



RAT SASS 5

A fanzine for Rowrbrazzle 134

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As this is the first *Rat Sass* I've attempted since my stroke, it will be a considerable challenge to relearn many of the skills that I once took for granted in order to publish this issue. Fortunately, I had most of the material prepared for the next issue before the stroke, so at least I don't have to face an empty page and wonder what to fill it with. I had received a book about R. Crumb over Christmas, and I wrote a few pages of commentary on it. I also took a trip with Traveling Matt to visit a very old friend – Barry Kent MacKay, a talented nature artist – who opened in a new gallery in January. I also remembered a story about Saara Mar, as told to her three "nieces," that would fit in nicely. I even had the logo for *Rat Sass* prepared in advance! You might even go so far as to call it terrific luck that I had my stroke when I did ... but I won't go quite so far as that.

However, I seriously need to take into consideration whether I want to continue publishing *Rat Sass* for Rowrbrazzle. Publishing a zine was once so easy that I could almost do it in my sleep, but this is not the case now. Perhaps it will be once more, when I've had more time to practice and recover, but then again ... you never know. More to the point, I have been taking a keener interest in how I can use my time more effectively. A long-term presence in Brazzle doesn't seem like the best use of my resources. I haven't reached a decision yet, but I'm not making promises yet either. At the least, I want to contribute a *Fraggle Rock* cover before I make my farewells.

MIGRATORY BIRDS (WIP)

I made a rather long trip with Traveling Matt up to The Junction the other day. That's a part of town north of here, where the two major railway tracks join and run parallel ... an area that was heavily industrialized from about 1900 to 1960. It was still considered a low-rent district in the '70s, with plenty of chemical and industrial pollution to hold property values down all around the neighborhood.

However, heavy industry has been moving out of Toronto gradually and inexorably for decades, and in recent years The Junction has actually become somewhat trendy ... particularly the area around Annette, slightly to the west, which had been a small-town center at one time.

Back in the '70s, the *creme de la Toronto fandom* used to wander late at night between Victoria Vayne's apartment in High Park and Bob and Janet Wilson's place in The Annex. Our nocturnal route encountered a bottleneck at The Junction, where we were often forced to use an iron footbridge that arches over the tracks. As often as not, there was a train in the not-too-distant distance, and we'd pause in the middle of the bridge to watch it approach. Then, with a roar and a volcanic shower of sparks and smoke, it would rattle the bridge under us and be gone, and we'd resume our march downtown. Those days are long behind me, and nostalgia was not what brought me back to The Junction ... or was it?

A new art gallery recently opened in The Junction, near Annette, and the attraction was featured artist Barry Kent MacKay, one of the more prolific fanartists of the 1970s. Barry is a naturalist painter specializing in birds, but for a few years he did fanart for relaxation. We had been friends back then, and had managed to stay in touch ever since. But Barry and I had not set eyes on each other for perhaps 40 years. He lived in Uxbridge, a small town an hour's drive north of the city -- and neither of us owned a car.

So when Barry told me he was having a show, I saw the opportunity for a reunion. Sure it was rather cold, and the distance was a bit of a challenge for Matt, but I'd been up that way before and knew that, unless the cold sapped the batteries too much, I should be able to make it.

Traveling Matt didn't let me down, either. Barry was now white-haired and bearded, but still the same cheerful elf I remembered, and he apparently took great pleasure in showing me off to his "bird friends" as a living fossil from his old days. I would have liked to stay longer, but Matt could not mount the steps into the gallery, and I was nervous about the batteries being out in the cold, so I took my leave after about half an hour. It was great seeing Barry again ... though I suspect, sadly, it might have been the last time.



Barry Kent MacKay (pronounced Mac-Eye).

THE INDIGESTIBLE CRUMB!

TARAL WAYNE

YOUR VIGOR FOR LIFE APPALLS ME, ROBERT CRUMB LETTERS 1958-1977
FANTAGRAPHICS BOOKS, 1998, ED. ILSE THOMPSON, SEATTLE WA, \$19.99 US

When it comes to comics, you have to admit there is only one Crumb: Robert Crumb, and I've just read a volume of the letters he wrote to friends when he was sixteen or seventeen. Its effect on me has been somewhat like looking the wrong way through a telescope, oddly diminishing the man. Granted, he was an adolescent at the time, and appears to have led a life rather more isolated than that of most teenage boys. Yet I found the same patterns of sophomoric questions and answers that were first raised in his final year of high school were still being repeated in most of his later work.

All but a few letters toward the end of the volume were written before 1963, so the book represents the young artist far more than the adult. Yet there is little difference in the character of the letters from beginning to end. They consist largely of "chummy" gossip, in a vernacular that may have been current at the time, but which continues to appear in most of Crumb's later writing. But another large part of these letters relates to comics or old records that he wants to find, already owns or is willing to trade with his correspondent, along with commentary on them. Most of his comments are simple, along the lines of "That Benny Goodman is sure hot," or "MAD hasn't been as good since Kurtzman left." They are perceptive, but not particularly deep or thoughtful. His obsession with collecting almost anything from before his own time reveals someone who feels very much out of place in the present, and is attempting retreat into an imagined "better" past. He is acutely self-conscious – to the point that much of his writing amounts to little more than inspecting his own motives and actions under greater and greater magnification – but without ever reaching a resolution.

As an intellectual, Crumb comes across as someone who may have repudiated his Catholic background, but has not for one moment put it behind him. Every waking moment in which Crumb is not thinking about comics, he is thinking about guilt and sin – explaining away his culpability, since he has decided that Man has no Free Will, but still unable to feel free of impurity. His thoughts are strictly Platonic. Older things, closer to their sources, are less artificial are therefore nearer the ideal.

It is not surprising that the young R. Crumb discovered J.D. Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye* and instantly saw himself mirrored in it. The book was very much written for his generation, although in that day it also appealed to all readers of all ages. I don't think it retains all that impact for today's readers. When I read *Catcher in the Rye*, I was merely surprised at Holden Caulfield's naiveté. Had he *really* grown into his teens without ever realizing his parents lied and that adults were hypocrites? Had he not yet nuanced his view of the world? What a maroon...

From talking with people of *my* generation, I gather that's not an uncommon reaction to Holden

Caulfield's world.

It was, however, very much R. Crumb's world – one full of self-doubts, crumbling authority, meaningless goals and misrepresentation. No matter that Crumb's guilt and insecurity came from his Catholic upbringing and Salinger's from his Jewish; they might as well have grown up in the same household.

The disappointing thing about Crumb's mental universe at this time is how little else there is in it.

He meditates over character and human behavior endlessly, but never seems to concern himself with any of the thousands of other things he must have encountered in his reading or on the street. He is not interested in architecture (except perhaps for how to draw it). He couldn't care less how an automobile runs. At least, judging from what he wrote, the youthful Crumb has no interest in how to fight a Medieval battle, how to paddle a canoe, who was playing in the World Series, when dinosaurs ruled, how to load a flintlock, who first flew across the Atlantic, how medieval armor was made, when beer was invented, how Cricket is played, where diamonds come from, how many kidneys he had, which planets might bear life or anything else that a moderately curious young intellectual might find worthy of attention. Crumb does not mention The Beatles once ... although he did mention Fabian – disparagingly – several times. I suppose Fabian *was* pop music in Crumb's mind.

The most interesting passages I found in the letters related to his visits to Stan Lynde, artist and creator of the Western strip, *Rick O'Shay*, which occupies a comfortable niche between realistic and comic. Lynde was born in Montana, and nothing on the artist's own website mentions his ever living east of teepee country. Yet, Crumb was able to visit him in his studio in New Jersey in 1960, because Lynde created *Rick O'Shay* in New York in 1958, and only returned to Montana in 1962. Crumb had little enough to say about the artist, but what details he provided more than made up for his interminable lists of old shellac records.

