

BROKEN TOYS 32

BROKEN TOYS 32 IS NOT THE SECOND HALLOWEEN ISSUE, PUBLISHED BY TARAL WAYNE, WHOSE TENURE ON THIS MORTAL PLANE IS STILL AT 245 DUNN AVE., TORONTO ONTARIO, M6K 1S6. ON THE SPIRITUAL PLANE, HE CAN BE REACHED BY SÉANCE (OR INTERNET) AT TARAL@BELL.NET. THIS IS KIDDELIDIVEE BOOKS & ART 289. THE OCTOBER ISSUE IS DATED EARLY IN NOVEMBER, 2014.

Halloween Not

This was supposed to have been the Halloween issue, but it is not. There is a reason for this that I will get to. As for Halloween itself, I wrote a few words about it on Facebook.

“Halloween this year reminded me a great deal of the first Halloween I can remember. I was about six, as far as I recall, and living in a part of town I can no longer identify. It was the same year I saw my first issue of Mad Magazine (with Alfred E. Newman as the Headless Horseman), bought the only package of Canadian Football League bubblegum cards I ever owned, lost a Matchbox Toys Jaguar E-Type behind the stacked auditorium chairs in the school basement, got locked in out on the upstairs porch by accident, heard Kennedy debate Nixon on TV, and found fool's gold in the schoolyard. I looked forward to Halloween that year, because I was living in the city again, and could go trick-or-treating. Unfortunately, just like this year, it was cold and rainy. My parents wouldn't let me go out! Rats!

“I was all grown up in 2014, thankfully. I went out any way, and bought myself about \$10 worth of chips and candy to wolf down by myself. There wasn't much else to do ... children don't trick or treat in my building. One old lady, a neighbor I knew, was sitting out front, under the building's overhang, with a folding TV-dinner table for treats, but she wasn't doing much business. I came home and worked on my Halloween story a bit, then watched The Munsters all night.

“I have a few cheesy Halloween props to put out for myself. This year I added a nice set of "iron" shackles that even fit me! Wearing them, I pretended to be dressed up as Harry Houdini.

"I ate the last of the candy this morning for breakfast."

As I was saying, I had planned this as a Halloween issue, and began a work of fiction with a Halloween premise. Although the writing has gone well enough, it hasn't gone as quickly as I had hoped, and the story has still a few thousand words to go. The length is the other problem. At around seven-or-eight thousand words, the piece just won't fit into an issue of *Broken Toys* that is only 24 to 28 pages long.

I also have a colour cover for the Halloween issue that I am of two minds about using. On the one hand, I dislike abandoning a format that I have stuck to for so long. On the other hand, it's a gorgeously coloured piece, based on a black & white original by Ken Fletcher.

What I have decided to do, then, is demote this issue from the Halloween issue to plain, old issue number thirty-two. I will finish up the story as soon as I can, and publish it in a second *Broken Toys* for October. As long as I don't actually publish it in December, I think that's fair, don't you?

Taking Stock

A Look at Where *Broken Toys* Stands After 31 Issues

It was near the end of January of 2012 when I figuratively rolled the first stencil into the typer to begin *Broken Toys*. At the time, it seemed like a big commitment. I hadn't published a regular fanzine since *DNQ* ... back in the days when that meant actual wax stencils, a typewriter that didn't correct your typos, mimeograph ink, cranking, collating and mailing out physical copies at ruinous expense! The memory of all that effort had put me off publishing another fanzine for a couple of years. Nevertheless, the time had come.

And it turned out to be remarkably easy! As long as I wasn't trying to micro-manage every page, and out-do the design of slick-art magazines, I was able to simply start, add material as I went along, and stop whenever I felt finished. Composing in MS Word Doc was hardly challenging, and converting it into a .pdf turned the working copy into an instant fanzine. *eFanzines* and *Fandom.Org* did all the rest.

From the start, *Broken Toys* was meant to entertain the readers. Other fanzines might educate the readers, pursue Terribly Important Causes or promote the True Faith of Science Fiction to the masses. I wanted none of that for my fanzine. And since I didn't want to be bound by rules, I broke *that* rule too, and wrote about books and authors whenever I damn well felt like it.

I also strove to make the zine as fannish as I could. It wasn't long, however, before I discovered that there was only so much I could say about fandom that hadn't been said a hundred times before. Nor was it as though I had my finger on the pulse of events and issues in fandom, either. What I had to say was exhausted in a very short time ... after which I obsessed on fannish awards, probably for longer than was good for me.

The next several issues seemed overshadowed by my own poor health and other problems. It took a

determined effort to remind myself that I was supposedly entertaining the reader, not wringing pity from stones. I'm managing to stick to that resolution ... so far.

In the 31 issues to date, I'd say I've had both one surprise success and a matching disappointment. The success has been the letter column. The first few issues had to make do with little return, but the letter column gradually grew to the point where it is both lively and fills half the pages of every issue. I like to think I helped this success along by adopting three tactics. The first was to directly e-mail new issues of *Broken Toys* to a regular list of readers. The idea behind this is to emulate the sense of "obligation" created when the reader receives a paper fanzine through the regular mail.

Next, I constantly sought out the e-mail addresses of new readers. Unfortunately, a lot of fanzines publish only post office addresses – which are of no use when I have no paper copies to send. I frequently answer letters of comment the same day, developing a sense of communication between the reader and me.

One final tactic did not work. In early issues, I ran a list of Fans I'd Like to Hear From – with one or two exceptions, they had no shame and never wrote.

The only real disappointment with *Broken Toys* is that what I thought was the best, most creative, indeed the most *fannish* writing was always the *least* successful, judging by the lack of readers' comments. While the readers might talk of the Golden Age and the fabulous writers who gilded it, they don't seem to have any interest in that sort of writing today. Wild flights of fantasy, humour or myth-building were all well and good when we were young, I suppose, but today we have important things on our minds ... such as rebadging awards with more acceptable names, or achieving the proper gender balance on panels. It's clear to me what fans really want to talk about – fan politics, and their damn books!

Not even fanzine fandom is fannish anymore.

Still, that's no reason for me to give up my aspiration to publish a fun, imaginative little fanzine. Now and then, too, someone gives me a sign that it's not altogether in vain.

If there is one regret I have about publishing *Broken Toys*, it's that it has inevitably reduced the amount of writing I do for other fanzines. Three years ago, my articles seemed to appear in just about every fanzine. I never missed an issue of some titles. At any given moment, I had three to five articles pending publication. It may surprise you to know that, at present, I have *none* ... save only a couple of reprints.

Is it *not* just me? Has fanzine fandom also been changing over the last couple of years? It seems that many of the fanzines I thought "fun" have either disappeared, or fallen so far behind schedule that I don't see them nearly as often as before. I'm inclined to say that we're seeing another "changing of the guard," a periodic event in fanzine fandom as new titles emerge and old ones fall by the wayside. In an ideal world, I would keep up by sending articles I used to write for *File 770* or *eDitto* to one of the newcomers. But the new titles don't seem as much fun to me as the ones I was used to. They confront me with reports of conventions I care nothing about, reviews of books I will never read, interviews with authors I don't want to know and fiction by fan writers who have no reputation. Faced with the likelihood that all this is representative of the tastes of fandom today, I am not moved to contribute.

Then again, maybe I just don't feel like making the effort to become familiar with a new crowd of fans – who may, after all, not be as different from the old ones as I think. But as long as I have an outlet of my own that is greedy for every word I produce, it's just as likely that I'm simply grown lazy about writing for other fanzines.

Lazy enough to go on for many issues of *Broken Toys* to come. My original goal was to publish 35 issues, because I had previously published no more than 34 issues of *DNQ*, and 24 issues of *State of the Art*. I will likely achieve that goal in January, next year. Then ... who know? I'm in *terra incognita*! Maybe I'll throw caution to the wind and set myself a new goal of 50 issues!



Wheels Within Wheels

We all have our bucket lists. Yours may contain seeing Paris, driving a Ferrari across country or finishing your doctorate. My bucket list is a modest pressed-tin pail, painted blue with My Little Kitty on the outside, and a plastic shovel. I never really grew up enough to have grandiose ambitions in life. Instead, I wanted the model of The Visible Head, or a complete collection of Mad Magazine. Perhaps that's why I never drove a Ferrari, but do have a model of the Visible Head glowering down on me when I eat at the kitchen table.

