

RAT SASS 8

A FANZINE FOR ROWRBRAZLE

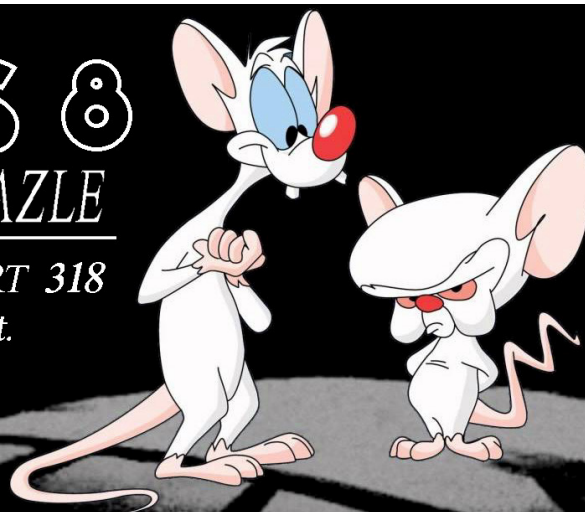
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To begin with, I have a confession. Those are not rats. They're mice. Malignant and with diminished capacity, but still mice. I have searched for well-known rats for future issues, and have one or two up my sleeve still ... but the supply is limited. As a result, I have expanded my repertoire slightly to include mice. With known resources, I should manage to publish *Rat Sass* up to issue 12 without resorting to characters so obscure that even I don't know them. Who thought rats would be so unpopular ... but there you have it.

I also have a small confession of another sort. I'm *really* bored with funny animals, anthros or furies. I barely glance at artists I used to follow, and rarely save any files from FurAffinity or Deviant Art. I only follow one webcomic, and it is only marginally furry. I am desperately searching for a home for my copies of *Gallery*, and may yet solve the problem of finding them a home by simply chucking them out. (Even the editor of *Gallery* says he can't get rid of old issues – the Millennials have no need of paper, or anything as archaic as “issues.”) Even after thorough weeding-out of unwanted furry comic books a couple of years ago, I still find I have too damn many boxes of them. And the horror of it is that most of them were never really any good!

Self-expression by damned! The best part was often the art, which may appeal to readers on many levels. But in the long run, few artists were very good writers, and most produced bubble-gum level adventures or slice-of-life soap opera.

But then, I was a lukewarm comics fan to begin with. I had a couple of boxes of them as a kid, and later began collecting undergrounds and alternates that I mostly still own. But even those are not looking as attractive to me they once did. Dope comics were edgy in their day ... but they were mainly sophomoric drug humour. For every *Freak Brothers*, there were a dozen *Dopin' Dan* comics that were only topical. I have an arrangement to ship most of them to a friend who will split the sales on eBay. Some have real value on the market. But as for furry comics? Basically, no value at all. Look for further announcements in case I decide to make a clean sweep to cut back on my collections.

Resolutions

I have never made a fetish over making a list of New Year's Resolutions. In fact, I only rarely make them at all! Resolutions seldom seem like a useful way to spend time, inasmuch as they are rarely observed. This time, I thought I would dare to be a little different, and – if I don't make any rash promises – at least perhaps I can draw up a reasonable game plan for the weeks and months ahead.

The last days of my 2017 were occupied with three main concerns. First, to complete new coloured art for a special fanzine project ... which fell through. I was asked to finish the work anyway. Despite the fanzine project's demise, the completed art was the first coloured art I had done since my stroke, and rather a milestone.

My second goal in the last days of the year was to finish *Rat Sass* 7. If you read my fanzines, you should be aware that I continued to publish for a private audience ... the 15 or 20 members of *Rowrbrazzle*. I had little temptation to re-join this limited group, who distribute print-only versions of self-publications. I did so a small favour to the editor, Edd Vick, who hoped that some new members would revitalize the group. I knew that I could mainly re-use material from my previous fanzine, so my previous contribs it wouldn't cost me much effort. By the greatest good luck, I had just mailed the issue before my stroke, and had recovered well enough to continue before the next quarterly issue

Brazzle's first issue at the start of year is always a theme issue, with a special cover. As no-one else had any suggestions, I said I wanted to do Fraggie Rock. The colour art had appeared on one of my other fanzines, so my job was a little easier. Still, along with my usual comments, I had to write a brand new short story of some 3,800 words. Every writer is different – some are able to dash off thirty-eight hundred words in an afternoon. Most – like myself – take longer. Inevitably too, you have off-days or you suffer interruptions that delay typing those words – “the end” – when you have more to add. Those of you who actually read “The First Song” when I posted it will know that I finished with time to spare, and the acclaim has been deafening.

Alright... that last bit was pointed sarcasm. But if I haven't grown used to the limited rewards of authorship by now, I have no business writing. The important point is that I was able bring the trying year to a fairly successful close.

The question for now is: “what about next year”?

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Resolution #1) Get this finished!

Among my priorities are to finish a lengthy, commissioned comic strip that was begun in 2017. It has been sitting, unfinished, on my desk all this time, and I can't even recall it

well enough to say whether it was to be ten pages, twelve pages or more. The pages were all laid out, and some of them finished. I think a couple of them had even been posted online. I will have to dig through the stack of work on my desk to remind myself who I owe the work to, or how much of it was paid for. **sigh**

Ah... wait. I have it all on my desktop. The eleven pages were commissioned by Vander Cat ... who has been remarkably patient.

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Resolution #2) The last issue after the last issue?

When I was laid low last winter, I had another large project underway. It begun as a lark, and turned into a major headache. My old fanzine, *Broken Toys*, was meant to be a simple, easily produced effort that I would post online, and email directly to regular readers. I gave no thought at the time to embellishments such as covers, tables of contents or anything smacking of an index. But the time I closed the book on *Broken Toys*, the 50th issue had grown to a much larger and more ambitious monthly publication, whose final issue was 74 pages long!

It was careless of me... I admit it. I have been more methodical, not so lackadaisical, but what was done was done. Worse than that ... I decided to repair the omission by publishing an all new index to the entire run! I thought it would also be a good idea publish the final letters from the letter column ... and one or two other small features to fill space. *Most* of the work had been finished when I had the first, minor stroke. The second stroke, a week or two later, knocked the idea completely out of my head. I only realized a couple of months later that the zine was sitting on my desktop and only needed to be revised, proofread and an afterword written. Although I got on it as soon as seemed practical, I put it off again and again. Enthusiasm for the work had evaporated entirely, and I focused my returning powers on newer, more interesting work. By then, the index was all but forgotten again.

