



Broken Toys 39, published on that rarest of days, the 32nd of **May, 2015** by **Taral Wayne**, who calls 245 Dunn Ave. Apt. 2111, Toronto, Ontario, M6K 1S6 home. You can also reach me at Taral@bell.net to commend or condemn. If I haven't sent this issue directly to you by e-mail, you can also download Broken Toys from eFanzines.com, fanac.org, cdnsfzinearchive.org, furaaffinity.net/user/saara and taralwayne.deviantart.com. For those of you who remain snobbish about reading *only* paper fanzines, take a hike! It's not like you *pay* for *BT*... or any other fanzine, either. So you've got some nerve to complain! **Kiddelidivee Books & Art 298**

EDITORIAL MUTTERS

Readers should notice a continual improvement in the general tone of the last two or three issues of *Broken Toys*. I've come through another crisis – this one a crisis of health, rather than finances – and the bowl of cherries that is life is beginning to look as though it is not empty after all. In this overly long issue, I am running three new articles, a review, a reprint and *over 20 pages of locs!*

The first piece, “Out of the Joint,” was written early in the month, when I had only just begun a new regime of medications that had not yet had their full effect. I had also only just begun going out of the apartment on a frequent basis again, and had confronted an unexpected problem ... the sun badly hurt my eyes!

“Fair Day's Drive” more or less continues from where “Out of the Joint” leaves off. By then, the drugs had fully kicked in, and the problem with my eyesight had largely vanished. Likely the repeated exposure to the bright light of the sun helped strengthen my eyes.

“Father of the Bride” is just a bit of reminiscence that ran through my head recently. And “Big Hero Nix” is the reaction I had to the most recent Disney animation, *Big Hero Six*.

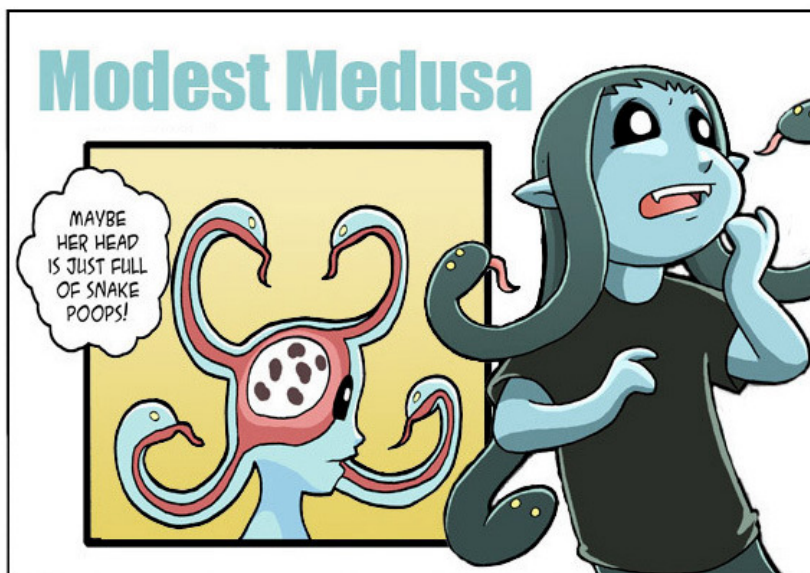
Broken Toys 39 is unfortunately a little late. I have noticed, lately, a slight inertia whenever I begin a new issue, and this time it was worse than ever. For one thing, I haven't been writing a new article every week or so. Instead, I've been putting it off, and when the end of the month swam into view I had to rush to finish one article, and then write the other two pieces practically from cold. I had hinted before that I may end *Broken Toys*, at issue fifty, but I was uncertain that I really meant it. I now think I do mean it. It may not be the end of the zine for good. I can revive it whenever I want, after all. For a while, though, I think I may revert to my less frequent title, *New Toy*, and publish a longer fanzine only a couple of times a year. I suppose we'll have to see in April 2016, when *Broken Toys 50* is due. Appropriately, it will be the April Fools' issue.