I always loved collecting the things of childhood. I had a drawer full of bubble gum cards of all kinds – pirates of the Caribbean, jazz musicians, film monsters, Indianapolis racing cars, dinosaurs, Civil War battles and even a few sports cards. I'm pretty sure I had the entire Toronto Maple Leafs team for the very last year they won the Stanley Cup, for instance. I remember buying a solitary pack of Canadian Football league trading cards, just because the black and white photographs were so sharp. Because it sounded so odd, the name of one of the players always stuck in my mind – Jim Rountree, who played for the Toronto Argonauts from 1958 to 1967. He still holds the team record for longest pass reception – 108 yards.

I also collected toy soldiers, marbles, rocks, coins, comics, Dinky Toys, play money ... if I could keep it in a shoebox or in a drawer, I probably had a collection.

One of the more unlikely things I collected were picture wheels.

The most common way to collect them was to eat potato chips. In the early 1960s I lived in a flat over an animal hospital, next to a creek full of water that looked very much like weak tea. My school at the time was a good fifteen-minute's walk from home, but I had a bike, and went home for lunch. On the way back, I'd stop at a variety store and buy a ten-cent bag of Hostess potato chips. Hostess was the prestige brand. The chips were crisp and fresh, compared to Sheriff's, which were often greasy and stale. Lay's were an import from the US that were fried in the cheapest possible cottonseed oil, like so much American junk food back then, and "rank" was about the best you could say of them.

The trick was to finish the bag before I got to school. If there were any left by the time I got there, a teacher would spot me, and demand I share the chips with other school kids – assuming that it was somehow "fair" to make me share my things with people I barely knew and didn't give a shit about. It was typical of so many of school's lessons.

But the important thing in the Hostess bag wasn't the potato chips.

The moment I left the store, I tore open the aluminized bag and rooted through the chips for the cellophane wrapper inside. When I had it, I beheld my latest prize! Protected by clear cellophane was a plastic disk about the size of an old silver dollar. One side was brightly coloured – yellow, white, red, black, blue, green, bronze, silver, purple ... The other side had a printed insert, a full-colour portrait of ... I'll get to that in a minute.

The fad may well have begun by Shirriff foods, who also owned Salada Tea, both popular Canadian brands in the 1950s and '60s. Beginning in 1961, Shirriff included picture coins (or wheels) in their packages of jelly powder, cake mixes or tea. They had the rights from the National Hockey League for the likenesses of all the NHL team players – the Leafs, Canadiens, Bruins, Rangers, Blackhawks and Red Wings. As an added incentive, you could send away for a plastic holder, shaped like a shield, for each team's coins.

Hostess countered by releasing its own picture coins. Since hockey players were the exclusive property of Sherriff, Hostess gave away *airplane* "coins!"

There were 200 in the complete set, and they were divided into 8 colour-coded categories. Fighter planes were red. Bombers were black. Bushplanes were Green. Transports blue. Airliners silver. Yellow transports. White pioneers of aviation, and orange for "other." Turn the coin over and the other side was embellished with a three-bladed propeller.

Shirriff, with the rights to NHL hockey sewn up, released the next year's team line-ups – as it would continue to do for a number of years.

To counter their rival, Hostess next came out with a set of automobile "wheels." As with the airplane coins, the "wheels" were plastic, dollar-sized disks. The backs were embossed wheels and hub caps, and the disks were once again colour-coded ... this time by decade, spanning the history of automobiles. Purple coins began with the 1769, three-wheeled, steam driven Cugnot. Its top speed

was 2 m.p.h., and it would run for only ten minutes before the head of steam was exhausted. The final purple coin depicted an 1899 open-buggy style Porsche. Blue represented the decade 1900 to 1909. Coin #26 was a 1900 Oldsmobile, and coin #50 was a 1909 Simplex. The coins of the third decade, 1910 to 1919, were red. They began with a Maxwell (Jack Benny's car, voiced by Mel Blanc), and ended with a Templar. Black coins were the decade 1920 to 1929 – from a Mercedes-Benz runabout to the stately elegance of the Rolls-Royce Phantom I. The yellow 1930 to '39 series started with the incomparable Duesenberg ragtop, and ended with a sporty Bugatti. Green was the colour of the 1940s – from Hollywood's favourite Packard Darrin convertible to the little-known Riley. White covered the '50s – from stodgy Studebaker to nimble Fiat Spyder. The final series was bronze, 1960 to "the present," ranging from a sleek finned Cadillac to the very last coin in the set, a Volvo P-1800 – Simon Templar's fictional "Hirondel" British sports car.

Hostess offered informative little booklets to go with both sets. As well, for a nominal charge, you could order a special plastic caddy that held all 200 "wheels" in neat stacks. Actually, it was a poker chip holder, but it was perfect for the purpose.

Hostess never topped itself. The airplane and automobile coins were their masterpieces. Other companies tried to trump them with other kinds of coins. Humpty-Dumpty potato chips did dog breeds. I own one unidentifiable coin with a World War II warship. An internet search turned up still another unidentifiable type, with orbital satellites. How many others were made, only someone painfully more obsessive than I would know.

I am, however, obsessive enough to make a "coin" of my own. So far as I know, this is the one and only "fanzine coin" that has ever existed.

Naturally, I collected a complete set of both airplane and automobile coins. I send away for the caddies and the booklets. I kept them in the closet, on top of a drawer cabinet that I still have and use. These days, the drawers are full of clean wash cloths and towels, soap, talcum powder, old electric razors and other bathroom clutter. In 1963, though, it was full of cards, toys, rocks and whatever else I needed to keep organized and out of the way.

Unfortunately, one day I somehow managed to knock the coin caddies down, scattering bright coloured plastic disks in all directions.



I scooped them up hurriedly, separating them into piles of either cars or airplanes, then into different colours. Finally, I slotted them into their caddies. And came up a few short. Oh, shit, I thought. Where could they possibly have gone? I searched around with a flashlight until I had the notion to check the molding between the floor and the wall. Sure enough, there was a crack wide enough to allow a plastic coin to slide through. I lay on the floor with my cheek pressed to the wood, and with the light shining into the crack I could make out the rims of the missing coins ... completely out of reach.

You wouldn't have believed a young kid in those days knew such language. I *must* have tried coaxing them out with some long, thin object, like a kitchen knife, but whatever I might have tried obviously failed, because I never recovered the lost coins. In a fit of rage, I threw the rest out.

How we *do* get smarter as we get older. Of course, the first thing I should have done was got the Old Man to do something. But my father rarely had time for me, so it was just not something I would ever think of when I was 12 or 13. He would have just shrugged it off and gone back to reading the paper or watching TV. What I *should* have done was gotten a claw hammer and pried the molding up. It's what I would do today. It's what I would have told myself to do, if I had a time machine in which I could go back to 1962.

That was how my bucket list came to include sets of Hostess airplane coins and automobile coins.

A few years ago, I just happened to find a man online who had Hostess airplane coins for sale. I bought a whole bunch. Later, I found someone else who had more for sale, and bought the remaining airplane coins I needed. By some twist of fate, I had never thrown out the booklet that I had sent away for, so apart from the caddy, I had completely replaced the airplane coins.

Nobody seemed to have the car coins, though, so all I could do was shake my head and wait.

That wait finally ended about a month ago, when a casual search on the Internet during an idle moment found what I had been waiting for. A lady in Ontario was selling three complete sets, each with the caddy and the booklet! The price seemed a trifle steep until I considered that it was only half a buck a coin, and the rest a free bonus. You can't even buy a bag of chips for half a dollar any more, so it was in fact a very reasonable price.

So I have struck off my bucket list two very elusive entries on my bucket list. I am nowhere near the end of the list, of course, so you may be sure that I am still searching for many priceless, long-lost treasures of my youth. I don't know which I will find next, or indeed if I will find any more at all. But you may be sure you will hear about it as soon as whatever-it-is is **mine!**



← THE SAUSAGE WHISPERER

I looked in my wallet. There was a lonely ten-dollar bill, and in my pocket was another dollar or so in change. A few minutes before there had been \$130 in my wallet, but that took a tremendous blow at the check-out counter when my “little bit of shopping” was toted up. It seemed I was not buying a waffle iron *that* month.

Rather than eat out or order in a pizza, as usual, Steven suggested that since we were in a grocery store to begin with, why didn't he pick up a few things so that we could cook something ourselves?

I had a small but fairly efficiently laid-out kitchen, and we worked well together, so it seemed like a good idea.

What should we cook, Steven asked? I think I knew the answer before Steven could make his own suggestion a fraction of a second later. He was *very* fond of steak. Steak was not exactly far down the list of my favourite foods, either, so I nodded eagerly. The fact is, my buck goes farther when I buy pork or chicken, so I rarely ever fry a steak. In fact, I'm not entirely sure I know *how* fry one so as to get any good out of it. So I stipulated that frying the steak would be Steven's responsibility.

