

One Swell Foop #5



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Masthead

Yet another aperiodic exercise in recreational insanity from Garth Spencer at 82 East 40th Avenue, Vancouver, BC CANADA V5W 1L4, garthspencer@shaw.ca. Be warned, kids, this is what happens when you don't eat your vegetables.

Art credits

Cover:..... William Rotsler
p. 3:..... Brad Foster
p. 6..... steampunk clip art
p. 7:..... Alan White
p. 14:..... Taral Wayne

p. 9 photo: by Alan Stewart

I haven't found current email addresses for the following; perhaps I've fallen way behind on reading zines at efanzines.com -
Dwain Kaiser, Earl Kemp, Lexie Pakulak, John Purcell, Henry Welch, Neil Williams

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Drivel

This issue was intended to include a scholarly look at modern ritual magic, and a frank look at how to design a life (and how well or badly I have done); but of course, those are subjects too large for a couple of months' preparation. Instead I'm running a short piece on language construction and why projects like Esperanto missed the mark.

The Canadian fanhistories that appeared in a previous form in *Opuntia* are now posted online, in a wiki format that will allow other people to correct and complete them. See <http://canfanhistory.wikispaces.com/>.

I started a new Facebook group: the "*Second Reformed Anarcho-Syndicalist Party with a Hot Tub in the Backyard Inc.*" If I can set up a non-profit society in this name, I can maybe rope other people into doing street-theatre gags as a cult, as a fringe party, or as some kind of weird company, in alternation.

Or not.

If I were a fully qualified person I suppose I ought to get a move on and provide for my remaining future, notwithstanding the continuing disintegration of Western industrial multinational economies. Instead I'm seriously thinking about lining up my personal problems and tackling them with spells and talismans. This is what despair of rational solutions comes to. Behold the wreckage of a reasoning mind. Here I am, brain the size of a bloody planet, mutter grumble mumble ...

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Uffish Thots

Here is the sort of thing I am writing on Facebook instead of in a fanzine ...

... the world is a joke, or a kinetic sculpture, created by a rather dim superbeing who kept forgetting what he was doing, which is why we have puzzling logical flaws like the dark-matter problem. At least one science-fiction author has suggested the creator needs a collaborator, which may be what SF authors are meant to do. We were created to be part of a grand design but Someone forgot to brief us about what it is. There is no planet Earth, and there is no conservation of mass either; there are little planetoids circling about a centre of mass, each claimed by a different nation-state, and each inflates as it gains more economic and political influence, and nation-states compete to see who can throw the most weight around. Gravity is enforced by cats lying on things, which creates a quantum entanglement effect; cats all look at us that way because *they* know what *they're* for. Societies and cultures are compounded of various frauds instituted by different con artists at different times for different purposes. Every so often a kindly superbeing tries to contact one of us and explain the real score, but we have real trouble communicating out-of-context experiences without dragging in our tribal prejudices, and anyway we get malevolent or prankish superbeings passing themselves off as the Supreme Being, and it takes critical thought to tell the difference. Buddha was the only person I can think of who "preferred not speaking" to the whole question of gods. The world already ended several years ago, but we've been put in a cosmic waiting room, a sort of Matrix-like virtual reality, while someone up there finishes the documentary paperwork; only nobody is taking care of *continuity*, which is why our virtual reality is getting stranger and stranger.

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Maybe I can promote this sort of worldview as the Second Reformed [Whatever] Cult. The inner circle of the Rational Secular Humanist Church. Whatever.



The Wit and Wisdom on Facebook

– I still can't believe that "liberal" has somehow become a pejorative word in American English; I associate it with everything Americans say they profess. One more reason I think English has broken down into deceptively similar languages that aren't mutually intelligible, the way Latin did.

– There are times when you see Anglos outside the US making rather self-satisfied comments on the weirdness that television reports from the republic. Then you see things like this:

"In Canada - Our Homeless go without shelters or food.

"In Canada - Our Elderly choose between food or medicine because their pension isn't enough for both.

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"In Canada - Our Children go to school without enough teachers or textbooks.

"In Canada - Our Injured wait hours or even days in Emergency Rooms because of under staffing.

"Yet we donate BILLIONS OF DOLLARS to other countries before helping our own first.

"Have the guts to re-post this. 1% will re-post."

