



Broken Toys 33 is a little late, and not the issue that **Taral Wayne** had planned from his eyrie high above Lake Ontario. My address is still **245 Dunn Avenue, Apartment 2111**. Nor have I left Parkdale, in the west end of **Toronto, Ontario, M6K 1S6, Canada**. I don't mind unexpected visitors, but it may be more convenient for you to drop me a line at Taral@bell.net. This is Kiddelidivee Books & Art 291. Due to circumstances that I'll explain in all good time, it is published in early **December 2014**.

just so you know...

This should have been my Halloween issue. I had something special planned, and have worked on it sporadically all month. Unfortunately, things do not always go as planned, especially when one has bitten off more than one can chew. I'm forced to admit that this has been one of those times. It is not that I won't chew and finally swallow what I have bitten off, but it is going to take more mastication than I had expected. After all ... I am not a song writer. (That is a big hint that some of the more astute among my readers might pick up on.)

Worse, I have had somewhat more trouble with my Myasthenia Gravis over the last month than usual. I would spend the early part of my day with e-mail, news pages, comic strips, on-line groups and FaceBorg, expecting to put in another few hours of productive work, but find myself tired out, instead. Each day I got up with a promise to myself to not fall into the same trap, but it happened day after day, with the monotony of an obsessive-compulsive disorder. It hasn't been a totally unproductive November, but my pet project, the Halloween Issue, was the big loser.

Toward the end of November, another spanner suddenly jammed in the works. Jim Mowatt had sent me a segment of his TAFF trip report *at least* a couple of months earlier. I thought he wanted it vetted, so read the file carefully, made a couple of comments for his edification and sent it back. Then, a couple of weeks ago, he wrote to me asking when, oh when, was I going to be running it *in Broken Toys*. How embarrassing! I checked his mail, though, and *nowhere* had Jim said that he was submitting the piece for me to publish ... and I was too slow on the uptake to see the obvious!

It was not a matter of me scrambling to return a frantic “yes” to Jim before he changed his mind. I did have to think about it for several minutes. Perhaps you’ve noticed that apart from letters of comment, and a single bit of doggerel that I co-write with Walt Wentz, I have never published anyone else’s written material in *Broken Toys*. Was I willing to create a precedent? No. Over my dead body!

On the other hand, I had, through my own stupidity, held up Jim’s trip report, and as it covered his only stay-over in Canada, he clearly wanted this segment published in a Canadian fanzine. Apart from *Broken Toys*, what was there? I don’t wish to traduce my fellow Canadian fanzine editors, but let’s be serious ... obviously there was no choice but *Broken Toys*!

But my next issue was supposed to be a special Halloween Issue? How was a TAFF report going to fit in with the Halloween theme? I mulled it over a bit, and decided that since I was breaking more than one tradition with that issue, why not another one? I wrote back to Jim and said “yes” to his report.

Nevertheless, it didn’t fit in my mind. And as the days dropped off the calendar and the Halloween issue grew no nearer to completion, I knew that the matter was only getting messier. Shortly, I’d be publishing a Halloween issue with unrelated material just before Christmas. And then when would I publish the Christmas issue? In February?

I briefly considered publishing issues 33 and 34 out of order, but thank Gawd I dismissed that perversion from my mind in only a day or two.

Finally, it occurred to me that I had better just publish a regular issue 33 with the TAFF report and other regular material, and publish the Halloween Issue whenever I could. And I will simply deem the publication of another author’s writing as **Not A Precedent**. Problems solved!

One of Those Months

Those of you who follow such things may have noticed that I haven’t published new art in a while. This isn’t because I haven’t been drawing. Far from it. In fact, I’ve drawn quite a lot, but the backlog of scanning to do has become intimidating. And that backlog grows more intimidating the longer I leave it.

Last night I at least made a start, by scanning three pieces that I can post tonight.

To be clear about it, scanning is not itself the problem. The problem is that I’m scanning pencil drawings. Painting them out with Photoshop is the only way to clean up the image. No adjustment of the scanner will pick up the faintest intended line, without also picking up many that are unintended. Also, different parts of the drawing may be darker or lighter than the rest. And erasures that are invisible to the human eye are sometimes all too visible to the electronic eye. And if I were using a blue pencil and going over it again in black, this could be dealt with easily ... but I don’t. And if I inked the drawing, it could be dealt with even more easily. I’ve tried using various Photoshop dodges, but in the end it always comes down to using the paint tool or eraser to remove unwanted blurs, blemishes and blights by hand, and that takes anywhere from half an hour to an hour per piece. That

means cleaning up only two or three drawings at a time, tops, unless I want to spend the entire day on the work.

I have 12 to 15 more drawings to scan and clean up. And it's highly likely that number will grow during the scanning, so I may be looking at spending a week ruining my eyes by squinting at pixels on my computer monitor.

A while ago I commented that I was writing a new short story. That hasn't stopped, but for much of the intervening time I've been having problems with fatigue and lack of motivation, so little has been done on it. Nevertheless, I've been inching slowly toward the finish. When I'm done, I'll be able to start on the Halloween issue of *Broken Toys* ... albeit a little late.

This month I've been handed the shitty end of the stick by life. It would be too depressing to write about it again, so I'll just quote myself from FaceBook:

*"Early on Friday, I cashed my check at the bank, paid my rent & utilities, and put about \$120 in my wallet for grocery shopping across the street. The remaining money went into a bank envelope that I tucked into a pocket under the seat of my roller ... as I've done before, perfectly safely. On the way home from the grocery store, I happened to notice a couple of things peeking out from under the roller's seat that shouldn't have been visible with the seat down. I looked in the seat pocket and found that the envelope full of money was missing. I think it must have dropped out at the checkout counter, but I was too far away from the supermarket by then, and too exhausted to go back for an immediate search. I continued home and called the grocery first thing. They didn't find my envelope, naturally, but they told me they'd call back if it ever turns up. The envelope is from the Royal Bank of Canada, and has the transaction tape inside with the money. A Good Samaritan could return it to the RBC, and the bank would identify me from the tape ... so the lost money might be returned to me yet. More likely, though, some asshole will just pocket the money, and treat himself and his buds to a few rounds of beer to celebrate... and I'm out **over \$400**.*

I considered a search near the supermarket the next day -- from the store's exit to where I first noticed the envelope missing is only a search of a couple of blocks. But it's a long walk from home to the supermarket. After my exertions the day before I was unusually weak, and it would have been a foolish adventure. If it had been summer and it was still daylight, and if I didn't have to wear 20 pounds of coat for cold weather, I might have tried. So it looks like it'll just be a matter of sweating it out until next month's check, and dipping into savings if I must. I had already paid the rent and bills, and have a cupboard full of groceries. All things considered, it could have been worse. At least I don't live in Buffalo.

Since then, I've been back to the supermarket, retracing my route. The earliest possible time for me, though, was two days later, after a thorough rest. As expected, I found nothing. I also went into the supermarket and asked them to check under the conveyor belts in the checkout lanes, in case my envelope had been swept into the mechanism. It hadn't. Now it's several days later, and no call from the bank about a Good Samaritan returning my money, so I think it's well and truly gone.

There's a positive side to the mishap. For one thing, I haven't gone all to pieces. A few years ago I would have raged over losing a mere \$40 like an infuriated Chihuahua that hears a noise at the front door. That's because I wouldn't have known, back then, where my next 40 bucks was coming from. But I get a pension now, so all I have to do, really, is wait until next month, and there'll be another check. That doesn't make losing \$400 *easy*, but it *does* mean it's not the end of the world. I have food and there are no bills left unpaid, so I'll just do without caviar and Champagne this month. Two or three people have offered to assist financially, but in addition to having no major liabilities, I also have savings to fall back on, and so I think I will be able to resist accepting every penny offered.

Better news! A phone call I've been waiting for over the last couple of months finally came last week. The government has processed the paperwork for my new power chair, and I'm waiting for one last call that should come in the next couple of weeks, to set a day for the retailer to bring it over. Then it will be mine ... mine to zip over hill and dale, to swoop block after block through my neighborhood at a breakneck 5 mph, up to 20 miles in any direction I wish before it needs recharging. No doubt it will snow for five hours the next day after it arrives. But at least I will be *theoretically* free to go where I *want* and not only when I *must* ... and not have to rest every 50 feet along the way, as I do with a roller.

And now it is December, a new month, the Christmas month ... no doubt with fresh disasters lying in wait, but perhaps also a modest step ahead to make up for every two slipped back.

JIM MOWATT: TAFF TRIP REPORT

Toronto

I filled in a declaration form on the plane. I hadn't realized what a vital and exciting document this is. I searched on the instructions to find where I was supposed to leave it, but there was nothing there. I left it on my seat figuring that maybe someone collected them all up and just filed them on a dusty shelf somewhere. It seems I was mistaken. This is a super-important document that carries vital information for everyone in the airport. The uniformed chap looks unimpressed at my passport and says the single word "declaration." I tell him that I don't understand what he means. "Card you were given on the aeroplane." Ah, yes. "That's on the aeroplane." He looks at me but says nothing. I'm obviously the biggest cretin ever to attempt to walk upon Canadian soil. I realize I will need one of these declaration thingies and ask where I can obtain another one. "Back," says he. Hmm. I ask one of the women who are herding queues. "Back," she says. I explain that this "back" word isn't helping me much. Please please please I need more specific instructions. Through several miles of queue-herding tape there is a little table, and I see someone bent over it doing some writing. This, it seems, is the naughty boys' and girls' table, where they must obtain their declaration forms. I go to do my duty, returning later with correctly filled-out form. Now there are more questions. Why are you here, and why for ONLY four days? Just visiting someone and then going on to visit someone else. And where does this someone live? Erm, I don't know. You don't know? "In Toronto," I offer. She's called Catherine. I've used up my two pieces of information. I have nothing left. Customs woman presses the point. She wants to know what expensive and luxurious gifts I have brought for this Catherine. I say that I've brought nothing at all. I didn't think she'd really want to know that I had a copy of *Pips* for Catherine. Much suspicion continues about how I know this Catherine. I tell her that we meet at Science Fiction conventions (which isn't entirely true, as Catherine and I haven't yet met - I wonder what the penalty is for lying to a customs official - maybe I'll be dangled from the CN tower until I say sorry, or made to wait in a customs line for eternity). She understands about Science Fiction conventions and nods and smiles. I have made it into Canada. Or so I think. She has put large red crosses all over the top of it which is a bit worrying. I put away my declaration but within seconds there's someone else who wants to see it. I'm baffled as to why. I found it completely

uninteresting. However I produce the document and the person in uniform looks pleased. I continue onwards, collect giant purple luggage and am about to leave the baggage return when I encounter another huge queue. It seems that there are yet more uniformed people who are keen to view our declaration forms, and this time they are so keen on the form that they confiscate it from each and every one of us.

