my numbers.

Then there are the Shuster Awards for Canadian Comics. I am proud to have been nominated and I think it gives the book I was nominated for a certain level of credibility. But I don't know their criteria. Some of the awards given in the past

seem to have been poorly chosen. And others, who have deserved awards, have been ignored.

Meanwhile, I have this nephew, a wonderful young man. He had won two Emmys and been nominated for two more. These have been real American Emmy awards that come with a big, heavy statue of who knows what. He has also won an Argo ring and a Raptor ring the years that those teams won championships. He was one of the cameramen and the cameramen get them too. He has lots of other awards – a glass case full.

My nephew has been completely deserving of these awards though I am sure that there are other people who felt that they deserved them, too, and were not even nominated.

I once had a vice-principal who said to me, "People not as good as me got here before I did and there are people better than me who didn't get here at all". I think that is a sensible philosophy.

My nephew could pick his teeth with a Canadian comic book or SF award. He is not full of himself, however, and realizes what his and other awards ultimately mean. He works freelance. I assume he gets a second look from a potential employer when he applies for a job, though the award is likely less important than references from other employers and how well he can get along with existing staff.

So I subscribe to the old adage that we should not allow external judges to influence us. We should judge ourselves though it is hard to do that and leave it at that.

I might mention an old friend who won a teaching award of which one was handed out per year. I was the one who announced it. He responded in front of our staff, "Awards don't mean much except to the person they are named after". I don't remember if he said anything else but it would have all been along the same lines. I believed he meant it though. He never picked up the award.

It is a cardinal rule not to pay any mind to awards ... but it can be very hard to ignore them when fans are applauding the guy with the spinach stuck in his teeth. As often as not, awards are begun with good intentions, but quickly develop the same flaws as their predecessors, with the same inconsistencies and biases they were meant to correct.

Long ago, I realized that I was never the best writer, nor was I the greatest artist in a world of 8 billion people. Who is? Whoever is probably isn't even a Canadian, much less being anyone I know. It is more realistic to think of oneself only in a relevant context. In my case, I never hoped to do anything more than leave a mark on fanzine fandom. Naturally, it's disappointing when a person falls short of his aspirations. Yet, eleven Hugo nominations are nothing to sneeze at, nor is being the fan guest of honour at a Worldcon. As well, I've had my share of recognitions from the FAAns and from Corflu.

But, well... does anyone ever want the party to be finally over, and nothing left but rest?

Rich Lynch – 5 July 2023, rw_lynch@yahoo.com

I've been reading *DT75* and as you'd probably guess, the article that interests me the most is "Plausible Denial" where you ask the question: "Why do the rest of us publish?" You describe me, in general, pretty well: "...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." But I don't agree with your conclusion that: "Writing about your fannish social life proves how fannish you are. "

Why I publish fanzines is a lot more complicated than that, or at least I'd like to think so. Some of it, truth be told, is a legacy thing. Assuming Bill Burns and the fanac.org people have made the proper arrangements for longevity of their fanzine archives, stuff I've written and fanzines I've published will be readable decades after my death. If any of my relatives (or future historians) want to learn about me or piece together a biography of sorts, they'll be able to do it. But it's more than just that. Writing is an art form, as I think you'd agree. I don't have talent for composing music, or creating paintings or drawings, or making sculptures, or doing much of anything related to physical arts and crafts. But I sure as hell know how to write. That's been my creative outlet for many, many years. I've shown some of my essays to professional colleagues and they've, if anything, have been more entertained by them than by the fan community we belong to.

So no, I don't have any 'faanish' pretensions. My only pretension is that anything I write does add to the overall texture and knowledge base about the decades I've lived in. When Nicki and I were publishing *Mimosa*, we always were interested in publishing articles and essays related to the preservation of fan history. And we were also interested in publishing articles and essays about things fans do. I never wrote very much about myself back then. With my personal time capsule, *My Back Pages*, I guess I'm making up for that now.

Good issue. Keep on doing what you're doing.