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Resolution #3) Put it in writing!

There have been several classic examples of chronic procrastination in my past. The most glaring has probably been my effort to produce a massive reprint of “Ah, Sweet Idiocy.” Some of my readers may be unaware that this document was written by a fan named Francis Towner Laney in the 1940s. For various reasons, his *magnum opus* – a scathing testament to Los Angeles fandom in the mid-1940s – has remained out of print all this time ... this, despite its historical and sociological interest. People have often planned to bring “ASI” back into print, but the effort had never been successful. It was almost a curse on anyone who attempted it. During one of my less lucid moments, *I* decided to reprint “ASI.” This was no sudden impulse.

Back when the digital medium was new, I had produced similar projects on CD ROM. But that technology became dated, and after my first, enthusiastic projects, I lost interest.

What with new jewel-box art, new art for the disks, ads for promotion and burning the discs fifty at a time, it was just too much work to go through again.

My other options include editing the material to copy to disk, one at a time, without artistic bells and whistles. This is probably the simplest, sanest thing to do at this point.

Another possibility would be to just to send all the files to eFanzines, to be posted as a free download. It would certainly get *that* out of my hair!

But there is still the allure of making something *more* than just a list of files on a website, something closer to my original inspiration. It has been mentioned to me that I could publish the material as a book, through Amazon. It *would* be rather a kick to have a real, published book on my shelf. Maybe I might even be able to sell three or four?

And those are enough resolutions for now!

DEAD ARTIST SYNDROME

No, last I checked, I was still alive ... if not entirely what I like to call living. But I definitely wasn't dead.

And yet, one of my readers has informed me that he found a copy of *Tales of Beatrix Farmer* for sale on eBay for almost \$70, making it a moderately collectable comic book. My reader only searched for the book online to prove a point. A day or two later, another reader discovered yet another copy for sale for almost \$50, also to prove a point. What that point is, I'm not very clear.

One thing that *is* clear, however, is that I have to stop selling copies of *Beatrix* for only \$3! It isn't as though the supply is endless ... I only have 18 or 20 left.



The screenshot shows an eBay listing for a comic book titled "Tales of Beatrix Farmer #1 VF/NM; MU". The item is listed by the seller "cyberspacecomics" (56981) with a 100% positive feedback rating. The price is US \$69.99, and the time left is 18d 01h 12/5, 12:14AM. The listing includes a "Buy It Now" button, an "Add to cart" button, and a "Make Offer" button. There are also links to "Add to watch list" and "Add to collection". The seller's information is displayed on the right, including their store name "CyberspaceComics" and a link to "See other items". The item's condition is "VF/NM", and the listing includes a "60-day returns" guarantee, "Experienced seller" status, and "Best offer available". The item image shows two characters, a pink one and a yellow one, standing in a field.

Unfortunately, life as a renowned artist is not always as glamorous as it is cracked up

to be. When dealing with the kind of knuckleheads who occasionally publish my work, it is sometimes downright frustrating.

For instance, I was finally able to finish a comic strip I had begun last winter. It was to promote a fan fund that began in 1953, and has run every year since. I supported the candidate this year, and volunteered to do a cute little, two-page cartoon. The art was purposefully simple, so as to save time ... and to be truthful, it didn't need to be complicated. My plans didn't include a nine-month time-out, however. As a result, I was only able to work on the art sporadically, and with some difficulty, and was only finished about a month ago.

By then, naturally, the campaign – and the subsequent tour of the country by the winner – was long over. Fortunately, I was able to salvage the final panel by a bit of hasty rewriting. By good luck, the candidate who I had been backing won the campaign, and was only too happy to run the modified two-page cartoon story in his fanzine. So far, so good.

Like almost all “digital fanzines” these days, the zine is a throwback. It is neither a fanzine, as was once printed on paper, nor a blog, website or social network. Fanzines of the old school generally adhere to a magazine format, but take advantage of digital techniques in pursuit of an old-fashioned look. Modern audiences are frequently baffled by fanzines, neither understanding them for what they are, nor seeing the point.

This particular fanzine was usually mailed directly to a list of readers, but also sent to a couple of sites with updated lists of other fanzines. When the latest “issue” was mailed, I eagerly turned to the right page to see my contribution. Usually, this is the payoff of days or weeks of work, but – to my horror – the editor had decided to compress two complete pages onto a single sheet! Not reduced in size – that would have made sense, had the art been reduced in letterbox format. Instead, three-inch panels had simply been shrunk vertically, so that art looked like it had been squeezed from tubes of toothpaste!

For the life of me, I cannot understand why he did this. It was a *virtual fanzine*. It costs *nothing* to run an extra page.

The horror, the horror. It is not done. There is more...

I was scarcely over the annoyance of my mangled art, when a different editor asked if I would be willing to do the cover art for a special issue, or *one-shot*. This was for a convention to be held sometime in the summer. With such a distant deadline, when I agreed to do it I thought I had plenty of time. Imagine my surprise, when, a few emails later, the editor ungraciously ordered me to clean the wax from my ears and the cover had to be ready about two weeks from now! We had been talking about a convention at least six months in the future, but – yes – buried in the emails was a

single mention of the editor wanting the art ready to be for November!

Nevertheless, I girded my loins, and gave this turkey a choice of four or five drawings that I could finish in time if I put my mind to it. I hoped.

The work took about a week, putting in about five-to-eight hours a day, and – glory be – it was done more or less in the time frame I expected.

In the meantime, however, the editor decided not to publish his one-shot after all. He had decided he could use the art in one of his usual, monthly issues instead. I think I was actually offered the choice to turn the offer down, but the suggestion in passing, as though the possibility was scarcely thinkable. But the work was complete, and it was a piece that I think I was justifiably happy with ... regardless of the less-than-ideal circumstances in which I produced it.

