



©1989 Ken Feather - digital colour, Tara Wayne 2014

Broken Toys Halloween Issue

BROKEN TOYS 36

BROKEN TOYS 36, THE FOUR-MONTHS-LATE **HALLOWEEN ISSUE!** IT IS WRITTEN, DRAWN AND SWEAT OVER BY **TARAL WAYNE**, HOLDING ON AT 245 DUNN AVE., TORONTO, ONTARIO, CANADA, M6K 1S6. BACK ISSUES ARE AVAILABLE AS DOWNLOADS FROM EFANZINES.COM, [HTTP://WWW.FANAC.ORG/FANZINES/BROKENTOYS/](http://www.fanac.org/fanzines/brokentoys/) OR FANAC.ORG, [HTTP://EFANZINES.COM/TARAL/INDEX.HTM](http://efanzines.com/taral/index.htm). PRODUCED FEBRUARY (OR OCTOBER BUILD 1.1) 2015© KIDDELIDIVEE BOOKS & ART 295.

Fraggles Rock: It was practically impossible to produce this issue in time for Halloween, and I should have known it. That I went ahead anyway is either a testament to my determination, or to sheer, ludicrous optimism. Nevertheless, I stuck with it, and early this month I finished the 8,200-word short story that set this issue in motion.

"All Fraggles, Then and Now" is either a terrific short story, written in the universe of one of television history's most inspirational programs for adults and children ... or it's the most spectacularly nerdish thing I've done in as long as I can remember. I felt it was something that I had to do, however. For years, I've had good ideas and then let them stagnate until I had lost all interest in trying to work them through to a finished comic or story. I wasn't getting any younger, so it was time to get in gear and peel some rubber. Otherwise, I'd be just another sad old fan who never did anything but go to conventions or club meetings and *talk*.

I've made it no secret, either, how much I love Fraggles Rock. But perhaps I haven't stressed just how important it has been for getting me through the last couple of years. Those weren't the worst of times, but they were difficult ... more difficult than I sometimes realize myself. It's easy to sink to a new low, and after a few weeks begin to think it has always been like that. Then I'd suddenly realize that *two years ago* I had actually walked from here to there, or had been able to do my laundry or just plain wash

myself without making a special effort. Such insights are a little hard to digest.

All my life I've been something of a loner, yet I'm not sure how natural it ever was. I do enjoy the company of other people, even if I'm also used to extensive periods of privacy. For various reasons I won't get into, I have a limited family life and a social life that is also not very extensive. It's normal for me to see no one for two or three weeks at a time, and only make use of the phone to stay in touch with a very small number of people. I wish it wasn't like that, but as older friends moved away or left my circle of acquaintances, there were few replacements. I don't seem to fit into any of the circles I know about any more ... and I seem unwelcome in others.

So I've always turned to my books and videos to fill the lackings in my social life. Sometimes this meant immersing myself in the peculiar cosmology of Fireball XL5, at other times entering the charmed circle who knew the secret after-hours activities of Bruce Wayne (we are distant cousins, after all). Over the last couple of years, though, I've turned most often to *Fraggle Rock*.

The funny thing is that when it first aired, back in the 1980s, I was not drawn to the show. I was a big fan of the Muppets, but where was Kermit and Ms. Piggy? And why did they sing those lame, often folkie or country-ish songs all the time? I grew to like *Fraggle Rock* more over time, but then it was abruptly off the air and I didn't see it again for quite a few years. When I did see *Fraggle Rock* again, some time in the 1990s, it had somehow grown far more appealing. I was able to see a larger number of episodes in the correct order, and formed a better sense of the unique balance of whimsy and serious purpose that lay behind this fantasy, Jim Henson's most perfect creation.

Inevitably, when I enter a fantasy universe in this way, I always begin to add to it, whether it's a quantum mechanical explanation of the One Ring or Divine intervention to put Ned Flanders in his place. Half in and half out of *Fraggle Rock* over the last two years, I've gone to town, and have not only added new characters, but also two large volumes of extra "lore" about the show that you'll never find on Muppet Wiki. Are there other Gorgs, or just the three of them? What do Doozer sticks taste like? Since they seem to be understood by the viewers in several countries, what language do Fraggles actually speak? I give answers to these and many other questions. I couldn't stop there, either. New characters meant new situations and relationships, and plots began to emerge. I had at least three well-formed stories I could tell, and it might be possible to complete others.

That was when I began to worry about doing it ... actually writing what was filling more and more of my mind. The trouble was, *Fraggle Rock* was intellectual property owned by one of the most litigious corporations on Earth. Not Jim Henson Productions, but Walt Disney Studios. Nothing I wrote in this vein could ever be published. Well ... so be it. At this point I've accepted that I have no career in writing of any kind ahead of me. The market is in flux and I have no idea how breaking into it is done. As well, I doubt I have time to nurture any career that can't be launched virtually overnight.

So the stories will never be properly published. I've found writing the first of them to be enormously satisfying anyway. I hope you all find as much enjoyment in reading it. If not ... if all this is to you is an uncool gush of fanboyish enthusiasm for something that seems unworthy of any adult's serious attention ... maybe it is. But too bad – I'm down in the Rock, not listening to you. What has Outer Space to offer me that is better?

ALL FRAGGLES, NOW AND THEN

When Kiki entered their Hole, Darl was on the floor, engrossed with an orange gourd he was carving with a knife.

“That’s not how you cut a honeygourd up for dinner, Love,” she said. “Besides, that one is past its prime. They’re best *green*.”

“I know it. It’s not for dinner, though. And I need one this colour rather than fresh.”

Kiki bent to examine his work. Darl had already removed the soft pulp from inside and left the slops in a bowl he’d set aside. He had cut two triangular holes in the empty shell, and was working on what appeared to be a mouth!

“Why, it looks like a face!”

“It *is* a face, Kiki dear! It’s called a ‘Jack-o-lantern,’ and we used to make them for Halloween when I was a Silly Creature.”