OUT OF THE JOINT

Me and Traveling Matt have been getting along just fine. Oh, we've had our little differences, such as the time I wanted to go along with the guys and grab a bite to eat, but none of the nearby pubs or sushi bars had an entrance ramp or any other sort of wheelchair access. I had to go home and pout by myself. But the rest of the time, the two of us have been wheeling along together, eating up the miles as we seek the limits of Traveling Matt's range.

The most recent trip took me all the way from my Parkdale home to the corner of Yonge & Bloor, the very heart of Toronto ... a distance of about 7 ½ kilometers. That's about 9 miles, round-trip. For an electrically powered chair, that seems phenomenal! Especially since, according to the meter, I used less than half the charge in the battery to cover that distance. And even more remarkably, I can travel to and from downtown not only while resting comfortably on my butt the whole way, I can do it at almost twice the walking speed of most pedestrians! In fact, I have to be careful not to run them down.

The reason I want to go downtown is that on Saturday there is a one-day *free* comics fair at the central reference library downtown. I want to attend – not out of any overwhelming desire to geek it up, surrounded by millions of dollars' worth of graphic novels, collector's editions, action figures, toys, games, t-shirts, mouse pads, key chains, blinking buttons, etc. – but there's someone I'd like to meet. An artist named Jake Richmonds, whose charming, humorous on-line comic, "Modest Medusa,"¹ appeals to me. Anyone who can write about a six-year-old "Medusa" addicted to Chocodiles who climbs up out of his toilet, disrupts his household and then takes over his life, must think like a crazy man ... and I like it.



Apart from that, it's another excuse to get out of the house.

¹ <http://www.modestmedusa.com/>

Before Saturday, though, I wanted to see whether or not Traveling Matt could drive that far. I was pretty sure it could, but why wait until Saturday to discover that I was being over-optimistic? It was better to know Matt's limitations before I tried. And the only way to know that was ... to try.

Aside from that, I've been going to a lot of doctor's appointments, filling prescriptions, grocery shopping and fulfilling other household needs. For instance, you have no idea how old and ragged and disreputable the shorts I wore around the apartment had gotten. The elastic waistband elastic was so shot that there were down around my ankles as often around my waist. I was terrified of answering the door in them. I might as well just met a visitor in my briefs. So I've bought two new pair of stylish fleece shorts, with elastic waists that are actually elastic.

It's rather nice having the freedom of the neighborhood again. I don't know how I kept ahead of deep depression for the last couple of years without my mobility. Maybe I didn't... In any case, I find there is one drawback to my new freedom. The sun.

I think I'm no longer used to it. Even in an overcast, the glare is almost as bad, but the naked sun at eye level in a clear blue sky is the worst. First, I just can't look at it, or even in the general direction of the sun. Next, my eyes begin to water. Then they involuntarily close, or refuse to focus. Finally, I'm half-blinded, and desperate lest I drive my chair off the curb or run over a small kitten. Maybe even over the foot of some big bozo who is too drunk to make allowances for a guy in a wheelchair. I've had one near-encounter. Fortunately, he wasn't drunk, and I was able to demonstrate that I was avoiding an unseen step in the sidewalk that I couldn't drive down.

At one point I was wearing two pairs of sunglasses at once. I couldn't see the sidewalk or the curbs, but the sun still stabbed into my brain like a light- saber stuck on max!

Bad as that is, coming home when my eyes are overloaded with sunlight means they will be sore for the rest of the day. Spending more than a few minutes with the computer monitor is out of the question, limiting my options enormously.

My doctor says to try a cold compress. There's nothing *obviously* wrong, she says, nor is it likely a side-effect of any of the umpty-ump prescription medications I now take. I say, "it isn't the same sun as when I was a young man ..." and it isn't. Much more UV gets through our chemically damaged atmosphere than did in the 1960s and '70s.

Maybe I should just file my fangs down more often ... and learn to avoid garlic?