I emerge into the arrivals lounge to see huge numbers of people milling around. Catherine Crockett is immediately recognizable from her FaceBook profile picture and I home in and accuse her of being Catherine Crockett. Caught in the act of being Catherine Crockett, she admits to it and we go to collect the car. I fulfill the stupid Englishman stereotype in these situations by attempting to climb into the driver's seat. Damn! I'd thought about that beforehand and convinced myself I wouldn't make such an elementary mistake. Ah well. I comfort myself in the sure and certain knowledge that I will make many more blunders during my stay in North America, and they will surely eclipse this one.

Catherine takes me away from all this

We drive for many miles with Catherine pointing out many flowers and tall buildings and eventually emerge into the suburbs and The Annex, which is the area where Catherine lives. "Eclectic" is my first thought upon entering the area. There are many tree-lined, one-way streets festooned with Victorian and Edwardian housing of all shapes and sizes. I love the crazy mixed-up collection of building styles on every street. It's a real feast for the eye. Catherine's house is no exception, and is fronted by a large apple tree (McIntosh apparently) festooned with fruit that is, frustratingly, not quite ready to eat. There is a large front porch with a very inviting-looking wooden chair and a maze of rooms beyond, festooned with all manner of musical instruments, fannish paraphernalia and artifacts which indicate that Catherine and Colin have a very rich variety of interests.

I am now fed with a bacon and tomato sandwich (with Guacamole on it - I never expected that), which was very welcome indeed. This would be my dinner time, and yet it is still the middle of the afternoon here in Toronto. We chat and footle about on the computers for a while, and then head out again through another vast variety of neighborhoods to a place called The Only Café which can be found at 972 Danforth Avenue in Toronto. Catherine threw me out of the car and went off to do a little light parking. I wandered in, sat down and got out my ancient technology (pen and paper) to do some note-taking. It looked a little odd to me. There was much evidence of coffee, but I saw no beer. Now I'm not adverse to coffee, but I was hoping for beer. Maybe there would be beer later, or perhaps there was a secret stash of beer under the counter. I would leave myself in the lap of the hosts and see what transpired. Catherine emerged sometime later from the back of the room. How did she do this? I would have seen her come through the door. "I have found them," she exclaimed. "They are in the beer bit." Through the black curtain we went, and there indeed was "the beer bit." This was an exact copy of the other side of the curtain but this room had a bar festooned with beer possibilities. I liked this bit. Of course we then realized that there were far too many of us to find a table that would fit us in this side of the café, and so did some major maneuvering

of furniture and colonized a chunk of the coffee section. Ira Nayman sat opposite me and fired off desperately searching questions. "What are you a fan of?" says he. "Stuff," says I. There were questions about the process of choosing where to go for a TAFF trip. This was an easy one to answer. My process was ridiculously simple. If someone said they were willing to host me, then I was happy to go there.

Ira then gave me a book he'd written called *Welcome To The Multiverse* for the TAFF auction at Worldcon. It looks pretty good. I read some of it later and found it playful and fun. I may even bid on it myself. Ira Nayman is here with the astoundingly beautiful Giselle. She is animated and almost as intense as Ira. This couple are a powerful force indeed. Catherine has given me something called Canadian Tire currency for the TAFF auction. It looks very much like real money, and I hear there are places that do accept it as currency. All most peculiar. It is currently a bookmark, but hopefully it will eventually be converted into real money for the fan funds.

There is a man with a hat (Cliff Goldstein) who comes to sit beside me. He is very proud of his city and I'm sure his intentions are good, but I find that so many of his recommendations of wonderfulness just flow over and around me. I have no context for these things of which he speaks. They sound like fine things, and if I had a spare 6 months then I might get to see half of them. Diane Lacey is with man in the hat and she has been designated to look after me during Saturday party preparations. Diane strikes me as being one of those female fannish forces of nature that make sure that stuff happens in the fannish world, and woe betide it if it should try not happen.

Lloyd and Yvonne Penney (Penneys From Heaven as Jacq Monahan has previously dubbed them) unfortunately need to leave early. Lloyd writes letters of comment to an incredible number of fanzines, and I did want to talk to him about how he motivates himself to keep going. Ah well, maybe I shall get to speak to Lloyd at the party on Saturday.

Jim Caughren and Murray Moore are sitting together. There's a delightful air of "pair of naughty schoolboys" about them. You feel that at any time they would be making rude gestures behind your back or constructing ink bombs to throw at the swotty kids in the front row. Keith and Nancy Soltys unfortunately have to leave early also, but they assure me that they will be back for the party on Saturday.

I drank many fine beers that evening. There were IPAs and Pale Ales, most of which were very tasty indeed. I had been assured that there were now many excellent craft beers on the North American continent, but somehow hadn't quite believed it.

The following day I got up fairly early for a run around the local streets. It was not too hot but massively humid, so did get jolly uncomfortable after only about 20 minutes or so. I was happy to retreat back inside for a shower, a stretch out and a bit of a lie-down. Later my hosts arose to take me out for breakfast. I wrestled with the menu and managed to order eggs with only minimal

embarrassment about “sunny sides” and all that kind of thing. Then we came back to the house to collect hats and Ctein. Moments later we were bound for Bloor and exciting new shops and strange things.

We were shown a board game shop called Snakes and Lattes. You can try out all manner of board games here and order coffee also. Seems a splendidly civilized notion. There was also a shop called ‘Good for Her’ which had free water and coffee available in a little cupboard by the door. It also had a dazzling array of vibrators and dildoes. I asked the shopkeeper what were probably terribly naive questions about bondage tape. I was intrigued as to why there should be a special tape called bondage tape, and what qualities does that have that other tapes don’t. She assured me that it being shiny and black was a real plus as it looked very good against the skin. It also stuck to itself but not so much to skin, which will have been a big plus. It was also strong enough to hold someone, but not so strong that they couldn’t break it open if there was a real need to do so. I am now rather more enlightened than I was as to the ways of bondage tape. Catherine also bought us some walnut cake. An intriguing item that actually tasted quite nice once I’d removed the walnut.

We returned home with beer from The Beer Store. That seems eminently sensible. Of course you should get beer from something called ‘The Beer Store’. There were several interesting beers, and one that called itself “Buzz” that had hemp in it. I had to try some. Unfortunately it was a “meh” kind of beer. T’was fairly bland and quite inoffensive. Drinkable, but made no real impression upon the taste buds.

Friday night is a fairly relaxed time sitting around chatting and then an early night. Helsinki is discussed once more. There’s a fascination with this Helsinki bid and an ambivalence about the Spokane bid. Orlando doesn’t seem to be popular among the people I’ve spoken to.

Awake at 6 a.m. on Saturday morning. A thoroughly bad idea, as there’s an all-night party planned for me tonight and then I’m traveling straight after, with no sleep in between. I lie there for hour and a half trying to get back to sleep but it’s not happening so I get up and pound the streets. It’s nice and cool and the streets are very quiet indeed. I very much enjoy my morning run. Then back again, shower and lay down to see if I can get any sleep. No chance so turn on the cricket and check out how England are doing in the Ashes. Alan Dorey joins me online to share enthusiasm over the progress of the England bowling attack and Curt Phillips joins us also to discuss cricket, cucumber sandwiches and tea.

Diane Lacey and Cliff Goldstein arrive to whisk me away. We decide we’re going to descend in force upon Chinatown. There’s a dim sum place where people keep arriving with carts of wonder and offering you these amazing things. They make a note on a piece of paper and then away they go, leaving very small but fabulous things on the table. After a moment or two someone else arrives with things that look even more tasty. This keeps happening and it would be all too easy to

stay there and continue to sample everything they have to offer but we slow down and then stop, satiated and happy but still cocking half an eye at the delicious foods which continue to be trundled by on the carts.



Some Dim Lunch....

We head off to Kensington Market. Curt Phillips has issued strict instructions that I must have a wide-brimmed hat, so I dutifully buy such a thing there. We then go to the library which houses the Merrill Collection. Judith Merrill apparently donated her collection to the library when she moved to Toronto, and they have lovingly cared for and expanded it ever since. Every now and again when visitors come to town they run a special tour around the facility, and they are happy to do so for me. We see many first editions and even several drawers full of old fanzines. I make a grab for them, but the drawer is shut firmly before I can touch the treasured documents. Possibly she's seen the shocking state of the fanzines in my own collection. Two other people seem to have managed to inveigle themselves onto the tour. After the tour we decide a drink is the thing and we go to a student bar which is happily devoid of students, so allows us plenty of space to spread out (although at this point there are only Cliff, Diane and myself). I drink something which has the head of Albert Einstein on the tap. It tastes fine and goes down nicely. We chat for a while. Cliff is passionate about Toronto and does much wailing and gnashing of teeth that my stay is so short and I'm missing so much. Diane, I find, is busily organizing everything in the universe. Like so many superfanwomen, she is adamant that she will stop all of this and start just attending

conventions to enjoy them. I am somewhat skeptical about this. She is doing guest liaison at LoneStarCon3 and will also be presenting a bid for Kansas City in 2016. I feel tired just hearing about all of this, so Cliff and I relax with a game of pool. I win and Cliff says that now he will have to kill me. I assure him that I won't tell anyone and he lets me live.