– **Rich Lynch**

“Fannish pretensions” was a loaded expression: it was a cliché that I should have avoided. Nevertheless, I feel there is some truth to the proposition that fan writing is about showing that one is a member of that group. It isn’t the only way, since many go to conventions with no writing or publishing to show at all. Their reasons are they like science fiction, enjoy the group experience, and need no more justification than that. My spin on “fannishness” serves mainly my need for fandom to be something more than an Old Boys’ club. This is obviously not true for anyone else. For me there is nothing else, however, since it’s nearly impossible to be an active member of the Old Boys’ Club. My lack of disposable income for travel, and limited mobility rule it out.

I never did definitively answer my own question about why I write. I might simply say, "Because I can," but that would beg the question. Obviously, writing was a long, drawn out process that I haven't totally mastered even now, and is still an engaging challenge. Maybe that's one reason why. "We choose to go to the moon, not because it is easy; but because I have a good proofreader." In fact, I write these days because it is a surrogate way of having a life. I do little that is different from day to day, and couldn't do more if I wanted to – so I have a soul mate who came to Earth from another planet, and live in Fraggie Rock, visit the emperors of Rome, bankrupt billionaires my head, and by giving the world free, no-carbon energy. Sad. Yeah. A Corflu isn't exactly making up for my unrealistic expectations in life – so I write.

Heath Row – 11 Jul 2023, kalel@well.com

I am sorry to read about the misadventures of you and Traveling Matt, and am glad that things resolved well in the end. It gave me cheer to read that "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 Fraggie stories I'd written online, and now I'm at work on a new fanzine." I hope the Positive Mental Attitude continues! I can certainly understand waxing and waning enthusiasm for fanac – and other activities.

Everything in its own time ... except when the boss wants it tomorrow!

Your question "What does *anyone* see in fandom...?" prompted some reflection. I particularly appreciated your consideration of what fen believe fandom to be, what fandom is, and what fandom was – though I'll refine that approach slightly in a moment. While you don't indicate what fen believe fandom to be, you suggest that "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." Similarly, you contend that "What fandom was for many fans in past decades was a study of science fiction and related topics."

I think both those things are still true, but it's an evolutionary or developmental process.

Those who do find fandom, however, change over time. We age, our life concerns and considerations adjust as we reach various milestones (employment and careers, housing and home ownership, relationships and perhaps marriage, and changing health), and our interest shifts from sf as such to our life and fannish friends around it. We might still enjoy sf. We might still read, watch, and talk about it. But other life interests move to the foreground.

So that puts us in a bit of a bind. If older fen have moved on to talking about life – and enjoy older works more than newer works – how can we better connect with the new fen, who come in with a different set of expectations in terms of technological access, communication modes, literature and media preferences, and understanding of what fandom is to them in their current, personal experience? If older fen indeed all grew up with each other and “have known each other for nearly as many decades as it took the Soviet Empire to rise and fall,” the new fen might very well ask, “What’s the Soviet Empire?”

What’s the solution? It can’t be to talk about SF if that’s not what you want to talk about. And it can’t be to talk about new SF if you prefer older forms of sf. Maybe it’s to focus on another trajectory of fandom, the move from consumer to enthusiast to fan to producer as posited in Stephanie Plumeri’s Continuum of Fandom. If we stick with other fellow producers (faneds), we might have as much in common with other fen or enthusiasts, and that’s where most new fen will enter this thing we call fandom. Not everyone wants to make their own stuff. Maybe what’s missing in fandom is enthusiasm – or fandom itself – for the new.

What are you – am I, are we – a fan of? What are we enthusiastic about? That seems like it’d help us find fellow fen and enthusiasts, if we remain enthusiastic fen. Writing about sf might help signal to other fen what we like, connect with, and want to engage in conversation about. And if we don’t want to find more fellow fen, perhaps being a fan ourselves is sufficient.

Regardless, despite all of the above, you still managed to write about sf in *Dark Toys* 75. I was unaware of Captain Star. A DVD is available from Back to the ’80s DVDs, and there’s a Change.org petition to bring the series to Blu-ray and DVD. (<https://www.change.org/p/dhx-media-bring-back-captain-star-to-blu-ray-and-dvd-cffa7877-94fc-4da5-b0af-6dd865fbb2e5>) *JustWatch* suggests it’s not streaming anywhere. Thank you for bringing the series to my attention!