“But what is it *for*?” Kiki asked.

“Well ...” he began slowly, but then spoke more enthusiastically as he as he warmed to the subject.

Kiki listened. Back when they first met, she would listen absently to the absurd stories Darl told about his life in Outer Space, before he came to live in Fraggles Rock, but over time she became more and more interested in them. She wasn’t sure just how true they were, but she had never really questioned his stories, either. Outer Space – or just *Outside*, as Darl preferred to call it – was a particularly strange place, even by her Fraggles standards.

This story of Darl’s, however, truly took the prize.

What he was saying was that Outside, this was the time of year, when the summer had passed, that the children of Silly Creatures dressed themselves up to look spooky, then went door to door after dark, asking for “treats” – gifts of candy or other sweets.

“For goodness sake, who would be scared of children at the door? And even if they did scare you, why would you give treats to anyone who gave you a fright?”

“If you don’t, you’re fair game to have a ‘trick’ played on you.”

“What?”

“Oh, well, not really. Nobody is actually scared, and you’re not supposed to actually play tricks. It’s all just pretend, and part of the fun.”

Darl held up the completed gourd. The eyes were not quite the same size, and certainly not level, and the grin that stretched from one side to the other was a gap-toothed nightmare.

Darl stood up and handed Kiki the jack-o-lantern. “Once it’s dried out a little, I’ll stick a candle inside, and leave it out where it can be seen once it gets dark. People also put out spooky things like make-believe skulls, phony gravestones and rubber rats.”

“Rubber *what?*” she asked dubiously, looking at the face carved in the gourd.

Darl chose to ignore that question, and rushed on. “It’s all *put on*, of course. Nobody believes that the kids at their door are scary, and they have plenty of candy and stuff to give them. Grown-ups also wear costumes sometimes when they go to Halloween parties. Everybody has a good time.”

“Phht. I should think being a huge, galumphing Silly Creature would be scary enough *without* a costume.” Kiki handed the jack-o-lantern back to her Holerate, went over to sit on the bed and began to undo the buttons of her favourite black shirt.

“Maybe we can make a pie from the gourd innards,” said Darl. “Outside we always had pumpkin pie at this time of year, and honeygourd is near enough to pumpkin that I think it’ll be good.”

Kiki regarded her feet, which were dirty. Standing up again, she went to one corner of the Hole where there was a natural basin in the stone floor, with a rivulet of clear water running through it. Stepping in, she swished her feet about as she said, “Any reason for a party is a good one. Are you *thinking* of having a party? I’m sure there hasn’t been one for at least a week.”

“I hadn’t thought of that – why not?” Darl said eagerly. “We’ll ask the usual gang to come, and have a Halloween theme!” He set the jack-o-lantern on a stool, and put a mat down for Kiki to step on with her wet feet. “We’ll have to make, oh, muffins I guess, and bowls of different berries. Even Doozer sticks ... as long as *I* don’t have to eat ‘em. Rock sugar candy that tastes peppery, gak!”

“You’re weird,” Kiki said, and giggled.

“We can ask our friends to wear masks and disguises!” he enthused. “Maybe I’ll dress up like a Gorg.”

“A Fragglesized Gorg wouldn’t be very scary ... not even as a game.” Kiki wiped her feet, then used the mat to rub them dry before she sat on the bed again. “When do you want to have the

party? Tomorrow? I'd better work on that honeygourd pie first thing in the morning, then, while you go around to find our friends and tell them to come." Kiki popped up again, shirttails flapping. "I better cover the pulp with a bit of freeze-grass to keep it fresh until then."

Darl was standing in the middle of the Hole, momentarily lost in thought. "Did you think I was scary when we first met?"

"Actually ... yes."

It had been more than a year since the day Darl first saw Kiki wandering the streets in "Outer Space," plainly lost and distraught. What was most odd about it was that no one else seemed to notice a furry, knee-high person-sort-of-thing with a long, ropey tail trying to keep out of their way ... yet apparently in need of *somebody's* help. Since Darl was the only one who seemed to see it, he had stepped in to rescue the creature. The rest of that evening was spent at his shabby home, establishing a friendship with what he learned was a Fragggle.

Kiki hadn't planned to wander so far away from the Fragggle Hole she had newly found, and *definitely* didn't mean to lose her way back. It had just happened. Neither had she planned on losing her way again the next day, after she had invited Darl to follow her, on his hands and knees, into the Hole after they had rediscovered it. Once he was trapped in the Rock, one thing led to another, and ... well ... now Darl was a Fragggle who lived in the Rock with Kiki, and that was a story he had played over in his head many times ... and it still left him in a state of delighted wonderment.

Morning came gradually in the Rock, as the light-making Ditzies woke and began to flex their wings. As they took to the air, spreading dawn through every cavern and grotto, Fraggles and every other kind of creature woke also, and the Rock quickened with activity. Darl lay asnooze for a while after Kiki got out of bed, stretched on tip-toe, scratched and burrowed into her second-favourite shirt – the one with wide, black and white stripes – and began to take plates and bowls down from the shelves to start breakfast. It was the clatter of dishes that finally ended Darl's sleep.

Radish muffins from the day before were not his favourite way to start the morning. They became a good deal more appetizing when broken up and fried in a little gourd grease, but he still missed bacon. With a Cove Hen egg on the side, it was not half bad ... he could even imagine the smell of fresh coffee. The hot bitter-berry juice in his mug just wasn't the same, though at least it seemed to wake a body up.

"I'll be baking this morning," said Kiki over her plate. "You'd just get in the way, so you go around and make the invitations. Maybe we can join in on Red's tail-hanging gymnastics this afternoon."

Darl was leery of the very idea of dangling from a tail he had never quite grown comfortable with.

It was never hard to find Boober. If he wasn't in his Hole with mountains of other Fraggles'

dirty clothes to launder, he was usually in his Hole with a pot of gumbo on the fire. But this time, Boober was nowhere to be seen. Darl asked Large Marvin if he had seen the germ-obsessed Fragggle.