On the other hand, I tended to take charge of the vegetables. I don't care a great deal for the green side of the menu, which makes me fussy. I turned down the frozen mixed veggies that Steven suggested, and insisted on broccoli, niblet corn or cauliflower. Outside of a garden salad or Chinese stir-fry, there is just about nothing else I *will* eat, that doesn't leave a hole in the ground when you pull it up. It seemed pointless to ask if Steven liked Brussels sprouts...

While I waited, sitting in my roller, Steven bustled around the store, to return about ten minutes later with broccoli, frozen corn *and* a bagged salad. He had even picked up a tub of black cherry frozen yogurt for dessert. We were all set. Moreover, since I had just about exhausted my bankroll on double-roll toilet paper, espresso coffee beans, generic sandwich meats, two tubs of decent quality margarine and other sundries, Steven offered to pay for the dinner.

In fact, his generosity went even farther. Once we were in the car and on the way back to my place, Steven suggested we stop at the LCBO.

In this province, wine and liqueurs are sold through the Liqueur Control Board of Ontario. People complain that the taxes make wines and spirits unnecessarily expensive, but they would probably complain even more if the province's lost revenues were made up by an increase in the general taxes. Moreover, the stores make Ontario a handsome profit above the taxes ... so much so that inveterate private enterprise boosters eye the LCBO with envious eyes, believing deep in their black hearts that the public has no right to revenue, and the government monopoly should be privatized as quickly as possible – then those enviable profit margins would be *theirs* rather than *ours*. They call this a “principle.” But I digress...

The LCBO had a small outlet very near where I lived. The lot was small, so there was no difficulty parking close enough for me to leave the walker in the trunk, and walk the entire 50 feet to the door almost like a normal human being.

When we were inside, though, I noticed a column of tiny shopping carts. I pulled one out and said, “I think I’ll take one of these ... just in case I need something to lean on.” I tentatively put my weight on the handle, and the blamed thing nearly leapt into the air and turned a somersault! Small as it was, the front end had almost no weight, and could not under any circumstances support me if I needed it. Fortunately, I didn’t in fact need its support just that moment, and was in no danger of falling. Steven, bless ‘im, was Concerned.

Our first thought was for wine or port, but I had a hankering for sherry. Steven asked me if I knew the difference. I thought I did. Both were aged, fortified wines ... that much I knew. Port was usually dryer, but even if sweet it was fruity and musky. Sherries that I’d had were always tangier and lighter. But that wasn’t the distinction. Although the styles were slightly different, originally port was simply from Portugal, and sherry was from Spain. Period.

We picked an inexpensive bottle of almond cream sherry anyway. On the way out we discussed more expensive options, such as *Gran Marnier* and *Cointreau*. Much as I like them, the cost is prohibitive – I have only had either on rare occasions. So Steven asked if I liked brandy. That was when I learned that *Gran Marnier* and *Cointreau* were, in fact, brandies. The difference between them and most other brandies was just that they were made from orange peels. Steven picked up a bottle of St. Rémy regular French brandy, saying that it was quite decent also. In fact, I am drinking a liberal dose of it in my coffee right now – you might have noticed fewer typos and grammatical errors than usual.

Before we began cooking dinner, I had needed to rest a while, so Steven and I sat and talked in the living room. It was then that he told me the most recent of his little stories. As I’ve said before, he seems to have a flair for them. I’ve pinched nearly a dozen for re-telling at this point, usually expanding upon and embellishing his tales for the reader. But this time, the story needs nothing from me. I could only mar Steven’s own concise, pithy telling by adding my own words. Apart from one or two minor alternations to the punctuation, this is the authentic anecdote.

You're Sexting & I Know It *Steven Baldassarra*

This morning, when I turned on my phone, I noticed I had received a couple of messages. They were both from an unfamiliar phone number. The first one was a text message, which was written by someone who was barely coherent, presumably blitzed out of his mind. I'll spare you the crudeness of the message, but suffice to say, the gist of it was that he wanted to know if his lady-friend was available to get together with him for an intimate rendezvous. The message that followed was a brief video of his naked self, prominently displaying his aroused interest for the intended evening's event...

Now, while I have my opinion regarding one's sense of propriety, and while it was rather upsetting to get these inappropriate messages, all I am going to say is this: if you're going to be so stupid as to flash your nether regions on your Smartphone – keeping in mind that this sort of thing can be re-transmitted to other Smartphones, as well as all over the Internet – at least get the intended recipient right! I mean, honestly...

People will often do whatever the hell they want to, for whatever reason, and maybe I'm becoming an Old Fart, but damn it, a little bit of common sense goes a long way! As for the goof who sent me these messages, I decided to call him The Sausage Whisperer. And while The Sausage Whisperer certainly lived up to his newfound name and notoriety, his intrusion onto the sanctity of my cell phone was rapidly expunged.

I could just imagine him waiting for the reply that never came. There's a certain satisfaction in imagining this jerk standing around, somewhere, with his Smartphone in one hand and his shame in the other.

When I asked Steven if I could use this story in my next fanzine, he looked anxious. “You won’t make it vulgar, will you?” I can’t imagine what he meant. It’s not as though I were Seth McFarlane.

When dinnertime came around, Steven took charge of the steak, while I chopped the broccoli and put the corn on simmer. As long as we kept to our own responsibilities, we had little trouble keeping out of each other’s way, despite working literally elbow to elbow. In honour of the steaks, I permitted Steven to use my almost virgin Teflon pan – the one I reserve for only for the most refined practice of the culinary arts.

There really wasn’t much to report on the dinner. It was superb. I brought out a choice of steak sauces – Montreal Smoked and Wild Whiskey Smoked. The salad had peanuts and a lemony dressing that I had never had before, and thought appealing. We had a glass of sherry each, and *two* dishes of dessert each. As well, I had made fresh, dark-roast coffee.

“While we eat,” I suggested, “why don’t we watch a movie? What would you like to see?”

“Something light and not too long,” he answered.

So I played *The Nut Job*. It was a CGI animated film by an independent, rather than one of the big animation studios, and had been largely ignored by critics and audience alike. In plot, *The Nut Job* was somewhat like *Over the Hedge*, from a few years ago. Both films were about a band of anthropomorphized animals obsessed with gathering food for the coming winter. Past that basic detail, however, the films diverged widely. *Over the Hedge* was about the American suburbs where the animals were remnants of the wild. *The Nut Job*, however, was set in a 1950s city very like New York (or Toronto, for that matter), and its characters were by and large street-wise. The human cast of characters and their story was as important in its own way as the animals and their story. In *Over the Hedge*, humans were largely walk-on characters, forgotten when their scene was over. It also didn’t have end credits danced in Gangnam style!

Happily, Steven enjoyed the movie as much as I had hoped. The critics be damned! As well, I felt even more pleasure at the suppleness and expression of the girl squirrel than the first time I had viewed the movie. If she came in human-size, I would not have kicked her out of me bed.

(No, I don’t think I had had too much of the brandy and sherry. Why do you ask? I’m *always* that way.)

As evenings always do, this one came to an end eventually. Steven had work the next day, and left as soon as the movie ended, leaving me alone again with Facebook. But for once, I was tired enough to be glad to see him out the door.

My condition seems to be a little better in some ways – the pains are mostly gone. But in other ways I’ve slipped a peg or two – I get tired more easily and sometimes even my medications seem helpless to keep my eye open, head up and typing fingers nimble. It was getting to be one of those nights ... in spite of which I decided to check my e-mail, and learned something I might not have otherwise.

One thing or another led me to read up on the son of A.A. Milne, Christopher Milne, who had been the “Christopher Robin” in the Pooh books. Christopher Milne had suffered from Myasthenia Gravis in his final years also. We had had more in common than just a childhood full of imaginary friends, it seemed.

“So they went off together. But wherever they go, and whatever happens to them on the way, in that enchanted place on the top of the Forest, a little boy and his Bear will always be playing.” So it should be for all of us!

As I grow older, it only seems all the more true of my own case – that there is somewhere an enchanted place where everything is as it should be.

But for now, life is *still* to be enjoyed for what it is.

LEFT OVER PARTS

WAHF: Reese D’Orrycott, who wrote by was too shy to let me print any of the loc. Andrew Porter, aporter55@gmail.com, who was one of those who received my accidental “blank” e-mails, and in response to my advice to hold it up to a candle to see the invisible writing appear, said, “PS: That old candle trick only works if you write in lemon juice.” Actually, it works with urine too, but I hold my readers to higher standards. Bill Plott, wjplott@aol.com, who hopes that he can write a loc for the next issue. Richard A. Wright (HotRod302), Ogre302@aol.com

By an unusual oversight, I failed to print this letter from Eric Mayer in the last issue. Since it is hard enough to encourage writers to contribute to the letter column, I can’t afford to waste good locs. So ... better late than never! And if there is a second loc from Eric in this issue, so much the better!