I do sometimes write about SF – though in recent times mostly about SF in film, such as my complaints about various incarnations of Star Trek. I more often write about animated films, however, such as Captain Star or the recent sequel to Puss and Boots. While I have no absolute aversion to reviewing SF books, it seems a quixotic quest, given how many hundreds of titles there is every year, from major publishers to self-publishers, with little hope of connecting to any meaningful percentage of the readers of those books.

I signed that Captain Star petition ... it’s six years old, and at last count had only nine supporters. This could take a while before anyone releases it on DVD.

But I digress. In your case, maybe you’re just a writer. When one writes, one doesn’t have to read absolutely everything else in the periodicals – fan or pro – that publish

their work. As long as you're writing what you want or need to write, if you find some satisfaction in its publication even if you don't feel like reading or commenting on everything else around it, all seems good to me. You could even write what you need to and not publish it, though as a reader of your work, that would frustrate me. What you have to say is worth sharing.

I think that gets to the nub of the matter. A lot of fans are like myself, who like to write and to publish what we've written, and likely prefer having readers. If we can't find readers, then we publish ourselves. And that's the peculiar situation I think we are all in. We are a fandom of Indian Chiefs who have no warriors braves.

Thank you also for the memorial piece about Joshua Quagmire, or Richard Glen Lester II. I first encountered Quagmire's work in *Army Surplus Komikz Featuring Cutey Bunny* #1 40 years ago – I was 10 – and have picked up everything I can from the man over the years. While I've never fully immersed in furry fandom, stuff by Quagmire, and similar comics of the time brought me awfully close. If I'd known Quagmire lived so close to me, I would have sought him out! I was even unaware of his Web comic *Bunz & Katz* (<http://www.bunzandkatz.com>). There's a ton to dig into there, which we should all do before it's removed by the Web, if it's not maintained.

- Heath Row

Bob Jennings – 7 July 2023, fabficbks@aol.com

Received *Dark Toys* 75 at the end of June, but I'm just getting around to reading it and that I'd send along a few random comments.

In my opinion most of the people who vote in the FAAn Awards (not too many, you will note), seem to vote for their friends years after year, with the fanzines/writers/artists/LOCers who show up the most regularly tending to be the people who get the awards.

Mike Glycer had something pithy to say about this that I won't print verbatim. In essence, he said that it is a poor fanzine that doesn't win its own fan poll.

That's not always true, of course. Every year I nominate *Opuntia*, a bi-weekly zine from Dale Speirs in the best per-zine category, but it never wins anything. There are plenty of people reading it besides me, but apparently those readers aren't voters in the FAAn Awards.

Quite a few zines are routinely overlooked when ballots are filled in – I overlook most of them myself because don't publish things that I want to read. I am only one reader, however, so the question is why does there seem to be such a consensus when it comes to the FAAns about what is nominated and what is not. More broadly still, why do some fans vote when so many don't. Clearly this has more than a small influence on the eventual winners?

It seems to me that almost every issue of almost every fanzine I've ever received from you had the on-running essay on why you bother to stay in fandom, or why fandom still exists, or should ever have existed in the first place.

*I guess it must seem that way, but if anything, my output has been slowing from what it was a few years ago, when I published a long issue of Broken Toys every six weeks, as *well* as write articles for any fanzine that would have them. If I seem to clogging up fanzine fandom with my work, I think it's only because the arteries of fanzine fandom are sclerotic! There are fewer venues for a fan writer than there used to be. I think fans are increasingly following the route of personalzines like Askance, Spartacus and Opuntia, and perhaps talking to themselves rather than to whatever fans are listening. But I've never questioned why fandom originally existed. For decades fans *did* talk to each other via the print medium, and did it with a high degree of art. Now it's habit.*

It has been pointed out repeatedly by lots of people, including me, that the internet and social media provide convenient forms of communication, the kind that fan clubs, conventions and fanzines used to provide, and they do it almost instantly. People can make comments, and get a response, lightning-fast.