Since then, I've been out of the house on long drives with my mobility chair several more times, and each time my eyes seemed stronger, better able to deal with the overwhelmingly bright sunlight. I haven't been troubled by the computer monitor since then, either. In fact, for the first time in years, I put my contacts in and went out for a drive. The had dehydrated in the containers, but re-hydrated when I added fresh fluid. Although they became a little uncomfortable due to quickly drying out again, I soaked them overnight and went out the next day with no problem. I'm thinking now of buying a new pair since the old ones are, well, old, and more prone to dehydration regardless. Contacts are quite cheap these days –

fair day's drive

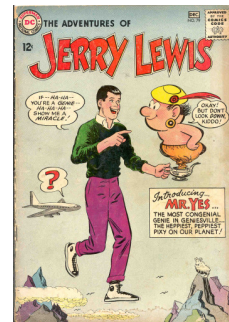
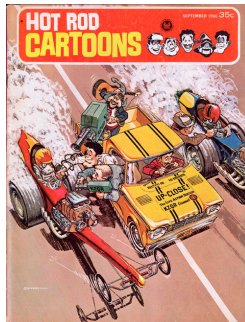
You wouldn't ordinarily call me a comics fan, yet I have always had a lively interest in the graphic narrative ... ever since learning to read from the Sunday funnies page at three or four year's old. During my childhood I read comics voraciously, the way some science fiction fans boast of reading Clarke and Bradbury. Not me. I was reading *The Adventures of Bob Hope*, *Jerry Lewis Comics*, *Spike & Tyke*, *Magnus Robot Fighter*, *Superman*, *Batman*, *JLA*, *Space Family Robinson*, *Herbie*, *The Inferior Five*, *Sgt. Rock*, *Men of War*, *CARtoons*, *Adam Strange*, *Space Ranger*, *Mystery in Space*, *Blackhawk*, *Looney Tunes*, *Donald Duck*, *Uncle Scrooge*, *Metal Men*, *Fox and Crow*, *Rip Hunter: Time Master*, *The Spirit*, *Little Iodine*, *Little Lulu*, *Nancy*, *Melvin the Monster*, *Man From U.N.C.L.E.* ... it seems there must have been hundreds. From that partial list, you can see that many of my favourites were science fiction titles, but – apart from Romances and Westernsm – I read 'em *all*.

It all came to an end around 1968 for me, when I moved to the sticks and had nowhere to buy comics. I was getting a bit old for them, too, I erroneously thought. At just about the same time, Marvel Comics were turning the comic book market upside down and shaking out all the marvelous diversity they once had. Most readers regard that era as a golden age. I regard it as the death of comics as I knew them. For decades, *Archie* notwithstanding, nearly all that was left of the comics universe were costumed crime-fighting oafs in tights.

Luckily, in my 40s I grew old enough to realize you don't need to grow out of things. Only immature people thought they did. It was a good time for my realization, too, since the comics industry was in a frenzy of reprinting old classics such as *Thimble Theater*, *Krazy Kat*, *Wash Tubbs*, *Pogo*, and *Li'l Abner*. Reprints of '60s and '70s undergrounds were also readily available. I had kept precious few of my comics from childhood, but began to supplement them from the bins of bagged "oldies" at comics stores.

Then I became involved in producing comics myself for a short while, and collected an impressive library of anthropomorphic titles. Fortunately, I was able to sell most of those later, when I realized that they were almost all crap.

And now we seem to be in the era of the adult graphics novel ... everything from *The Sandman*, to *The Watchman*, to *Kingdom Come*, to *League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*. There are even superb adaptations of prose fiction to comics, such as *Coraline* and Marvel's *Oz*.





So while you wouldn't call me a comics fan, the *oeuvre* has always been close to my heart.

Naturally, I'm aware of a small corner of the vast multiverse of Webcomics. There are far too many to keep up with, even if you spend all day downloading them, five days a week. I suppose most readers have a handful the follow regularly. I know that *I* do.