“Aw, no? Nod least I don’d think so,” answered Marvin, who then went back to counting his fingers ... and getting a different total, each time.

Darl encountered Willa next. She carried a yoke across her shoulders, suspending two large pots of fresh clay for her pottery, and was, as usual, muddy from digging it up.

“Oh, gee... Boober will never come anywhere near *me*.” Willa was painfully shy, and looked aside whenever she spoke with anyone. It was only with her clay and her wheel that confidence awoke in her. “He’s afraid he’ll *catch* something unless I’m all washed up.”

Darl told her of the party, and they went their separate ways.

On the terrace above the Great Hall’s pool, Darl found Red and Gobo, setting up poles, trapezes and other higgledy-piggledy contraptions for that day’s tail-hanging championships.

“Hiya!” said Gobo, “Can you lend us a hand?”

“Better still, a *taaaaaa*!” crowed Red. She knew tails were a bit of a sore point with the newcomer.

“Lay off, eh?” said Gobo. “How would you feel if you *didn’t* have a tail?”

“Like there was nothing at the end, ha haaa!”

“Aw, Red, stop kidding around.”

“Seriously, guys,” said Darl, getting his word in edgewise, “Kiki and I are having a Halloween party tonight. Naturally, you’re both invited, but do you know where Boober is?”

“Wasn’t he with his laundry?” was all Red could offer.

“Nope.”

“Well, that’s funny,” said Gobo. “I brought him a bundle just last night. He said he was going to do it this morning.”

“Maybe he was scared by your smelly socks?”

“Re-ed! Who wears *socks*?”

“All right, all right, maybe Boober ran out of soap-wort and went to pick some more.”

“Good idea,” said Darl. “I’ll check. The party won’t be the same without Boober.”

“No,” crowed Red, “it might be more *fun!*”

Just then an adenoidal voice could be heard singing a little way off. With a clatter of loose stones, Wembly stepped into view from behind a curtain of rock.

“Why is there never time enough,
In spite of all the hours in a day?
Morning comes, but before it’s gone
I’ve fooled it half away.

“All too soon I’m fixing lunch –
Even if breakfast plates aren’t dry.
Besides, it’s already late afternoon –
Funny how time does fly.

Tomorrow I’ll have dinner first,
Sing myself to sleep by half-past three.
But who will tuck my blanket in,
If I’m in bed before me?

Why is there never time enough,
In spite of all the hours in the day?
I’d like to think the problem through,
But now it’s time to play!”

Seeing them, Wembly broke off his song. “Oh, hi, guys!”

“Seen Boober?” Darl asked.

“Uh-uhn. I haven’t seen anybody yet. Just you guys.”

“I’m going to look for him, but if you see him first, Wembly, tell him that he has to come to our Hole around dinner time. Kiki and I are having a Halloween Party, and you have to come in costume.”

“Oh, sure!” Wembly chirped happily.

But as Darl turned to go, Wembly spoke again.

“Um ... by the way, what is a Hallow Ween Party?”

“I was just meaning to ask that myself,” said Red and Gobo together.

Boober *wasn’t* anywhere that Fraggles went to pick soap-wort. Nor was he where he collected pumice stones for scrubbing. Nor was he at the pissy-smelling pool whose water made even

the toughest laundry stains fade away. In fact, Boober didn't seem to be anywhere at all, which presented Darl with a problem. Boober often didn't *want* to be found, and how did you find someone who didn't want you to?

The answer was that you asked the Trash Heap. However, *that* meant a long trip to the Fraggles Hole that led out into the Gorg's Garden, however, a risky venture with inadequate cover in wide-open spaces full of hostile Gorgs, and an answer from Madame Trash Heap that (as often as not) made no sense. So Darl did the next-best thing: he asked the Storyteller.

"Not doing laundry?" Storyteller cleaned her glasses on the hem of her wrap. Since her wrap was probably dirtier than her glasses that didn't help much, but she seemed satisfied. Darl suspected that this was just her method of playing for time while she thought. "Let's see," she mused. "Today is eleven days after the petals of the Luminous Lilies began to fade, the day after the carrot juice festival, two days before Red's fourth birthday of the year, and ... goodness, yes! Today is the day Boober doesn't do laundry."

"What?" Said Darl, more surprised than usual by a left-turn in Fraggles thinking. "The day Boober doesn't do laundry is *on the calendar*? But there are lots of days that Boober doesn't do laundry for one reason or another!"

"Yes, but today there's a *special* reason why he doesn't do laundry."

"Why?"

"I can't tell you. You'd have to ask Boober."

"Umm ... well, never mind. I only need to know where Boober *is*, not why he's not *somewhere else*."

"I really can't tell you that, either. I never asked him. Boober made it plain that it was one of those things that he didn't want to discuss. Ever. Take him your laundry tomorrow, why don't you?"

"It's not about laundry," said Darl, and explained about the Halloween Party.

"Oh, dear!" said Storyteller, polishing her glasses again. "Are you sure tonight is a good time?" she asked.

On the way back to his Hole, Darl stopped and talked with Mokey, Gillis, Lou, Rumple, Deb, Tosh, the World's Oldest Fraggles and at least a dozen others, but naturally hurried past Marlin with a barely repressed shudder. He asked each of them – except Marlin – two questions: Would they come to the Halloween Party? And where was Boober?

The answers were always the same. 'Sure. What's a Hollow Een?' And, "I have no idea. Why isn't he doing my laundry?"

Darl brushed aside the bead curtain at the entrance to his Hole, and looked down the steep rock staircase inside. Like most Holes, it was neither very large nor very small, but just large enough for two Fraggles to cozily live in, and barely large enough for several Fraggles to crowd into. At the bottom of the stairs was an open space used as a kitchen, breakfast nook and sitting room. An open fire burned merrily in a cubby, and running water spouted from the rock wall. Furnishings were sparse, but aside from a bench and a couple of chairs, some wooden shelves, a chest for clothes and what-not, a table and a bed for the two of them, what else did a loving pair of Fraggles need?