Eric Mayer, groggy.tales@gmail.com

"These Goodly Gifts I Will Give to Thee" is a great little story with a classic twist at the end. Considering you wrote it in 1980 it is notionally insightful but also prophetic. Despite our best intentions most of us never can escape from fandom, can we? And here you are, thirty-four

year later, still "into" fanzines, wondering in your initial article whether you've wasted your time. If you wouldn't have been better off directing your energies in some other direction? As if we really have a choice in these matters.

It isn't just fandom you talk about, though, in "A Life Misspent," but the whole art/writing ethos. What is the matter with those of us who define our lives by creative efforts rather than socially approved measures of success, such as money and position? The older I get the more often I have my moments when I think, as Job so eloquently put it, "My soul loathes my life." I wonder, as you do, if I would have been happier had I settled for doing no more than what I am actually qualified to do – working at a decent job, raising a family. Normal stuff. Normal ambitions that most people succeed at to some degree, not wild artistic dreams that virtually every wannabe fails at. Especially people like me whose talents are limited.

Instead of being a second- or third-rate writer I could have been a first-rate... well... umm... There's the problem. I'm not sure what the hell kind of normal work I'm suited for. None, really. I've made a living as a legal editor. I do good work, as evidenced by my having work continuously as a freelancer for twenty years, but I don't like the law enough to embrace the job wholeheartedly and the rather pedantic, detail-oriented nature of the writing isn't a good match for the way my mind works, or doesn't. I have no idea what sort of regular job I might have enjoyed since I've never enjoyed anything except writing and drawing in one form or another.

And honestly all that time I spent writing and drawing for fanzines and mini-comics I was enjoying myself. So that is hardly time misspent, is it?

There is also the secondary question, brought to mind by "The Montreal Screwjob," of whether we ought to have expended so much creative energy on fandom. What is there to say? Of course you deserved to actually win the Hugo at some point and I certainly expected that fandom would rectify the oversight in Montreal when you were Worldcon GoH. But fandom was changing fast, as we've since seen, and I guess Montreal came a year or two too late. But you do have all those nominations and the GoH spot. Hell, the year I published ten issues of *Revenant* I did not get one vote for best fan writer in the FAAn awards. I mean, not a single vote. There must have been more than forty writers who got votes, and I wasn't even in the conversation.

*Therein lies most of the problem with choosing a "best" fanwriter. The voters thought **40 different writers** were eligible for the top honours! With such a wide choice, it is inevitable that other factors than how well a fan writes will come into play – factors like novelty, popularity, controversy or habit.*

So, in my case, doomed to be a wannabe artiste as I am, I do question all the effort spent on fanac. But, hey, I have enjoyed my fanac even if no one else does.

Funny how gentrification creeps ever outward. But where do all these people get so much money? (Oh, right, they have been doing something other than writing and drawing!) Well, I've never been in a Starbucks, never even drove past one, which shows my lowly social

position. The people responsible used to be called “yuppies.” Is there a new name for them? The original yuppies can't merit the "y" by now.

“Mippies?” Middle-Aged Immobile Professional?

Congratulations on your promotion to disability! Here in the USA ("Greatest Country on Earth" ™ Right Wing Loons) you would sure as hell need to grovel for commissions until they carted away your dead body and confiscated your estate to pay for the service. But I am happy for you that you had the good sense to be born in a still somewhat civilized country and no longer need to work for nuts who pay peanuts. Most interesting are the examples of the sort of commissions you will not take, which, I gather, must somewhat reflect the kind of things you have been asked for. Yuck! Yes, that's what we need, an article about the most disgusting art requests you have had.

Words may be inadequate...

Strange, isn't it, how many people today reject science, while living in a world full of technology made possible by science? Familiarity breeding contempt? Or maybe just the predictable reaction to such sudden (historically speaking) change? Sad to say, if science is right about things like global warming, which I believe it is, then we are at a point in history when it is crucial to take science seriously.

By the way, I like the logo. That picture is very weird and you certainly discover some very unusual fonts.

And now... Eric Mayer! groggy.tales@gmail.com

Another enjoyable issue. although a couple of the items I think we've already discussed.

That furry meeting you attended sounds like one of my nightmares, finding myself in a crowd of total strangers with whom I have nothing in common. I would have thought someone in a furry group would have recalled your work and taken some interest. Than again maybe that's like me putting out a fanzine and expecting some fans to take an interest because they remember me!

It would be more like your going to a local con and expecting anyone to take an interest in you because they had ever heard of a fanzine. I doubt many people at the fur meet I attended had ever seen any of the old b&w anthropomorphic comics, or the fanzines that furry art used to appear in, before the Internet became Everything.

You wonder whether your time in furry fandom was worth it. I wonder the same about my time in fanzine fandom. Mary and I have fared pretty well with our mystery writing since we started to do it seriously. We've had a couple dozen stories published in the very biggest mystery markets and ten novels from the most prestigious small publisher in the field. Still, would I have reached my ultimate goal of having a book out from a major publisher had I not

squandered so much time and effort on writing for fanzines?

It's impossible to say. I loved most of my stay in fandom, especially in the Seventies. I was living an isolated existence and those friendly faneds flooding my rural mailbox offered me a creative community I couldn't find elsewhere. They also encouraged me to write and gave me a reason to write which otherwise I might have lacked. I had no inclination to involve myself with literary zines and was losing interest in science fiction. Fanzine fandom kept me writing.

There came a point though, in the Eighties, when fandom began to discourage my efforts and I almost certainly would have been better off turning my attention elsewhere sooner than I did. Over the years I've been bemused by how professional editors and reviewers regard my writing more highly than fans do. I keep writing fan articles, though, for the handful of people who seem to enjoy them.

I suppose what you mean is that fanzine fandom seemed to take a sudden turn from the sort of friendly, even touchy-feely zines of the '70s, to the smart, in-groupish zines of the 1980s. I think it was less a matter of you getting outwardly hostile comments from fanzine reviews than simply being neglected, due to the change in fashion. More recently, you never received the amount of feedback I thought eFanzines and Revenant deserved. In 2014, however, the explanation is more likely to be found in an aging fandom that grows increasingly indifferent toward anything but convention politics and arguments on FaceBook.

Although I've reread a fair number of science fiction from the Fifties, Sixties and Seventies recently, I haven't got around to Zelazny, probably because I didn't like the novels I read by him when they originally came out. To me, they were overwritten and part of the new wave trend towards adopting the trappings of Literature that helped drive me away from the genre. When I reread *Samuel R. Delaney's The Einstein Intersection* I was struck by the laughable, posturing digressions featuring the Great Author wandering about Venice and cogitating on his work in progress. Give me a break!

You write that you dislike techniques that bring the author to the reader's attention, that remind the reader that he's just reading a book. Generally, I agree, although sometimes the author's musings on the subject matter can be interesting and there are authors, such as John Updike (for my taste) whose style is so brilliant I don't object to verbal fireworks.

Every once in a great while I hopefully dip into some short, modern "speculative fiction," and I've lost track of how many times I am instantly driven away by a first sentence which is some variation on "Now I'm going to tell you a story." What this tells me is that the author is kind of embarrassed to be writing fantasy or SF and wants us to be aware that really, he or she doesn't take any of it seriously, it's just a story, an allegory of some sort. The author is just using the genre as a literary vehicle. I don't understand why this is so popular. Maybe it's what they teach at writing workshops.

Saara writes beautifully and movingly. Perhaps she'll win a Hugo. Wonderful description of the winter night sky. I can certainly relate to spending lots of time around creeks as a kid. The creeks near where I lived featured frogs, minnows and crayfish. The one at the lake, where we

lived in the summer -- no, not a wealthy family summer home sort of thing; my parents ran a picnic grove -- also had sticklebacks, the little fish that build nests from pebbles, and comically rotund baby bullheads. I can't relate so much to the idea of inventing a friend. Well, I did practically live in my Strat-O-Matic Baseball season recreations but I can't say I considered the players my friends exactly, or even quite as real as J. Henry Waugh did his Universal Baseball Association players in Robert Coover's Sixties novel. Later I did acquire a bunch of, to me, immaterial friends in the pages of the fanzines that I read. How real were they? In retrospect I kind of wonder if I didn't invent them all and tailor them to my own specifications.