For a while I followed an oddball strip called *The Watch*. It was crudely drawn but spirited, and touched on subjects that hooked me immediately. It has since lapsed, it seems, as had one or two others I watched for. At present, I am a fan of a wacky strip called *Guttersnipe* ("The Heartwarming Story of a Street Urchin and Her Sewer Rat"), which is embroiled in a month's-long "Christmas" epic that is more of a horror story. There is also an artist named "Bleedman" (actually Vinson Ng), who does the most beautifully rendered *potpourri* of Cartoon Network characters all in one vast, convoluted fanfic soap opera that includes *The Powerpuff Girls*, *Jenny the Teenage Robot*, *Samurai Jack*, *Invader Zim*, *Dexter's Laboratory*, *Courage the Cowardly Dog*, *Atomic Betty* and so much more I could probably go on listing them for most of the page. Most of the time I have only the vaguest idea what's going on, it's been going on for so long and in so many different threads. But the art is drop-dead gorgeous!

At present the Webcomic that most pleases my appetite for graphic story telling is *Modest Medusa*, by Jake Richmond. I like it enough that I have actually *bought* the first two volumes of its collected posts ... which is saying quite a lot. The story begins with a strange creature, half-snake and half-little girl, with with snakes for hair, coming up out of the toilet of the artist's alter ego, who is also conveniently named Jake. Modest isn't much of a monster, however. She is basically a precocious six-year old girl, with all the curiosity, naiveté, single-mindedness and instinct for mischief of a real six-year old. However, she comes from a magical land called Yeld, where her natural mother is a giant snake who lives in a black castle and eats her own young. And Mother wants her child *back*. It is the strange juxtaposition of the humorous and innocent with the blood-curdlingly *horrible* that makes this odd comic so immensely appealing. The art is deceptively simple yet richly coloured and superbly composed so as to pace the narrative perfectly.

I admired *Modest Medusa* enough to enter into a limited correspondence with Jake Richmond on *DeviantArt*. He was open and friendly, which may have the decisive detail that led to buying his two collected volumes from him by mail. They were the best value for money that I've seen in a long time – thick, full-colour hardcovers, quality-printed on heavy paper, for under \$20. You can't buy most crappily printed trade paperbacks for that price anymore.

So when I learned that Jake would be attending the free comics fair at Toronto's Central Reference Library, I wondered if it was feasible for me to go and meet him.

I had not yet driven *Traveling Matt* such a distance, and running out of juice halfway home was not an option I willingly embraced. Instead of leaving it up to chance, I decided to test the route first. A few days before the comics fair, I drove the entire distance and back, and found that I used less than half the available power. So the con was on! There was only one hitch – there was rain expected later in the day.

In case of need, I broke a fresh \$50 bill out of my piggy bank.

I arrived at the fair in the early afternoon, and used the guide that was handed to me to find Jake's table. It was in a rotunda opening off the back of the main library, and recognizable by the stacks of *Modest Medusa* piled on the tablecloth. There was a large guy standing behind the table who bore a fair resemblance to the "Jake" in the Webcomic. We sized each other up in an instant, and extended hands. Jake was just as friendly and approachable as I had been led to expect by his remarks in *DeviantArt*. We chit-chatted while he simultaneously interacted with his customers, a skill I had picked up myself when I was a dealer at furry cons. As a peace offering, I had brought along copies of *Beatrix*, a couple of my Xeroxed booklets, and my collection of art on CD, *Off-Colour*. I still have copies of most of my old wares, but no place to sell them, so I thought they were better in the hands of someone who would appreciate them than in a box under my bed. Unexpectedly, Jake pressed the third volume of *Modest Medusa* into my hands. I had planned to buy it, so this was a most welcome development.



After a while I left Jake to his customers, and browsed around the rest of the fair. As dealers' rooms go, it made some Worldcons look unimpressive! Of course, it didn't compare with the dealer's room at a *large* comics convention. Few things do ... I'm pretty sure the Canadian National Exhibition does, or a World Soccer match, but not many other things. It didn't take me much time to tour both floors, though. More or less confined to Traveling Matt, I could only get near a table with effort, and was rarely close enough to know if the effort was called for. Another problem I encountered was that people didn't tend to notice me. They looked over me, instead! Not only was it necessary to avoid running into anyone, I had to think ahead lest they run into me! It was not unusual for someone nearby to suddenly spin around and walk straight into me. If I was moving, someone would likely be hurt ... and it wouldn't be me. Still, I managed to thread through the crowd without crushing more than one set of toes in an open sandal. That'll teach her to watch where she goes in future!