Kiki was humming to herself, leaning back in a chair with her feet up on the table. When she heard Darl coming in she looked up, smiling, and said, "The pies and cookies are baking. How did it go? Find everyone?"

"Yeah. Everyone," Darl said, "*except* Boober. No one seems to know where he is, not even Storyteller or Tosh, and Tosh is his best friend."

"Oh, *we* know where he is," said a tiny voice from the floor.

Darl looked down to find two Doozers unloading bundles of Doozer Sticks from a tiny cart. One of them was Cotterpin, the Architect's pupil and a friend of some of the Fraggles. Kiki must have asked her to bring the spicy, sugary sticks for the Party. Unusually, they were in different colours this time— different flavours, perhaps? Darl hoped they were better than the last flavoured sticks he had been coaxed into trying. They had reminded him of strawberries and turnip and red-hot peppers, and the mere memory of them still left an unpleasant taste in his mouth. Not for the first time, he wondered what the heck they were made of, but the Doozers seemed unable (or maybe unwilling) to explain.

The other Doozer with Cotterpin was Slide Rule, who had a habit of shop-talking with Darl ever since Darl showed him how to build a suspended cantilever. "If Boober is the drowsy-looking Fraggie who is depressed all the time," he said, "we know just where he goes at this time of the year."

"Gosh, yeah," added Cotterpin, "Every year on this day, it's the same old thing. A big dopey Fraggie with his hat pulled down over his eyes gets in our way while we're tapping 'shrooms for glue. If he's going that way at all, he could only be going one place."

"Well, *where is that*, for goodness sake?" said Kiki.

The Doozers explained, and Darl's face fell.

"You're kidding me!"

Since they were expected, both Kiki and Darl would have to go to Red's Tail Hanging Contest. But while Kiki would compete with the others, Darl would excuse himself to go and find Boober. In any case, it was a perfect way to avoid an event in which Darl had no desire to participate. The last time he had let himself be persuaded to hang from his tail, he had fallen on his nose. He wasn't certain whether it would have been any less embarrassing to succeed.

He took a last look back just before entering the narrow tunnel the Doozers had told him to look for. Red swung upside down from a crossbar, then with an effort flipped herself up into a sitting position ... then slipped off backwards. Her tail didn't grip and she was suddenly on her back on the ground. "Ow!"

Darl knew he shouldn't, but he snickered anyway. Then he was on his way.

The tunnel was wide enough to stretch out both arms, and sloped first up, then down, and finally began a long, shallow curve to the left before opening up to a larger cave full of oddly shaped formations. It was one of the main crossroads used for reaching any number of places. At one end, a path led to the Great Barrens. The two dark openings halfway up the opposite wall took the traveler in a wide circle and back to where he started. *That* tunnel over there led ultimately to the Winding Stair colony, and the other one next to it led to the Iron Kettle colony. You reached the Crystal Cavern and The Cave of Dreams by taking one of the hard-to-reach tunnels just above ground level. In fact, dozens of tunnels branched out from this central cave, each with its own rivershed of exotic, beautiful, rugged, enchanting, frightening, mysterious or even downright dangerous destinations.

Slide Rule had told Darl to take the path toward the large bottle-shaped column in the middle of the cave, and then go around to the *right*. If he did, he should see a sort of natural bridge to cross over a crevice full of Fondling Weeds (whatever you do, don't fall in, they're hard to resist), and a purple-crystal-lined passage on the other side. That would lead to a lake-filled cave. So far, this was a well-traveled route. But from one tunnel to the next, ducking under low entrances, squeezing between ranks of marching stalagmites and pulling himself up on ledges to reach tunnels nearer the ceiling than the floor, Darl gradually found he was traveling in no-one's footsteps. No ... that was not quite true. Darl looked closely at the trail and saw a faint line of footprints. A heel mark in the moss here, a few toes scuffing the dirt there. He was following the trail of a lone Fraggles, who had gone on before him. Boober.

Fraggle Rock was almost infinite in its variety and strangeness. It went off in unexpected directions, looped back on itself, and arrived at places no one thought to look for. Tunnels appeared where no one expected, and led where no one imagined. Every cave was the doorway to another, each as distinctive as rooms in a Victorian mansion that knows no bounds, but just goes on and on, through archways, around corners, past unfamiliar stairways and around puzzling obstructions. Did that formation of purplish flowstone resemble the Firechief Fraggles' left profile? If you moved ten paces, though, it looked more like an old four-poster bed with the sheets all disarrayed. And that stalagmite over *there* was the spitting image of Cantus's magic flute, except that no flute ever played had ever been twice as tall as its player!

And of course the Doozers left signs of their passage almost everywhere. A Fraggles knew when a Fraggles was in *terra incognita* when it dawned on him that he hadn't seen a single Doozer construction – not so much as a broken Doozer stick or a tractor road no wider than a Fraggles' hand – for a long time.

Darl seemed to recall that the last tiny Doozer footprint he saw in the dust was at least several hundred paces back. He was getting a long way from "civilization" as Fraggles knew it. He thought he might even be too far off the beaten track even for the Iron Bees. But still he

followed the solitary trail of Fraggie footprints through the maze of stone.

When he was new in the Rock, Darl found the vast warren of tunnels and caverns to be a confusing labyrinth, and lost his way with frustrating regularity. Over time, though, he began to recognize the better-traveled pathways, and also started to develop a Fraggie instinct for finding his way. Whether or not he was conscious of a particular stretch of tumbled rock or forest of stony pillars, he felt comfortable around them, and knew he was on familiar ground. More surprising, he always remembered the directions he was told, however complex and unclear they seemed at the time.

But not so now. Still following Slide Rule's directions, Darl felt less and less comfortable with his surroundings. The rock faces that rose up on either side had lost their friendly visage and become blank slates, like ancient tombstones whose inscriptions had weathered away.

Worse, there was an ominous sound ahead.