Of late you may have suspected that I wasn't real, but unfortunately I am. I don't think Saara needs a chrome rocket ship from the Worldcon, though. She has one already, and hers works!

Bob Jennings is surprised that you are surprised by your changing neighborhood. But I am surprised that he is surprised you are surprised. It's common human experience, I would have thought, to know something on an intellectual level and yet to be surprised at a gut level which faced with the reality of it. I also wonder about his characterization of the Judeo-Christian religions and them not having a predisposed timeline, since that seems to overlook Calvinism entirely.

I'm with Brad Foster in that I like writing but when it comes time to try to sell it I am sure the editors will finally wake up and realize what idiots they've been in the past to buy such dreck. And, as he notes, this happens every single time.

Hey, I have to take issue with Jefferson P. Swycaffer. I was not the fat kid who always got picked last for softball. No indeed. I was the skinny kid who always got picked last for softball.

J.T. Major, jtmajor@iglou.com

You said, "someone wrote a story about a post-apocalyptic society based on fandom." It was Robert Bloch, "A Way of Life" (*Fantastic Universe*, October 1956). The apocalypse was not so drastic, there was still some sort of organized society at a contemporary level. For example, the story begins at a Presidential nominating convention and the competing parties are the NFFF and FAPA.

That's the one! Was it ever reprinted outside of Fantastic Universe? Is there anywhere the story can be downloaded, free? Just like Action Comics #1, everyone knows about this story, but hardly anyone has read it.

Twenty-four years later, Ian Watson published a bleaker version, "The World Science Fiction Convention of 2080" (*F&SF*, October 1980). Society had reverted to an almost pre-industrial level. There is a mention of one fan being killed or captured in a slaving raid, and that in general, life-expectancies are low.

Now, the coherent group that could have prevailed (Bloch) or survived (Watson) is becoming too old and sparse to do so.

Ned Brooks, nedbrooks@sprynet.com

Thanks Taral! I like the wonky font in the colophon - what's it called?

*It's called **Crazy Crazy**. It's a free download, probably from Da Font (or maybe Blambot). I've got quite a large number of interesting fonts ... many of which are quite legible!*

I'm not surprised at your experience with the small con. The only one I have been to in years is the DeepSouthCon last year that piggy-backed onto a JordanCon in Roswell, about 30 miles from here. I know none of the Jordan fans - I thought the "Wheel of Time" series was a waste of paper - and certainly would not have bothered except that I knew that a lot of the old SFPA crowd would be there.

The Islington Fur Meets are large parties more than a small con. Islington is the name of the nearest large street to the apartment building in whose basement rec room the Meet is held.

I liked the very early Zelazny and he was a nice guy, but I never got much further than "A Rose for Ecclesiastes" in the 1963 *F&SF*. I don't remember ever seeing a copy of "Sam-I-Am."

You realized that "Sam-I-Am" was a joke that I put together with Photoshop? (In a later e-mail, Ned admits that, no, he didn't. He says he may have forgotten more Zelazny titles than he remembers.)

I never had much interest in the Civil War other than to think it was a disaster. But I am not much of a "southerner" - I was born in Montana and grew up in Chile. WWI is more interesting for the boost it gave to technology, but otherwise it was utterly asinine. Recently at a yard sale I bought a bayonet meant for the 1890s French Lebel rifle that was still in use in WWI - worth more than I paid for it, apparently - it would be worth a lot more if it had the steel scabbard.

While I've been interested in the American Civil War for a long time, I don't rightly know why. Was it the visit to Gettysburg that got me hooked? Or was it the set of Topps bubble gum cards that got me started? No matter. As for collecting, those cards weren't the end. I also have a handful of minié balls and \$55 in Confederate paper money. (Which might possibly have bought a chaw of tobacco by 1864.) From WWI I have a couple of Canadian Expeditionary Force service pins that had belonged to my mother's father - I never met him myself, as he succumbed to a heart attack while shoveling snow, long before I was born. From the Second World War I have a little more - a flimsy wooden box marked .303 Ball Mk. 7 CTN, 288 Ctgs., that the British Army used to carry rifle rounds. I think. It could have held belt fed rounds for a light machine gun. A few years ago I bought a badge from a Deutsche Afrika Korps field cap. It was rather cheap and satisfyingly sinister looking. I also have enough money, in paper and coin, to spend a day in Berlin, any time from 1934 to 1944. I have a fired .50 cal. machine gun case, but the weapon is still in use and the case might be from almost anytime up to the 1960s, when it was given to me. Of course, when it comes to collecting war memorabilia, it's mostly a matter of money. I knew someone who owned an M-20 Ford Armoured Scout Car, complete with non-functioning .50 cal MG, and he was trying to sell it.

Interesting details about Fraggie Rock.... The local "race" on the Chattahoochee River often includes contestants in bathtubs.

Bathtub racing appears to have begun in Nanaimo, BC, in 1967, and spread. Of course, with "bathtubs" like this, the original idea seems much adulterated.



I'm all ready for post-apocalyptic fandom - I have manual typewriters, mimeos, stencils, paper, and ink. My typing skill alas has deteriorated after so many years on a PC keyboard.

I have a lot of books I would like to sell, but Alibris was a dead loss as their fees exceeded the income. I use AddAll often enough, but have not looked into being found there.

The local barbershop was never busy enough that I felt rushed - of course I was always there in what must have been off-peak hours. There are 4 chairs and just one barber left now. Maybe I will get my nephew to cut my hair.... You should publish the article about your grandfather. Barbering must be an ancient profession - perhaps older than the Oldest Profession. Man seems to be the only animal that needs a barber - long hair must have been a great bother to get rid of before the Bronze Age.

I also have an equally long piece on my life in Willowdale (before moving here, to Parkdale). Both are awaiting publication in New Toys 4 and 5 ... but I keep doing new issues of Broken Toys instead.

Most of the movies I buy online are under \$10 including shipping - it costs little to ship a DVD, and I buy several at a time.

I hope Steve Stiles doesn't find your spoof too cruel!

Remarkable biography of Saara Mar. I lived at least 6 different places before I was 8, and could have used an imaginary friend.

Milt Stevens, miltstevens@earthlink.net

In *Broken Toys* #31, you talk about interacting with local fans. My situation is much different than yours. Without resorting to much ego, I can say I've been a public figure in local fandom for a long time. People may not know what I'm up to, but they're willing to suspect the worst. As a result, there are many more people who think they know me than I think I know. I just go along with the gag. I usually talk to people as if I've known them for years. It may even be true. If you act as if you know them, they aren't likely to point out that they don't know you.

It was Bill Rotsler who pointed this out to me. As it happened, Bill and I were walking into a

con hotel at the same time. A young woman walked out of the front door, waved to us, and said “Hi.” We both said “Hi” in return. When we had walked a bit further, Bill asked me if I knew the woman. I admitted that I didn’t. He said he didn’t know her either. However, we had both returned her greeting.

I’ve had that experience at cons on several occasions. Other signs of people not really knowing you is that they repeat catch-phrases that you said 20 or 40 years ago, that you never meant seriously in the first place, or were just a gag. So you get known by a supposed love for French fries, or believing that funerals waste good fertilizer, or that you love Bill Bixby, when it was really nothing to you. Now and then I learn that some other fan expects me to know him! He told me his cat was named Perky and died last November, because he said so in a letter ... maybe even said in twice, in letters a few weeks apart. In fact, I forgot what he wrote almost as soon as he wrote it, because we were barely acquaintances ... I hadn’t seen him since something like 1979, and Victoria was fonder of him than I was. Sometimes fandom is like being 007, having to pretend you’re really some guy named Lester, who works for International Export and doesn’t know any Bond or MI6...

From your comments on WWI, I doubt alternate history would interest you. When I was in school I enjoyed history because it had a plot. Actually, it had lots of plots. Once you have a reasonable grasp of history, you can have all the fun of re-doing it with suggested improvements

That we could with fate conspire
To grasp the plan of things entire
And mold it to our hearts desire

It does, actually ... but not to the point where I collect every alternate history I know about. I can take it or leave it as just another plot device. And where does alternate history begin? Is Middle Earth or Narnia alternate history? What about the subtly different narrative of the Baroque Cycle books by Neil Stevenson?

I have a very elaborate alternate history of my own devising, involving a different history since 1812, when the war between the British empire and the US was less favourable to the US. The North America that emerges contains several nations, not two. But it also has fantasy aspects, including non-human beings who have always lived among us. It probably violates sacred tenets held dear by true alternate history buffs, but who’s ever going to know about Willow Run?