(from Andrew Murdoch)

- "walked past the Aveda cosmetics store this morning just as some jerk with a knife was trying to hold it up. But then the store clerk pulled out a wand and yelled, "AVEDA KADAVRA!" and the jerk's hair strangled him to death. It was pretty funky."

(from Andrew Brechin)

- The Vancouver Freegeek group, like Freegeek groups in other cities, refurbish outdated and donated computer equipment, install the Ubuntu release of Linux, and sell the computers at low, low cost to income-minus users. For my part I'd like to build my own pocketbook-sized netbook with amazing CPU power (running Linux, Windows, and any other operating system). Am I aiming a bit high?

- There are a fair number of conspiracy theories going around, and not just in new television series, and they are all disappointingly derivative. I only wonder, *"How many power conspiracies are there? Are they all pulling in the same direction?"* I remember a saying attributed to Timothy O'Leary, that wherever he went he ran into the same twelve conspiracies, under different names.

Which cheers me up; if you've got that many gangs working against each other, life is more like a science fiction convention

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committee than a totalitarian state. (Have you ever *seen* a convention committee in action?)

– The great thing about entering middle-aged is that if you let your fitness go a bit, you no longer get so horny it hurts. You can be quite comfortable being alone, most of the time.

– Tim Horton's keeps advertising this "Where do you enjoy Tim Horton's coffee?" poll on Facebook. I want to tell them I *don't* enjoy their coffee, nowhere, no way, but like Facebook, they don't have a Dislike button.

– I never got the distinction between written and oral language. Why do people attach different connotations to each? (And no, tone of voice does *not* change the meaning of the words.)

– I keep getting these ads on Facebook offering links to sure-thing dating sites. Especially for dating sites slanted to older men. I wish I could block them, or at least tell them all that *I won't pay the price that a relationship costs*, and I'm not talking about the expense of dating.

– *"Contrary to the 'eureka' theory of scientific inspiration, conceptual development is dependent upon multiple discoveries in related fields. For instance, the Steampunk Revolution did not develop until after a team of Goth chromatic researchers, looking for the latest, hottest shade of black, stumbled upon the colour "brown" which was closely followed by Cosplay Fen discovering the plumbing aisle at Home Depot."*

(from Russ Weasel Laughlin)

– My idea which is mine and belongs to me:

If governments were set up and marketed as non-profit subscription services, offering a package of security, mediation and social/insurance services, what should their subscription rates amount to? Assuming they weren't regional monopolies, that is.

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You can imagine what I'm trying to establish: what is the actual cost of the services we now rely upon a mixed-economy industrial state to provide, plus the administration and infrastructure costs?

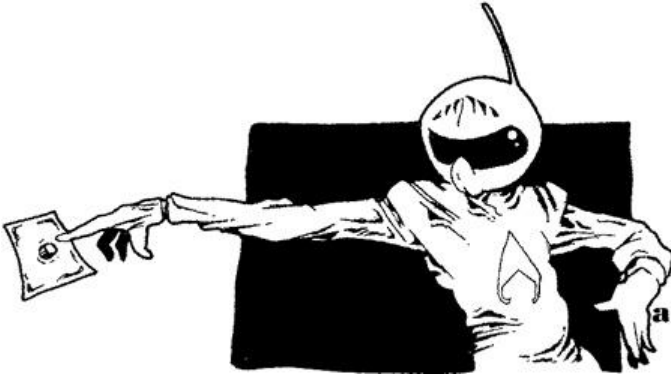
I suppose if some corporations or plutocrats want to take on their own security or go to an independent mediation service or provide their own medical insurance, they can, but then they don't get the services from the "government" provider. That's as close as we get to income-dependent subscription rates.

As it is, we define governments as regional monopolies - with the conditional exception of federal states allocating different responsibilities to federal versus state/provincial providers - because the basis of competition was brute force. We don't *have* a definition for a regulatory agency to ensure "fair competition" between, well, governments.

- Is this reading like straight-faced satire yet, or should I do some editing?



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Letters

Alan Stewart [fiawol@netspace.net.au], July 16, 2011

I've finally scanned the photos I took on my 1994 DUFF Trip.

The eventual report will be called '*The 1994 DUFF Fun and Activity Book*' (there was a *Footrot Flats* one which came out about then that was the inspiration). So on my trip various photos were taken, items collected and notes made with that in mind.