Darl had come out into what he thought was one of the largest caverns he had yet seen. Only the cave with the Sea of Mists had been plainly larger, but of course *that* was shrouded in mists from the lake, so no one was quite sure just *how* large that might be. But while the Sea of Mists receded into a white void, this cavern towered upward until its ceiling was lost in darkness. Down at the bottom of this dark well of sheer stone walls burned a fire, apparently the sole source of light. As the fire leapt and cast its reddish glow on the stone, so the silent shadow of a monstrous Fraggie danced over the walls. It was as big as a Gorg's appetite, and then some.

Almost lost at the feet of his own shadow, Boober glided here and there, dabbing at one spot on the wall, and then another. The ominous sound Darl had heard earlier was the Fraggie singing in a sad monotone:

"On a day so long ago that hours were young and rock was new,
Fraggle kind first opened eye, and saw that *they* were newborn too.
Strange, they said, to wake this way beside a friend you never knew.

The world unfurled its endless caves, no two of them the same.
And everywhere the Fraggles went, a sense of wonder came ...

"Ahem," said Darl, conscious that he was probably interrupting something important.

"Who's there?" screamed Boober, and whipped around as though stung. His hands were red and dripping, and for a horrified moment Darl thought it was blood ... but then he noticed a paint bucket on the ground, and a sponge in one of Boober's hands. He had been painting on the rock wall, and now that he was closer to the flickering light, Darl could see the crude drawings of Fraggles all over the rough stone. He thought of Lascaux. Altamira. The same burden of unfathomable time seemed to weigh down the Fraggie paintings before him.

"Is that *you*, Darl? What are you *doing* here?" wailed Boober. "Nobody's supposed to be here, but me!"

"I... um ..." It suddenly didn't seem to even remotely urgent enough to come all this way to disturb a friend at something private just to invite him to a party. So instead he asked, "What are you doing?"

"It's private," snapped Boober, dropping the sponge into the paint bucket and trying vainly to conceal the rock paintings with his outstretched arms and small body. Try as he might, he just couldn't spread out enough to hide *anything*!

Darl sat on a moss-crowned boulder to massage his tired feet. "Yeah, I guess it is. Storyteller said you'd be doing something you didn't talk about, so I didn't ask. I needed to know where you were, though, and one of the Doozers told me they'd seen you go this way."

Boober sighed resignedly and sat down next to Darl, wiping the paint off his hands with a badly stained rag.

"Yeah. Well, now you've found me. Is it okay if I do your laundry *tomorrow*?" His words dripped sarcasm.

"It's not about *laundry*, damn it! Yesterday I realized it would be Halloween today. Kiki and I decided to have a party this evening, after Red's tail-hanging whatever. Everyone else has already been invited, but I've spent half the day looking for *you*!"

"... Looking for me? Oh," Boober said hesitantly. "Well ... I'm not really big on parties, you know... it wouldn't be very much fun, would it?"

"Well... depends. There'll be good food to eat, and games that some of us might think are fun. But you also get to dress up in a scary costume. You should like *that*."

"Scary? You mean like a germ? Or a poison cackler?"

"That's pretty much what I mean. That wouldn't be any fun at all, would it?"

"No, not in the least. I *could* do that, maybe... except I can't," he ended, firmly.

"You can't? Why not?"

"I have work to do here."

"Can't it wait until tomorrow?"

"Absolutely not! It has to be done today, before dark, or not at all!"

"It won't be the same without you, Boober, but if this is what you have to do, then I guess I'd better let you do it. I'll save you some pie, though."

Darl stood up to go ... and stepped right into the bucket of red paint. Yanking his foot out hastily, he caught his toe on the handle and knocked the bucket over before anyone could say,

“Red Fraggles.” Paint splattered in all directions, while Darl hopped away holding one red foot in the air. Boober stared, aghast, and then looked even more dismal than usual.

“Oh, that’s just *fine!*” he shouted. “I don’t have any more paint, and by the time I walk all the way home and all the way back with another bucket, it’ll *be way* after dark!”

“I’m sorry! I’m sorry,” wailed Darl. “Is there enough of that rag to wipe this off?”

“Here!” snapped Boober, thrusting the paint-smeared bit of cloth at him. It wasn’t nearly enough. Darl was going home with one foot red to above the ankle, and that was that.

“I don’t suppose there’s some other way to finish whatever you’re doing?” Darl asked hopefully. “Is there any way I can help?”

“No,” groaned Boober, “and no. The paintings on the rock all have to be painted freshly over, and I was less than half done. The other half...” He hesitated.

“The other half, what?”

“I don’t know,” Boober admitted. “Even in the face of this unmitigated disaster, I can’t say. Maybe if we stay in our Holes after dark and we’re very, very lucky, though, there might not be a catastrophe.”

“Um... in that case, you can stay in Kiki’s and my Hole, by coming to our party.”

“You sound like you don’t believe me?”

“I never know what to believe in Fraggles Rock,” said Darl, who genuinely didn’t. “And you have been known to exaggerate disasters just a *wee, tiny bit.*”

Boober used the now-empty paint bucket to scoop sand over his fire, extinguishing the light. For a moment nothing could be seen, and then the faint light from the tunnel leading home gradually grew visible. Had anyone else been there, they would have seen one Fraggles with a red foot and a second with a shabby cap and muffler shuffling away into the dimness.

Said one to the other, “What is a Hello When, anyway?”

Gobo was dressed, so he said, like The Rhyming Rock. However, the silvered paper ball around his middle made him look more like a dented cooking pot with legs. He helped himself to another honey-dipped Doozer stick, and spoke for everyone when he said, “Alright, we’re all here. Some of us are in costumes, like you asked. Now you have to tell us what Halloween is, like you said you would.”