Since I was short of cash that month, I wasn't counting on spending more money if I could help it. But since I had not needed to buy the *Modest Medusa* book, I did buy an anthology of old *Wonder Warthog* comics that had been among my favourites as a kid. "The Hog of Steel" was an underground that I used to chortle over in wicked glee – he couldn't possibly be less politically correct today. For that matter, Wonder hadn't been very politically correct in 1973, either. I had most of the stories in their original underground comics, but there were a number I hadn't read before, and it would be cool to have them all in one cover.

To my surprise, I abruptly ran into a strangely familiar face ... thankfully, not literally. For a moment I was stymied, then recognition dawned. It was a local furry named Terry Smith, who I hadn't seen in ages. Back in the day, Terry had been somewhat notorious. He had a Website where he posted art that he liked. His intentions were honorable – he viewed his actions as helping to publicize furry art and the artists. The problem was that he didn't seek the artists' permission first. At the time, no one was quite sure how the Internet would develop, and what it would mean to creator's rights. I took the view that allowing people to exhibit my art without permission would endanger my rights and potential income from the art. In the end, neither Terry nor I had been very accurate in our predictions about Internet art, and we eventually reconciled. Seeing each other for the first time in probably 15 or 20 years, we immediately blurted out how much older we were looking! We took photos to prove what we'd seen, and went our separate ways.



photo by moi



photo by some stranger using Terry's camera

It seemed time to be moving on, so I dropped by Jake's table again to say goodbye, and left the building.

It took about 90 minutes to return home, with a little dallying and dallying along the way, and the predicted rain had so far, thankfully, held off. It was clouding over, though, and from my 21st floor apartment I could see thunderheads on the horizon. Sure enough, I saw a flash of lightning a little before midnight. The storm had finally broken.

The possibility of rain was no longer my problem, however. Explaining to my piggy bank why I was not returning the crisp \$50 bill I had taken from it that morning *was!*

Sad Words

We may hear someday ... “What does it matter. It’s only a *Hugo*. Even ___ won it.”

Time for a reprint! Although I had begun the new policy some issues ago, I kept running out of pages, and so had only run a single reprint so far. This issue is going to be way over long, anyway, so *what the hell* ... This article originally appeared in Eric Mayer’s wonderful little zine, *eDitto 17*, the December 2011 issue. “This is a true story ... only the names have been changed to protect the innocent.” Except this isn’t *Dragnet* and I *haven’t* changed a thing.

TO SERVE AND NEGLECT



If you don’t live an interesting life, you might try looking out the window more often. That’s a bit of advice that Bob Wilson was recently in a position to give me.

Bob was speaking to me not as a professional writer of science fiction, but as the fan I’ve known since 1971. Our friendship has endured ups and downs of various sorts, as well as a period of several years when Bob lived on the West Coast. Most of what I know about a writer’s life, I’ve learned by watching and listening to Bob. It’s *not* intrinsically exciting.

There are benefits to be had from professional writing, of course. Not the least of rewards is the paycheck in the mail. But there are other perks as well. Only a few days ago, Bob returned from a free trip to Israel with his wife, Sharry. It was one of a number of similar trips to Europe he has

made in the last few years, as a guest speaker or a guest of honour. Otherwise, his life consists of a daily routine that is no more esoteric than most people's. He wakes, he eats breakfast, he begins work, he consumes lunch, he works a little longer or goes out for a walk, he comes home for dinner, spends quality time with Sharry and, at the end of the day, he spends eight hours asleep. Not the stuff that most science fiction novels are made from – unless they are by J.G. Ballard. Most of Bob's days pass in this fashion. Now and then, however, he looks out the window...