Back to base to see if I can grab some sleep before the party.

Goodness, I actually did manage to get some sleep. There's frantic tidying and organizing. I heard things being hit with a hammer earlier on downstairs, so I'm a little afraid of what's been happening down there. I sleep for about an hour. I'm hoping this will be just enough to help me stay awake and reasonably sociable throughout the night.

Party Time

I've been hiding in the guest Room for the evening while things were heaved around downstairs. I was convinced that I might be considered a frightful nuisance if I appeared downstairs while party preparations were still ongoing. Eventually, shaved and showered, I descend the stairs to find the first of the guests has arrived and a long table is laid out with snacks, and coolers contain a variety of drinks to tempt almost any palate. This first of the guests is called Kevin and he is highly praised by Catherine for his highly technical work, but even more

so for being the saviour of the masquerade. Apparently costumers are in some kind of guild, and earn points for appearing in a guild thing that conforms to several rules. One of these is that a requisite number of costumers must take part (a sort of quorate costuming if you will), but things had fallen short of perfection. They had fallen about seven people short, but Kevin, it seems, travels with an array of exciting dressing-up items. I know not what or why, but Kevin rounded up a bunch of folks and persuaded them into these items of clothing and suggested they parade around in them for the masquerade. And so the day was saved by Kevin's fabulous dressing-up box. Now I was given context for Kevin but not as much for some of the other guests, so it occasionally felt like I was struggling to work out who was who, what or why.

I had no problems working out who Taral was, as he's a very prolific fan writer indeed. Words just pour forth from Taral, and I read as much as I can keep up with. I zero in upon him and introduce myself. He tells me many things about Roman coins. A couple of days later he's posted a party report on *File770* and I was amused to hear him report our meeting thus:



Party at Catherine & Colin's – Jim and an unknown wastrel who wandered in for the free food...

I thought I may have come on a little strong at first, aggressively describing the English part of my coin collection, without ever taking stock of whether Jim's eyes were glazing over. But after a bit, I relaxed and thoroughly enjoyed the conversations over the course of the evening. Things were surprisingly fanzine-oriented. But then, apart from Jim and myself, Keith Soltys and his wife were present. Keith published a fanzine named Torus in the 1980s and apparently still remembers how it was done. Both Penneys were here as well. It should be pointed out that the evening's hosts, Catherine and Colin, had also published at one time or another. The only conspicuous omission from the local fanzine clan was Murray Moore.

“Aggressively describing” does give a fine indication of Taral's style at that point of the conversation, but I was actually interested in the subject so must take a goodly portion of the blame there for encouraging his forays into ancient coinage. Taral mentions that Murray was missing from that party which was unfortunate indeed, but I had seen him earlier in the week and am hoping to see Murray again at Worldcon. (The tenses are going to get really weird here – I'm jotting down these notes as I'm on my trip and yet I'll be editing them later – should I change everything to past tense? Should I retain present tense for authenticity? Oh woe, life is such a trial sometimes. <Back of hand to forehead - strike tragic pose.>)

We speak of many things, and fanzines are very much in the forefront of those things. I've wanted to meet Taral for a long time. He has so many varied interests, and yet I always feel a little unbalanced reading his material. Even now while I'm speaking to him I feel that I'm missing something, or that I have some kind of fundamental misunderstanding. I suspect I could talk to Taral for ten years and still not feel that I really understand him well. Someone who I suspect does understand Taral quite well is Hope Leibowitz. They're sitting together and chatting, and they seem so relaxed and warm to each other as they lament the changes that have taken place around them. Over the top of our conversations we hear the phrase “syphilitic noses” blasting around the room. There's a woman I don't recognize who has much to say on this subject, and every few minutes we hear another similar phrase ring out around the room and possibly reaching into the next continent. It keeps us amused and adds to the party ambience. There's a whole group of people I don't meet during the evening. I get the impression they are SMOF types plotting and planning at the far end of the room. They will undoubtedly be taking over the universe sometime soon. Of course they would need to elect a chairbeing first. You can't take over the universe without a proper committee structure in place. The evening progresses into morning and people begin to leave. Pizza arrives and is happily received by we party remnants. Later I am buzzed down to the airport by saviour of the masquerade, Kevin. It's ridiculously early O'clock in the morning but I battle my way through bag drop and security. US customs tried desperately to keep me out of the country by using the diabolically cunning tactic of hiding all the pens so we couldn't fill out the customs declaration that they claimed they wished to see. However, I fooled them by bringing my own pen, and in the blink of an eye, much shuffling of the

feet and tortuous search of my bag I was through customs and allowed into the United States. Then I flew from Toronto to Cincinnati. Then I caught a flight to Tri-Cities, and there was a Curt Phillips waiting for me.



Jim at what I believe is the Only Café, with the usual gang of SMOFs... most of the fanzine types being conspicuously absent for reasons which I can only conjecture point to a far-reaching Conspiracy!

LEFT OVER PARTS

wahf - graham charnock, grahamcharnock85@gmail.com, who sent *vibrator 2.0.9*, ... whatever his goofy numbering means. dave redd, dave_redd@hotmail.com, who endorses a plan to extend *broken toys* to 50 issues, "although that might be other editors' loss..." also, a suppressed letter on *broken toys 31* by kent pollard, who sent it along on the principle that it is better late than never. he had been going through a bad patch, and grouched (among other things) that "if i were the kind to look for proof of a god's existence, i'd have found it recently in the fact that a random universe couldn't possibly have shat upon my wife so often as this one has. coming on the heels of the fifteenth anniversary of her m.s. diagnosis, and the tenth anniversary of her confinement to a wheelchair because of it, comes her first chemo treatment. the next person who tries to tell me that anything is all part of his plan, or that he cares about anybody is likely to get a fat lip if they're lucky." like kent, i have always felt god owed us an explanation whenever he moved in mysterious ways...

Joseph T. Major, jtmajor@iglou.com

You asked if "A Way of Life" had ever been reprinted. ISFDB is your friend:

<http://www.isfdb.org/cgi-bin/title.cgi?40803>

It lists eight other reprintings, though I think the one I read was in *Rulers of Men*.

Now what are the odds of finding any of those printings? Probably close to zero without a dedicated chase and a willingness to part with serious money. Too bad it can't be downloaded from Fanac.org ... it seems the sort of thing that should be posted there.

But it was Bloch making the fandom he knew writ large. Just as Watson did with the fandom he knew. It has been longer since Watson's story (33 years) than between that and Bloch's story (24 years) And fandom has become con-oriented, cons that are aimed at consumers instead of participants.

SF cons have become something like Burning Man, but with more Klingons and fewer Wiccans. Maybe.

You talk of "conventions I know nothing about." I think I hit that level some time ago, when somehow I found a LiveJournal report of a con. All the people mentioned were referred to by their LiveJournal names ... which I didn't know. It was like being at a party where you didn't know anyone else there.

Most of what passes for SF these days is totally outside my interest. It has zombies, vampires, and werewolves. I can get those old Universal movies on DVD. Or it's steampunk. Most of which fails of its promise. It could be a story of a different kind of technology. Most of it seems to be standard romance with goggles, brass, and steam thrown in randomly.

There's also a lot of "literature," ie: stories of minimal gosh-wow content and long on authenticity and style. These can be okay, but at some point I have to ask why they're published as science fiction at all.

The failing of the modern "vampire huntress" trope is that somehow, in spite of a parasitical species preying against humanity, the rest of society has developed unchanged, so the modern Buffy has a cell phone, a fancy leather coat, and a blog. I've seen it pointed out that if there were vampirism even at the level of *Dracula*, humanity would have become extinct, due to the inexorable growth of vampires, as everyone drained by a vampire becomes a vampire and has to feed at the same rate and everyone they drain . . .

Kent Pollard, kentpollard@gmail.com

Thanks for the most recent issue, Taral.

I too was a bit of a collector, something I learned from my father. But while he was pursuing the missing 1887 Dominion of Canada 1-cent piece, a 1936 maple penny, or a slightly better condition of his Victory nickel, and pouring over hundreds of this year's newest coins with a magnifier in hopes of

discovering an oddity, I was more esoteric. Mostly books, and comics, and maybe the little china animals or fairy-tale characters out of his Red Rose tea, I came to realize I was a collector of collections. I liked collecting, I just didn't care to specialize. And so I have a handful of pieces of bone china, and a half-dozen examples of lead crystal figures and a few *Star Trek* cards and some *Magic the Gathering* cards, and--well.

Although I collect coins, my main interest has never been on contemporary issues. Especially of late. I do keep any pocket change of interest, but the Royal Canadian Mint has a policy of flooding the market with "collector's items" that are not scarce, and only hard to find in circulation. They want you to pay \$69.95 for it in a velour-lined box and airtight plastic retainer. My favourite dealer calls this stuff "flash & trash." Older coins such as the ones you mention are as legitimate as all get out ... but I never found minor variations in the size of a numeral "8" or the placement of the letter "E" to be very interesting. At least not compared to a portrait of the Temple of Solomon burning to celebrate the fall of Jerusalem in 79 AD.

Then, when I was about to turn 19, my father died, and his coins, lovingly collected and sorted for 40 years, stored in an assortment of WWII ammunition boxes with padlocks on them, were mine. I liked them, but I didn't love them. I added a few things, here and there, then when I was 24ish and unemployed, a little business opportunity came up. I wasn't dumb enough to sell them. I just used them as security with my uncle who was relatively flush and accommodating. I knew that I could get them back, however long it took, though I'd have to be aware of the token interest he was asking.