The other Fraggles gathered in a circle around their hosts. Looking about at their expectant faces, it occurred to Darl that almost every day was Halloween for such a motley crew. Red

was dressed as her role model, Rock Hockey Hannah, complete with pads, helmet and long-handled paddle. Mokey had dressed as a painting, with a canvas hung on her front and back, and a variety of colours smeared on her face to match. The Archbanger claimed to be the Firechief, and vice versa. Or had they just forgotten, and come as themselves? Large Marvin was the Belching Rock, and belched with annoying frequency and authenticity. Lou and Wembly came as a pair of banana trees, which was rather a good trick since there were no bananas in Fraggles Rock. Convincing John wore a variety of odds and ends that suggested that he had never quite made up his mind what to be. Despite such an unprecedented parade of colours and accessories, the overall impression was that nothing was really out of the ordinary for Fraggles.

Darl cleared his throat, and began: "A long time ago, in what was my world, people celebrated the changing seasons of the year with a number of special days. After the summer, when the harvest has come in and the days are getting longer, we pay our respects to the approaching end of the year. It's a somber season, with cold weather approaching, the leaves dropping from trees, barren fields and longer nights. People's imaginations turn to the darker side of nature ... including the spirits of those who might still unhappily wander the Earth after their span is over.

"One tradition we Silly Creatures observe for Halloween is make-believe. We dress up in ways that look scary, but also a little silly, and that way we defy our fear of the dark and unknown. Devils and ghosts didn't seem so frightening when we know that under the costume is only someone who is pretending. Young children, especially, go from house to house on Halloween, knocking on doors and demanding a treat – an apple, a cookie, or candy – to make the spirits leave them in peace. If the grown-ups refuse to give a treat, a 'trick' may follow. Nobody really believes any of this, of course, but grown-ups pretending to be afraid of the kids at their door is part of the game.

"When we grow too old to go door to door on Halloween, asking for treats, we can still have fun wearing costumes ... at a party, like this one!"

It was the only time since he'd lived in the Rock that Darl had seen a number of Fraggles together who weren't making an uproarious racket. Everyone was staring at Darl in silence. It was so quiet that you could have heard a Toe Tickler crawling ten feet away.

Then Kiki was at his side, whispering urgently in his ear, "Darling? Why didn't you mention any of this *yesterday*?"

"I thought I did?"

Kiki smiled uncertainly and turned to the other Fraggles, still standing silently about the room.

"Anyone for a muffin?" she said brightly, thrusting a tray of baked carrot and berry confections at the crowd.

"Oh... yeah, sure, Kiki," said Wembly, taking one in slow motion. "Green icing. Nice."

"You didn't!" Kiki hissed in Darl's ear. "All you talked about were costumes! And giving people

a scare. You didn't say *anything* about spirits and ghosts!"

Darl thought it over for a moment, while everyone stared at him. "You know, I *could* have been a little more clear about that," he mumbled. Obviously there was some complication to celebrating Halloween in the Rock that he hadn't anticipated.

The awkward silence was broken by Gobo, who said, "I'll say! Didn't you know that this Halloween of yours happens at the time of year in Fraggles Rock *when all Fraggles, past and present, then and now*, are closest together?"

"That's right," added Mokey, "It's at this time of year when we must be most careful not to violate the borders that separate all the generations of Fraggles that have ever lived, going all the way back to the Beginning. If we were to forget the years between us, time would fall into itself and all the Ages would be One."

"Oh," Darl said blankly.

"The dead would walk," moaned Boober, collapsed against a wall at the back of the crowd.

"Perhaps one day, when the right time comes, All *will* become One... Golly," continued Mokey, "do you suppose *this* could be the right time? It would be wonderful to talk with Mother again."

Storyteller quickly put *that* idea to rest. "It is certainly *not* time. Until it is, Fraggles will keep the walls between Yesterday and Today intact by minding our own business whenever we see or hear something that's not Here and Now." She directed her next words directly to Darl. "It's none of our concern, don't you see?"

"And now you've come along and shaken the walls! Disaster!" wailed Boober from the back of the crowd.

"Didn't you *feel* how Other Times and Fraggles of long ago are in the air all around us?" whispered Mokey.

Darl was about to say no, he hadn't, but stopped himself when he realized that he *had* sensed something strange in the air over the last few days. He realized, now, that it had been that sense of strangeness which had put him in mind of Halloween. "Yeah," he said. "I guess I *did*. I just didn't know what it meant. I wish someone had told me."

"But we *don't* talk about such things, silly," Kiki murmured and squeezed his arm.

"There's no real harm done, though, is there?" he asked, hopefully.

"Well, none that *I* can see," said Gobo, looking about. He laughed, a little nervously. "Naw, it's all right. You just sort of caught us by surprise."

"No! We're all doomed!" cried Boober from the back.

“Booo-ber! It’ll be alright,” Gobo said, this time more confidently.

“Sure, it will,” Mokey added her assurance to Gobo’s. “All Darl did was *mention* spirits. And only for a moment ... You won’t say anything more, will you?” she purred to Darl.

“Not a word!” he promised.

“You don’t *understand!*” insisted Boober. “It’s no longer just about him *talking* about spirits ... He stopped me from ... from ...” Boober shuddered. “I guess I’m going to have to explain. No one in my family has ever had to explain before. But, then, no one in my family has ever failed in his mission on the *same day* that some dummy *called* to the spirits before...”

“I have a bad feeling about this,” said Storyteller, with reason. “I’ve always known Boober’s family had a special ritual that they alone performed every year at this time, but they never told any Storyteller before me what it was.”

Boober grabbed a cup of lightly fermented glowberry juice from the table and swallowed it down. “It’s like this,” he said. “Ever since anyone can remember, my family has gone to the Rock of the Ancestors once a year at this time. We clean up and refresh all the painted pictures of the Fraggles that came before us, and tell them everything that has happened in the last year, and that everything is all right. You see, they get curious about ... us.”

“Wait!” shouted Red. “You know where the Rock of the Ancestors is? Nobody has known that for a thousand years ... way before even the World’s Oldest Fraggles was born.”

“Of course, my family has known. Who do you think painted the first Fraggles on the wall there?”

“I ... don’t ... know ... Boober. No one has seen it! *Are* there Fraggles painted on the walls of the Rock of the Ancestors?”