Unfortunately the Ian Gunn cover won't be a possibility, but I plan to publish it sometime. Along the way various 'activities' and 'reports' may appear in other publications if it works out, and they will be re-used with acknowledgment in the final volume.

I will be despatching various pieces in due course, hopefully for publication in some of your magazines. Please use the content as supplied, and parts of this note as explanation, but feel free to alter the design and the layout if you wish. I'm an editor and am good at checking and supplying accurate content, but my design skills aren't that great.

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A couple of ACTIVITIES have already been despatched:

- Registered fans (matching fans to their personalised number plates) to Guy
- How much wood (putting the woodstacking photos in proper order) to Chris

Other things I have lined up include:

ACTIVITIES

- Join the dots (places on a map of the US and Canada where I stayed during the trip)
- Scramble hosts (anagrams of some of the fans who hosted me, probably with photos)
- Conadian badge and ribbons jigsaw

REPORT/DIARY

- The awful trip across (delayed flights, staying awake all night in Auckland airport, Mr. Blobby on TV etc.)
- The trip that wasn't (fictitious drive from Boston to New York with Ben Yalow)
- The trip that was (crashing and staying the night at Wilson 'Bob' and Fern Tucker's)
- A visit to Harry Warner Jr (arranged by Dick and Nicki Lynch while I was in Washington)
- The perils of taking someone else's luggage across a border (I'd given Tom and Marcia some stuff to take to Conadian for me, they were asked if they packed it...)
- The bid that ate by DUFF Trip (How Australia in '99 ended up taking up a lot more hours than I thought it would)

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There will be more of this sort of thing by the time I eventually finish it.

Anyway, if anything here piques your curiosity, or you want more information, or just want to goad me in to writing something in particular, please let me know. Some pieces will have to be run past some of the people concerned after I write them, and before publication, just in case. Though if you host a DUFF winner, you should expect to be mentioned in despatches.



20 August Vancouver Garth Spencer

Eric Mayer, groggy.tales@gmail.com, August 2, 2011

I have fallen woefully behind with my loccing so it is just as well your May-June issue came out late, making my loc less late, if no less incoherent.

If you want to find proof of God in the existence of sf cons I guess that's as good of proof as any other. But then, I also think

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religion ought to come with a warning label: *Religious belief may be dangerous to your health and that of civilization.*

((It's an art form. Not everyone can be talented.))

Your article on cons was educational but I doubt I will ever attend a con let alone run one. Still, it is helpful to have some idea what other fans are doing while I mess around with ezines! I am sure I have already mentioned too many times that I did once help organize the US Orienteering Convention.

The proposed crank theory wouldn't help me, I fear. I can't understand people but my grasp of math/logic is even worse! I am reminded of a course I took in law school about the nature the law. The well known professor had spent his lifetime trying to formulate an objective description of what we mean when we say "law." It was incredibly complicated. A statute may be a "law" but not if it is enacted by fiat, without popular consent. On the other hand, what the mob demands is not precisely "law" either. A dictator's order, ruthlessly enforced is not "law" but neither is a democratic statement about desired behaviour with no means of enforcement. I don't think the prof ever reached a complete description, although his system was useful for analyzing the law in parts. I think a system like you describe in your crank theory would be similar.

Taral's article brought back memories like that special Eric Mayer issue of *DNQ*. Man, I should've kept that material. Best stuff I ever did, particularly that light, humorous spoof of the TAFF wars co-written with Ted White. And I recall those fundamentalist pamphlets by Brad Foster, I think. Small things with pictures of nekkid women. Goodies? Or was that something else?

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And then there is the Post Office. Taral does capture the irrational stupidity of demanding the PO make a profit. Here in the US there's no money to be had in delivering the mail that's too expensive for UPS and FedEx to deliver. If the PO is a private profit maker it ought to invest in some health insurers and ease itself out of the mail delivery business. Eventually it sells the unprofitable mail side of the business, maybe for \$1 to some fans.

The Japanese convention report was rather horrifying and the Worldcon's fate unfortunate but then I never go to cons anyway, because I imagine they are all exactly as Taral describes.

Finally, welcome to Club Grey. Let's try to keep the grey on the outside of our skulls and not let it seep into our brains.