The business never went anywhere. But the coins did. A year or so later someone broke into his home, targeting the coins only, and they were gone.

As to my own collections from childhood, my experience can be encapsulated by Tarzan. I had, though means I don't recall, ended up with a complete set of *Tarzan* paperbacks, probably just Post-WWII covers, about 35-cent cover price, maybe 25. Then when I was 14 a used bookstore opened in town (the first ever) and he had a lovely set of new *Tarzans* with brighter colours and smooth black spines and frames. So I traded the unattractive older books, plus a little hard-earned newspaper money, for the newer ones.

I can understand making that mistake. I do appreciate a handsomely designed, uniform edition in brand, spanking new condition. Particularly when compared to a lot of dissimilar, ratty old copies by different publishers that may not even be quite the same size. Unfortunately, originals and older copies tend to have more value. At least they do among collectors. Modern book stores would rather have last year's edition, with \$8.95 printed on the cover, than one from 1958 that sold for 25¢.

As an old friend is fond of saying, *C'est la vie, c'est la guerre, c'est la cartes.*

Happy hunting, my friend, and I hope there's always a drop of sherry around when you want it.

Next time I'm out of the house, maybe I'll buy a bottle of Almond Cream...

ned brooks, nedbrooks@sprynet.com

Hi Taral - Thanks for the zine. I don't think I ever collected tokens from junk food, or knew that they were called "wheels" in Canada. At the age for that I was in Chile. They sound a little like the "pogs" that came along after I was far too old for such things. But I will buy any odd thing in a thrift store, so I have a bunch of them. They came in lidded plastic cups and are cardboard with any sort of peculiar image - some iridescent, some said to glow in the dark. And three were metal - an iridescent Ying/Yang, an "8-ball bomb", and a brass one a quarter-inch thick with a hologram inset of a foot and a ball.

Hostess Potato Chips called them "wheels," but I don't know if they meant only the car coins or the airplane coins too. As a kid, I called them all "coins," and that seems how they are known on the Internet too. Hostess may have thought it was too cute not to call them "wheels." Of course, by that reasoning, aircraft coins ought to have been known as "props" and hockey coins as "pucks."

Pogs were originally the cardboard liners in the caps of bottle fruit drinks in the Philippines. Some wiseguy got the idea that they could be made collectable, and boost sales. He was right. First they caught on the Philippines, then the fad spread all over the world. Now, of course, nobody wants them.

When I lived in Virginia in the 1960s, hard liquor was sold only in state stores - and was cheaper than in Georgia, where it was sold in liquor stores. So my father asked me to get him Seagrams Crown Royal and bring it to Atlanta when I came. I doubt I would ever have gone in the place otherwise. I asked about carrying it to Georgia - and they said if I wanted to take more than a gallon at once, they would provide a special permit.

Is the movie *Over the Hedge* based on the comic strip? A strip with that title runs in the Sunday Funnies here, quite well-drawn, and usually starring a squirrel with magical powers.

It is based on the comic strip, but very, very loosely. There's a raccoon, for instance... not much else.

The notion that anyone may have "wasted their life" in fandom or at a dull job seems useless to me. I suspect that only a few people spend their lives doing something important that they are really good at. It seems more important to me to make a living *and* do something you enjoy - which may be something else. I was not a great engineer, and did not imagine that I contributed much to the advancement of the space age. The work was interesting and I did the best I could with it. I don't imagine that I am a great fanzine editor either, but I have fun with it.

I see that I was able to download the Crazy Crazy font. Binker Glock just wrote me about an 1888 book she found that she thought was in a font imitating hand-lettering - but when I looked at the page images at Hathi Trust, I could see that it *was* hand-lettering. I have a correspondent who hand-letters - and it looks like the Papyrus font.

You may remember Robert S. Hadji (now going by the new family name "Knowlton"). He wrote all his correspondence in a miniscule hand that was impeccable. It almost looked printed by Linotype.

I think the last movie-length animated film I liked much was *Fantasia*. I often enjoy short ones, though. My favorite for both the wit and the art is *Courage the Cowardly Dog*.

I like Courage the Cowardly Dog also. It has a macabre quality that creepy old collectors like you, me and Bob Hadji could be expected to enjoy! Recently, a set of the complete episodes from the Internet came my way – I look forward to watching them. I have never seen more than a fraction of them.

brad foster, bwfoster@juno.com

So, I was incredibly late on getting a loc to you on issue 31, let's see if I can be incredibly early on getting back to you after getting issue 32. Ready, set, go!

Made it! But you were still only fourth in the queue when I opened my mail today!

Sounds like the – next – issue will be a “very special” issue, with both a long fiction piece and the first-ever actual piece of cover art? Yes, do it – you are not “abandoning” a format, you are advancing and growing, and being an artist and a designer trying new ideas and, in general, it's your freakin' zine, do whatever you want to with it! Plus, of course, I personally am quite happy with anything that shows more artwork, and a Fletcher/Taral collaboration? You must share that with us all.

It may come as a disappointment, then, that it's probably going to be a one-off... at least until the next special issue, which might be number 35, my record-breaking number ... or the next Christmas Issue. In fact, last year's Christmas issue more or less set a precedent for varying my format.

I agree with you that one reason you probably get more locs (aside from pubbing a zine that is full of interesting material each issue), is that you do send it directly to people, just as must be done with the paper zines, and getting that “obligation” to reply. A zine sitting in the inbox here each time I open my email is much more likely to get a response than another one added to the long list on eFanzines – and only seen when I happen to drop by there on my own. Bill [Burns] does send out notices when new zines are posted there, which helps. But, still, an editor directly sending me not only notice of their zine, but a copy, is more likely to get a response.

Regarding Milt's comment of interacting with people at conventions ... 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. That rings quite true for me. I am TERRIBLE at names, and after so many years just about everyone I meet now “looks familiar.” And most of the people who I have met in fandom are so freaking nice that they will start talking with someone out of the blue. So, I never know for sure, aside from a tight group of people I have seen enough times over and over to finally imprint on my brain, if the person I am talking to is someone I really know that well. So I just treat everyone like they *are* my old friends. And, you know, treating everyone like an old friend is actually a nice way to get through a convention! (Though I am sure my lack of memory of previous conversations has confused many of them.)

Of course, your own comments in Milt's loc cover the other side of that coin, where someone expects you to remember something they mentioned in passing way back in a random letter or conversation. I have the opposite of that, in that I don't really expect anyone to remember *anything* I might have said, and so probably spend more time repeating things than is really necessary. I do expect them to remember some of my art, not because I think it is that memorable, but because that is how I remember other people—by what they create. But to remember anything about *me*, personally? Naw!

*I'm not as modest as that, but, as a purely practical approach to other people, I think it is pointless to get mad at them because they do not remember everything you want them to. After all, they have their own lives and circle of friends. Even if you are close to a person, you can't expect them to be listening closely all the time, or to have a perfect memory. Gawd knows that I don't ... listen **or** remember!*

So, you're shooting for at least 50 issues now? Sounds good. Then, when you hit that, should be no problem to realize that, having done that once, you can do it again – and off we will be to be big century issue!

Yeah, well, don't make book on it. I may have found some other way to fritter away what's left of my worthlessly spent life.

jim mowat, jim@umor.co.uk

Many thanks Taral for *Broken Toys*, not a Halloween issue 32.

And neither is this one, alas.

Congratulations upon your letter column. Some kind of response is a thing of joy, wonder and head-scratching curiosity. Why do people choose to respond, and what sort of things do they respond to? You get a pretty good level of engagement and it looks as if the loccers have actually done a little bit of thinking before they commit finger to keyboard. I promise no such thing, but my curiosity has roped me into a little bit of circumspection and introspection.

I look at Facebook and Twitter and wonder if it is showing the society of tomorrow. Fanzine writers were/are often looking for some kind of engagement with the world, and a recognition that they have produced something worthy of notice. People who write Twitter and Facebook posts are looking for the same thing, but for rather shorter pieces of work. We send out a photo or maybe just a phrase and then look for people to comment upon it. It's an engagement with other people and provokes some kind of response. It does provoke very fast responses and so very quickly begins to train us in the things we post.

Writing a fanzine is a longer job which can provoke responses, but there's enough gap between the production of the zine, the responses and the reposting of those responses that we're not being groomed by the medium.

I see a future where we feel compelled to post several times a day, and feel dissatisfied if we don't get a certain level of response. As a result of this, we will veer toward the sort of postings that guarantee a response. Most of our postings will have a pseudo-political bent. There will be some sort of cause we're espousing and we encourage others to espouse along with us. They will, of course, be terribly controversial causes such as, isn't being horrible a bad thing and isn't being nice something we should all get behind? Hurrah for peace for nice things and down with all that bad stuff. We will put personal things in there, some sex and some angst. So, the ideal post is political, personal, guilt-ridden and salacious. Soon every post will contain all these elements, and any posts that doesn't will get almost no response at all. The medium will have trained us to all follow the same path. The ideal post will be something along the lines of, "Cop victimized me for showing my same-sex partner how much I loved him. OK, I was giving him a blow job in a public place, but we'd just had an argument and we were trying to make up, and then this cop came along and called us such horrible names, and now I'm so embarrassed that I can't eat and may starve to death. I don't think it's right that this fascist scum can victimize us for demonstrating our love. Wave the rainbow flag for us to show your solidarity."

Some day all posts/fanzines will be like this.

"Share if you agree?" I'm not so sure this is the future as it is the present. In the future, people might just be tired of all that BS. Or maybe they will have moved on to an even shallower medium, that limits your message to eight characters? Whither the general public goes, I feel that Facebook has done fanzine fandom quite a bit of harm, though it seems to have gone largely unnoticed. Fanzine fans who once wrote letters or articles now stay in touch in one of four or five fannish groups, that permit impulsive outbursts of trivia, an infinite number of noncommittal links, and instant gratification. These same fanzine fans often haven't locced a fanzine – and helped keep the wheels greased – in years.

milt stevens, miltstevens@earthlink.net

In *Broken Toys* #32, you begin by "Taking Stock." Once begun, a fanzine takes on a life of its own. The concept is related to a battle plan never surviving contact with the enemy. Your readers aren't the enemy, but they can push you this way and that. If you say something really controversial, the letter column may eat the rest of the zine.