I even thought ahead to provide *two* versions of the cover, with either an October or November date. My reasons would be obvious to anyone who is aware that *most* non-artists will inevitably add a plain box to a cover, with a bold, font, sans-serif title ... probably in a font like *Ariel*, *Verdana* or *Tahoma*, which are nearly indistinguishable. Hoping to avoid the obvious – and ugly – default choice of most editors, I picked a discreet serif font called *Trajan*. Rather than plain black, I used soft gray. Perfect.

That was when the editor dropped the final bombshell. He didn't know *when* he planned to use the art ... but not right away. Doubtless there was some reason why the work I was pressed so urgently to finish had to be put off until the Tibetan New Year, or whenever, but I'll be hanged if I know what it is. Moreover, this opened the possibility the editor would revert to that box-and-*Ariel* logo after all, despite my best efforts to thwart him.

And, finally, there was a incident that was as unexpected as it was hard to understand. Sometimes all you can do is shake your head, move on...

No, no... I'm not dead yet. But there are days when, dealing with fans I wish, I almost wish I were. It would be so much less frustrating.

Incident at Babel

The other day, I ran into Scott – one of the social workers in my building – as we were both coming in. I also encountered an unfamiliar man with a package. As we waited for an elevator, the other man came closer, and stopped to ask me a question.

“What was that?” I asked.

He repeated the question. I listened again, but still couldn't make it out. He tried a third time, with no better luck than before.

Maybe it's just that my hearing is worse than it used to be, or maybe it's because Toronto has become a suburb of Babel over the years, but it seems that these days I have trouble with almost *everyone's* accent. In the first thirty years of my life, I might occasionally have a spot of trouble with a foreigner's thick Italian or Jewish accent, or whose French was problematic. But increasingly, I am having trouble understanding with people with Indian, Korean, Vietnamese, Arabic, Russian, Tibetan, Nigerian, South African, Afghani, Turkish, Ukrainian, Persian, Portuguese ... even "Bajan" accents, which is technically English, although it is nearly unintelligible. I have come to think of it as the normal state of affairs in Toronto in my elder years.

But whether it was my hearing, or this particular person's accent, I was utterly unable to understand a word of what he was saying. His question was short, and sounded a little like English, without any foreign-sounding vowels or consonants ... but it simply didn't make sense.

Finally, I turned to Scott for help.

Luckily, *he* seemed to have no trouble. Scott exchanged a few words with him, and the man happily took off down the hall, ignoring me and the elevator just as the doors opened for Traveling Matt. At the same time, Scott was headed for his office at the other end of the hall.

I called out to him, "What did that guy want, anyway?"

"I have *no* idea," said Scott, as the doors closed on me.

Wherever that guy was going, I hope he got there.



Schmoozing

Once again, my *least* favourite part of creating an issue ... the mailing comments. For many readers, the mailing comments are the life and breath of an apa like *'Brazzle*, but I find it difficult to comment on other writers. This may or may not be a reflection of what I've read, but whatever I have to say in reply. A thousand words may evoke only the non-verbal equivalent of a grunt in response. With that in mind, I begin, writing on the fly as I page through the more recent *'Brazzle*.

William Earl Haskell – So, the Mustelids will no longer put up with skunks, and have removed them from the family? I'm not surprised. Skunks are up all night with wild parties, and usually leave quite a mess in the morning. • I've occasionally drawn with my other hand, and while the results were better than the work of non-artists, it is better to stick with the hand that I normally use.

Kjartan – Someone keeps leaving the door open, that's how you keep getting back in from the grave. Use a shovel next time. • *Tiny Toons* was funny most of the time, but, like quickly produced product for a non-discriminating audience, it had its off days. If you didn't like *Tiny Toons* – and I can be open-minded on that – you should not watch most of the subsequent Warner Bros. Productions ... which ran from hit-and-miss to just plain awful. *Pinky and the Brain* was probably the best of the lot, but be ready for arguments. • In case I ever move to "Aridzona," you might like to check out the AK74 I bought at the Canadian National Exhibition last fall.



Edd Vick – I had originally hoped to do more for the *Fraggle Rock* issue ... but you're a literary man, and know that "The best laid schemes o' mice and men gang aft agley." For the rest of the readers, "we screwed up." The new Fraggles story (about Darl) was everything I hoped for in a story that might as easily turn into a fiasco, but I ran out of time for a new piece of art for the cover. There was a fall-back position – a coloured work that I had used in another of my fanzines, but which would be unfamiliar to most *Brazzle* members. I would have liked to add a folio of four to six pages of Fraggles art, as well. But ... I was rushed on a number of other matters, and tired. I don't have the energy that I used to have, only two or three years ago, when my health began to nose-dive. Perhaps I can add that folio in this issue, instead. • One of the things I would have liked to have added last issue was a few comments on the special attachment that I've developed for *Fraggle Rock*. For one thing, the show – both the live action segments with Doc and Sprocket, and the Rock itself – were filmed and produced in Toronto. Special versions were filmed for *some* languages for the live-action sequences, notably France and Germany. More often, the shows were simply dubbed in Spanish or other languages. What was somewhat goofy, however, is that the live-action segments were shot in English ... for the British audience. It seems as though the Canadian accent was too rustic for the refined tastes of the British. Regardless, Fraggles are *obviously* Canadian. As well as the Middle-American accent spoken by Fraggles, there is internal evidence that *Fraggle Rock* opens into the world of Silly Creatures somewhere in Canada. Doc's home is close to the sea, for one thing, and there are hints of a Maritime flavor, pointing to New Brunswick, Nova Scotia or (less likely) Newfoundland. When Doc's long-time friend is forced to move to the desert, Doc decides to move as well – precipitating a crisis, since he had only discovered the Fraggles' existence days before. The most plausible place Doc plans to move to is Alberta. Of course, one could assume some less probable locations in the US – such as Maine or Arizona – but there is one irrefutable fact. When Uncle Traveling Matt discovers the first Fraggles Hole, he exits into downtown Toronto. There is hardly a spot I didn't know intimately that Matt didn't explore in the first months of *Fraggle Rock*! • Bollocks to your previous employer. He probably expected you to pick too much cotton anyway.

Simon Barber –Fraggles with computers? That seems counter-intuitive. More likely, the Doozers would figure them out from the start, but Fraggles would be too lazy or too easily distracted to learn. "What's this thing do? Oh, wait, a Red had a balloon ... and Mokie is singing a song about caterpillars. I'll be back in a jif." Four days later...