The co-op Bob and Sharry occupy is near the end of a nondescript suburban street just north of the Toronto city line. According to Bob, the neighborhood has become home to large numbers of middle-class and very conservative Russian immigrants. Another large demographic are second-generation Jamaicans. I speculated that not a few of the Russians may be one step ahead of investigations into their actions during the Yeltsin years, when they made their piles. But Bob points out that there are rather too many Ladas and Trabis in their driveways for that.

The view out Bob's kitchen window is directly over the street and across from virtually identical houses on the other side. He and Sharry are relatively unfamiliar with most their neighbors outside the co-op, having little in common – in some cases not even the same alphabet.

One day, as Bob was washing his coffee cup, he noticed there was a funky-looking car parked in front of the house across the road. The occupants had been too preoccupied with a good smoke to notice a police cruiser had pulled up right behind them. A pair of grim-looking cops spotted a rather nice glass bong on the front seat and asked the occupants to step out of the car. There was a very short and terse conversation, then the cops began to search. Clearly, the officers were looking for drugs. The two guys from the van stood to one side, looking nervous – as well they might. Toronto cops are often cool about citizens smoking a joint, but possession of over an ounce is still a felony that carries a jail sentence... and who said it was only *pot*? Perhaps somewhere in the vehicle, there was coke, meth or any one of many "designer" drugs hidden.

I would imagine that, as trained professionals, the cops made a pretty thorough search. The comedy that followed are in my words rather than Bob's, but the details are substantially as I was told them.

The two officers would have begun by checking the glove and other compartments where one might store something about the size of a Ziploc bag. Next, they likely pulled up the floor covering, poked at the lining in the ceiling, felt under the seats, examined seams that might have been recently sewn up and unscrewed the stereo speakers. Eventually, they gave up on the interior and went through the trunk with the same precise methodology. Finally, they opened the hood and searched for packages taped anywhere in the engine compartment. But, apparently, the vehicle concealed *nothing*. Nothing they could find, anyway.

After all that, what if there really *had* been nothing hidden in the vehicle? The innocent may look just as worried as the guilty. Regardless of innocence, cops still don't like to look like fools.

It looked like the two guys from the car were going to get off with a lecture. Since the officers hadn't found whatever they were searching for, however, there was nothing more they could do. Looking disgusted, the cops returned to their cruiser to compare notes. One of the guys from

the car did a rapid retreat to the nearest townhouse and disappeared inside. The other guy jumped in the driver's seat and peeled away at high speed, leaving nothing behind by a cloud of burnt rubber... and... *something else*. One of the cops looked up and did a literal double-take. There on the road, in exactly the spot that had been vacated in such a hurry, was a plastic Ziploc baggie!

Total professionals that they were, the cops had looked everywhere *in* the car. But they had not thought to look *under* it.

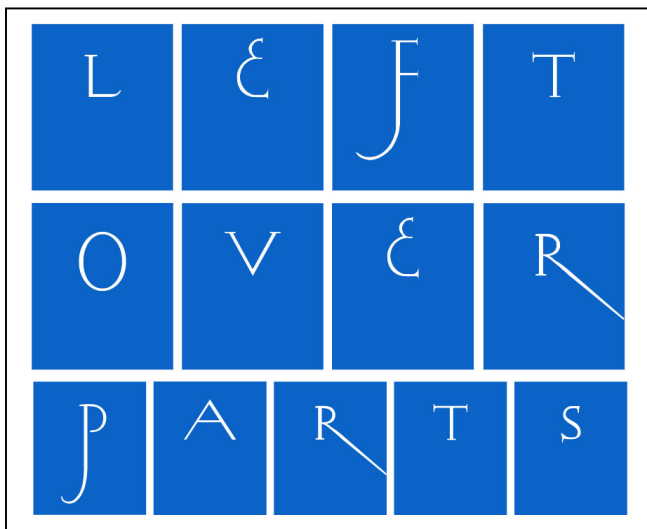
In less time than it takes to type the words, the cops grabbed the "evidence," ducked in the cruiser and roared off in hot pursuit!