*Some of those 1970s zines, like Don-o-Saur and Title, seemed to be nothing **but** letter columns!*

I tried doing a general circulation perzine ages ago, but it didn't last anything like 30 issues. In fact it only lasted six issues. Initially, I thought doing a perzine would be an easier way of getting fanzines than trying to respond to all of them individually. I found I had many ideas, but most of them didn't usually flow together into long articles. In the end, I obviously decided letterhacking was the easier alternative.

So why fanzines at all? Let's see, creating things improves your feeling of self-worth. Playing with words is fun. Doing stuff promotes your status in your peer group. You get to meet all sorts of

interesting people. It gives you something additional to collect. When I look at all these reasons, the activity seems almost reasonable.

Since I became involved in science fiction at a ridiculously early age, I never developed much collectorism for much else. I did have a stamp collection when I was in grade school. That was the only case of my father and I sharing a hobby interest. My father would have been interested in those old car coins you describe. He was a trufan in old car fandom. Some old car fans are active collectors. Collecting automobiles can get to be very expensive very rapidly.

Although I had read some paperback SF that my Dad had left around the house, and loved Star Trek on TV, I don't think I was aware of it as a genre until I was at least 18 or 19. After that, I became a fanatic SF fan ... but my late start seems to have lead to an early disenchantment, as well as leaving me plenty of interest in other sorts of collecting.

Thinking about collectorism, I wonder how Bruce Pelz would have approached the age of electronic fanzines. Would he have needed his own personal copies of eFanzines.com and Fanac.org? Even if he didn't need them, would he have acquired them anyway?

Maybe Bruce would have started his own on-line archive ... Bruce.com, or maybe The Pelz Dispenser.com

Speaking of WWII memorabilia, my father has a \$1 silver certificate overprinted "Territory of Hawaii." That was done in case the Hawaiian Islands had fallen to the Japanese. The Japanese wouldn't have been able to reintroduce all of the currency from Hawaii back into the continental United States. In a box somewhere in the garage, I still have that stamp collection I mentioned. As part of the collection, I have some Japanese occupation of India stamps. The Japanese advance planning group got a little ahead of themselves.

I don't have any of those, but I have quite a bit of paper money that the Japanese printed for their occupations of Malaysia, Singapore, Burma and the Philippines. At first, I couldn't figure out what it was – paper money denominated in Pesos, written in English, and showing a portrait of palm trees with coconuts! It sank it that it could only be McArthur's lost prefecture! I also have occupation money printed for use in Japan by the US.

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Received the emailed copy of *Broken Toys* #32 a couple of days ago, on 4 November as a matter of fact. I am tempted to snidely remark that it was a day of double infamy here in the States, but I won't. Here's a question I've been meaning to ask for most of this year: why do you always send along two separate emails with the attached files? The first copy of the zine always arrives just fine, why are you immediately sending along a second copy? Just curious.

People who have more than one e-mail address without their name in it ... and they wonder why I send them more than one copy?

I think fans tend to make too much of Halloween when it comes to their fanzines and Net postings, but that's just my personal opinion. If Halloween is a major social event, with parties, gatherings,

fancy decorations and the like, I can see chortling over it. I have a friend, the president of the OTRadio club, and a talented amateur magician, who views Halloween as the most important holiday of the year. He and his wife decorate the house, and the yard, and enlist the neighbor on the near side to turn the whole area into Halloween Central for the entire north-east. His Halloween parties are legendary. They attract about a hundred and fifty people in full costume each time, many coming from far distances to enjoy the scene, discuss old movies, watch bad horror movies on five separate TV sets, and in general go nuts discussing Halloween and creepy media stuff. Occasionally some minor league splatter movie stars will attend the fests.

I do not go to those, because the distance is a bit too far for me to feel comfortable negotiating the return trip late at night, plus I don't necessarily mix well at parties anyway. Most modern horror movies also gross me out.

I've always liked Halloween as a kid's holiday, but have had little experience of it as an adult. I know some adults refused to give Halloween up as they grew older, and throw elaborate costume parties. But I've never been to one myself, other than a couple thrown by Bakka, the SF store in Toronto, back in the 1970s. They were affairs full of strangers and not too appealing to me. Nor do I equate horror films with Halloween. For me, it's all about atmosphere, not gore and violence. It should be a time when troubled spirits walk the earth, not when all-too-real axe killers stalk victims.

The holiday I really don't understand is Thanksgiving. I grew up with it in Canada when it was nothing. Your family had turkey, and that was about it. There were no movies about the urgent need to get home for the day, no parades, no parties, no hoopla, no nothing. Somehow, it's grown into a major event behind my back, though.

Halloween around here this year was a big nothing, again. I have had no trick-or-treaters for the past five years, but a new family moved in down the road, with grammar-school-age kiddies, and I heard the guy with the two young girls at the corner house down the other side was going to let his girls go out in costume this year so I stocked up on candy, and waited, and waited, and waited ... Nobody showed up. Just what I didn't need, five bags of assorted miniature candy treats to crush the new diet flat.

I don't know why you are worried that your Halloween fiction is going to run a bit long. Just add a few more pages to the next *Toys* issue and run it anyway. Are you limited in the number of pixels you are allowed to post each issue? I sometimes receive journals and research material via email that runs more than a hundred pages long. Unless your internet provider is being nasty I can't see why moving an issue up from 28-31 pages to 48-60 pages would be a big deal at all. But whatever you do, please don't break up a seven-thousand-word story into two parts. The tale isn't long enuf to justify that, and weird fantasy adventures are best read in one setting.

What I was mostly worried about was delay. Although I also preferred to keep a "regular" issue to no more than 30 or 32 pages at most, I probably wouldn't have been able to if I included the fiction. The preference is just that ... not a rationale. Some people's mailboxes do balk at e-mails containing files that get too large, but it's not probable that a fairly plain, text-oriented issue of even 100 pages would amount to a problem.

No chance of my splitting the fiction in two, relax... It'll all be in the next issue. The only uncertainty is whether the letter column or anything else will be in number 33 too, or be held over until December.

Your tactics for getting fans to respond to your zine seem to be working. Yours is pretty much the only e-zine I bother to LOC, but I think much of that is due to the fact that you often reply back to the letters I send. The main purpose of producing a fanzine (at least in my opinion), is to increase interaction among creators and readers. I always reply to letters of comment I receive for my own fanzines, and I am usually a bit disappointed when many other faneds ask for LOCs but never bother to reply back. I guess I'm a left-over fossil of Fandoms Past, where communication among people with common interests was the heart of the hobby. Today I suppose it's all come down conventions and after-movie parties, and of course, endless blogs detailing every trivial routine event in every person's supremely boring life. Not that I'm bitter or anything.

It's not that Facebook sucks because it provides instant communication ... it sucks because it seems to encourage sloppy writing, shallow exchanges and the sort of minute detailing of every-day trivia that you complain about. I could also add that the pressure for political correctness is an order of magnitude greater than what it is in fanzines. Do we really need to constantly remind each other that racism is ignorant, that women shouldn't be raped, and that rich greedy fucks are rich greedy fucks?

Very interesting article about your collection of the plastic trading coins from bags of potato chips. I must admit I was totally unfamiliar with these tokens, and the idea that such things would be handed out in ten-cent packages of chips also seemed strange to me. I suppose the profit potential of selling small bags of chips must be sufficient to make this kind of promotion worthwhile, although I wonder. Maybe it was a lost-leader publicity ploy to keep the name of the chip companies before each family with a youngster dedicated enuf to collect the things. You didn't mention if the tokens were also given out in the larger, family-sized bags of chips, but I assume they must have been.

I think they were... in fact, you may even have gotten two or more. But I was ten or twelve-years-old and didn't buy many huge bags of potato chips at the time. Thirty-nine cents was a lot of money, too!

I'm used to trinkets and premiums given away in cereal boxes. The advantage from the manufacturer's viewpoint is that a box of Chocolate Frosted Sugar Bombs (the cartoon Calvin's favorite cereal) or whatever costs a lot more than a dime, and the kiddies had to eat the whole box up before Mom was going to spring for another one. Tons of processed wheat, oats and rice were shoveled into the gapping mouths of youngsters so they could get the latest Pep Pin or Space Patrol Coin or Magic Viewer or whatever the current gimmick was.

Then, of course, after the cereal was gone, often the box top (with a quarter added on) could get you some other trashy plastic gimcrack that would thrill you for a week or two before it broke or got lost. I still have some of the premiums I sent off for, and frankly, I wish I had a bunch more. But at this late point in my life I'm not about to go out searching for them or spending big money to buy them in the name of bogus nostalgia. The memories are usually better than the actual solid objects in these cases, but I am truly glad that you have gotten so much belated joy from your collection of plastic coins.

I remember a few prizes in breakfast cereal, but they didn't impress. They were usually something like some snap-apart plastic pieces you put together to make Tony the Tiger with swinging arms and legs, or a propeller gizmo you spun to make fly five feet before falling to the ground. Cracker Jacks prizes were usually even worse than that by the early 1960s.

My own Bucket List used to include things like setting foot on the planet Mars, or writing the Great American Comic Book Saga, but these days it's more focused on avoiding medical problems, and somehow managing to sell most of the accumulated crap in my warehouse. Sometimes I worry what will happen to all that stuff and my assorted collections of science fiction/dime novels/comics/OTRadio and other things if I drop dead. My brother is a prominent physician, a specialist who makes more money in a week than I make in a whole year. I can't imagine him giving a shit about any of this stuff. He will probably toss it all into dumpsters, sell the house, add it to the money in my bank account, then forget the whole thing. Just a minor speed bump in his very busy life.