Another facet of Crumb's collected letters that I found intriguing was that he clearly thought of himself as belonging to fandom at the time, and his earliest comics were "fanzines" to him. Yet, they were not fanzines as we know them – they were printed in larger numbers than we are accustomed to, and every effort was made to sell them for a dime apiece, sometimes earning the artist up to ten whole bucks! He traded comics only with a small number of friends who also published. There is no mention at all of science fiction fandom, or any fanzines that we would be familiar with. Crumb was in an entirely different world from ours, despite the similarities and overlaps.

Yet, I wonder ... were the two fandoms so *very* dissimilar? We, who belong to "our" fandom, remember that era by such zines as *Warhoon*, *Void*, *Psychotic*, *Odd*, *Innuendo*, *Opsla*, *Habukkuk* and others. So far as I can tell, they are more sophisticated by far than the amateur magazines created by the comics fandom at the same time. Yet there was common ground – it was a period of great sobriety and serious purpose for most prominent SF fanzines of the time, mirroring the ambitions of the "Crumbzines" and others like them. It must be admitted, too, that it may not have been all that long before – ten years, perhaps – that most SF fanzines had also contained endless lists of books the editor wanted or had for sale, indexes of magazines and skin-deep reviews of slapdash space opera. Until the advent of cheap paperbacks reintroducing out-of-print classics to popular circulation, SF fandom was also once preoccupied with collecting, almost to the exclusion of everything else.

The early letters of Robert Crumb sometimes venture into discussions of art, and what he has to say is in character both with Crumb and with cartooning at the time. Cartoonists were striving to simplify, to

leave behind the constraints of unnecessary draftsmanship. The great exemplar of this movement was perhaps Jules Feiffer, about whom Crumb has quite a lot to say, blowing both hot and cold. Among Crumb's favourites, not surprisingly, were Carl Barks and Walt Kelly, two artists who could do more with simplicity than almost any others you could name. The elimination of unnecessary rendering and artificiality was an idea that Crumb seemed to come back to again and again. His aim, in his own mind, was to find the expressiveness of the cartoonists he admired, along with the authenticity that came directly from the source, not from technique.

But, of course, there is never any getting away from technique entirely, and Crumb spends more than enough time discussing the strengths and weaknesses of different sorts of pens to prove it!

But at the end of 245 pages of drawn, handwritten and typed pages of Robert Crumb's private thoughts, it seems as though rather little has been said that anyone might not have said. There are no great insights, no unique points of view, no surprising revelations. I think perhaps Crumb had a better grasp of his grammar than I might have had at sixteen – or else the editors of Fantagraphics have fixed his lapses – but these letters might almost have been written by you or I, or almost any other young fan we know. *Our* letters have no likelihood of ever being published, however, because *we* are not R. Crumb. People are no doubt intrigued by that artist's early epistles because they are hoping they will shed some light on his mind and later work. I suppose they do, at that. They reveal the roots of a self-conscious, wise-cracking, cynical, pessimistic, adversarial, escapist and sometimes tendentious creative personality, that for several years did more to shape underground comics than any other single artist I can think of.

Yet for all that, Crumb appears such a small man. He has had no really new ideas in ages, and hides away in France, in a house provided for him by a fan, and where Crumb has created a little bubble of time where it is always 1932. It is full of cardboard sleeves containing thousands of shellac records, old furniture, books in old bindings, old magazines, old photos framed on the walls, everything just plain full of oldness, without a hint that things might ever change. As well, Crumb's thoughts are as dominated by guilt and sin as they were the day he renounced the Church in 1959. While Crumb has held up far better than Vaughn Bodé, does he really have anything to say to us anymore?

I'm not sure he does. But, if he has little to say about 2017, perhaps he still has much to say about 1959 in which we might take an interest. There is a lot of Crumb's work that is now lost on me, but a great deal can still be read for the unique pleasure of viewing, from the present, the Jazz era as viewed from the 1960s!

R. Crumb may not be as palatable as he once was, and I would hesitate to serve him as an all-you-can-eat buffet. It can't be denied, however, that he still has a place of interest on any comic fan's menu. But it is the main courses – the issues of *Zap*, *Mr. Natural*, *Big Ass Comics*, *Unedda Comics*, *Snoid Comics* and others – that are most digestible. It is those that are important about Crumb. I don't know if I would recommend the collected letters ... except to the sort of overwrought connoisseur who sniffs the cork and believes he can tell you who trampled the grapes.





North of Superior is a haunted land. The Great God Gichigami may have permitted the building of a Trans-Canada Highway along the lakeshore, where the skirts of his land dip themselves in clear, cold water; but few men venture into the ghostly interior. Those who do, cut wood and haul it out as quickly as they can – for it is not a land for *mortals*. It is a land for the inexplicable, the unnatural and the outrageous.

Nonsense! That may make the start of a good story, but North of Superior is really only the stubs of an eons-old range of mountains, worn down to corrugated rows by a billion years of winter. Beyond that are the Hudson's lowlands – a waste of forests and string bogs. Finally, the Bay itself, like a shallow washbasin overflowing into grey, gravelly beaches. Not the stuff to write home about, really. Not if you'd seen *real* mountains or the *real* Arctic. Or ridden a spinning top of dusty ice in Saturn's rings. North of Superior was mainly cold and wet, and plagued by flying insects that were insane for a drop of blood.

That was not the way Saara was making it out, though. To listen to her, the wrinkled ridges were a graveyard of vanished Himalayas. Among those shattered knobs of gneiss and granite, down the puckered whitewater chasms, the embittered ghosts of strange beings still drifted. Their deeds in the long-ago were incomprehensible, but not even the rocks have entirely forgotten. It was a land that no Indians would live in, that the Aurora lights danced away from, and where anything might happen.

"Oh, Aunt Saara! You make up such stuffs!"

The three girls were not Saara's real nieces, of course. They were not even the same species, let alone family. Saara was a *Kjola*, and the girls – Minki, Sholep and Gelsipopinel (who insisted on her full name) – were Tangel's relations, and therefore *Teh Langgi*. The four made odd company. They were

miles from anywhere, their camp pitched in the lee of a headland that overlooked a lake so black it captured the stars in a second night sky. Saara had pitched a tent in the old-fashioned way – expanding a compressed wafer removed from a convenient carry-hole. Now she took a hot meal of barbecued chicken from a rotisserie out of the mirror-like carry-hole, followed by an ice chest of cold beverages, and two key lime pies for dessert. Then she folded the dimensionless hole into smaller and smaller quarters until it was only a piece of silvery confetti, and merged it into her silver dress.

The three girls watched attentively. They were hungry after a day's canoeing, and this was their first meal since the sun was high in the wispy northern clouds. They were also beginning to shiver, despite their thick coats of fur and heavy jackets. It was late August in the land north of the lake. As often as not, nightfall brought frost here, and it was even known to snow.

"Aunt Saara, make it fire! We're cold," said Minki.

Gelsipopinel was the littlest one, and gravest. She said, "Minki splashed in waters on purpose and has wet feet! I step out of canoe on to dry ground and has warm feet."

Not one of them wore shoes.

"But you wouldn't mind a fire anyway, would you?" Saara asked – of Gelsi in particular, and all three of the girls in general.

"No, Aunt Saara!" they chorused.

Saara's empty hands were suddenly full of a blanket, gorgeously quilted with Morrisseau designs, which she draped over her young charges. Then she turned and made an unconscious gesture with a hand toward the ground. All at once, in the middle of the small clearing, was a tent-shaped pile of roughly-hewn wood that had never felt an axe nor, in fact, ever grown from a tree. An instant later it was crackling with a fire that was not too big, not too small, but just right.

Saara looked back at the girls, the three of them seated in a line on a fallen log, their long-furred tails streaming out behind them like banners. Their black fur was so black it was lost in the pitch darkness, while their white bodies and faces were painted red and yellow by the flickering firelight.

Teh Langgi are smaller by nature than Humans or Kjola. The children were barely four feet tall – the youngest, Gelsi, just three-foot four-and-a-half (she insisted on the half). They were also what you might call "mortal," though it would not be exactly accurate to call Saara "divine." It might be nearly enough true if you were Human, and therefore prone to jumping to conclusions about the nature of things. But Teh Langgi knew better, even though they were only flesh-and-blood and had only been lifted out of a pastoral lifestyle on their home world by Saara's people a couple of generations ago. Wise beyond their means, they realized that there is nothing supernatural about better tools and superior know-how.