Gene Breshears – *Fraggle Rock* also showed on the CBC – the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation – where it was seen on nationwide television. It was also shown on the BBC, in Australia, New Zealand, the Republic Of Ireland, Germany, France, the Netherlands, Scandinavia, Spain and many places in Eastern Europe. Unfortunately, it

was only shown on HBO in the US, effectively turning into a huge acoustical shadow for 200 million viewers. Another hollow victory for pay-per-view TV. The episodes are available on four DVD sets, however, and are sometimes quite cheap. • In a way, though, *Fraggle Rock* was an atypical Henson production. He was the creator of the show, but once it was created he virtually stood back from it to allow others – producers, directors, actors, musicians and others – to do everything. Henson visited the show to appear in only a few roles –as Cantus the Minstrel (5 appearances), but also as Convincing John (3).

Steven Scharff – I think we’re all hearing the ticking of the clock more loudly, and my clock is running ten years later than yours. It’s one reason for trying to make some changes in my priorities, and not spend so much time trying to please fandom or make impressions on it. It’s a futile endeavor at best.

Robert Alley – The typographical mess was my fault – one of the many things I had to remember to do during my recovery, but didn’t notice. When dealing with Adobe documents, I need to create image files of any fancy typography, then insert the file into the document before it is printed out. Otherwise, other people’s copy of Adobe *may* throw up its hands in confusion over a type face not in its memory. I’ve fixed that ... but too late to do anything about it in the *Brazzle* mailing. • Furry fandom has become so different from what it used to be that I would not even attempt to re-engage with it. I don’t even think I have much in common with it as a interest I once had. Cartoon shows I haven’t watched, people in costumes, kids with their heads in their phones all the time, commercial dance music ... phui. Where’s my Geritol? • I couldn’t carry a tune with an MP3 player in my pocket. I do love music, but not with the sort of deep, abiding love of music that people who make it have... particularly the people who make amateur music. Some are quite good, but I like what I like. • My less than well-developed instinct for music is one reason I give to “prove” that Darl is not me, or vice versa. Even if I were to overcome my shyness about my voice, I have no desire to sing! I prefer to listen. But you are partly right that writer examines himself as well as his possibilities when he writes.

EXTENDED DUTY

A story about a car and a cop...

It was an original ’56 Chevy, with an L98 Chevy small block that Miller took from a used-up Corvette. I could get more mechanical, talking about stroke length, piston rods, compression ratios and all that, but I’ve learned enough in the last few years to know that most people don’t want to hear about it. Their eyes only begin to come unglazed a little when I describe the green-tea ice-cream and black two-tone paint, the chrome gleaming like jewel settings and the custom wire

sports wheels. Miller's Chevy was no crude hot rod – it was a gentleman's silk glove of high performance motoring.

Pity that so few people in Musquachewan could appreciate it ... particularly not Dippity Sheriff LesBeaux. "Lesbo," as we called him, had a hate on for that car we were never able to explain. There were other hotted-up antiques begging for tickets in the township, but it seemed that none of them brightened up "Lesbo's" day like Miller's ... perhaps just because it was just because the Chevy was *not* the rowdy exhibition of teenage exuberance that the police mentality expected of it. This was not the hot rod driven by the young Marlon Brando or James Dean, with grease on their hands and even more in their hair. It was the hot-rod of David Niven ... and I believe that is what infuriated whatever remained of the youthful LesBeaux, now suffocating beneath multiple layers of late middle-age flab, that wished it had had the imagination to own a class act like Miller's.

All that is speculation, though. Here are the facts.

Miller was at the wheel; his girl Abbie was in the back seat so that we guys could talk over last night's game and the driver not have crane over a seat back to do it. They usually call me Raven, because I'm as blonde as a Boychuk ought to be. It was Miller, who was half-Cree on his mother's side, who was dark. That sort of irony is common when you live a three-hour's drive north of anywhere important in Canada. I don't think it made LesBeaux like us any better, either.

As usual, he was probably waiting for us behind a billboard on the one highway that led out of town, and the first we knew about it was the red light on LeBeaux's OPP prowler car, flashing in our rear-view mirror. The siren caught up with us a minute later, and there was "Lesbo," leaning over to crank down the passenger-side window of his car to shout at us to pull over. We pulled over.

And stayed in the car. We knew the drill, from regular practice. Miller rolled his window down to let in the unwanted late October chill. It would probably not be cold enough for snow to stick the ground for another two or three weeks, but jackets were already a must.

Miller is not usually good at being polite, but when dealing with Law he does his best.

"Yesssss, Officer? What have I done *this* time?"

“We could start with speeding. Doing 92 in an 85 kilometer zone. “

“Are you certain of that? We don’t have radar in Musquachewan Township. We’ve been through that in court before, and it was your word against ours.”

“I was just going to let you off with a warning... “

In the back seat, Abbie could not quite stifle a *sotto voce* “Suuuuure you were!”

“But now I think you are driving under the influence of alcohol ... or drugs. Out of the car, *now!*”

Dutifully, we left the warmth and comfort of the Chevy’s padded buckets and stood in a line in the autumn chill while the Ontario Provincial Police officer poked around in the front and back seats, grunting as he bent over to peer *under* the seats. He jabbed at the glove compartment catch and let its door fall open, then scooped the contents out without really looking. We knew he never expected to find drugs, and, if we had been drinking, the smell of it in the closed confines of the car – let alone the empty Molson’s cans – would have been enough to make a search pointless. “Lesbo” was simply making a nuisance of himself, and worse was to come when he “searched” the trunk. He opened the tool case. He opened the emergency bag, with the flashlight, can and bottle openers, hatchet, blanket, flares, matches and other things that are good to have around when the car skids into a ditch when it’s thirty below. He opened the sealed plastic water bottle to sniff it, and didn’t even bother to twist the cap back on, just set it down open in the trunk. Within ten seconds he had “accidentally” knocked it over and wet the entire trunk. Satisfied with the “search,” so far, Officer LeBeaux slammed the trunk-lid down hard enough to bounce the Chevy on its shocks.

Then, with a grin, he said, “It looks as though one of your rear traffic lights is broken. I’ll have to write you a ticket.” We watched as the baton on LeBeaux’s belt came up and swung, as though in slow motion. The crunch and tinkle of broken glass came a second later.