Most people have no values! They look at a unique collection of shotgun shells or bunny slippers and only see "junk." They throw it away and spend their money on a lampshades made from a slightly more attractive (and expensive) material. No values...

From the lettercol, I second Eric Mayer's suggestion that you write an article about the most disgusting art requests you've ever received. I think you could have a ball with the subject. You might even consider adding some nondescript illos, from the Net as well as your own, with appropriate black strips across some parts of some scenes to make the write-up more personal. Really, give this some serious consideration.

*It's a thought. Although the really disturbing jobs go to other artists, who have reputations for doing that sort of thing. I don't. Of course, what I **do** have a reputation for might seem peculiar enough.*

I believe Robert Bloch's "A Way of Life" has been reprinted several times. I'm too lazy to get up and try to track the anthologies down tho. Ian Watson's "The World Science Fiction Convention of 2080" has not been reprinted, to the best of my knowledge, and certainly shouldn't ever be reprinted, since it has plot and logic holes big enuf to drive a tractor thru. This story got the cover illo for the Oct. 1980 *F&SF* issue and I still can't figure out why. Maybe it was the cutesy in-group thing that made the editor buy the story in the first place, despite its obvious problems, but to run a cover on it as well? I have to wonder what kind of drugs were being passed around at the home office that month.

Enjoyed the issue. Looking forward to the next one. With the spooky Halloween story, right?

I doubt it's terribly spooky ... humorous, yes, and hopefully atmospheric, but not scary.

dave heren, tyrbolo@comcast.net

I like your new upbeat attitude better than the old gloom. While it was justified, people like to see others do well.

That's more or less how I see it. The gloom only reflected the reality of my life at the time, but things have been getting more or less better, so the gloom has been lifting...

Oddly, the collection of things doesn't seem to be much about the things we collect. Whatever strikes the fancy can generate the necessary burst of enthusiasm, which pushes you off onto the slippery slope to "must have."

That was how I got into collecting Hot Wheels. I bought a few at first, because they were the exceptions that were well made and actually looked like a real car. But then I got suckered into buying more and more, until I realized that, cheap as they were, I was spending real money on that junk, and finally got rid of them. I still have a collection in the same 1/64 scale, but they are better make ... precious few of the remaining 1/64 cars are Mattell's crappy Hot Wheels.

I do appreciate the reviews, far too many are afraid to cast aspersions on the artistry of commercial products. This tends to guarantee that a lot of crap is produced in imitative mode.

Since you enjoy a nasty, sarcastic movie review, there's one in this issue, at the end of the letter column! Bon appetite!

r-laurraine tutihasi, laurraine@mac.com

I realized I'm a bit behind in my reading. There's just too much to do and too little time.

I've even heard that people who do not read books say that. But, if they aren't reading books, I can't imagine what they do with the time. Crossword puzzles, maybe? Obsess over their lawns?

I'm writing to comment on your opening article, "A Life Misspent". It's interesting that you feel that you may have tried to accomplish more than you had the talent for. I see nothing wrong with that. Me, on the other hand, I feel I never tried to live up to my potential. According to my parents, I tested higher on the school intelligence tests than my sister. For some reason this made my parents think that I didn't need any encouragement. The result of that was that I "rested on my laurels." I sailed through elementary school and junior high and lost any ambition by the time I got to high school. I didn't do too badly there, either. But I never tried to *be* anything. I settled for a career that was somewhat satisfying and made a fairly good living. I've had a comfortable life, and my husband is a very good companion for my sunset years. I feel a bit guilty about not having tried harder. I would like to get back to art, but I never seem to have the time. I'm spending a lot of time these days reading books for review and writing the reviews. I'm also singing in a church choir. I stay fairly active in fandom, attending one or two conventions a year and writing for two APAe.

steve jeffery, srjeffery@aol.com

Looking back over the last 31 issues (since Jan 2012 - which is a pretty impressive mailing schedule, when judged against most fanzines that aren't written by Chris Garcia), you wrote "with one or two exceptions, they had no shame and never wrote." Well, that's no surprise. When have fans ever been noted for their sense of shame, whether it's failing to respond to fanzines, dressing in silly costumes, or wrecking hotel rooms? Well, maybe not so much the latter any more, though there

seems to be a history of it in reports of room parties in days past.

You've discovered my secret plan ... to make Chris Garcia look lazy by comparison. What I forgot is that if your face isn't familiar at conventions, nobody cares who you are or what you do.

As for fans wanting to talk about "their damned books," that hardly comes as a surprise either, at least in my corner of fandom. I am still primarily a reader, although SF is now more part of a broader diet rather than the dominant genre. This might be part of growing up (though Vikki disagrees that I show any signs of growing up, gracefully or otherwise, and point to my collection of Winnie the Pooh and Asterix books as evidence. Unfair, I say.)

I distrust people who claim they don't read as if it's something to be proud of. Ditto for people who appear to have no hobbies. My first thought when I see a picture of one of those austere minimalist house interiors is, "but where do they keep all their books?" Are their lives as bleak and austere as their taste in design and furnishings? Maybe all their books, CDs and films are sitting on a hard drive tucked inside one of the walls, but what about toys and collectables?

Or in a secret dungeon under the parlor, where their Uncle Fester also does his experiments?

This thought came back to me again while watching a program about the current Samuel Johnson non-fiction book prize, where various authors and critic were interviewed about the coming results, every one of them in a study or office that was lined in packed, and often jumbled and overflowing, floor-to-ceiling bookcases. (I'm always tempted, in these cases, to hit the freeze-frame button and try to read some of the titles, though I never manage to decipher many of them. Maybe I need HDTV.) But even if, as I suspect, our choice of books barely overlaps, I can relate to them as my sort of people. "Books do furnish a life," someone once said – or more likely wrote – and a life without a lot of books (or music, or films, come to that) seems a very poor sort of life indeed.

Like Eric Mayer, I was another skinny kid who was always picked last for team games. As Terry Pratchett described one of his characters (Mort, I think), at that age I was angular, uncoordinated and appeared to be "constructed almost entirely out of knees." I suspect there's a high proportion of us in fandom. Piggies or Ralphs who secretly wanted to be Jack in Golding's *Lord of the Flies*.

I don't think I was quite either, but being on the move all the time meant I was unclassifiable, and therefore to be squeezed into the role of either Ralph or Piggy by default. Sometimes I was so confusing that other kids just kept their distance.

Vikki worked in a clinic allied to a homeless shelter. While I think you are being overly harsh and judgmental in labeling all of them as dysfunctional (some are just unfortunate or victims of circumstances outside their control), I have to admit there is a high proportion who are drinkers, drug users, abusive or violent, or all three, and keep getting barred from the shelter and end up back on the street for breaking the rules or threatening and assaulting staff or other residents. There is almost nothing you can do for this group because they are unable, or refuse, to adapt or moderate their behavior even for the offer of free food and housing.

*Perhaps, but what I was thinking is that a great many people – such as myself – are dysfunctional in the sense that we don't fit into a nine-to-five environment and don't gladly defer to the authority of others. There's nothing wrong with us, but as a result we tend to be poor employees, and the fault is placed squarely on **us** as though the right combination of pills, or pep talk, would cure us of being night-owls and loners, and gainful employment would no longer stress us beyond our design specs. This is a utilitarian view of "dysfunctional," of course. If we cannot use you, you must be broken.*

I seem to have missed out or mislaid issue 31. It certainly seems to have sparked a lively letter column in this issue. I'll have to look for it on e-fanzines.

Unfortunately, many people somehow missed getting number 31. I'm still sending copies out to those who inform me they've missed it. Pity ... I thought it was a very good issue.

[You] set me thinking about your attempt to revisit furry fandom at the Islington meet and finding you had almost nothing in common with the current crop of fans.

When I first discovered fandom back in the late 1980s it was like a vast and somewhat overwhelming *terra incognita* and I felt – like a lot of first time fans, I suppose – that I wanted to explore all of it. I pretty soon discovered the notion of fans being one big happy family, buttressing each other against the mundane world was a myth. There were numerous camps and cliques, eying each other with mutual suspicion and incomprehension. Science fiction versus fantasy, readers and writers versus costumers and filkers, fanzine fans versus gamers. Trufans (not that I could tell you what a trufan was in those days, or probably even now) versus just about everyone else.

I've wasted a lot of words with certain fans about whether fandom was inclusive or exclusive. A person's outlook on fandom often seems to reflect their earliest experiences with it. Some fans I've known believe that they were shut out of the old boy's club and that consequently the only fair and just fandom would have to admit everyone – even people who have never read an SF book, whose real interest is Tibetan folk tales or Spanish photo caption comics. Other fans have experienced the openness to fandom toward anyone of intelligence and creativity, and see no reason to ruin it with nitwits and pedestrian tastes.

The truth is a little of both. The fandom I grew up in included a wide variety of interests and close relations between the SCA, Mythopoeic Society, the local SF club and to a lesser extent the Trekkies. But we viewed the Dr.Who groups and media types as fixated on one thing, to the exclusion of others. While one of our own might be interested in SF movies or gaming, they were also able to talk about mainstream SF. In fact, among our core group, conversation strayed from SF into linguistics, medieval history, philosophy, rock music, esoteric cooking, travel, map-making, Amerindian culture, or anything else that someone could make sound interesting. What we had no room for were the sort of fan who was interested in nothing but dressing up as Luke Skywalker, could take about nothing but the Star Wars universe, and was under the delusion that everything George Lucas thought up was original ... and genius. Such an individual would last about 30 seconds in our group before he bored us ... and we bored him. Then he'd go away grouching about how elitist we were, and how closed fandom was to new people. It never occurred to them that they weren't fitting in, even a little bit.