*Indeed, my other fixation, the alternate history of Earth since 1970, when we were “discovered” by Saara Mar is a more conventional type, with only the **one** major premise. Of course, it’s a doozy of a premise, since it allows almost anything to happen.*

In Richard Wright’s letter, he mentions the idea of mini-homes for the homeless. I doubt the idea would work very well. In Los Angeles, there is a district referred to as Pico-Union. The district has a concentration of what are called single occupancy hotels. The rooms include a

cot, a sink, and a commode. People who are on disability for drugs and alcohol are sent to such places, and the government pays the rent. It's Zombietown.

There are "hotels" in Japan that are just a six-foot-long locker, wide enough to lay down it and set your bags down beside you, and just tall enough to lie down in. People rent them when they come off a plane or train, I gather, and have a long wait for the next leg of their journey.

I don't see anything like this working for street people, unfortunately. By definition they're dysfunctional – they will break things, dirty them or steal them. Or just wander away to sleep under a bush at the other end of the city, because it's too much bother to go back downtown to their locker. They might even forget they have one, or lose the key ... even sell it to some punk for a bottle of booze. Bums will also steal from each other, or get into fights, so whatever else, a warehouse full of lockers for the homeless would have to have supervision. It isn't all the homeless who are so hopeless, but enough of them are to make sensible arrangements for them difficult.

Lloyd Penney, penneys@bell.ne

Islington Fur Meet. Hmmmm... I'm not interested in attending, but I am not surprised that small groups crop up and remain under fandom's radar. I have been meeting with some of the newer local fans who are running conventions in the GTA, like Mark Tjan and Natalie Wallace for ConBravo in Hamilton (they both live in Toronto), and Thomas Gofton who runs Genrecon in Guelph. We do come from an older generation, but we have found the best way to cross the generation gap...volunteer. Once you make the overture, they find out who you are, how long you've been around, and we've been welcomed openly. Every group needs some help.

That's something I really don't have time for ... I also doubt it takes more than two or three people knowing what to do to put on a party three or four times a year. That seems about all the local furry group does ... though maybe they arrange movie outings, too.

I always enjoyed Roger Zelazny's work, and when he was a guest at Ad Astra many years ago, we got to know him a little bit. He was easy to talk to and very soft-spoken, but in some ways painfully shy. He counted on not too many people knowing what he looked like to make it through a convention rather anonymously. Some of his writing may not have dated well, but that's not his fault. (Just a few years ago, I joined up with a local editor/writer group as a trial, and met a local writer with the last name of Zelazny. He did not know of Roger, thought most SF was crap, and spent the rest of the time I was at the breakfast meeting trying to sell me his book. I did not go back. I get enough pressure to do so through our own local SF writers.)

We like to commemorate things; seems to be part of our nature, and a way to realize just how long it's been since something momentous happened. Yes, we overdid the centenary of WWI a little much, but we should look at that as practice. I have already seen on television and online ads for the impending Canadian sesquicentennial, 150 years of Confederation in 2017.

The Americans were still yammering about their revolution after 200 years...

I have a tendency to make lists, tons of lists. Every so often, when Yvonne and I are feeling a little stressed about all our responsibilities, we will make a list of those responsibilities, and make a hard decision about what to keep and what to ditch. Doing this has helped us out from time to time ... got us out of con running after 30 years.

I used to find list-making relaxing. I'd list books, comics, fanzines, coins, toys ... anything I happened to have more than "one, two, many" of. As I got older, though, I began to see how unproductive it was. After all, it takes a lot of time to constantly update lists, when I can easily go to a bookshelf and see for myself what's there. I also didn't seem to have enough time for making lists anymore. About the only lists I make now are to go shopping, or what previously viewed movies to watch for at the video store.

Please pass along my greetings and admiration to Saara Mar, a true character of the mind, and a true friend for you in your growing up. There are times I could have used a friend like her in my own growing up, but there's always time; I haven't finished growing up yet. Time to fire this up and get it to you. Many thanks, and see you with issue 32.

Jefferson P. Swycaffer, abontides@gmail.com

Oops, hope this arrives in time! Dawdling, doodling, fussing, and only finally getting off my keister.

(I'm still mad at Ronald Reagan for caving in, and apologizing to the small town of "Kiester, MN" after he spoke of people needing to "Get off their keisters." You named your town after your butt, and I'm supposed to apologize to you?)

(First...and last...time I ever thought he did something right, and he went and retracted it and apologized for it!)

Did the good times in furry fandom ever actually happen? Heck, yeah! It was great! We came, we saw, we conquered! And, as the theme song to *Animalympics* puts it, "We've made some friends along the way." The furry movement is still alive, if not all-conquering. Here, in San Diego, there is a monthly fur-suit meet-up...in a public park!

Okay, as fads go, it has declined and fallen. But, like the Roman Empire, we kicked butt for a while!

Then the barbarians arrived, swinging their tails and speaking in broken Texting.

re: Roger Zelazy, he was a good popular writer, and, while maybe not an elegant craftsman, he had a pretty good imagination. His collection of short stories, "The Doors of His Face, The Lamps of His Mouth," contains a handful of truly brilliant stories. "This Mortal Mountain" has one of the three best fantasy-novel mountain-climbing sequences ever. (The other two are Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser ascending Stardock, and the conquest of Koshtra Pivrarcha in *The*

Worm Ouroboros.) "A Rose for Ecclesiastes" is deep and loving, and fairly well-educated. It, I think, provides the evidence for Zelazny's erudition. He could do it; he just didn't always go to the effort of it.

I'm told that the early short stories are Zelazny's best work. I'm sure I've read some of them, scattered throughout anthologies, but don't seem to have a dedicated collection.

I've read the "Fafhrd & Grey Mouser" story you mention. While it has a certain sense of conviction to it, to me it seemed that they made a very difficult ascent in record short time. And at the end, a magic door opens in the rock face and they climb in... Not the best way to communicate the authentic experience of rock climbing.

What did you think of the scenes climbing the Misty Mountains and the Ephel Dúath that divides Mordor from Gondor? Not exactly "climbing" but I thought they conveyed the idea of an arduous journey through mountain passes pretty well.

re: "The Hundred Years War," this made me think of the song by Leiber and Stoller: "Let's bring back World War One/ When Yanks marched off to meet the Hun/ They parlez-voused and got themselves tattooed/ And war was so much fun!"

Nifty soliloquy from Saara Mar. I first saw her in a spot illo you did for the editor of the *Science Fiction Chronicle*. I was quite taken; very intriguing little character.

Currently reading: "Wild Wood" by Jan Needle, with saucy illustrations by Willie Rushton. This is a friendly send-up of *The Wind in the Willows*, treating the story with a kind of 1920's rising awareness of the stifling role of social class in English society. The Ferrets, Stoats, and Weasels are the working-class animals, just trying to make ends meet -- 99% of their time -- while Mr. Toad and Mr. Rat and Mr. Badger, the rich people with big homes, are their social overlords, so very self-important that they don't even need names. The point-of-view character is Baxter, the Ferret (he's got a name!) who is pretty much commonsense personified. He maneuvers his way through the rising chaos of social protest and rising consciousness, all forced upon him by an auto accident with the worst driver in England, Mr. Toad. A very kind-hearted parody, not a travesty by any means, but a clever way of taking a different view of a familiar and beloved story.

There are some very well done, authorized sequels to the Wind in the Willows, written some years ago by a guy named William Horwood.

Bill Plot, wjplott@aol.com

Thanks for *Broken Toys* #31. As someone returning to fandom after decades away, I know that I am out of the loop on many, many things that have transpired during my absence. You dropped one on the table immediately. Whatever is a "furry meet"? I can see that there is a whole subculture there that is totally unfamiliar to me. A brief explanation, please.

Furry fandom is conventionally explained as having arisen from disparate individuals on the fringes of other fandoms who share an interest in anthropomorphism, usually in animation or comic books. It is a little different from "funny animal" fandom, though it was called that at first. The difference is that funny animals are funny, but furies can be used in any adult situation without the tongue-in-cheek nature of a Carl Barks story. Furry comics got their start in the big b&w comics explosion of the early 1980s, appearing as superhero, war, suspense, satire, social commentary and romance stories ... as well as outright porn. Over time, sales drove the genre into mostly porn and gay wish-fulfillment tales that probably put as many people off the genre as it attracted. The first con was in 1989, and the number grew rapidly to at least two-dozen today. ("Meets" are a smaller order of event.) But the rapid growth of the fandom also shifted its center of gravity away from producers of stories and art to costumers and role players. The advent of the Internet also led to accelerated growth, and exacted a similar change in the fandom. At present, there is no center or focus to furry fandom, and few personalities rise above local prominence. The subsequent collapse of the b&w comics boom and narrowing of the field has also all but wiped out furry comics. Unlike SF or Comics fandom, there is no way in furry fandom to "go pro," which has been the undoing of a lot of old hands like myself.