“You know,” Darl put in, “Since a Doozer told me how to find it, I bet *they* have known about this Rock of the Ancestors all along.” But nobody was listening to him.

It was true, though. As Boober told it, the first member of his family really *had* painted a portrait of his best friend on the Rock of the Ancestors, when she passed away long ago In The Beginning. And he went there to talk with her once a year, when he felt her spirit grow restless. Over the years, he added other effigies of the Fraggles he knew, one by one as they departed, until he had covered almost the entire wall within reach of the ground. Then, when it was his own turn to depart, his son added his father’s portrait on the wall. Every year he came back to the Rock of the Ancestors, adding the likenesses of Fraggles as they departed, refreshing the old ones and talking to them. Later, his son painted *his* father’s portrait on the wall. In a few generations, the cave wall became full, and with the aid of scaffolding the paintings rose overhead almost to the ceiling, and around both sides to crowd around the narrow entrance to the cave.

“You can sometimes hear them speak, almost.” Boober whispered. “They ask questions, I

think. ‘How is Mokey’s painting coming along? Has Cantus been through the Great Hall this year? How was the last Medley? It doesn’t matter, exactly. They just want to know that all goes well with us. I talk to them, telling everything I can think of until the air seems to clear and they seem satisfied, you know. Then ... well ...

“Yes, go on,” urged Red.

“Yeah, Boober, what then? What next?” the others clamored.

He sighed. “Then ... I sing them to sleep again.”

That was when they all heard it. A moan.

It wasn’t sad, precisely. You couldn’t call it cheerful, either. Or be altogether sure it was there at all. What it was like, more than anything, was a weary curiosity that emanated from outside Darl and Kiki’s Hole.

“What was that?” squeaked Willa.

“It came from the window!” Red cried.

“They’re here,” said Boober quietly. “I haven’t sung them to sleep.”

Everyone crowded to the window-hole to see what was making the uncanny sound outside. They jostled each other for a view, jamming together nearly two and three deep. Some of more enterprising stood on stools and chairs to peer over their friend’s heads.

The Hole shared by Darl and Kiki was high up along one side of the Great Hall, and its window-hole gave a fine view overlooking the terraces and the central pool below. At this time of night, of course, all sensible Fraggles were at home in their own Holes, preparing for bed or already asleep. It was very late, when the Ditzies had mostly dozed off, bringing darkness to the familiar scene. Stalactites, stalagmites, boulders and ledges were all draped in black velvet, and a cloak of most unfamiliar stillness lay over the empty cavern.

And there, shimmering faintly in the air, hovered misty *shapes*. They hung above the floor of the Great Hall in their hundreds, bobbing slowly up and down like corks in the swell of an invisible sea. They were at the level of the Fraggles looking out at them, and gave the unsettling impression that they were looking back ... and *expected* something.

An awestruck Wembly spoke first. “Who ... who are they, Boober?”

“Yeaahhhh ...” drawled Gobo, short of words for once.

Boober sighed deeply. “Us. Those are The Fraggles. They are all the Fraggles who have ever lived until now. So far as I know, this is the first time they’ve ever come away from the Rock of

the Ancestors and returned to the great Hall. Usually, they're content to go to sleep again for another year when they've been sung to. My father sang to the spirits, his father sang to them, and his father sang to them ... all the way back to the Beginning. This is the first time they haven't been sung to ... and it's all *his* fault!" Boober whirled around, pointing an accusing finger at Darl.

"I didn't mean to. I'm sorry!"

"Well, being sorry won't help much now," said Gobo, beginning to assert his leadership. "Does anyone have any idea what we should do now?"

"Maybe it's all right," Mokey quavered. "The spirits will see that everything is fine with their children and grand-children, and return to the Rock of the Ancestors."

As one, the Fraggles looked out at the assembled spirits through the window. They showed no sign of going anywhere.

"I don't think we ought to wait and see," Gobo said. "They might *not* go back to their rest again."

"Can't they just stay with us?" asked Mokey.

"I don't know about you guys, but I think that would be a little creepy," said Wembly. He shuddered and added quickly, "No offense meant to the ... you know who."

"Wembly is right," the Storyteller spoke up. "The proper place for the spirits is not with the living. When the time comes for us All to be together, it won't be here, it will be at the Rock of the Ancestors."

"Why don't you finish singing them to sleep, then?" suggested Kiki.

"It's too late for that," Boober protested glumly.

Gobo gave him an encouraging slap on the shoulder. "You won't know until you try, Boober. Go on! Sing!"

"All right," he said, then cleared his throat.

"On a day so long ago that hours were young and rock was new,
Fraggle kind first opened eye, and saw that *they* were newborn too.
Strange, they said, to wake this way beside a friend you never knew.

The world unfurled its endless caves, no two of them the same.
And everywhere that day the Fraggles went a sense of wonder came.
As one by one, they sang the song that gives all things their name.

Yes, a whole world of our own!
Yes, the whole Rock is our own!
For we are one, old and young,
Then and Now, together sung.
We are the music of the Rock ... ”

It wasn't working... Boober's voice began to falter.

“It'll work,” insisted Gobo. “I think we should *all* sing.”

It was uncanny, and never ceased to amaze Darl, that other Fraggles instinctively knew the words to almost any song. It was as though they merely had to hear a word begun, and could finish it without missing a beat. In almost no time, the whole ensemble was singing ... except Darl, of course, who had no clue to what came next and contented himself with switching his tail unconsciously with the rhythm. It was as much of the instinct as he seemed to have been given.

“For golden walls and amber rooms they sang the words, “Great Hall!”
From bright ‘Ditzies’ to brisk ‘Doozers’ no object was too small.
One by one, from stone to sun, they sang names for them all!

The light most dear, and water clear, of things there seemed no end,
No sooner than they find a name, they must find another ten.
Until at last they saw themselves and named each other ‘friend.’