As if that weren't comedy enough, a few minutes after the dust had settled, the guy who had fled to the townhouse peeked out through the front door. When he saw the coast was clear, he darted out and conducted a futile search of his own for the jettisoned bag of weed. He returned to his home a sadder-but-no-wiser man.

As for what happened to the weed, Bob suggests, "I'm pretty sure it ended up somewhere other than the evidence room of the local police station. Being a cop means never having to pay for drugs... or so I'm told."

The full facts of the matter may never be known.

□



WAHF: Hope Liebowitz, tiki@interlog.com, who, first time through, found nothing better to comment on than a misspelled name. **Rodney Leighton**, rodney.leighton@gmx.co.uk, who rambled extensively about his mail arriving in last-to-first order, took great pains to explain why he does not like e-mail, and then wonders what will happen to him when Chuck Connor stops printing out all Rodney's e-mail correspondence for him. **R-Laurraine Tutihasi**, laurraine@mac.com, dropped me a note on the Christmas issue and offers a small bottle of Grand Marnier if ever she's in Toronto again. Let's hope it's soon, then!

Walt Wentz, waltw@teleport.com

Regarding your ambiguous adventure with the overly candid fan lady ("A Gift Horse," BT #38), I believe every clueless young male must have encountered this unnerving situation [[A Gift Horse](#)] at some time, too.

My own encounter came while I was still a naive pup, in tech training in the Air Force; returning to the barracks one evening, I was called over to a darkened car parked outside the NCO quarters. It was a young lady in distress. It seemed she couldn't get her car started. She scooted over to let me in; as I was

courteously trying the key and accelerator, I became aware that she was young, attractive and more than a little drunk. She had had a fight with her boyfriend in his quarters, she said plaintively, squirming and fiddling with the shoulder straps of her blouse. He was mean to her so she left, she confided, but now she couldn't get the mean old car started. As I tinkered futilely with the controls, I was privately wondering if said boyfriend might come out and find me in this ambiguous situation, and if he was just drunk and mean enough to object to it.

Being a doofus from a poor rural family, at that time I knew even less about cars than I did about girls. After fumbling with the starter a few minutes, as she continued to writhe and squirm and fiddle with her straps and and make plaintive noises, I announced gallantly that I would ... go and find someone who knew about cars to help her.

As I got out of the car, I noticed she was pulling one blouse strap down her shoulder.

In my own barracks I ran into a trusted older friend and mentor, Sergeant Rees, a genial old Arkie and a "short-timer" who had been in the military long enough to retire and who consequently knew everything about military life and didn't give a damn about any of it.

As I was explaining the emergency to him, I thought that old Sarge seemed singularly unperturbed by the young lady's plight.

A Great Light suddenly dawned upon me. "Say," I wondered, "Do you think maybe she was tryin' to put the make on me?"

"Ay-yup," old Sarge drawled benignly. "But I'll give you a bit of advice, Troop: Don't never fuck ner fight around a flagpole."

By that, of course, he meant that justice on a military base was considerably less indulgent and forgiving than civilian law.

Since he didn't seem inclined to take any further interest in the matter, I wandered back out into the dark to see whether the young lady was still in distress, if somebody else had come to her succor, or if she had finally driven away.

As it happened, the car was sitting empty.

I went back to the barracks and to bed, "enveloped in a large gob of dark-blue gloom," as Bill Nye so poetically expressed it.

Ned Brooks, nedbrooks@sprynet.com

Glad to hear you are feeling better! But we all come to an end, one way or another. A few years ago I came very close to departing instantaneously in an auto accident. It took my mother a year fade away, but my brother only two months.

Has anyone heard from *Weird Tales* at all lately? I don't even know if I still have a subscription. I see that I got #362 last June, dated Spring'14, but neither that nor the one before it included the sub expiration date in the mailing label. Good luck with your other targets.

I asked Bob Knowlton (“Hadji”) about *Weird Tales* at the book signing I wrote about in the last issue. He said that the magazine was between editors and having various troubles.