Uniquely in Found Space, it took Humans to believe the preposterous.

The girls had tucked into their dinner. Saara chose a chicken breast for herself, brought a log of her own into being and sat across from them. It would have been just as easy to create a jeweled throne or an antique Chippendale chair, but they were *roughing it*. Saara could also have used the carry-hole to pack all their bulky camping gear, but the children were young and not perfectionists. Minki and Sholep weren't, in any case. Gelsipopinel had objected immediately. "We are not being real voyeur-jers if we are not carrying our own campfires, foods and beds!"

“We are also not trapping beavers or eating pemmican along the way,” replied Saara, reasonably.

“I *want* to eat pemmican!” demanded the smallest Teh Langgi. “What’s pemmican?”

“Dried meat. Pounded to bits and mixed with fat and berries.”

“Ick!” cried Gelsi. “Who want *pemmican*?”

“Aunt Saara know everything,” said Sholep, who had a bit of a crush on their leader.

Minki argued with almost everything the others said. “*You* wanted pemmican a moment ago. That’s ‘cause *you didn’t know what it was*. Hah!” As the oldest, she had also adapted to correct English rather better, and was not above reminding her sisters of it.

“Minkilastiwenana has fish in nose!” Gelsi retorted. The mind of a six-year-old is sometimes a little hard to understand, especially if it is a Teh Langgi’s.

“Aunt Saara? Please tell us story?” asked the middle child, looking up from a chicken leg almost as big as her own thigh.

“Oh yes!” piped up Gelsi.

“Yes,” said Minki, “but not too scary story because Gelsipopinel is too young.”

“Am not young!”

“You are too. You are six, I are eight!”

“That just make you bigger! Not less young.”

“That’s what younger means! Smaller, and... uh... not as older.”

“GIRLS!” said Saara with that tone of voice that meant they had better listen up.

They looked up at the Kjola. Physically, the two species are little alike. Saara’s kind stand upright, like the Humans, and are even taller than most of *them*. Teh Langgi walk on legs rather like a satyr’s. Kjola also had short, smooth fur, so they didn’t look shaved all over. Saara was white except the top of her head and ends of her arms and legs. Those shaded into the colour of the ocean at Capri, the cerulean of a peacock’s feather, the deep sky blue of sapphire. Her plain silver sheath of a dress reflected the dancing firelight. Her silvery eyes glinted like winking rubies. It was hard, at such a moment, not to think of Saara as a goddess – even for a trio of hard-nosed Teh Langgi children.

“Well, I suppose you can’t just go to bed right after supper,” she mused. “A story it will have to be. Telling tall tales around a campfire is a Human tradition, too. I’m just not sure I know any that are suitable. If it’s *too* scary, you won’t go to sleep! How about something with ponies...”

“Yes! Tell us the one about ancient King who teach his horses to eat human flesh!” said Minki.

“Uh... no, not that one, I think. I’d have to tell you the whole twelve labours of Hercules, and we

wouldn't be done until morning."

"Tell us about Bone Fairies, who come if you wear flower when moon is red, and eat the bone out of your living bodies before you even dead, leaving only bleeding empty bag of skins!" asked Gelsi.

"Ugh! Where did ever hear something as horrible as that! Maybe *you* ought to tell the story."

"Tell us story about Terra and Lost Kingdom of Prester John," asked Sholep, who had less grisly tastes.

"I told you that only last week, Sholepesiwee."

"I know," she said sheepishly. "But I like hear when you tell about little Kjola girl's adventures with rich uncle and friends."

"Is baby stuff!" insisted Gelsi. "Want to hear about Things Too Terrible to Tell!"

"Even though it's dark all around, and spooky?" Saara asked.

"We not frightened," said Minki.

"Saara here to 'tect us," added Sholep.

Although it *was* very dark around the girl's feet, Saara noticed a movement from the corner of her glittering eye. Sholep had stepped on a scuttling beetle, killing it.

"*Eilah!* Is what?" she said, and wiped her toes off on the edge of a flat rock.

That gave Saara an idea.

"Let's say I not tell you a made-up story. I'll tell you one that actually happened. I heard about it when I intercepted an emergency transmission from the Lilliputians."

"Who they, Aunt Saara?"

"At the time, I had *no* idea. But are you going to let me tell the story, or are you going to ask questions?"

She looked sternly down at the three girls under the quilted blanket, their tails drooping sheepishly as she stared them into silence.

"I got the call for help while I was in deep space. Ironically, I had just been to their twin planet in the same star system, and found no-one there. Lilliput was one of two planets rotating around a dwarf sun a hundred light years from Earth. The other was unnamed, so I called it Nada. According to the computer, Lilliput was fairly ordinary, and supported a civilization of uninteresting Humanoid people who never seemed overjoyed to receive visitors. I had bypassed them and gone on to Nada to see if there was anything worth seeing.

"Nada was small, even as planets go, and I thought this *must* make it interesting in some way. Well... you never *know* until you look. Nada, though, was barely large enough for a Ford Explorer and a Dodge Ram to double-park. To boot, it was as flat and barren as a Wal-Mart parking lot after closing. As far as the eye could see, there was just a fuzzy nap of greenish, moss-like growth and a few crumbling ledges of

exposed rock. The planet was so flat – I might as well say it – that there were no hills or valleys a girl couldn't just step over, or hop across. It just barely held on to a tenuous atmosphere. A little over my head, a thin mist hung over the ground, but there was nothing as grandiose as a cloud in the sky. There was hardly anything to examine at all, not any rocks of a size worth picking up and turning over, no running water I could see, and nothing remotely tall enough to call a plant. Nada. A few insects buzzed around my head, making a nuisance of themselves, despite my swatting at them. Just before I turned back to my Smallship, I found some worm-like fibers in the grit underfoot. At first, I thought they might be alive. They appeared to crawl, but so slowly I was unsure. Once I picked one up, it didn't move at all. In fact, it resembled nothing so much as a stick of dried vermicelli. I chewed one a couple of times, and it was like a bit of insulated wire. I only needed a short look around after that to be satisfied that there was absolutely nothing more to be seen. I walked back to the Smallship. The last thing I did on Nada before lifting off was to brush some grit and damp off my feet so I wouldn't track it in. Five minutes later I was docked in my Starship. Soon, poor Nada was a wrinkled ball that looked a bit like a moldy apple, receding into the distance at kilo-gee speed. I put the place out of my mind, entirely.

"I don't think I had gone half a light year when I got a hyperspace signal from the direction I had just come. It was from Lilliput, though. While I had been on their side of their solar system, kicking up dust on Nada, they had been attacked by an incredible monster, and were sending a distress call to anyone in range to hear. I answered the call, and turned back on my course. But even at highest speed I couldn't be back in the Lilliputian system for thirty minutes or more. In the time it took, I heard a terrifying story from an unknown Lilliputian witness.

"It was mind-bogglingly huge," Saara's rich contralto shifted to an accented and slightly higher register to imitate the Lilliputian. "Vast beyond imagining," he went on. "So tall that the monster's head was lost among the clouds and couldn't be described. It had appeared all of a sudden. One moment it wasn't there, then someone screamed and pointed toward the horizon, where everyone saw it at once. Fortunately, the creature appeared a few miles outside the city. Sirens alerted the populace, so that most of the Lilliputians were able to seek shelter. Casualties were surprisingly few, at first. Unfortunately, not everyone knew where to go, or left what they were doing quickly enough. Many were caught at their keyboards, unwilling to sign off. Others wouldn't leave their homes without their precious family heirlooms or their hobbies. Many simply panicked and ran around in circles. Most of those were lucky if only maimed or crippled for life. The rest, sadly... squashed to jam."

Saara noted with satisfaction a near silent gasp from one of the girls.

"People died under collapsed buildings, or were flattened like pancakes by the creature, as one gigantic foot after another crashed through roofs, demolished structures, collapsed bridges and overpasses and flattened busy lanes of traffic. The thud of the gargantuan feet against the ground caused shock waves that overturned baby carriages and knocked power lines out of alignment. Violent whirlwinds followed in the wake of each step, sucking up anyone too near."