I was saddened by your experience at the meeting you attended, It is disconcerting to attend a function and find no one you know present. Usually, there will be one or two people in any gathering who thrive on outreach to newcomers. That was not the case for you, I gather. I think you let yourself get into a funk over that experience, though. If you had not had the past experiences of cons, friends, etc., your life would possibly have been much less enjoyable. As it was, you appear to have had a lot of fun back when. I hope you are in a better frame of mind now. I like what Ned Brooks said along these lines: *I never had much ambition or talent, so it never bothered me that I am not famous or infamous. I was lucky to have a talent for being happy most of the time.* When I was in college I dreamed of being a crusading journalist. When I got out in the world, I found I was much more interested in writing feature stories than investigative pieces. Thus, I had little ambition but a modicum of talent. It allowed me to make a decent living in a profession that was a great deal of fun at the time. My colleagues still in the business say there is little real fun in it any more. Lloyd Penney seems to say pretty much the same thing about life.

I hope this finds you in a little better frame of mind.

As philosophies go, that's fine, but I had more ambition than to work in an office by day, and then strain over a drawing board in my free time. Perhaps I was fooling myself, but I imagined that someday I would become an artist for Mad Magazine or Hot Rod Comics, or maybe illustrate SF magazines. Little did I realize that by the time you can have such dreams, the time for such venues has usually passed and something new will displace them. I wasn't on the lookout to become a digital animator, or whatever it would have taken to be in the right place and at the right time. As a consequence, my life has been largely hand-to-mouth and had more of its share of frustration. Was I happy? More or less, until the grind began to wear me down. In the early years of the century, I was squeezed out of traveling to cons as a dealer and it became increasingly difficult to make ends meet. Then around 2007 I began to notice there was something odd about my health, which by 2009 was full-blown Myasthenia Gravis. It's hard to be happy when you have trouble walking and are dead broke. I still have MG, but some of the worst of it has been mitigated, and being on a disability

pension has given me financial security, so I'd have to say I am happier than I was two or three years ago.

I agree with your comments on authors who wear you out with overwriting. When I returned to fandom I figured I ought to catch up on some of the big names, so I read the first books in the very popular Robert Jordan and George R.R. Martin series. I enjoyed both, but when I finished my feeling was that Jordan's books are ponderously overwritten. I don't need a five-page dream sequence to keep the action going. Someone in Southern Fandom Classic forum described the books as doorstops. How apt. Martin writes much leaner version in his epic. I may or may not continue the series, but the first volume was very readable. I haven't seen "The Game of Thrones" TV show because I don't have HBO. I may give it a shot later on NetFlix.

Your little essay on the First World War and the references to America's Civil War was interesting. I'm happy to say that very few of my fellow Southerners embrace the fantasy world of the Old South any more. There are still Confederate flag decals on rednecks' pickup trucks and the Sons of Confederate Veterans still do cemetery ceremonies on certain "holidays" but most people down here are long past that now. Thank you, Lord.

The Lost Cause can probably only be found in the Rural South these days, among the less educated generally. If you're making good money in the defense industry or computer programming, who needs cotton? If you look up to Barack Obama, how could you have Robert E. Lee as a role model?

Cf. Brad Foster on Mexican food: I love both Mexican and Italian food. They are very similar in that meat cheese, and tomatoes are common ingredients in many, many dishes. Because of that commonality, I find myself trying to remember that what the different dishes are. I guess it's easier with Italian if you can wrap your mind around the different styles of pasta that define the dishes. With Mexican – tortillas, fajitas, burritos, bring it on!

From what I've been told, the Mexican cuisine we're used to is more Tex/Mex than what is common throughout Mexico. It reflects the peasant food of the northern part of Old Mexico, and taqueria fast-food. Elsewhere, there are other local cuisines, and the urban diet has more fish and European style dishes ... often with eccentric flourishes, such as a bitter sauce with chocolate, known as mole. That style of Mexican cooking is harder to find outside of Mexico.

William Earl Haskell, forban@hal-pc.org

I was going to reply to what you said in a previous *Broken Toys*, but was distracted by a medical adventure (operation on lumbar). Anyhow, the main point was that there is all sorts of gentrification but here in Houstopolis down on the Mud Flats it usually takes the form of demolition of an interesting building and replacement with a parking lot or a hulking featureless condo/apartment complex.

A recent example: a high school on the east side built almost a century ago, used for most of its working life for the education of black children, had been closed and there was some

debate as to what its fate would be. Some local residents wished to use the building (in quite good condition despite years of deliberate non-maintenance) as a social center or something of the sort. A big meeting was set up, and at one point someone from the school district brought up the option of simply tearing it down, with the impression that this was only an idea. Presently someone's cell phone rang and brought the news that demolition was actually taking place even as they sat there. Orders were sent to stop it, leaving a gaping hole in the front of the building, no one seemed to be responsible for having given the necessary orders in the first place, and eventually the school board announced that the rest of the building was coming down anyhow - which obviously was their intent from the first. (Curiously enough, about a week or so before all this happened, a noted blues musician died, a member of the class of 1938 at this same school.)

Keith Soltys, keith@soltys.ca

I much enjoyed the last couple of *Broken Toys*. Herewith a rather late LOC that I hope will make it in time for #32.

Your article in #30 on the gentrification of Parkdale was excellent, perhaps the best in any of the issues of *Broken Toys* that I've read. You should consider trying to sell it to a paying market - *Now*, for example, or perhaps send it to the *Star* as an Op-Ed piece. It'd be right up their alley.

I'm glad you are happy with your new PC. I used to upgrade my PCs every two or three years, but the upgrade intervals have gotten longer over time. My current PC is an HP i7-based machine with 10 GB of RAM. About the only part that might need upgrading is the video card, which my son considers inadequate, but I'd only upgrade it if I got back into gaming again. For normal use and occasional gaming, it's perfectly adequate. An i5 is a very powerful system and should serve you well for a long time. As an aside, I wrote some of this letter on my phone on the way to work (a Samsung Galaxy S4), which goes to show you just how far that technology has gone.

I have been using Windows 8 (now 8.1) since getting my new PC and have no major issues with it. I do use a Start menu replacement (StartIsBack, although there are several others, including ClassicShell and Start8) and boot directly to the desktop. There are many small enhancements that make it easier to use than Windows 7, and it's also faster. You can mostly ignore the Modern (tile) interface if you wish, although there are some good apps - the CBC has a good news app, for example.

Re: Lloyd 's letter, I know what he means about the difficulty of getting rid of used books. Nancy and I have done some serious weeding on our book collection (and a lot of other stuff). We ended up donating a lot to Goodwill - our Pickering store should now have a good selection of SF. I am going to try to sell most of the remainder online or to specialty dealers, if I can find any. Any suggestions for anyone willing to buy autographed paperbacks or hardcovers would be welcome.

Re: Ned Brooks' letter in 31, our video rental options are getting fewer. The variety store across

the street has a few racks of recent movies and our local Sobeys has a RedBox kiosk. We use Netflix too, but their selection of current movies is limited - much more so in Canada than in the US. I prefer to rent DVDs or BluRay disks over streaming, because the quality is generally better and there is often extra bonus material that you don't get when streaming.

You commented in one of the issues that my choices of authors weren't that recent (Ian McDonald comes to mind as one of them). While he did start publishing in the 80s, his best work has been in the last decade. I'm currently reading the second book in his *Everness* YA series and it is excellent - very reminiscent of the best Heinlein juvenile novels from the late '50s that can be enjoyed by both teens and adults. And the quality of his writing is just as good as in his more "adult" novels.

I am also working my way through the last few years of the various "Year's Best" anthologies. That is probably where I see the most work from the newest writers as most authors in the field get their start with short fiction. There is a lot of good stuff there too.

Rodney Leighton, rodney.leighton@gmx.co.uk

Broken Toys #30 was good. Read the entire thing. It was interesting to read that you have self-doubts. I have no self confidence at all. Never have had. I laughed like hell at the Montreal Screwjob tale. I wrote a thing which had various ideas that Chuck [*Connors*] will hopefully send you a copy of, in which I write some stuff about this.

Actually I am going to go on the assumption that Chuck will forward on the other sheet, and will refrain from typing the same shit all over again.