Just as the fat turd started writing out the ticket, Abbie looked up and her eyes went wide. She made a motion with her head to indicate we should take a look. There, behind LeBeaux’s back, his black-and-white patrol car was beginning to roll forward, slowly at first, but picking up speed. He had left it in neutral ... despite of the pronounced slope of the road where we were stopped! Within ten

seconds, the Crown Victoria was slipping away at a brisk walk. At thirty seconds, it was escaping custody at an all-out run!

We knew how it felt.

Officer LeBeaux noticed something was indefinably wrong. Was it a subtle movement of the air? Or were we simply not acting quite the way we should while being ticketed? He noticed that we were all staring at a spot down the road, and looked ...

“JEESUZ CHRIST WHY DIDN’T YOU SAY SOMETH... ” But “Lesbo” was already pelting down the road, and didn’t waste his breath with the rest. The last we heard from the officer as he chased after his still-accelerating patrol car was, “DON’T YOU MOVE! I WANT YOU TO BE HERE ON THIS EXACT SAME SPOT WHEN I GET BACK OR, GODDAMN IT, I’LL KILL YOU!”

Well, *that* sucked. Here we were by the side of the road, miles from town, our water spilled and our emergency gear wet, and judging from the clear blue sky we were in for a cold night. Much as we felt no delight in seeing the Dippity Sheriff, the sooner he was back the better.

But he didn’t come back before dark. He wasn’t back by midnight. He didn’t come back before we tried to turn the heater on, sometime around 2 a.m. ... but the engine wouldn’t turn over. Too cold this early in the year? *Shit!* We dozed fitfully, on and off, in the back seat under the one damp blanket.

When the first light of dawn finally made it possible to discern the treeline, we heard the faint drone of a car in the distance. Swearing, we piled out and watched the headlights approaching from town. The lights were off and it was moving slowly, so it was several minutes before it was close enough to make out that it was LeBeaux’s cruiser, all right. Then the cruiser was right next to us. There was just enough light to see “Lesbo” in the driver’s seat, but he didn’t seem to take any notice of us ... or any notice of anything. He drove slowly past, as though he was in a trance, and then was gone. What the fuck was *that* all about?

The sun rose reluctantly through the morning mist, revealing us shivering by the roadside under a damp blanket. We felt like total morons.

“Why didn’t we just *give up* after an hour or two?” Abbie demanded.

"It would have cost more than a couple of hours to have to explain it all to the judge, later," said Miller, who was right, as usual. They take the law seriously in small towns ... the smaller the town, the *more* serious, in fact, until you get to Musquachewan Township, where it is practically *Opera Buffola*.

We were just crawling out of the Chevy again, to stretch and rub some life back into our frozen limbs, when a battered Ford 150 came rattling up the road and lurched to a stop. I recognized a farmer Philips or Phelps, who rolled down the window of his pickup and asked if we needed any help. Just then, Miller dug out his key and tried the ignition again. The small block coughed a couple of times, but then decided to come to life and purred like the pedigreed champion it was.

"Naw."

"Well, wut in the world were you doin' *here*, parked at the side of the road at the crack of dawn, miles from just about anywhere?"

"Aw, you know... that bastard LesBeaux stopped us again with that bogus 'speeding' routine of his."

The farmer nodded. "Lesbo" preyed on other drivers, too.

Miller added with a grin, "He had to leave suddenly. Unfortunately, he said '*stay put*' or else."

"Don't you know wut happened to Officer LesBeaux, last night?"

Looking as innocent as we could, we indicated that we knew nothing. How could we, if we'd been stuck out *here* all night?

"Well, it was the funniest thing ... kinda. I wasn't there personal, but my eldest daughter was just gettin' the Tim Hortons ready fer the morning trade, when she looks up through the winders and sees a patrol car on Cowper's Hill Road, goin' way over the town's speed limit. Then she noticed that the beacon was lit, the driver's door was open, but there weren't nobody innit!"

I remembered then that the highway turned into Cowper's Hill Road when it dropped into town.

"Must of been half the town saw the car roll the rest of the way to a dead stop in front of the Timmie's, as though *it* came fer the donuts *itself*. Then, heads turned

when someone pointed at LesBeaux, running hell bent fer leather about 200 yards behind. He comes to a slow stop, too, just in front of the Timmie's. But then he grabs at his chest, staggers a few feet and falls over. When the ambulance fellers got there, they said he was as dead as a tick on a banker's ass. It didn't seem so funny *then*, of course."

"Oh, shit!" I said.

Miller asked, "When did this happen?"

"Oh, yesterday 'round five-thirty or six I guess, about an hour before dark."

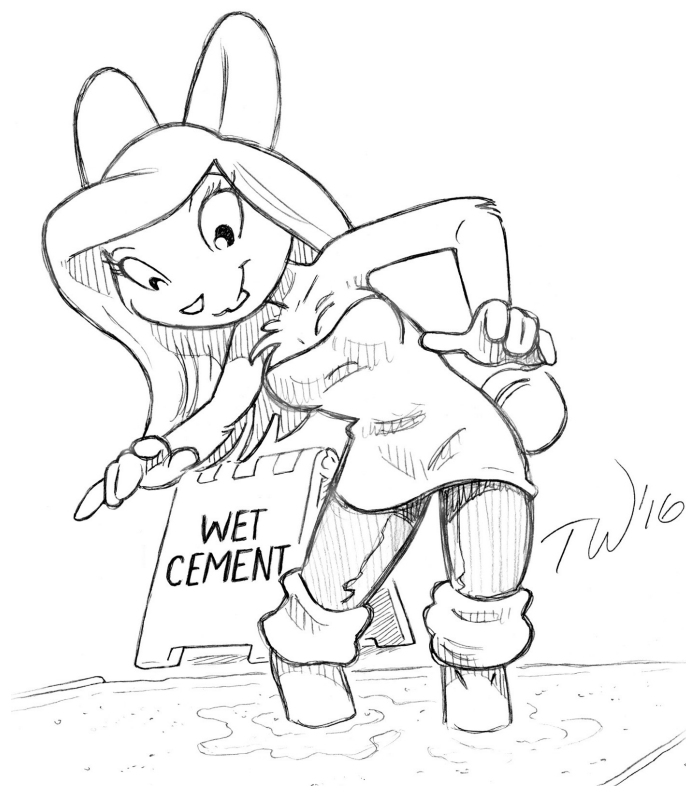
We thanked Farmer Philips or Phelps for the news and the offer of help, got in the Chevy and carefully drove to town at precisely the speed limit. We never mentioned the last time we saw Officer Lebeaux to anyone. They take the law too seriously in small towns, and someone might think *we* were responsible. Not that there weren't other clear, crisp October nights when there was a moon, and some unsuspecting driver *insisted* that he saw Musquachewan's Finest still patrolling the highway out of town. Perhaps he is still looking for us.