"I could hardly believe what I was hearing. All this was happening while I was only a few hundred million miles away? How did my sensors *not* pick up the sudden appearance of a planet-sized monster, or detect the presence of the vehicle or space warp that brought it?"

"Did you kill it, Aunt Saara?" asked Sholep in a quavering voice. The Kjola smiled, and noticed that, next to her sister, Minki was unusually grave, and Gelsi, at the other end of the log, looked a little green around the lips. She would have to be careful not to lay it on *too* thick, or she'd never get them to sleep.

"While I sped through Imaginary-Space back to the Lilliputian system, the voice told of even more

terrible disasters!”

*“Unimaginable as the destruction was in our residential suburbs, once the Creature was among the tall buildings and multiple levels of the inner city, every step smashed a dozen blocks to rubble. Billions of dollars of property were obliterated in an instant, and the only warning was a sudden darkening of the sky, a blast of wind from overhead and then – **smush!** Hundreds died in a heartbeat.*

“There was almost no point in running if you hadn’t already found shelter,” said the voice. “By then all doors were closed against the unfortunates who were still in the open. Worse, in running for safety, it was just easy to run smack into a block doomed to obliteration as it was to escape from one.. It was impossible to know which you had done until you were spared... or crushed out like a cigarette butt.

“The legs moved unbelievably quickly for things their size. From the ground you saw a dark column, one of a pair, that rose miles into the stratosphere. It was silhouetted against the sun and obscured by mushrooming clouds of dust and smoke. In less time than it took to cross your fingers, leg and foot shot into the air, flew a mile over the city streets, and dropped in an instant to flatten everything underneath. You were alive afterward... or you weren’t.

“As though the horror wasn’t already unbearable,” continued the voice from Lilliput, “the scale of the calamity grew and grew. The fabulous Tower of Seven Rings, tallest edifice on Lilliput, was pushed aside as though it were a blade of grass, by a single toe. The two-thousand-meter tower crashed to earth in one terrible piece, and disintegrated into a cloud of lethal debris. Shrapnel like cannon balls riddled buildings for blocks around. A school and convalescent home were reduced to powder under a million tons of steel and concrete. The famous seven rings gouged through the street level into the shopping concourses below, chopping stores and even shoppers in half.

“The Houses of Government were next to go. Built more than four hundred years ago in the inimitable 2nd Retro-Modern style by the greatest architect in Lilliputian history, the sprawling complex was erased from the map. The gorgeous parquet floors shattered, the luscious Silkenwood wainscoting turned to splinters, paintings going back to the Mercantile Age shredded, furnishings in the incomparable Gilded Lilliputian style reduced to flinders, and the Millennial Library ground into pulp and sawdust... Not to mention the deaths of His Highness the President, His Royal Family, their Esteemed Servants, hundreds of hardworking bureaucrats and even a group of tourists who had picked a bad moment to see the sights. Words fail to describe the loss to our civilization!

“But worse was to come!”

“Girls... ? Do you want the fire hotter?” asked Saara. “You’re huddled up under that blanket as though you’re freezing.” All she could see of the young Teh Langgi were three pairs of spindly black-furred legs. Their quilt had been pulled up over their heads and quite hid their faces – at the cost of exposing their feet.

“Yes, Aunt Saara. Make fire hotter. We are cold,” came a muffled voice from under quilt.

“I can fix that,” said Saara. “For a moment I thought you were becoming just a *little* tiny bit afraid.”

“But worse was to come!” she continued in her “Lilliputian” voice. “Beyond the Houses of Government was the transportation hub of our capital city. At any given moment, monorail trains are pulling in or out, criss-crossing the city on dozens of high-speed lines. Almost before anyone realized that the Colossus was upon them, a dozen elevated lines were kicked apart, and rail cars scattered like Parachute

*Seeds in the wind. Explosions burst everywhere, as high-tension wires came into contact with combustible fuels. And then... something **unspeakable!***

“Barely visible through the pall of smoke and dust, a third gigantic column descended at dazzling speed. It was a hand of unbelievable size! It crushed cement platforms and waiting passengers into a gritty paste. Five immense fingers fastened around one of the double-decker trains. Suddenly, all sixty cars were whipped into the sky. From either end, single cars snapped their couplings and fell with a sickening metallic crash into the ruins below. Others sank without trace into seas of fire. It was too quick to see, but one imagined the doomed faces pressed up against windows, frozen forever in the memory, in an endless scream of terror!

*“High above the smog of burning buildings and dust from pulverized concrete, above dancing towers of fire, the hand soared higher and higher. The remains of the 3:02 train dangled in its hideous clutch, headed straight for the threshold of space. The remaining passengers must have been suffocated from lack of air by then. If not, they might have seen the incredible horror of a vast, **incomprehensibly** vast, maw open below them. And then, at the apogee of their rise, they would begin to fall... **straight-into-that-maw!***

“AAAH!”

“What was is it, Sholep?” asked Saara, feigning innocence.

“Is... mosquito?” came a very weak voice from the huddled quilt.

“Is *not* moskido. Sholep being baby!” said Gelsi, clearly. “Gelsi not afraid of story!”

*“So then... **straight-into-that-maw!** Teeth the size of mountains clashed together, tearing the cars to pieces, mashing seats and bulkheads and passengers together like a wad of gum, macerating the debris until nothing larger than a cell phone could be distinguished from the featureless mash – a small cell phone – and finally... swallowing! Nothing left to mark the passing of hundreds of living beings. All gone into a black pit to be... **digested!**”*

Saara paused for a moment, to evaluate this last hit. There was dead silence under the blanket, the six little feet sticking out as still as tree roots.

“A... Aunt Saara?” said Gelsi after a long silence. “Did you... did you... kills it then?”

“No. I hadn’t got there yet. And when I was, I’m afraid I *couldn’t* kill it.”

The blanket shivered visibly. “It” was still at large, then, *and* a match for Aunt Saara!

“What happened next, Auntie?”

“According to the transmission – “as though destroying the seat of rule over our planet for hundreds of years wasn’t enough of an atrocity, the Monster went from one feat of total destruction to another. Barely half a mile from the burning remains of the Houses of Government was the Presidential Botanical Zoo. Species from every corner of Lilliputa had been gathered there for the edification of our citizens. Many were endangered – for ours is a crowded world – and some animal species had survived only in the Presidential Zoo for a millennia. Everywhere else they were extinct. But a half mile was only a step for the Monster! The terrified animals bleated, and cawed, and hooted, and trumpeted, and roared, and

*squeaked and zonkered, but nobody had thought to provide shelter for **them**. Had the Monster even a heart of stone, it would have had to be the size of a city block, but it would nevertheless have melted to see the plight of the captive creatures below. But the Monster could not have had a heart, not even one of stone. The inexorable foot came down and put out the light of day. The Presidential Zoo was no more. A hundred species were extinguished forever.*

“When the Colossus moved on, all that could be seen of what were once acres of splendid green gardens and shady woods, ornate pavilions and capacious enclosures for thousands of animals was a deep pit ringed all around with debris... and a flock of coloured balloons taken to flight that were all that remained of an unfortunate vendor! An empty school bus lay on its side, just outside a miraculously preserved gate.”

“To our despair, the path of destruction led right to the main power generators of the city. First one foot crashed through the protective concrete domes, releasing a huge cloud of radioactive steam. A tremendous gout of flame and debris followed. Then the other foot smashed open the sealed vaults where dangerous wastes were stored. Toxic clouds billowed into the air. Far beyond the power plant, a radius of death grew. Thousands dropped in their tracks when enveloped by toxic fumes, thousands more were hideously burned by the rain of radioactive cinders. Fire raced ahead of fleeing crowds, cutting them off and turning them to ashes.