But fanzines should and usually do provide something more. People produce fanzines not just to communicate with people, but to communicate in ways that short conversations and snappy observations or quick witticism cannot provide. People who produce and contribute to fanzines like to write. They want to express opinions in a longer structured format, and they hope that those opinions will generate comments and opinions from the readers.

I think that is still true today. For example, how many people in the building where you live, or in your immediate neighborhood, or in the whole city even, have an interest in animated cartoons? You do, but without fanzines sent out to other fans, would you be able to share that enthusiasm in depth and detail? I doubt it.

You don't find that on social media. People who know how to write either compose and contribute to fanzines or create in-depth blogsites. People who don't know to write coherently tend to hang out on Facebook and chatrooms. People who can't organize their thots properly tend to use Twitter and Instagram. OK, snarky, and oversimplified maybe, but more than a grain of truth there in my humble opinion.

And let me make one final point here, you keep bitching about how useless fandom is and how it is a waste of everybody's time, and how you aren't getting much out of it, yet, you keep producing fanzines and articles and art. Fandom is not a drug. If you weren't getting some kind of emotional satisfaction out of the activity I'm sure you would have quit a long time ago. But, you're still here. You might want to turn back the clock to when stf fandom was younger, fanzines were more interactive, and

there was a lot more honest communication among the whole hobby, but time travel is still impossible. We have to make the best of what we have, and I think fandom still provides something useful to you, otherwise you would gafiate.

Clearly, I've opened a can of worms that it would likely have been wiser to not have. But the damn things are wriggling all over, so I better chase after them. For one thing, I'm aware that there are only so many awards and prizes to go around, and – all things considered – I've had my share. But it is no easy thing to say to myself that my story is done, there is nothing more to come. Nor have I done all that I set out to do. Some things, such as win TAFF and visit England I will never do. I have accepted that the Hugo has become impossibly beyond reach – if for no reason than the difficulty of having the physical presence needed to schmooze with large numbers of people. So what is left? Only a few more votes in a peer award. Then will I rest happily? Probably not. There are a few more chapters left in me that I want to write, but write them I must.

Speaking of discussions about animated cartoons I enjoyed your article about the *Captain Star* series, which I am absolutely not familiar with at all. I was intrigued enuf that I will try to watch some of the episodes posted on YouTube this weekend (even tho you say the visual quality ain't so hot), and I also decided to view the original course material. I am getting a copy of *The Captain Star Omnibus* which collected all the print cartoons in one volume thru inter-library loan. I should have it in a week or so. I note that Amazon has both new and used copies of this book in stock for as low as \$9 a copy. I'll let you know what I think of the strip and the animated cartoons. I hope they live up to your enthusiastic hype.

I'm curious of what you think. But remember that I never hyped the comic, only the animated cartoon, which may be very different. I have never read the comic and what I know suggests something that it might is rather different.

On the subject on handicapped equipped ramps: one of the reasons that many businesses don't have wheelchair ramps may be the fact that the aisles inside the stores might not be wide enough to accompany a wheelchair or scooter. The business may be losing customers, but there's no point is getting a wheelchair inside the door only to discover the only place it can maneuver is right in front of the check-out counter. Big box stores and chains like CVS can afford to operate stores with wide spacious aisles, but retail space is expensive, and far too many retail outlets have narrow aisles because they need the space to stock the merchandise they sell. Just another unfortunate reality of life.

I heard the news about the death of Joshua Quagmire from a few other places. I always liked his *Cutey Bunny* series, but was unaware of *Bunz & Katz*. I'll have to check that out. Even at this late date I am unsure why he didn't produce more *Cutey Bunny* stories. It certainly had commercial sales appeal. From your short comments

he seems to have been a quirky and sometimes cantankerous person. I am not even sure if cartoons and art was the way he made his living.

Another nice issue. Hope to see the next one pretty soon (maybe by the end of summer, say.)

End of summer is a reasonable guess... I'm aiming at October. Although I have no ideas to put into writing new material at present. My current priority is my third and last Holmes pastiche, just recently completed and pending publication somewhere.