Lloyd Penney, 1706-24 Eva Rd., Etobicoke, ON M9C 2B2, penneys @ allstream.net, August 2, 2011

Thank you for *One Swell Foop* 4. Recreational insanity sure works for me. I think it's the heart of modern fandom these days. Do you suffer from insanity? Hell, no, I enjoy every minute of it! Similar comments follow in the next paragraph, I hope.

What binds and holds the universe together...well, I thought it was duct tape. Red Green told me so. The idea of God suing for libel, slander and copyright violations appeals so much. Actually, he should sue every organized religion in the world for misrepresentation. Our news and entertainment are marked by stupidity, violence, uncivilized behaviour and the fact we like to see people be humiliated or humiliate themselves. We are childish in that we build ourselves up when others are brought down. I guess we hope that won't be us in the near future. Yet, there is the desire to participate in reality television, which to me is a true

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mark of the stupids. Maybe that explains WWE Wrestling and UFC, too. My current most trustworthy source of news is the BBC.

The USA just went through this nonsense about raising its debt ceiling to about \$15 trillion or so... Too many politicians would rather their country blow its credit rating than increase taxes or cut tax breaks to the rich. I really don't like Canadian politicians much, but some US politicians are quite worthy of the hatred they have earned, from people around the world. They seem totally insulated from reality and the rest of the world.

My loc...when the Liberal incumbent Borys Wrzesnewskij was my representative, he was everywhere, in the local news, appearing at local events, and quite easy to talk to. He was defeated, by the Conservative Ted Opietz in Etobicoke Centre, and Opietz has been quite invisible. I don't even know what he looks like, and I certainly haven't heard from him. Perhaps he's the new Minister of Attack Ads.

The contract at the Ontario Association of Architects has ended, and I applied for an advertised job with a previous employer, one who said they'd like to bring me back. I didn't even get an interview, so I having some real trust issues with employers. Help me, 6/49, you're my only hope.

I would like to think that Yvonne and I were fairly good at the Art of the Con, which is why we were involved in con running for so long. Given that it got to the point where even a small loss was unacceptable to some, especially to a convention that eventually had to become a non-profit corporation just to get function space, and to repeat year after year. Memberships gave people a stake in the convention; tickets just let them in without giving them the right to participate other than to go to panels and watch what was happening.

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Conventions do exist in regions, and different regions do seem to have different events, different schedules and attendees with different expectations. Most committees try to pay attention to what their attendees want because they have those same expectations themselves. I think we found that while we thought our ideas were still valid, we recognized the fact that the expectations of convention attendees had changed, and our valid ideas simply didn't work in the newer convention structure. With that in mind, that's why we retired after 30 years in the concom trenches.

True, we don't always act logically when it comes to convention running, but then, what we want seems logically arrived at, while others seem stupid. We rarely agree on the best way to do things. A good chairman has to be able to hold all the warring factions together in one committee, and also had to pay attention to what people seems to like and not like, what worked and didn't work, and be willing to say that, in the long run, you're fired, especially if the person being fired doesn't work well with others.

An example...to us, a green room, based on its historic definition, is a room where panelists gather before their panels to meet, discuss what they're going to say in a panel, and enjoy a little light refreshment before going to their panels. A panelist could hang out there for a while, as could a guest, but in the long run, there was never meant to be many people in the green room at any given time, and once the panels ended for the day, the green room closed. Today, a green room is a continuous party for guests, panelists and convention friends, starts early in the day, and goes well into the night, and is rather alcoholic. That's not a green room to me, and our local convention went from the first definition to the second definition is a matter of a few years,

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which meant our idea of a green room was no longer viable or realistic.

((I am amused by the whole introduction of the term “green room” to conventions, let alone “pink room” – I only heard of it at conventions in the late 1980s, at a Westercon, but I had heard it a decade earlier in amateur theatre.))

Taral’s take on the ignominious end of Worldcon does make me wonder how much longer Worldcon will go on. There are bids to take it to Japan in 2017 and New Zealand in 2020, which is heartening in some ways, the bidding process will go on for some time, but how much longer than 2020 will Worldcon go? Would we recognize it if it happened?

((You do recognize that was a fiction, don’t you? You didn’t recognize his Torcon 3 satire as a parody, when I published that.))

I’m done for the evening. The rain is starting up, but I don’t think there’ll be lightning and thunder. I’ll have to shut down in case there is. Take care, and thank you for another issue.