I had friends with interests in just about every camp (divisions weren't quite as clear cut as I've drawn it, more a Venn diagram of overlapping Venn diagrams, and the interesting people tended to inhabit

the fuzzy borders) and being a typical middle-class wishy-washy liberal, I tended to bounce between them rather than commit to one sub-genre. I suppose the nearest I came to planting my standard was fanzine fandom, although with digressions into the sercon side of SF fandom with the BSFA committee and book reviewing.

Somewhere in there I got involved for a few years in Goth fandom. That was a whole something else, the outer fringes of which could be quite unsettling. I suspect if I went back there now I'd find it quite alienating. The same sort of thing happened with horror fandom when it started to morph from eerie supernatural fiction to slasher gore.

You're probably bit a bit hard (as you admit) on poor Zelazny. I don't think he was alone or atypical of the time. It was a period when part of sf was desperately trying to shuck off its Buck Rogers pulp origins and engage with the times with a claim to being another form of serious literature. Unfortunately the times it was trying to engage with were the hippy-dippy fag-end of the '60s and '70s and all the baggage of mystical claptrap that came with it. SF/fantasy fell in with all this perhaps a bit too readily (for a literature that prided itself on hard-headed scientific rationalism) and left a lot of people looking rather silly from this end of the telescope. Not just Zelazny, but Dick, Heinlein, Frank Herbert, much of the *New Worlds* movement in Britain ... a long list of people who probably now look back later and wince.

No one will admit it, but they all wore bell-bottomed pants once!

I'm as guilty as the rest. I had books on astrology, tarot, Persig's *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*. (I tried to find that the other day after Radio 4 broadcast an adaptation of the book as their Sunday Afternoon Drama. I must have donated it back to a charity shop.)

I remember Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance! It was pressed upon me by some of the more sensitive and arty types in my circle. I read it and hardly remember what it was about. Was it about anything, except roaming about the country as a young, bisexual, schizophrenic biker, talking to the goofy people you meet along the way? Sort of what Samuel R. Delany might imagine he would have done if he hadn't taken up writing... I got rid of the book decades ago. The Greening of America was another foolish book of its time.

I know what you mean about "poetic" writing, though. I opened a review once with "X is a writer and poet. That is both the strength of weakness of this novel." I think it was a book by Catherynne M. Valente. Gorgeously written, full of striking visual images, and almost no coherent plot. At the other end of the scale is someone like the late Graham Joyce, who had a deceptively simple style (very hard to pull off), where the words just seem to flow off the page.

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I just got around to reading *BT 31* last night. I very much enjoyed it. Thank you.

A few things. I could relate to your story about furry fandom even though I haven't spent any time with that group myself. My own travails are a bit different but close enough so that I think you could relate.

I went to the New York comic convention in October. It was a huge thing, taking up all or almost all of the Jacob Javitts Center. I had pre-purchased a ticket and I still had to wait almost exactly an hour in line. But there were a few other problems – not so much with the convention, but with me, and my place in fandom, the loose organization that I have been even more loosely associated with for about 45 years. In short, fandom and I are not getting along the way we used to.

The convention floor was huge, but the number of tables that actually sold comic books was probably no more than there were in 1975. In 1975, admission would have been under ten dollars, probably *well* under that. In October it was about \$100. Even most of the tables dealing in comics didn't deal in what I am interested in. Now, I don't expect anyone to design a convention for my exclusive benefit, but there comes a point where I have to ask myself why I am there. The answer – I went down to see a friend who moved to NY at the time of the comic convention. It is a good policy to visit friends, even if only once a year or so. But trying to wake up to this, the modern Comicon is no longer for me. There is just not much left for me to do down there. Next time I visit my friend in NY, I may use the opportunity to go to other places he has told me about which can be fun, and can only be found in New York.

And it occurs to me that I *did* meet two interesting people there, just by hanging around. If someone is as old as me, *and* at the NY convention, there is probably a reason for their being there. I met a former editor of *Heavy Metal*, and the granddaughter of Malcolm Wheeler-Nicholson, the original founder of DC comics. She claimed to be the only one left of his lineage who cared at all about what went on with DC comics.

I met a grand-daughter of the Baron von Richthofen, once, at an airshow. She enjoyed the attention, but I don't think she shared her illustrious ancestor's devotion either to Kaiser or Fatherland. She lived in Canada, and I think may have been somewhat amused that a Canadian may have shot him down.

And thanks for the perspective on WWI and the interesting comparison to the Civil War. My father was actually a Canadian soldier at the time of WWI but he never fought. It does give me a link, though.

I have a grandfather on my mother's side who I never knew, who was in the Canadian Expeditionary Force and, I think, invalidated out. I believe he had been gassed. I own his CEF and Reunion badges.

And, also, thank you for the commentary on Roger Zelazny. I read several of his books when they came out because I was reading a lot of stuff and I heard how good he was. I think I really liked to read most of the SF writers because I liked SF conceptually. Many of the writers weren't that good. I had to start *Dune* two or three times (it was a long time ago) and get over the first hundred pages before it started to mean something to me. I read *The Sheep Look Up*, forewarned that it was opaque, and was told by SF fans to avoid Heinlein after *Fear No Evil*. I listened. I can say it here for the first time – *I didn't finish the Foundation Trilogy* because, more or less, it was a waste of time. I was forty-two when I was reading it. I haven't read an SF book since I was given an eight hundred pager for my 50th birthday and spent four years reading it in airports and on buses. That's how bad it was and how little it spoke to me. Nonetheless, my last ten years have been happy ones.

I've puzzled by Dune's popularity myself. I saw it as a hash of old pulp formulas that turns into hippy-dippy, Philip K. Dick shit at the end. At one point I considered whether or not the long novel was a concealed history of science-fiction, showing its evolution from sword-buckling adventure, to technocratic puzzle-solving, to druggy psychedelia, to environmental correctness. But nobody seems to see any merit in my thesis. But I have always been fond of the Foundation Trilogy. Obviously, not for the fine writing style or brilliantly realized characters, but for something that seemed like a grand sweep of Gibbonesque history when I first read it at the age of 19 or 20. I could not recommend it to a contemporary 20-year-old.

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It has taken a little time, but now *Broken Toys 32* has made it to the top of my loccing list, and I will try to write up a decent loc for you.

Halloween came ... and left. We did have a party to go to, but it was cold and damp, and an evening at home is always an opportunity to write or create or get caught up on things. There's never enough time for everything, and sometimes, no time for anything.

I do get a lot of fanzines, and have read almost everything I get. I have always figured that the least I can do for a fanzine is write a letter of comment. Some disagree with that, and that's fine. Some think my letters are shit, and that's fine too. At least I make the effort to write, and I've gotten some good words, and some trophies and certificates out of it. They're meant to make you feel good about what they do, and they generally work. I'm usually on the outside looking in, anyway. Yes, fanzine fandom has changed, but there are times I think we've got to spend so much time just making a living that fanzine writing comes along when you've got time only, and I've had to become expert at time management to get caught up with all the zines I do get.

Bucket lists? There are things I'd like to do, but I am at the age where a bucket list is simply an invitation to disappointment. I will enjoy the accomplishment of what I can do, instead of the anger of what I can't. Or, can't afford. I do remember the little plastic disks Shirriff put in their potato chips, and tried to collect them. I also tried to collect the few comic books I could get my hands on, but my mother, rest her soul ... my mother had the attitude of "you're not reading those comic books, so you must be done with them, and they can be thrown out." That's where my plastic disks went, and my comic books, too. I do remember also the little ceramic items you'd find in the Red Rose tea, and at least we still have a lot of them.

One has to be realistic about composing a bucket list. Its one thing to want a Daisy BB gun, just like the one you had as a kid, or to see Disney World. It's another thing entirely to want to fly over Mt. Everest with your bicycle, just like in E.T., to raise unicorns in Never Never Land, or to win a Hugo for Best Fanzine.

I bet your mother never threw out the dumb stuff she probably collected. Can you imagine her indignation if she came home and found all her dress patterns and knitting books had been thrown

out because "you made that sweater three years ago – obviously you were through with that stuff, so I threw it out while you weren't home."

Steven must be your best friend to keep you going and be by your side when times are tough. He doesn't come to our pub nights very often, and we enjoy his company when he does. He's always got good stories to tell.

He's up there in the top three or four, no doubt of it. He has little spare time, though, and to put it very simply, he likes fans and shares some of their interests, but isn't into the whole fannish lifestyle thing. I steal his stories shamelessly....

It's interesting to see how wide and deep fandom is, and completely outside our own little corner of it. Explaining furry fandom isn't the easiest thing to do or understand. I remember the SF needlepoint society Tanith Lee set up many years ago, the fuss over the Trek zine being nominated for the Best Fanzine Hugo, and now explaining Steampunk to people unfamiliar with the term. Fandom resembles magic in that it not only larger than you imagine, it is larger than you can imagine. If there was a list of all interests encompassed by fandom, we'd question some, and openly disagree with others.

I don't even think it's meaningful to talk about fandom in that sense. Once we begin calling chili cook-offs, robot wars and rock climbing "fandom" what we really mean is "hobby." As a culture, we've been converted into hobbyists, one and all. This is probably a good thing, but not the sort of haven for misfits and pseudo-intellectuals that "fandoms" used to be.

Bill Plott says that being in journalism is not much fun any more ... it may be a profession for the idealist. Not long ago, I met Hana Gartner. She was one of the hosts of the news magazine *The Fifth Estate* for many years, and she is now retired. I greeted her, shook her hand, and said that I'd been a J-grad, and had hoped to become the next Lloyd on television. (Lloyd Robertson is about my height, 5'4".) She smiled and said that I was lucky I didn't get what I wanted, for it is a hard profession, and it's only the lucky one who actually makes a living at it. I wonder of some of the experienced journalists wonder if they have frittered their lives away.