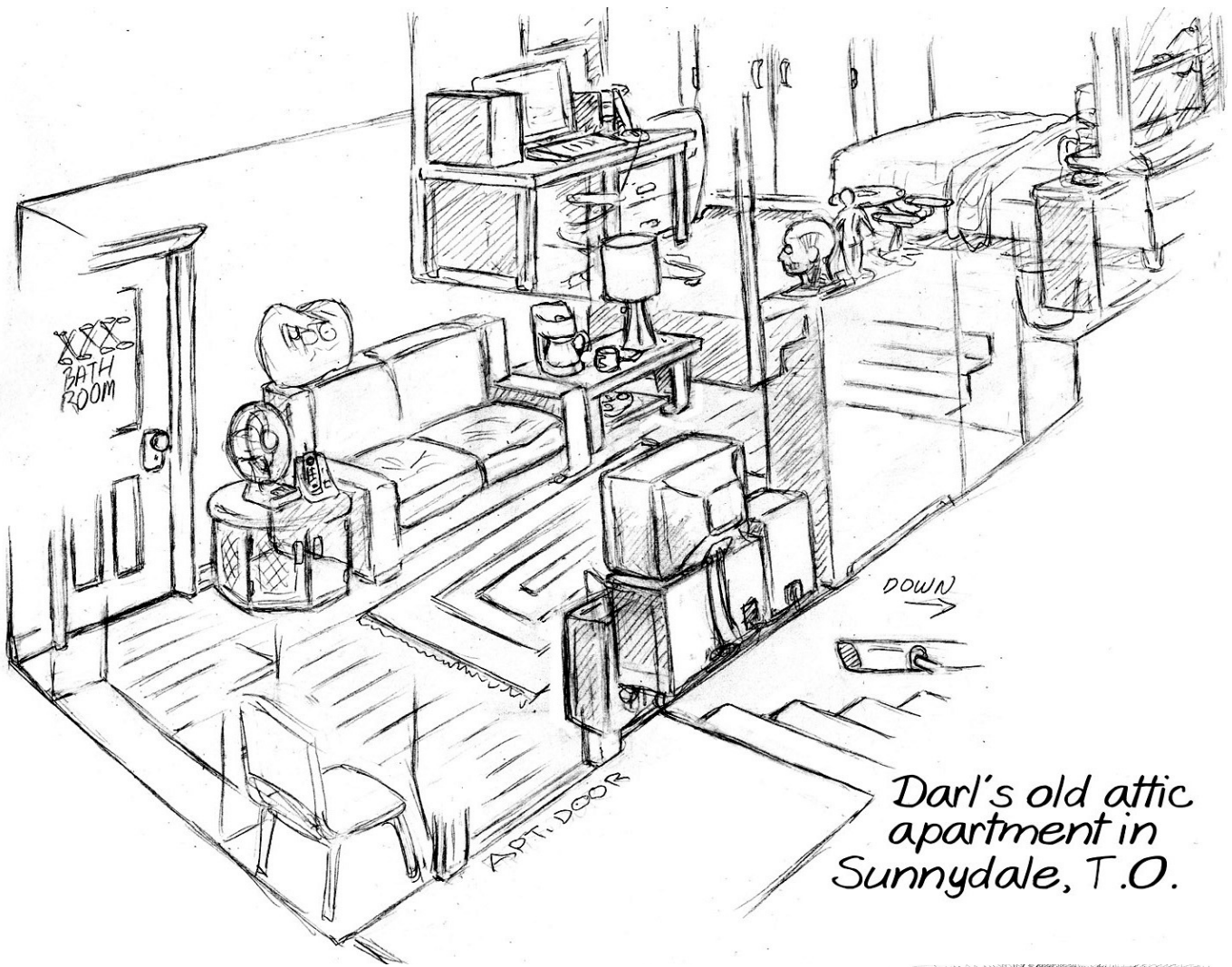
A Portfolio





What am I going to
do with this silly
thing on my butt?