Guy I was trying to think of, who I think Schirmeister knows and who would, I think, know about the Montreal Screwjob is Don Fields, known as Don-O. Don't know if you know him...

I liked Murray's Fanthology. Kind of curious where the writing came from; some of it, like an on-line discussion of Hugo awards, hardly qualifies as writing. More intriguing, I find him in TePe. How do you participate in an electronic apa without reading ezines? And if you are reading those, why not others.

Brad Foster, bwfoster@juno.com

Thanks for re-sending a copy of *Broken Toys #31*. Somewhere out there in cyberspace, the original email is probably still orbiting around, looking for an inbox that will take it in and give it comfort at last...

Loved the logo for this issue yet again, with the Last Supper of cereal brand mascots... or could that possibly be the Last Breakfast?

One has to be grateful to the Internet for giving us so many clever images to steal and manipulate!

It was good to read that your output of finished art this year is already greater than the last. At times, over the years, you have given indications of giving up totally on drawing. (Don't deny it, occasionally you actually seem a bit down about doing creative things ... though, of course, you write about it in a highly creative and entertaining way.) But, I think it's in your blood, and there is nothing you can do about it. That blood might "thin out," now and then, when you will create less work. But, it's still in your blood, and drawing is one of the things, like it or not, that keeps you going. And getting back to doing the art you want to do, not what others want you to do, is getting that blood pulsing stronger. (To continue to belabor the metaphor.)

It's clear that I'm drawing regularly, again. The year has two months to go and I've finished over 75 drawings so far. What hasn't changed, though, is how little interest I've had in getting it published in fanzines. I could do more, but the thrill of seeing my work in Clubzine Monthly or Tedious SF Reviews is still at an all-time low. Perhaps it's because the zines I thought most fun are themselves at an all-time low, and getting lower as it becomes evident that fandom has discarded traditional fanzines.

What I've always enjoyed about fandom is how often fanzine editors will leave it up to the artist to do whatever they want for a drawing or cover image. And it gives me an excuse to pull out some of the rough ideas I had, but just could not find the time to work on. Fandom gives me the chance to go "Well, I have to do *something*, so why not this?" Luckily, most editors have been happy with the results, or at least kind enough not to tell me to stuff the drawing where the sun don't shine!

I noticed in that first photo of Steve that you can see the reflected light off of not one or two, but *five* more Hugo rockets on the front of his shirt, obviously from a row of them just in front of him, below camera range. Tricky. Very tricky.

You're not the first to mention that. But I can't take the credit. Those were his actual secret Hugos whose reflections were caught in the original photograph. You'll have to ask Steve about those.

DO NOT WATCH THESE - EVER!

Three Animated Films that Were a Waste of Good Pixels

I don't usually approach reviews intending to be wholly negative, but there are just some films you can say nothing good about, and I've three of them in front of me, begging to be denounced. The most recent of them is probably the best place to start.

Rio 2 was this year's predictable follow-up to *Rio*, which made three years ago. I wasn't a huge fan of the original film, which was one-too-many ecologically preachy animated features for this jaded viewer. Moreover, musical birds are not my favourite dish. Despite that, I recognize a well-crafted piece of propaganda when I see it. The narrative was complex, compelling and logical. Characters were more than a little stereotyped, especially Túlío, the dwerpy bird conservationist from Brazil, but perhaps appropriately so. The music was a matter of taste. If you like the Latin beat, updated with syntho-pop dance music, you'll be in heaven. I would have given the first *Rio* three out of five stars.

Unfortunately, the sequel has none the limited charm of the original. The beat goes on, and if that's enough to get your foot tapping, you may be able to overlook the serious flaws in *Rio 2*. It was certainly not enough for me, though. To begin with, the human characters, Linda and Túlio, play little more than walk-on roles, robbing the film of one of the driving forces that moved the first. The nearly all-bird cast slips its moorings and drifts altogether too far from any relevance it might have had for me. So a lot of birds might lose their habitat? I didn't really care.

Major developments in the film seemed equally unsupported by any sense that they mattered. For instance, there is a soccer game between the blue parrots and some other kind of parrots, representing a turf war of sorts. So what? In the end it didn't matter even in context, since the game was interrupted by Big Bad People Coming to Cut Down Trees.

The two human protagonists from *Rio 1* make their reappearance just so that they can get lost in the Amazon and discover that the blue parrots are not extinct after all. Then they chain themselves to a tree. They have no story of their own in this sequel.

Other characters from the first movie are shoehorned in, but contribute little if anything more than Linda and Túlio. One of them pursues vengeance against the heroes in a half-hearted way that "ironically" saves the day. The trees are spared ... as if there was ever any doubt.

In the end, we have learned that the original blue parrots from the original *Rio* are not the only ones of their kind after all – which rather invalidates the entire purpose of the first movie, to bring them together to propagate their species. No matter, there is a lot of loud music with a muscular 1/2 beat and plenty of dancing! What more could an audience want?

How about a sensible, un clichéd story with strong characters? Sorry ... I guess that is too much to ask from most sequels. It certainly was of this one.

Hoodwinked Too: Hood vs. Evil was the sequel to 2005's highly original and clever *Hoodwinked*. Was it worth waiting six years to see what Red Riding Hood, Wolf, Granny and the others had been up to in the interim? Sadly, it was not.

The virtues of the first movie were mixed. *Hoodwinked* was on a budget, and it showed. But that didn't matter as much as the fresh approach to the storybook characters and their unexpected relationships. The narrative moved a little jerkily, and there are moments where it bogs down, but the humour is quite unlike any other animated film I've seen.

As with many sequels, *Hoodwinked Too* was given the budget to make up for all the production deficiencies of the first ... but then did nothing new with it. The fundamental conflict is the same in both, and the surprise villains are not a surprise at all. They might almost as well have whispered their true motives in an aside to the viewers at the beginning of the story, instead of halfway through. The rather unexpected angles to the storybook background in the first movie are exaggerated to the point they lose all their charm, and gave license to the writers to indulge themselves in far too many martial arts and espionage clichés.

Having gone through the motions of falling out, Red Riding Hood and Wolf learn the importance of teamwork again through their failure to succeed independently ... surprising no one. Entertaining no one, either. Not even a gigantic flaming wreck crashing onto the singing goat could have saved this film from its own awful predictableness.

If *Rio 2* and *Hoodwinked Too* were bad, I've saved the worst for last.

Barnyard was to have been Nickelodeon's 2006 "breakthrough" to the big screen. However, the only thing that was broken was *Barnyard* ... and Nickelodeon's hopes for a critical success.

The movie might be viewed as a poor man's plagiarism of *The Lion King*, which itself borrowed far too heavily from Osamu Tezuka's *The Jungle Emperor*. In the Disney epic, a young lion is unwilling to assume the duties and responsibilities of leadership, so buggers off into the jungle to live a carefree, irresponsible life. Eventually he realizes that his obligations as an animal aristocrat cannot be evaded forever, and shoulders his burden. In *Barnyard*, a young bullock whose father is leader of the herd, lives a carefree, irresponsible life, and refuses his father's mantle of leadership when the time comes. Eventually he learns his lesson and becomes the leader of the herd, as he was meant to be.

There are bad guys in both films too – in one they are hyenas, and in the other they are wolves that prey on the chickens. In one, Simba sees the spirit of his father in the heavens, in the other Otis and his girl friend seem to stroll away together into the stars.

It is rather blatant, isn't it?

Of course, *The Lion King* was a beautifully animated and beautifully told story about growing up. *Barnyard* is ugly from beginning to end, and animated no better than a bad educational cartoon for pre-schoolers. The humour is gross and labored. To put that statement into perspective, the big joke through the entire film is that bullocks have udders just like cows. At least I *assume* that was intentional. It's hard to imagine that an entire studio of producers, writers, animators and voice actors could be unaware of the gender difference between boys and girls! Also ... I have the assurance of one insider that the director thought tits on boy cattle was hilarious.

Nothing in the film goes uphill from there. Don't look for much that's funny. Skunks smell bad, pigs are dirty and rats are sneaky. Animals do barn dancing, and ride "mechanical humans." Of course, the dumb cluck of a farmer doesn't know that his animals talk and mess around when he isn't looking. Reverting to "dumb animal" mode is a gag that runs throughout the 89 minutes of this film and didn't raise much of a chuckle the first time it was played, let alone the next dozen.

I had to check the DVD case to remind myself that there was music and songs ... they were *that* memorable. In fact, hardly anything about *Barnyard* was memorable ... but watching this ugly, distasteful mess did leave me with a lingering, uneasy feeling that what I had seen was just not *right*.