Yes, a whole world of our own!
Yes, the whole Rock is our own!
For we are one, old and young,
Then and Now, together sung.
We are the music of the Rock.”

Now it *was* working. Candles were lighting up throughout the Great Hall, wherever the song reached sleeping Fraggles and woke them. Then, one by one, they joined in. With *all* the Fraggles singing, the spirits of their Ancestors gathered in the Hall had become still, attentive, and the feeling of wistful questioning that hung in the air had gone.

“Yes, a whole world of our own!
Yes, the whole Rock is our own,
We are one, and always have been.
We are one and forever will be.
We are the Music of the Rock,

The Music of the Rock!”

And as the final note faded away, a breeze seemed to rise in the Great Hall. With a sense of quiet gratitude, the assemblage of Ancestors faded away with it.

"They're gone," whispered Gobo in the hush.

The Fraggles at Darl's Halloween party fell back from the window, gabbling and laughing as if the awe and fear they had felt moments before had never happened. Some reached for pie, others giggled as they compared and disputed about what they had seen.

"Gone for at least for another year," Boober sighed. "... No thanks to *him*," he added darkly, casting a meaningful glance at Darl.

"Next year I won't interrupt, and they *won't* be back..." Darl replied, somewhat defensively.

"Never mind that," said Gobo. "Actually ... I think we've just learned something very important from this experience."

Mokey came up behind Gobo with a mug in her hand. "Oh, I agree entirely! All this time we've left the poor things forgotten, and only Boober's family to look after them, year after year. No wonder they came to see us once they were free!"

"You mean..." said Boober, "I *shouldn't* sing them to sleep every year before they wake?"

"No, not that exactly. I think we should *all* go to the Rock of the Ancestors on this night. Why not let them wake up to greet us, and then *all* of us sing them to sleep again? After all, someday we will be Ancestors too, and wouldn't you want to see your children and grandchildren again?"

The perpetually glum Fraggles swallowed and said, "I never thought of it that way, before. Now that you mention it, my old Da used to say that what the Ancestors really wanted was to speak to their loved ones. Maybe... maybe all this time they've been waiting for me to bring you to them ... and I forgot?"

Mokey gave Boober a hug and said, "Next year we'll *all* go with you!"

Boober brightened up, a rare thing for him. "It'll be a lot less work, touching up the paintings, that's for sure!"

Soon the party was in full swing again, and didn't begin to wind down until hours later, when yawns began to bloom among the Fraggles like Black Button Blossoms in a field of white Cotton Puff Blooms. Finally, only Kiki and Darl were left in their Hole, contemplating the disorder of cups, plates, spoons, forks, crumbs, rumpled covers, cushions on the floor and bric-a-brac moved out of its accustomed niches that would have to be tidied up the next day.

"I guess that ended better than it might have," remarked Darl, sweeping the lock of blue hair out of his eyes. "But I suppose it'll be just as well if I keep my next bright idea to myself."

Kiki plopped her slim rump on the bed, and sighed in exhaustion. She kicked her feet as though a little surprised to find them still there ... despite having been on them nearly all day. "What do you mean, Love?"

“I mean, next time I remember something from when I lived Outside, I shouldn’t try to get everyone here in the Rock to do it.”

“But why not?”

“Look at all the trouble it caused. According to Storyteller, I picked the wrong day, of all days, to try to celebrate Halloween. Then I mess up Boober’s family tradition. Next thing you know, all the Fraggles from Then to Now rise from their sleep to haunt the Great Hall. When I try to do things from my life Outside, I never seem to be able to foresee the consequences! I’d better not do it any more!”

“Oh no! You must! You didn’t mess up Boober’s tradition, you reminded him of the part he’d forgotten all about! Maybe even the most important part. I’m sure the Ancestors truly meant no harm, and probably enjoyed being fully awake again for the first time in ages and ages. Besides ...”

Darl looked down on the pale, black-haired Fraggles with the swelling sense of completion he always felt at the sight of her.

“Besides what, Kiki my dove?”

“Besides, if you didn’t stir things up now and then ... what fun would *that* be?”

And *that* was how the first Halloween came to Fraggles Rock.



Kiki Fraggles



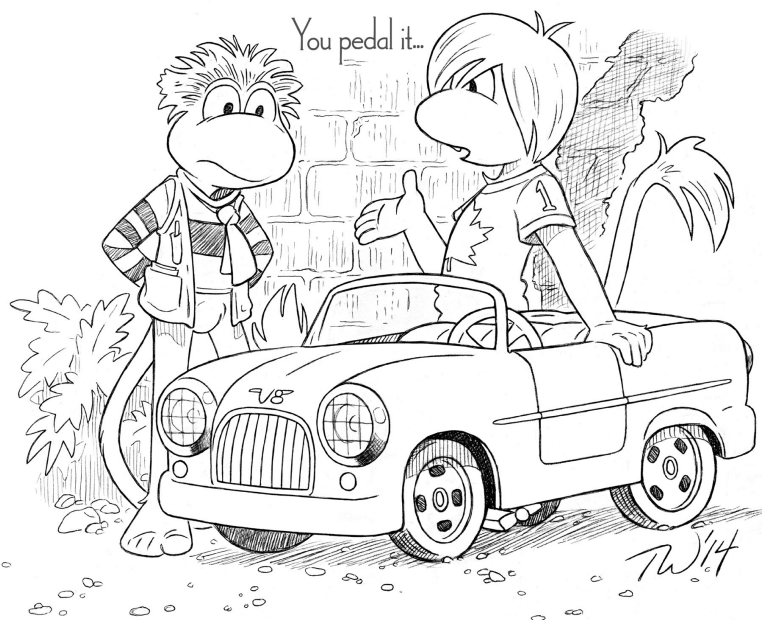
The Usual Gaggles of Fraggles



Darl Fraggles



RADDISH COFFEE
IS NO SUBSTITUTE FOR
THE REAL BREW, BUT
YOU STILL HAVE TO HAVE
IT FIRST THING IN
THE MORNING...





©brad w. foster
2008