“The Armed Forces were quick to respond, as you can imagine. Fighter craft took off from a nearby air base, and drove home attack after attack against the Creature. It didn’t seem to notice. It was impervious to our guns, bombs and air-to-air missiles. Not until the very end did it even try to fend the planes off. But though our pilots pressed the attack as long as they had a missile to fire or a round in their guns, a single swoop of a gigantic hand easily batted a dozen out of the air at once. Invariably the jets broke up, and sometimes burst into flame. The brave pilots inside had no chance, tumbling to their deaths miles below. Again and again, that hand swept planes out of the sky. Despite the ineffectiveness their weapons, the doomed airmen may at least have delayed the Creature long enough for the Army to come up.

“It was the turn of the Armoured Corps to try for a kill. Some of the largest Land-Destroyers in the army were stationed not far from the city. These were the latest generation King-MBTs – 1,000 tons and over, quad tracks, tandem main battle guns, 400mm frontal armour, crew of eight. They were greatly improved models of the armour that overran the last redoubts of the Third Globalization War, and more powerful armour than many warships. They should have rolled over any opponent. But even at long range, these juggernauts could not even see over a toe of those mountainous feet. As they got closer, the drivers and gunners could see nothing through the smoke but a huge dark wall before them.

“The blasts from their guns was fearsome. Incandescent gasses erupted in huge blossoms of fire whose heat could be felt fifty meters away. The shock waves of the shells passing over sent trash cans and newspaper boxes rolling down the street. Otherwise, the shells had no effect. A small puff of dust could be seen half way up the looming wall of the Monstrosity’s foot – nothing more.

“Then, like a flash, the wall was in the air and moving forward at a speed that would credit our best jet fighters. There was no time to evade. Our armour were sitting ducks. One moment ponderously standing their ground, and next instant flying through the air – flung away like so many unwanted pennies. One 1,100 ton juggernaut came to rest upside down inside the seventh floor of an office building, two kilometers away. The building promptly collapsed, of course, giving no warning to those remaining inside. Although the MBT was almost intact, the crew within were churned into bloody meat.

*“Not a man retreated from his duty as long as it was in his power to fight. But it wasn’t long before it was perfectly clear than **no-one** could fight this Colossus. The few remaining MBTs backed off, having fired all their shells. The last fighter planes were only debris at the end of a smoke trail. And the Colossus? So far as anyone could tell, it hadn’t noticed our defense at all!*

“There was not a soul who wasn’t certain that we were all going to die.”

*“And then it **left**.”*

“Lamentably, not without leaving a trail of new destruction behind it. On its way out of the city, the Behemoth utterly ruined a lovely sports complex of arenas, tracks, stadiums and gyms. Nothing was left of a housing project for seniors but a smoking hole in the ground. Perversely, a mausoleum for the residents was left untouched. One of the last blows to our civilization was the eradication of one of the most Holy Shrines on the Planet, where The Anointed Himself once received the Submission of Tribes. Little even of the Sacred Hill the Shrine had stood on remained. As for the sprawling communities of scholars, scribes, and priests who served the Shrine... the wreckage yielded only mangled body parts!

*“Oh, the horror, **the horror!**”*

“AUNT SAARA! STOP!” cried the girls in a ragged chorus.

“What? You don’t want me to finish the story?”

“*Must* you?” asked Minki, peeping out from under the blanket.

“Well, we are very near the end. Just as the voice over the radio related the last of the horrors, I arrived in orbit of Lilliput. I was there to save them, assuming anything was left to save.”

“When I entered the system, I noticed Nada was on my side of the sun, just as it was last time. I passed it by and went around the G-class star to the other side of the system, going into orbit around Lilliput. It was oddly quiescent, I noticed. No sign of cities, no atmospheric pollution, no energy signature or other works of sentient-kind. I apported down to the surface, but found nothing. Nil. Nada.”

“Suddenly, it hit me. Back up in the ship, I discovered that the rescue transmissions were all from behind me, on the other side of the sun. It took only a minute to enter orbit around the system’s other planet, the one I had *originally* landed on. Another minute to descend to the surface a second time and confirm my worst fears.

“On my hands and knees, using enhanced vision, I was able to make out microscopic roadways through the moss, with infinitesimal vehicles speeding along at a whopping 55 centimeters an hour. Then that patch of grit and gravel over there was actually a city of domed buildings and slender towers... *Had* been a city, that is. Now it was in ruins. I clearly saw the imprint of my own foot on a densely built-up residential area. Another footprint in the middle of an industrial sector, and more running smack dab through the center of the city. *Aniiyi te glos ilsaglin*, what had I done?

“I had named this planet Nada, but the truth was that *this* was Lilliput! I had stepped out of my Smallship onto the surface of this planet, taken maybe three dozen steps, and all but destroyed an entire civilization of beings that were no bigger than Richard Nixon’s honour. *I* was the Horror, the *Monster*, the **Colossus** that wrecked the planet!”

“AUNT SAARA!” All three girls exploded.

“You pulling our leg. Is all one big stinky fish story!” snorted Minki.

“Is horse patootie, alright” said Gelsi.

Sholep just groaned, over and over, then said, “you has us so scared.”

“Has *you* scared, maybe,” snorted Gelsi. “I not believe for one minutes! People *that* tiny is no possible.”

Minki, not to be outdone, added, “Not possible at all. Head that small has no room for brain cells. Is some story, alright. But, *eilah*, only scare Sholep.”

“Did not,” the middle girl said, defensively. But she had stopped herself from stepping on another beetle.

“That’s good,” said Saara. The fire banked down by itself, and suddenly a spacious tent loomed invitingly out of nothing behind it. “Your sleeping bags are ready, I’ll clean you up.” The girls blinked in and out of existence almost too quickly to see, in and out of an invisible portal that filtered out dirt and burrs and left only three spick-and-span and exhausted Teh Langgi children standing in a row. “Since nobody was scared, you shouldn’t have any trouble getting to sleep. I’m going to read for a while, but I’ll look in on you shortly. When I do, you had better be snoring and not sawing wood!”

One at a time, they answered, “Yes, Aunt Saara.” Then the Kjola was sitting by herself, reading a book in her mind’s eye.

After a while, she looked up at the sky. The Pleiades were up – home was only 400 light years away in the direction of the Seven Sisters. Their presence in a starry sky as clear as deep space itself was poignant. So much to see, so far to go, so many strange things to experience, thought the star-farer. No one was awake to hear her speak.

“No wonder the Lilliputians didn’t like visitors...”

MAILING COMMENTS

Albert Temple Albert wasn’t a member of Brazzle when he died, I’m pretty sure he was a past member, and regardless whether he was or not, he was a member in good standing to me. I wish I had known Al better, but we didn’t run in the same circles. However, we had a mutual interest in art, and more so in coin collecting. We had an advantageous arrangement, by which I sent him newly minted, commemorative coins from Canada, and Albert sent me new commemorative coins from the US. I have to wonder what will become of them. Will someone go nuts at the penny arcade, spending a bag full of Canadian quarters whose value was, frankly, marginal? Of course, Albert’s main collection, like mine, consisted of ancient Greek and Roman specimens of considerably more value. I remember when Albert brought his only gold coin to a ConFurence – a heavy, yellow Solidus that was about the size of a nickel or dime, that was minted around 405 AD. It was the first Roman gold coin I had held in my own hand. Also, it was the only Solidus that Albert could afford, and it was quite a while before I managed to afford one of my own. And neither of us could afford a much more valuable type of gold coin called an Aureus, a type which had borne the images of the well-known emperors of an earlier age. I wonder if Al ever did manage to own one? It would have been a well-deserved prize.

Ken Marcin There is a school of thought that claims that Fraggles Rock is *not a cave*. It is, instead, inhabited space that is surrounded by solid rock. The Fraggles live in the empty space, and the rock goes on forever. Of course, Fraggles tend to be weak on geology and might have it inside out, but most Fraggles are reluctant to accept that it is they who live inside the rock, and that it is Outer Space that is empty. When you think about it, it does sound absurd.