WAHF: Paula Johanson; Dara Korra’ti; Taral Wayne (“Well, don’t dood it again! Er... did what? In that case, did you did or dood you not did, but if you dood then didn’t dood it, then dood it again until its did done.”); and Jean Hollis Weber



The Confusion of Tongues

Like a number of fans – both of science fiction, and of Tolkien’s works – I gained an interest in constructed languages. For this and other reasons I went so far as to major in linguistics, before I dropped out. Of course I was interested in projects such as Interlingua and Esperanto and Loglan, before I worked out why they never quite ... succeeded.

Of course part of the issue was marketing, or rather the lack of it. Another is that artificial languages were conceived to meet a need *that no one felt*. But I suspect there is some deeper and more intractable reason.

There were multiple communication problems in my background – individual, interpersonal, familial, social, you name it – and when I began to identify them, I dropped out. Nothing in a linguistics program came to grips with the problems I was apprehending: the problem of hearers who *will not* hear what you are actually saying, or speakers who *will not* say what you need to hear.

To a great extent information about ordinary social norms was kept from me, perhaps unintentionally but persistently, for decades. And I didn’t get out enough, take some risks, and ask enough questions, to be honest about it. If I didn’t even *know* how people wanted me to behave, or what I was supposed to do, or even to *be* in this life, this why.

Oh, it was still interesting to play with artificial languages; I have occasionally made noises about constructing a *lingua franca* for Vancouver, pieced together largely from English and

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Cantonese and Punjabi, with occasional Spanish and Japanese loanwords thrown in. S.M. Stirling suggested something like this, in *The Peshawar Lancers* – a post-catastrophe English heavily influenced by languages of the Indian subcontinent, from pronunciation through vocabulary.

But this project runs aground on the same reef as Esperanto: the unwillingness of the people I meet to make an effort, to look at what they're trying to say ... to achieve communication.

If you're still not clear what my subject is, consider everyday, normal failures of communication – not between people who *don't* share any common language, or who misunderstand each other's accents in broken English (or French, or Spanish) – but between people *fluent* in English, even *raised* in English, who still can't make themselves understood. A lot of comedy routines revolve around ordinary social misunderstandings, just because a speaker or listener is preoccupied with something the other doesn't know about.

A number of personal tragedies, by the same token, revolve around people unwittingly saying the wrong thing or making the wrong gesture, in precisely the wrong social context.

Any occasion when people speak or write to each other – even the *fact* that someone speaks or writes to you – can be taken the wrong way. No matter what occasion, or what phrasing you use, somebody can read into it a subtext that isn't there. A letter from a lawyer or a knock on the door from a policeman, for example, can automatically be taken for a threat, no matter what they really have to say. I have known people *determined* to misunderstand anything you say, even to the point of taking compliments as insults.

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Over thirty years ago I was struck by how divided a small university was, between the communities gathered around different faculties. (This was striking if you were exposed to the idea that all knowledge had an original unity, despite the drive to specialization that marked twentieth-century education and occupations.) Some years later I was struck by the growing divisions in SF fandom, which itself was a subculture somewhat removed from the mainstream; Star Trek fans, and then other mediafans, reinvented fandom and redefined fannish jargon, as if almost entirely out of touch with prior fandom; later, anime fandom redefined costume shows as “cosplay”, some convention runners kept redefining “consuite” and even conventions *in toto*.

Now, I suspect this breakdown of common definitions is fracturing what we laughingly call civilization. Different institutions, occupational groups and factions do not speak the same language, almost literally. How often do people talk *past* each other about public issues, or personal ones? How often do we work at cross-purposes, in private companies and even in families? Is this becoming the norm?

Now I ask you.

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Why You Got This

- ___ I'm fishing for ideas about how to salvage a misspent life.
- ___ You are a correspondent of mine, and I am under the impression you enjoy my comedy routines.
- ___ We both wish fannish fandom were still an active community.
- ___ In memory of nights of forbidden lust.
- ___ I am trying to recruit you for the Anarcho-Surrealist Party, the Rational Secular Humanist Church, or both.
- ___ Somebody hates you and wants to drive you crazy.
- ___ Somebody wants to spread the rumour that I should be committed.
- ___ You are Library and Archives Canada, and I owe you a whole whack of back issues.
- ___ These are not mutually exclusive reasons.