Garth Spencer – 14 July 2023, garth.van.spencer@gmail.com

Thank you for mentioning me (he said wryly). Actually my desperation, if it was that, was not simply to understand fandom – but to understand *why* it transmogrified under our feet, and what to do now. As I will probably tell people at NASFiC (as if they don't already know), there is no fandom. There are now a lot of separate fandoms that have less and less contact or common ground with each other, receding from each other at high fractions of the speed of light, like galaxies receding from each other in the expanding universe. I thought this was a function of the continuing expansion of the popular-entertainment market, but a recent edition of *Alexiad* maintained that market is actually diminishing. Mixed messages out there. Somehow, we lost common ground with other fandoms. Nothing to be done.

*Oddly, that's the exact opposite of how I usually look at fandom... but perhaps the two outlooks are not as dissimilar as they seem. My belief is that there is only *one* fandom. No matter that they are ostensibly different fandoms – whether science fiction, comics, steampunk or bronies – they are all doing the same thing. They swear loyalty to the cause, learn the secret signs, use the special language, appear in costume and adopt a persona. The particulars of fandoms may be different, but in general it's all one. As you might expect, many fans belong to more than one fandom ... maybe several. They might even meet many of the same people from convention to convention. Fandoms might appear balkanized from the outside, but – whether Trek or gaming – I argue that nothing is essentially different seen from the inside.*

You're quite right. Fanzine activity is a stand-in for social activity. Also it's an outlet for my compulsive scribbling.

The point is to get things said. That is my goal. Whether anyone reads it or not is secondary, to me. The fanhistory? Same difference. Maybe, I theorize, the interpersonal behaviour, and the successes and failures of clubs and conventions, will be useful to some future reader. And maybe not; but it must satisfy me to put things on the record, on the off chance it might be of benefit. – **Garth Spencer**

There we may be a little different. I may be unable to stop writing, but it makes a difference to me whether or not anyone reads what I write. One reason I have been

submitting very art to fanzines lately is that it doesn't feel like it matters. So I still draw, but just put it away unpublished. When I remember, I sometimes post some of it on FaceBook ... which actually seems to have a greater impact than it does in fanzines. If ever I come to believe that nobody reads what I write, I'd likely withdraw that from fanzines as well. As it is, more than half of my written work is fiction, where it is less likely to find an audience.

Lloyd Penney – 17 Aug 2023, penneys@bell.net

Many thanks for issue 75 of Dark Toys, and I know it's late, but it's always worth a read and some comments. I finally can get that done now.

We always have problems with our wheels. We've had a few expensive problems lately, as well as a door handle that simply fell off. We did have some plans for this weekend, but they will have to wait until next year. I think we both know that customer service is a thing of the past. Good that Steven is helping you. We haven't seen him in quite a while.

The pandemic and resulting soaring prices for everything have pretty much killed off fandom as we know it, and for us, steampunk is getting a little moribund. There is an event near Cayuga, ON this coming weekend, but our car is having the problems detailed above. Our little business of selling steampunk jewelry and tropical shirts is doing okay, but age is making setup and teardown just a little tougher each time we do it. Fandom's different things to different people...maybe that's why I took the Amazing Stories job when it was offered. I have always tried to move from interest to interest when things get a little stale, so with Amazing, fanzines, our business, and other activities, we are more than busy.

Cartoons...I do remember Captain Star. Just checked, and all episodes, all 13, are available for watching on YouTube through the client Studio 100 KIDS. I admit I haven't really been taken by many cartoons over the years, but a niece showed me Miraculous: Tales of Ladybug and Cat Noir, and I do like the animation and complex story line. If I was 13 or 14, I'd really like it, but I am not so old as to not remember when I was that age, and some of the characters' concerns were my own. It is a popular cartoon, and I think it is in its fifth season.

The local...we seem to need the Internet. Addiction? Perhaps, but it has become the primary way of communicating in the world. I am still writing lots of locs, although not at the rate I used to write them years ago. Amazing Stories does keep me busy, and I wouldn't want it any other way.

This was composed in a coffee shop in east-end Toronto, and typed up at home. My being busy means I have to be creative time-wise in getting everything done.