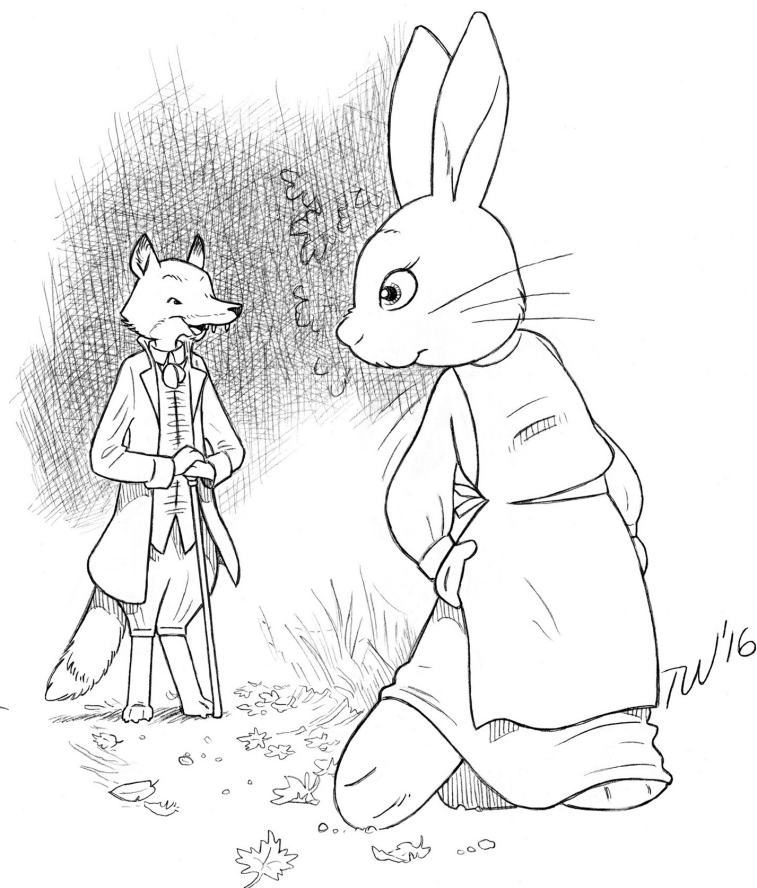




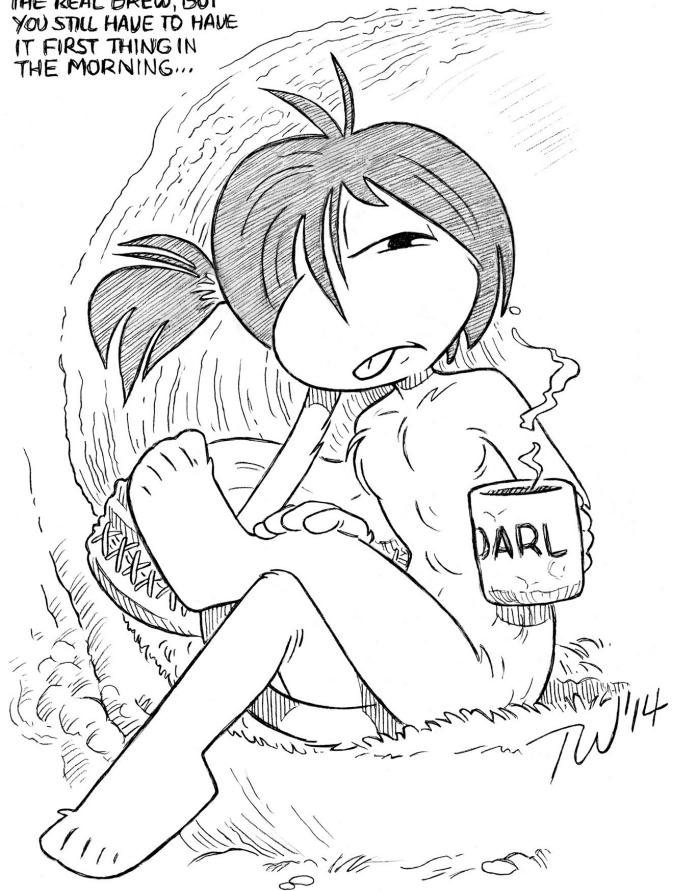
Darl's old attic apartment in Sunnydale, T.O.







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

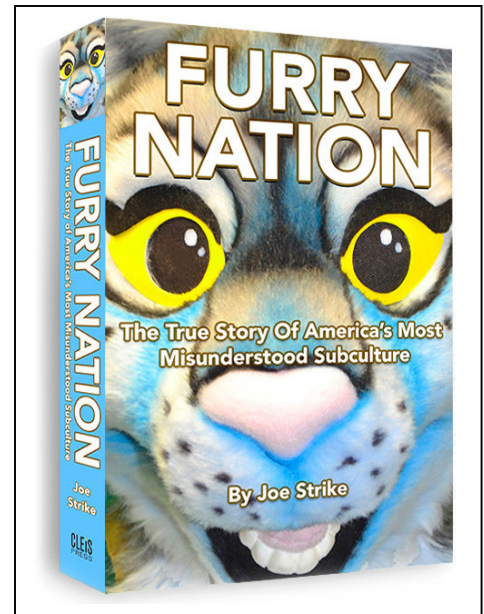


NO NEED TO SHOUT, I'M
NOT BLIND, YOU KNOW!



A Furry Notion

In a way, this is not the book I meant to review. The book I *wanted* to review was one about the history of the anthropomorphic fandom that grew up around comics in the early 1980s. Most of the people involved comprised a relatively small number of fans whose interest – comics, gaming, animation and science fiction – were interconnected, and who were closely involved in the creation of alternative comics. Unlike traditional “funny animal” comics for kids, featuring characters such as Bugs Bunny or Mickey Mouse, the comics created by anthropomorphic artists told unabashedly *adult* stories. Whether depicting humour, sex, politics or adventure, funny animal stories offered a completely new perspective that was unlike anything in serious science fiction, action-oriented superhero comics or children’s cartoons, and was uniquely its own. If *that* had been the book that had been written about anthropomorphic fandom, it would have been the book that I wanted to review.



Instead, *Furry Nation* was the book that Joe Strike wrote about furry fandom, from the point of view of furry fandom as it had become more than 30 years later.

It was, also, not really the book I wanted it to be at all.

A little background music, *Maestro*....

I’ve known Joe for almost as many years as I knew furry fandom. If he was not in it at the very beginning, he was very close to it, and knew as much as anyone about how the fandom developed, and continued to evolve. A while ago, Joe let it be known that he had begun to write a book about the fandom. There had been a little written on the subject – in particular a series of well-researched articles about the early comics.¹ There was also Fred Patten’s early history of the fandom ... and a few other odds and ends. (Ahem.)

Fred’s history was well-done as far as it went, but inevitably his take on fandom was very much *Fred’s* opinion of it. I was excited by the possibility of seeing the subject covered from a different point of view.

When Joe originally finished his book, he proposed a cover idea that he and I discussed in late 2016. I produced a rough sketch according to Joe’s directions ... but that was when things came unstuck for me. To begin with, I had the rotten luck to have a stroke right at the end of January, which threw into doubt my ability to recover soon enough to complete

¹ “What a Long Strange Trip It’s Been” by Ian Curtis, in seven parts

the work ahead of publication. The second serious setback was the publisher's insistence on replacing that cover with one of his own. It shouldn't be too surprising that I was dead set against this, if only because of the time and effort I had expended. However, in the end, Joe came around to the publisher's point of view, thinking the new cover art would be a better draw for the intended readers ... who, for better or worse, were mainly interested in *fursuiting*, and would immediately know that this was a book that would interest *fursuiters*. It was hard not to agree with that logic ... but in my disappointment, it was also hard not to suspect that the new cover's *real* purpose was to please the publisher's girlfriend. And to sell more copies, of course.

Putting those suspicions aside, I ordered the book from Amazon when I had a few bucks to spare.