Edd Vick I do remember seeing *Colonel Bleep* on the TV, and though it left an indelible impression on my mind, it was many years before I knew what it was. Of course, we're saturated in TV trivia now – have been since the '80s – and you can hardly say that anything as well known as *Colonel Bleep* is truly obscure! But if you remember seeing *Suzan's Show*, a nightmarish world of magic flying chairs, dogs turned into hot dogs and a talking table top, then you have my attention. That local CBS affiliate out of Chicago scared the shit out of me in 1956! But for sheer obscurity, the prize has to go to an even more obscure program called *Wee Willow Wonderful*. For good reason, hardly anyone remembers this NBC puppet show out of Wisconsin.

No one even seems certain when was aired – merely the mid-'50s. There seem to be no photos and nobody can remember much about it, except that poor Willie Wonderful, a tiny finger puppet, is trapped in a snowbound mountain cabin by a terrifying axe murderer! The episode I saw was a cliff-hanger, and the theme was played cheerful carousel music ...

“We love you Willie, we do, we do,
We love you Willie, we do!
We love little Willie and you will too
When you know Willie like we all do.”

The emotional scars are still livid! I've seen *Ricky & Morty* mentioned, but know nothing about it. I gave up cable TV when I discovered – that unless I paid for the premium channels – all I got from regular TV was *Scooby-Doo* and *Pokemon* reruns. From a tentative viewing, however, I didn't find the on *Ricky & Morty* very attractive.

It would be very flattering if anyone thought it was worthwhile collecting *Beatrix* under a cover ... but let's face it, there wasn't enough of it make a decent book. Not only that, there were never enough people who bothered to take a good look at it – maybe under 2,000 sales, which is nothing. Thousands of books have disappeared that had more readers.

When it comes time to adapt the Fraggles to a more general audience, I have it pretty much thought out. Names are easy. I have already altered the appearance of the Fraggles to look like realistic creatures, not puppets. More difficult is how to make the Gorgs and Doozers fit, but I can do that too. If you remember my House Gamins, their country cousins who live underground are ready-made – though perhaps not as “nice” as Doozers. I also remember some material for a fantasy story about a pair of rival kings who were down on their luck, and each one only ruled over a dilapidated cottage and a few pigs, but kept up all the pretenses of magnificence. I could almost make a case that Henson copied from me ... although not very seriously.

What I mainly worry about is that Disney finally *will* make a Fraggles Rock movie. You know they will only make it if they can make oodles of money, of course, and won't care a shit about the original. They will not only get it wrong, they will *intentionally* do it wrong. Instead of a movie about Fraggles Rock, Disney will use the property to imitate *Alvin and The Chipmunks* and *The Smurfs*. In exactly the same plot in which the Smurfs emerge from the Middle Ages into New York City, and the Chipmunks leave

the north woods to discover Hollywood, Fraggles will make friends with humans and spend almost the entire film in the familiar environment of the Human world, foiling some uninteresting villain – someone who wants to develop Fraggles Rock into a condo, say. At the end, the second-rate actor hired to escort the Fraggles around will learn about friendship and family ... and we might as well have stayed at home watching *The Cosby Show*.

I don't know how to prevent this, of course. Apart from murder, I have no way to keep any director away from *Fraggle Rock* before they suck it dry of creativity.

Robert Alley Basically, all fiction is the same thing. You can call it make-believe, or simply imagination. You can divide it into genres, such as historicals, mysteries, romances, adventures, science fiction, fantasy and even furry. But the urge to categorize fiction into different types is not natural. We like neat pigeonholes in which some kinds of stories belong with others, depending on subject or treatment, but in fact they cross boundaries all the time. One story might be about time travelers on a quest find a magic ring while fighting crime. Another might be about a detective in the American Civil War who has lost his way while seeking Spiritual Enlightenment. Or again, two furry Japanese chicks who are secret agents under cover as roller-derby stars. When creating any kind of fiction, the only limit is your imagination. Which is not to say that most readers prefer to stick to familiar genres.

As for no-talent, self-deluded fools, I now have the additional advantage of having to spend a few months *relearning* English before I can properly start again ... my poor proofreader has to work double-double time sorting out my intentions.

My Fraggles Rock stories – there are only two for far, but there are outlines for at least three more – were not written as they were meant to be read, which is not really an advantage as far as the reader goes. As far as the formatting problem goes, both Walt and myself sorted them out as best we could ... but the word processor is a devil for changing the formatting in unpredictable ways that looked fine only so long as there were no changes in the spacing of the text. Still, the words should still be in the correct order.

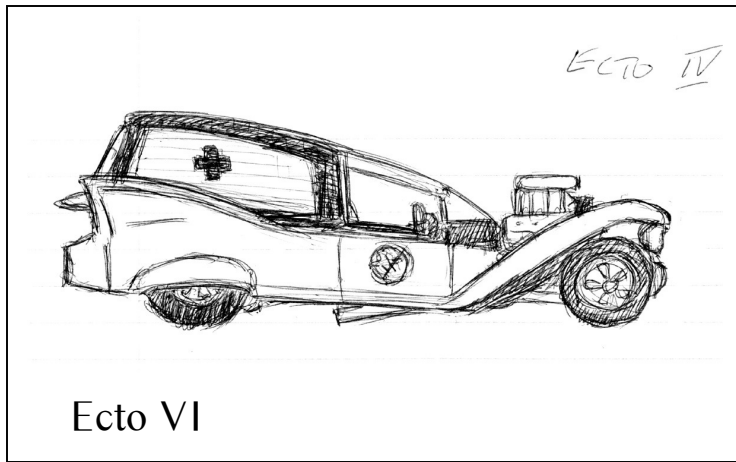
I have already given quite a lot of thought to how I need to change the story to transform it into an “original” story. About as much effort as it would take to turn *The Smurfs* into *Fraggle Rock*.

Kjartan Clearly, I've come long way since the stroke in early February. I'm writing again – though I have to struggle with it – and at first the printed page was gibberish to me. I hope that in another couple of months I'll have put it all behind me.

Gene Breshears I'm not entirely certain what I was trying to say to you, or what you were trying to say to me. I change my contexts the way some people change gears on a high-speed racing machine. I may be speaking about furry fandom one moment, or the larger context in the next moment. I've always had a lot of different points of view, and can usually find as many as I need in which to change my mind.

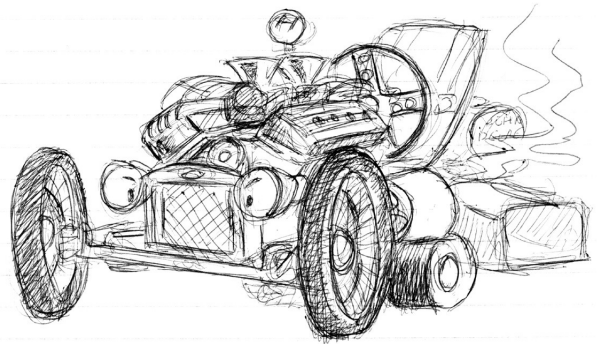
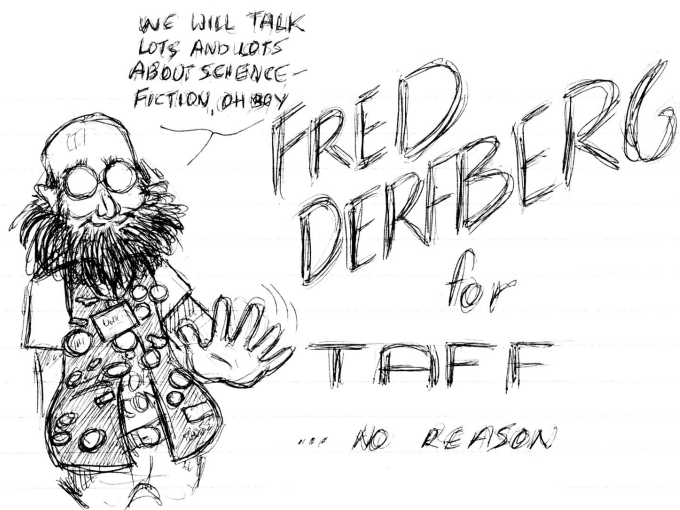
Jeff Wood I've always had a suspicion that my imaginary characters have snubbed me, and have someplace better to be than here.