Thanks, and I hope there will be another issue along shortly. – **Lloyd Penney**-----

WAHR

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What I Miss About Deadlines

What I miss is the sense I once had that everything mattered. There was a profound *urgency* in life that has gradually ebbed away over the years, until I sometimes feel that nothing I do matters a damn. I miss the almost intolerable importance of everything. I don't mean that I like having arbitrary deadlines, or enjoyed being in a panicky last-minute hurry, of course. Who does? But I've always felt that I work better with a sense of passing time to measure how I've used it. If I have something worth doing, it should be worth doing soon ... rather than "someday."

Most of my life I've had things to do and did them, and then expected a prompt payoff. This sense of doing and anticipation of having done well has slowed down with the years. As I grew older, my ambitions and energy also waned, and so has the feedback on my efforts that fed the entire cycle. It used to be that when I finished my work, whether it was art or writing, I'd sometimes have to wait for weeks or even months before I could scan the letter columns for the response.

These days, it may be months before there is any hint that anyone has noticed. As well, the delay has been growing worse every year. One of my longest pieces that I've had published was almost two years ago: there hasn't been any locs on it yet because there hasn't been another issue! For all I know, there may not *be* another.

I've also increasingly taken to writing fiction, arguably that no one wants to read. If it was anything that could be published in some semi-pro magazine, or even an actual prozine, I might get at least the standard ½ cent a word. Or I could self-publish, and join the legion of frantic *wanna be* writers who haunt conventions by throwing themselves at potential book buyers in hucksters' rooms. Actually ... I can't. Conventions are out of reach to me these days, because of the limitations of my mobile chair and its batteries. At present, neither can I sell what I write because it infringes on copyrights.

Swell... copyright laws protects the people who never created a thing in their lives, but prevents me from benefiting from my work. Yet I do it anyway, because I feel the work is good and deserves to be done, and no one would be better off if I didn't write it. No one knows it better than me that I was in a hopeless situation. But ... it also gives me that sense of doing something that matters that I miss so much.

Stories from *Fraggle Rock* aside, I still publish *Dark Toys*. The third issue (number 76) ought to be out in October, therefore is in your hands as you read. I've also been doing a little artwork of late. While I'm not in a rush, slowing down lets me target my drawing for better results.

I've finished the last of three Sherlock Holmes pastiches that I promised myself to write. "Everything is Turning Up Ruses" is based on a couple of amusing puns, and takes on Holmes' older, smarter brother Mycroft. It appears that John Purcell is eager to publish it in his next zine, and I've promised a new drawing of the Great Detective in full fig, with pipe, deerstalker and Watson in tow.

What is the point of all this? Probably not the egoboo, since fandom has gotten too tired and jaded to be too generous with it. So, I'm not sure. Maybe I keep intellectually active mainly because the alternative is so clearly a worse option?

□

A Passing Age – John Douglas (6 Aug 2023)

John Douglas died on the third of August this year. He was a professional editor of many years, and was married to author Ginjur Buchanon when he died. He had begun suffering from dementia from about a year ago. He was under treatment for the condition when he developed an infection. This led to being placed on a ventilator, then pneumonia ended in fatal pneumonia. John was born in Toronto, and was one of the founding members of the Ontario Science Fiction Club.

As one of the most active members, he was involved in the OSFiC's first two forays into convention running, then made a jump to the con committee for Torcon II in 1973. I joined the club after the bid had been won, but I had a small part to play myself, having worked on a little art that appeared in *Locus*, and participated in some collating and stapling sessions. It was mainly at monthly club meetings where I first met John. He married shortly after Torcon and moved to the United States, where he found work in editing. He became well know in convention programs, where we would occasionally met. John wasn't one of those who move up in life but forget everyone he knew before. He always seemed to be pleased to see anyone he knew from OSFiC days. When I heard the news of John's passing, I couldn't help be feel the weight of time pressing. From the old days, when fandom was still new, many people are now gone. Mike Glicksohn is gone, Susan Wood is gone. Capt' George Henderson is gone. Phyllis Gotlieb is gone. Judith Merril is gone. Now John Douglas.

Endit

72rd. Birthday Issue...

Next issue when it happens, when I have material for it, and no sooner than spring.