It has to be said that *Furry Nation* is a well-made book, with no signs of amateurishness. Nor can the author be faulted – Joe has been a professional publicist or copywriter for *The Sci-Fi Channel*.² Judging from other reviews I've read, the book quickly became popular among furies. To create the book, Joe interviewed a large number of people, allowing them to speak in their own words as they described how they had discovered furry fandom. Their stories comprise the largest part of the book, relating the various personal discoveries that highlighted the various ways in which they were turned on to furry fandom.

Reinforcing the basic message about furry fandom as a creative lifestyle, Joe included a number of chapters about other facets of furry fandom ... such as role-playing, art shows, and – of course – the alternate comics that got it all started.

For the most part, Joe has done this book exactly as he should have.

It's just *not* the book I had wanted to read. I imagine Joe will be surprised that I found *Furry Nation* a terribly unsatisfying account of conventions, role-playing and fursuiting. I began to skim over later chapters, becoming increasingly uninterested in people's similar stories of similar discoveries of fandom, and of people making similar new friends.

I can't fault Joe for my having the wrong expectations. *Furry Nation* was not written by accident, but with skill and purpose, using techniques that journalists go to school to *learn*. Perhaps some courses are even titled "Human Interest 101," teaching you to interview your subjects in such a way as to draw out their stories, much the same way that survivors would be interviewed after a fire.

The problem I had was with all this was that I *would* have preferred much fewer syrupy appreciations of fandom, and much more understanding about *where* this fandom came from, *why* it appeared *when* and *how* it did, how it *evolved* over time, and *what* any of this

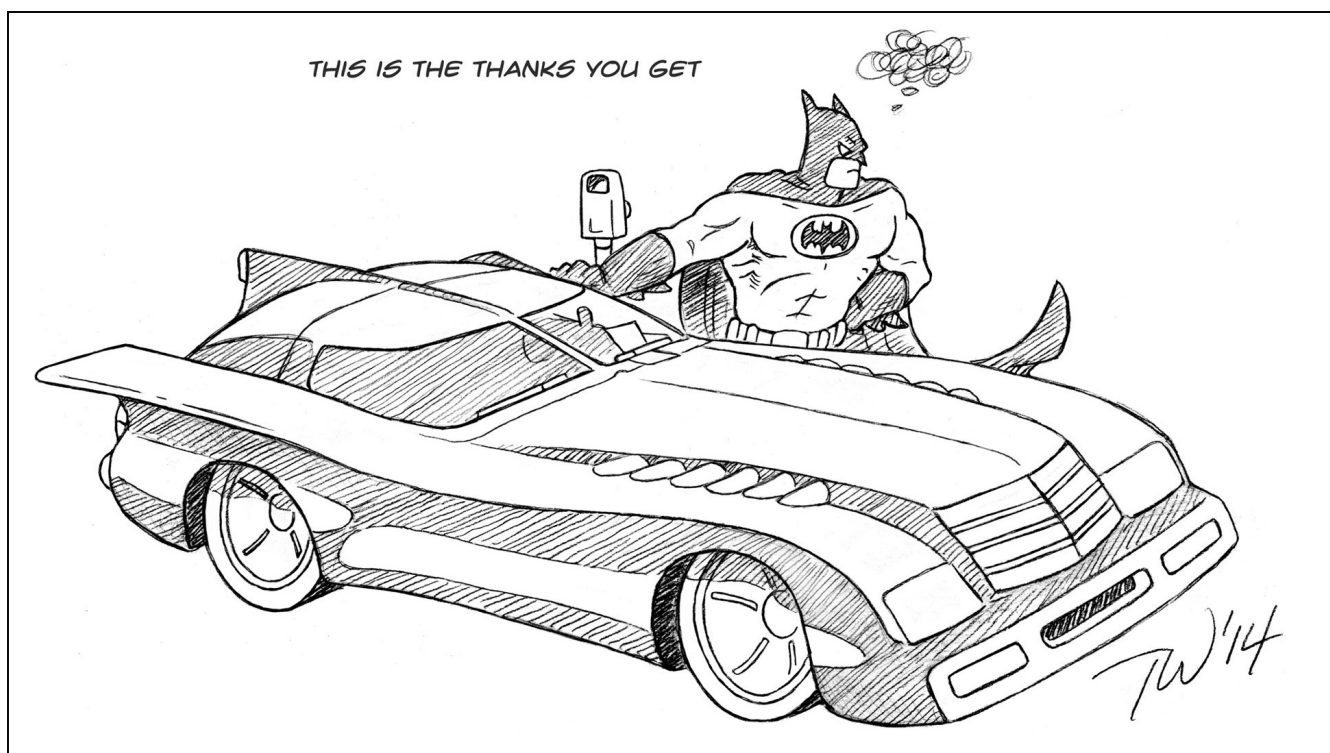
² I confess that I'm a little fuzzy about the nature of Joe's profession and education.

means ... if anything. The entire *raison d'être* of furry fandom – the artists and the publishers who began it all – were more or less sidelined in a single chapter or two!

At this point, I want to dismiss any suggestion that my review is motivated in any way by the taste of sour grapes. As a matter of fact, Joe treated me quite generously in *Furry Nation*, citing an anecdote of mine, and finding a reason to add an example of my artwork. For this, perhaps, I should be grateful.³

And while I may be dissatisfied with the book, there is no question that *Furry Nation* has been a big hit with furry fandom. This is not terribly surprising, really. It has been quite a long while since the original cast of misfits created anthropomorphic fandom, almost forgotten in the mists of a bygone era. Since then, the people who comprise the great majority of present-day fans have become totally enthusiastic about those very facets of fandom that *I* think of as “fringie.” This was *their* book as much as Joe’s ... and, by inference, it is *I* who is now on the fringe. It is entirely likely that *Furry Nation* may become one of the publisher’s best-selling books. Good for Joe.

It’s too bad, though. I really wanted to read that *other* book ... the one that was never written!



egress

³ After all, in what seems like a serious omission, the co-founder and first Official Editor of Rowrbrazzle – Marc Schirmeister – is strangely missing from the text. Schirm edited ‘Brazzle for several years before turning it over to Fred Patten as OE. The moral is, “Never rile a writer if you want to be mentioned in their books.”