I have not seen the animated features you mention in the last article, and don't intend to. And then, there's lots of really good animated features I probably should see, but probably won't. So much to see, read, watch and do, and so little time and money. It's the way of the world, *c'est la vie*. As I get older, it's getting tougher to care.

Time to fire it off! I have some data entry and database editorial work to do, and I am getting paid well to do it, but one fine day, I may actually find a place I like to work at, and who likes me enough to pay me well and want me to stay. Or, I will win 6/49, whereupon I will never darken an office door again. Thank you for this, wrote a decent letter, I think, and hope you find it the same. Take care, see you when the next *Toys* arrive.

THOR ABOUT THOMETHING!

Thor: The Dark World is second of the Thor movies, not counting his appearance in the first Avengers movie.

It's good eye-candy, sure, but I found the backstory about stripping a super-weapon from an evil Dark Elf Lord in a huge apocalyptic battle, before the current age of Odin's rule, then losing it to be eventually rediscovered on Earth, sounded suspiciously like stripping Sauron of the One Ring in the last big battle of the Third Age in *Lord of the Rings*. But nobody ever accused Marvel comics of originality, eh?

Beyond that bit of plagiarism, the movie contains a lot super-powered punches and magic hammer blows and stuff blowing up with exciting fireballs. This time London gets trashed, rather than New York. But all the action and special effects are entirely pointless. We've seen it all before, in eleven other Marvel superhero movies, and it somehow just doesn't matter anymore.

And, of course, nothing is settled at the end of the story. A new Dark Lord, or something like it, will be found for the next movie, and the history of the entire universe will be re-written – again – to explain where he came from. Once again, it will be necessary to restore the status quo after 120 minutes, with the querulous, one-eyed Odin still on the throne as sole autocrat of the Nine Realms of the known universe, and his two royal brats still squabbling over who is the Rightful Heir. For reasons never made clear, this is somehow better than being ruled over by a *different* autocrat, one with a less Nordic complexion, beady eyes and a wicked leer.

The chemistry that made the first *Thor* movie work is missing in its sequel. We know the character now, and there is nothing to work out between his lofty, Norse-god destiny and his new awareness as a more earthly Everyman. In the sequel we see nothing of him in jeans and sweatshirt with beer stains, but always in his anachronistic god-armour, toting his all-powerful hammer.

Speaking of hammers, the science of this film is plain ridiculous, even by Marvel standards. Why are people still fighting with swords and daggers if they have projectile weapons and ray guns? Why do they wear armour that makes the brasswork on a circus steam calliope look conservative? Does everyone *walk*? Didn't you see how huge the city of Asgard was? Yet I saw no cars or public conveyances of any kind. Or telephones of any description. They still seem to roast joints of meat over an open fire. Yet they can teleport to Earth and erect force-field defenses.

And how did Loki pull that switch at the end? I admit that I didn't see it coming, but now that I've seen it, I don't know where it came from, either. Obviously, we are expected to watch the *next* movie to find out. And the next one after that, and the one after that, and... Eye-candy these movies may be, but I for one can't live on a diet of intellectually empty calories.

the company i keep

When I was a much younger fan (of 40), I began to collect plastic figures. I had always had a few such things even as a kid – plastic soldiers of all kinds, display figures for my model cars and planes, space men, a scuba diver propelled by baking soda, Aurora kits that I assembled and painted myself, some easily broken Disney figurines that came with Lipton’s tea and no doubt other things that no longer come to mind.

Most or all of those ended up in the trash, unfortunately. Some were chewed up by my mother’s dogs, others I broke myself, but on the whole they seemed to lost all relevance to me by the time I reached the serious, adult age of 18 or 19.



Sexy cat-captain from Disney’s *Treasure Planet*, an otherwise lackluster movie.

Then, at the much younger age of 40, I found myself in the company of people I never really expected to know – animators. Foremost among them was a fellow science fiction fan artist named Marc Schirmeister, who had realized a dream by finding work at Warner Brothers. He made a number of friends there and introduced me to a few of them whenever I was in LA. There was big, bluff Bob Guthrie, ex-Navy and a natural at girly-art. Another was Mike Kazaleh, short and peppery, whose manic comic talent contrasted with his laconic personal delivery. Garrett Ho and Lou Scarborough were another pair I met through Schirm. I was briefly introduced to a background painter named Ron Diaz, and think I may have once met Kent Butterworth or one of the other Warners afternoon cartoon directors. Finally, there was the chance encounter that Schirm and I had with Jay Ward in the street outside his studio.

No, none of this adds up to much, but for a boy of 40 from the sticks (Toronto), it seemed that the society Schirm kept was so elevated that I would not have been surprised if the waiters at the Brown Derby knew him by name, and were in the habit of sweeping him to his favourite table. The reality was, of course, somewhat less glamorous.

Heck, even back home in Toronto, I had some remote contact with the animation industry, through a couple of Sheridan College students. I had even walked into the Nelvana Studios once, asking about a job. (There wasn’t one.)

Perhaps my contact with the profession was small potatoes, but it was a wider world to me.

One thing I learned about the professionals in the field that surprised me was that they all seemed to love toys, particularly cheap figures from the animated films and shows they worked on – the kind you would get with a Happy Meal or at Wendy’s. Every empty inch of their work cubicles would be decorated with little figures of Johnny Bravo, Shrek, Lilo & Stitch, Batman, The Simpsons, Ren &

Stimpy, Pikachu, Darkwing Duck, Aladdin, Bugs, Daffy, Pepé Le Pew, Betty Boop, The Incredibles ... even Mr. Spock. Basically anything. And not all of them cheap. McFarlane toys were a respectable \$10 or \$15 each. Figures from anime or manga also tended to be more expensive, but remained popular.

On the other hand, there were “gallery quality” figures and busts for sale at the Disney and Warners stores, and in many comics shops, that ran into three figures ... but they were anything but toys. I didn’t see a single one of *those* in anyone’s work cubicle.

Seeing other grown men collecting cheap figures from the cartoons and animated movies I loved was all the encouragement I needed to fan an old obsession into flame. Eventually I had cheap plastic figures standing on bookshelves all around the room, and a cardboard banker’s box in the closet that was stuffed with spares and the less interesting examples.

I was helped in this quest by the neighborhood Salvation Army. A few years ago, they had bins of kid’s toys, priced as low as twenty-five cents, and I spent many a happy half-hour shoveling aside the bigger, blockier junk – like broken police cars whose siren no longer flashed, or faded Barney the Dinosaurs with a missing eye – to get to the bottom of the bin where the smaller McDonalds and Burger King toys settled. On a given day, I might go home with several new acquisitions. It was no wonder I ended up with a large box that was full to bursting with small toys.

Inevitably, they began to get in the way. Whenever I wanted to read or reference a book, I first had to clear away the characters from *Chicken Run* or *Sailor Moon* to get at it. If I wanted to play a videotape, I had to remove Alvin & The Chipmunks before I could pull it out. Eventually, I began to alternate between putting most of my toy figures away, and putting even more of them out on display again.

That pendulum swinging one way, then the other, began to make me dizzy. There was a simple answer, fortunately. I went through the box, sorting out what didn’t greatly interest me, and took all the discards back to the Sally Ann.

Later still, I boxed up a lot more and sold them to a convention dealer. I still have a banker’s box of toys, but at least it is less than *half-full* now. Yet my bookshelves are still obstructed by dozens of the best figures that I chose to keep.

How could I ever give up my cherished 8-inch figure of Marks Mothersbaugh in his yellow Devo trash-collector’s uniform? Or the corrupt detective partnership of Sam & Twitch, lovingly depicted in sepia? I have a lovely figure of Motoko Kusanagi, the cyborg *from The Ghost in the Shell*, and an equally lovely Emily from *The Corpse Bride*. Atop one set of shelves is a set of six-inch, articulated figures from *The Muppet Show*, complete with props from the show. Directly behind my computer monitor, I have the Bob & Doug McKenzie *Great White North* display.

At the other end of the scale, I have all four of the toys McDonalds made for *Fraggle Rock*. They are only half-figures, sitting in fanciful vehicles made of radishes, carrots and pickles, but they were also the only *Fraggle Rock* toys I ever had the opportunity to acquire. (There are nicer, German-made figures, but I have never laid eyes on one.) I have all the figures from *Monsters, Inc.*, made by McDonalds, all four of the Beatles from *Yellow Submarine* (with a Yellow Submarine and a Boob), a classic Betty Boop, Alfred E. Newman dressed as Batman, Dr. Evil, several characters from *ReBoot*,

Atomic Betty, the Jetsons in their flying saucer, a 1960's Marx Tinker Bell that I hand-painted, Darth Vader, several different Smurfettes, "The Scream" of Edvard Munch, a charming little Rocky the Flying Squirrel less than two inches tall, a stunning Long John Silver and Captain Amelia from the Disney movie *Treasure Planet*, which were made in the UK ... the cast of characters around me goes on and on.

I confess that I don't see a great many real people on a day-to-day basis. I have my friends, but must twist their arms to visit me only once or twice a month. An entire week can go by in which I see no living person at all – just electric charges across the LEDs of my TV screen. Another option is to go out, which means pushing a damn roller ahead of me, and sitting in it every half-block or so. And all that I gain from this effort is some meaningless babble in Punjabi or Tibetan and a bag of groceries. It just won't do as a social life.

For all that they are just molded polyvinyl chloride and paint, it is the plastic people who are around me most of the time. Any psychologist, holy man or New Age busybody would tell me at great length how wrong this is, but would have no useful advice on how to find better companions. Besides, I've noticed that real-life people come with annoying habits, disagreeable opinions and emotional needs I'm at a loss to meet. It may not be entirely due to a lack of opportunity, then, that Batman and Harley Quinn, the Powerpuff Girls, Buzz Lightyear and Mr. Spock are the company I keep.