Finishing the issue are a number of sketches I worked on while recovering from St Joe's Hospital following the stroke.

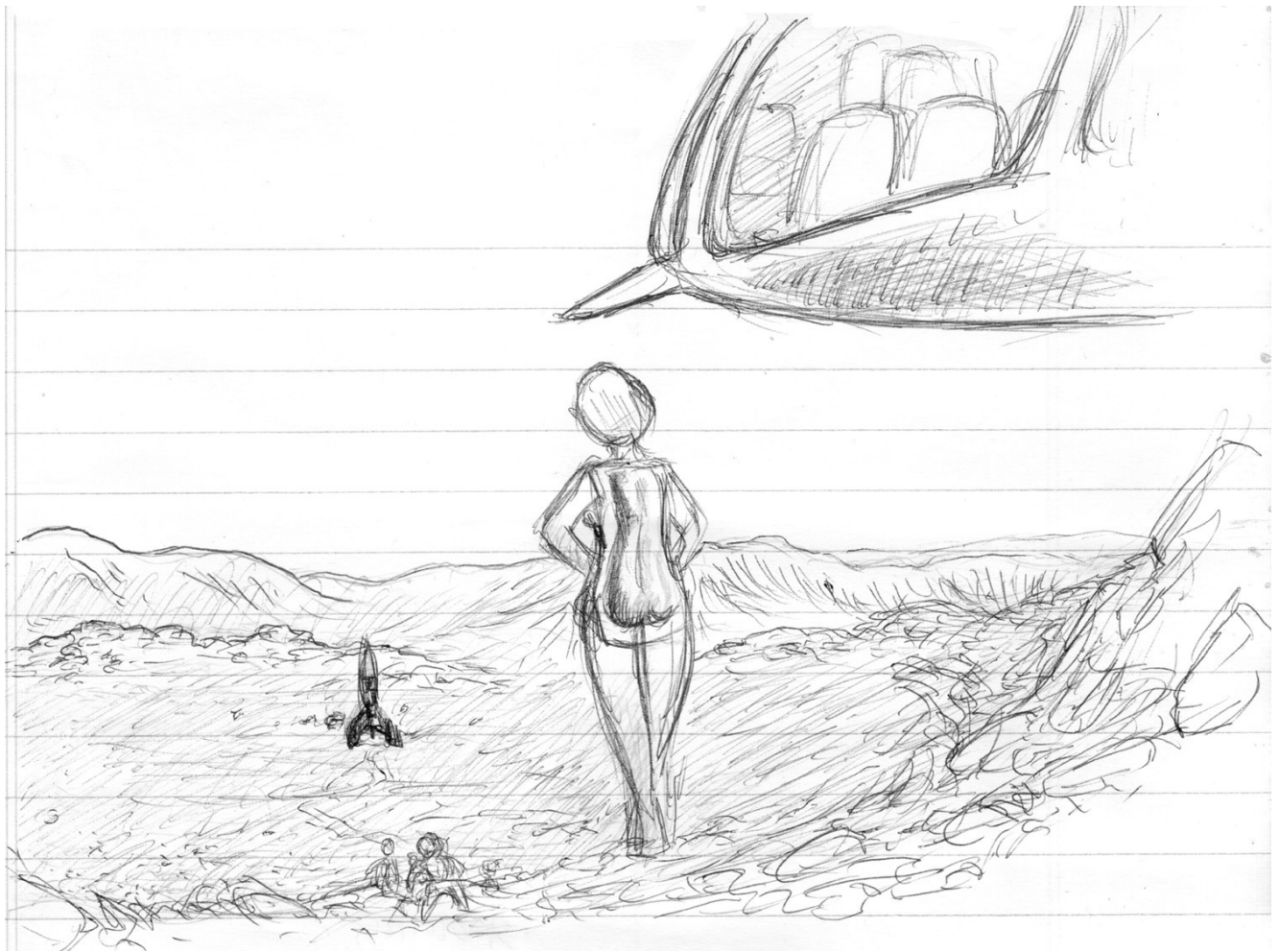


Saara at Sputnik Planum

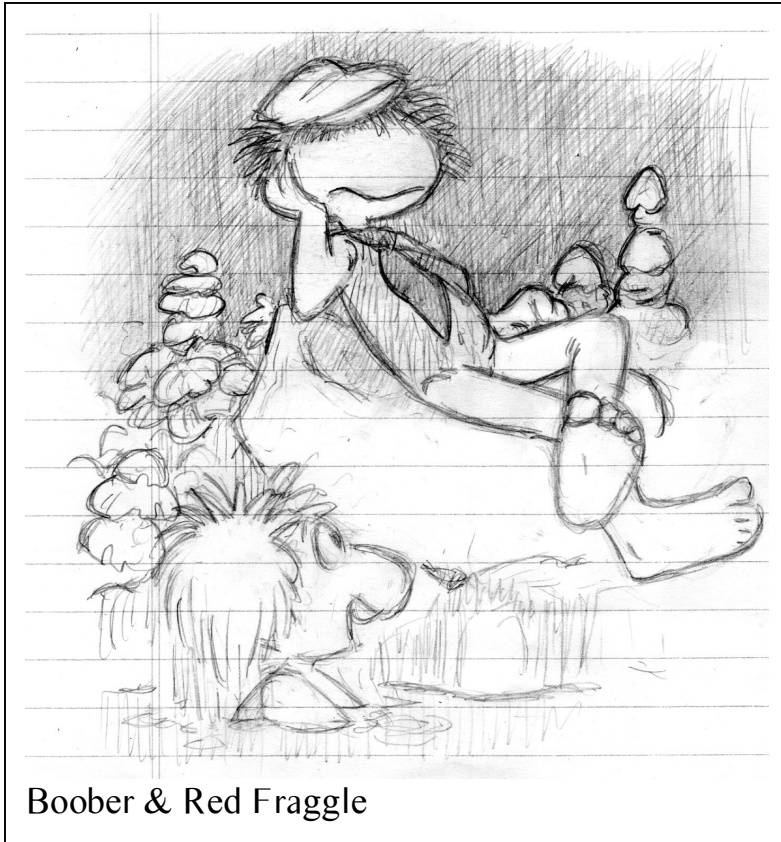




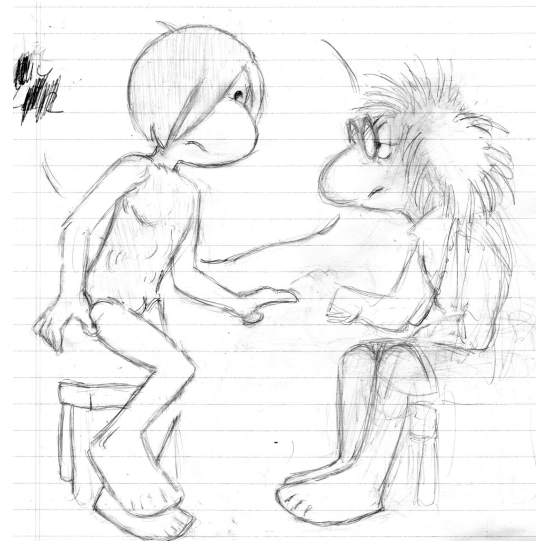
Lawn More



Saara Mar and classic landing, borrowing the Rocked from Tintin's Moon Adventure



Boober & Red Fraggle



Unfinished drawing of Darl
And Story Teller

Martian valley landscape

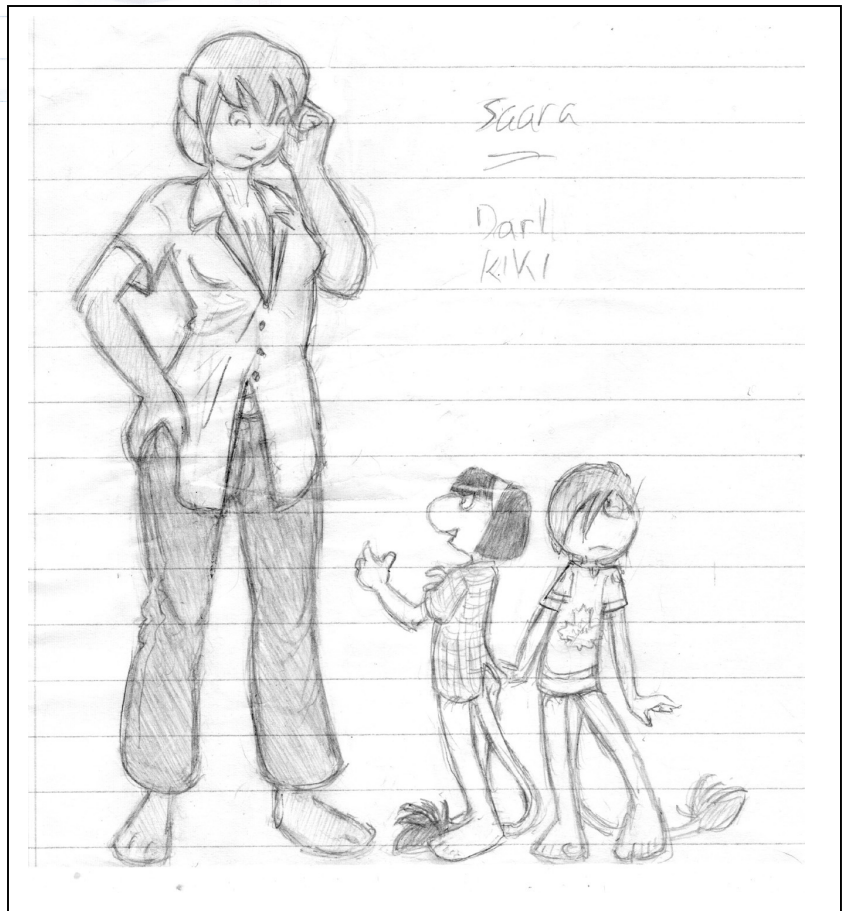


STAYING UP ALL
NIGHT WHILE
KIKI HAS THE
DOUBLE CONNIP-
TIONS ---



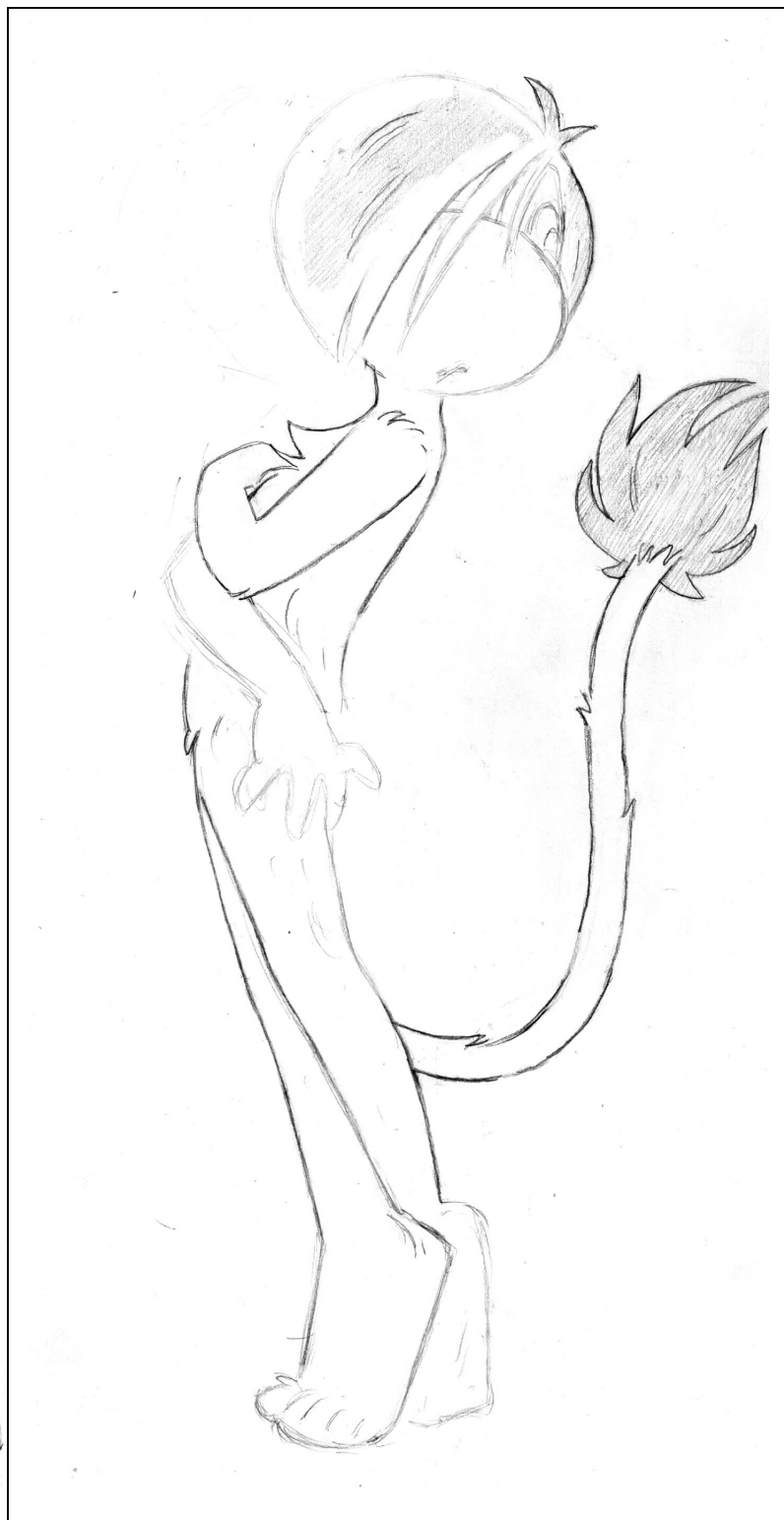
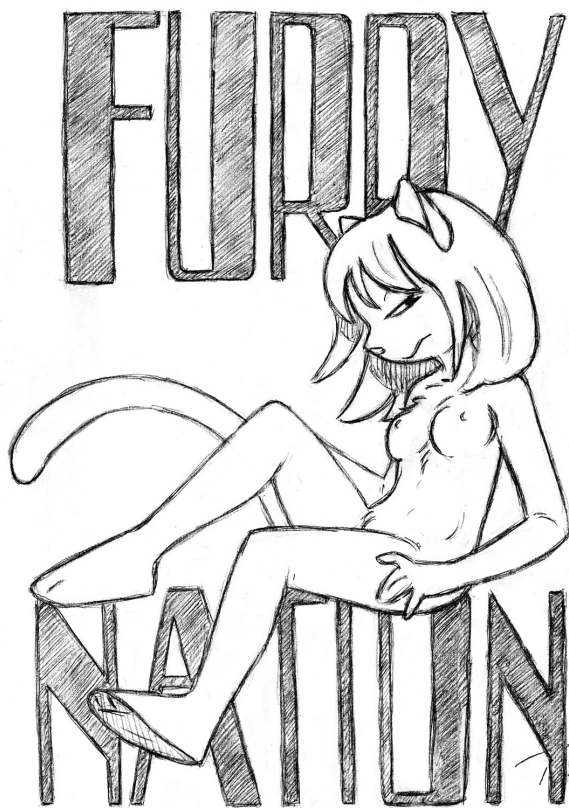
Staying up all night with
Kiki while she is ill

Saara, Kiki and Darl
in an imaginary meeting



I really haven't been in the mood To draw since leaving the hospital, way too much on my mind in recent months to feel much like drawing. This is virtually the only piece I've felt like undertaking ... however, with one thing or another, it remains unfinished.

This was the last one of the last bits of art before the two strokes late in January/early February – although more or less finished, my intention was to work it up into full colour, as a cover for Joe Strike's upcoming book on the social history of Furry Fandom. The publisher insisted on a different cover, however – a blow-up of a photo of a fursuit – so both Joe and I were overruled. There seems little reason to continue with the art begun. However, Joe wants to at include *some* illustration in the book that would include one of my works at least.



... and that was *Rat Sass 5*.