Handicapped access has become pretty general here I think. Even the thrift store I go to has a ramp. I was once asked, as facility safety head, to report on the accessibility status of Building 641 at NASA/Langley, which was built in the 1950s – pretty much nil as far as a wheelchair was concerned. No ramps, no elevator, no automatic doors. The first floor was 5 feet above the parking lot, and a good thing too, as the parking lot was prone to tidal flooding.

I thought there was some sort of law governing handicapped access in Ontario, but I know very little for sure about it. In any case, it seemed peculiar to that area. My own neighborhood has rather decent access.

I remember the bad music of 1957, but otherwise my time was pretty much taken up with my sophomore year at college. I did walk the mile or two to the Atlanta public library, and ate dinner at the Varsity to watch *Science Fiction Theater* on their TV. I was reading the library copies of *Lord of the Rings*, and stumbled onto Mervyn Peake's *Titus Groan* at a used book store just a couple of blocks off campus.

Scanning Victoria Vayne’s old *eXcentric* stencils might work – the scans would probably have to be massaged. In any case you would want to scan them before sending them to be run off!

William Earl Haskell, forban@hal-pc.org

So there's this scene in Charles Dickens' early book, *The Pickwick Papers*, where an old lady is sitting in her flower garden when she notices that one of her domestic servants, the Little Fat Boy, is standing far too close to her. She rather nervously asks what he wants, and he replies, "I wants to make your flesh creep." Every time I read of your medical misfortunes I come to know exactly how that old lady felt.

You're only a few years ahead of me - I don't recall Sputnik as I was only 2 1/2 weeks old at the time - and it will be cancer rather than myas. grav. that will be my nemesis. Oddly enough, my own medical misadventures tend to be thrown in the shade by other people's - on Monday the 13th last month I woke up with my right ankle and foot swollen up like a water balloon; when I managed to go outside to get the morning paper I met one of my neighbors who asked me how I was - I mentioned my foot, and she replied by telling me another neighbor (across the street) had a *stroke* the past week and was unable to drive anywhere. "OK, I can shut up now," I thought to myself.

The subsequent piece about improvements in your health had a calming effect. Let's hope they continue.

Your review of Fred Patten's furry anthology was interesting, not least so that it appears in the new issue (#125) of *Rowrbrazzle* as part of Edd Vick's trib, and that I wrote a comment in my own trib essentially agreeing with several points you brought up. After, why should furies be created? So far from being "superior" to humans, I suspect they would have short unhappy lives - read what that mathematician fellow said in *Jurassic Park*, about bringing all those dinosaurs to life without knowing anything exact about their habits. I recall at an early ConFurence there was a SIG where this question came up: if there were any furies, what would they do? There was no really good answer except that furies in stories are controlled by the authors' limitations, and furies in real life would be unpredictable, even more so than dinosaurs.

And then there's the outlandish quantity of resources that would have to be dedicated to research in creating the wretched things. I'd personally rather see it dedicated to learning how to grow livers and legs instead.

Concerning your worry about someone stealing your Electric Chariot of the Gods, I should think someone trying to boost a 300 pound item would be less likely than someone snatching the batteries. I hope you have them locked up.

Snatching the batteries? Half of those 300 lbs. the chair weighs is taken up by those batteries. No, the problem is that if the chair was unattended long enough, nothing would stop anyone from just getting in and driving it away. Hence the coil and lock ... and of course I bring with me the backpack I have hung on the back. Anyone who was going to remove the two heavy, lead-acid batteries without a wrench, and who planned to run off with them, couldn't be stopped by locks and chains. Possibly not even by small arms fire.

Eric Mayer, groggy.tales@gmail.com

Your opening essay is harrowing. Indeed, it often feels as if the world is being run by a malignant force. I think the Gnostics had the idea that the world was created by an evil being, far removed from God, and you can see why they might have deduced that. Theologians have come up with a long succession of reasons why a loving God would allow his world to be so hellish. Original sin is a popular explanation but doesn't work very well with evolution. At what point would some particular species be human enough to sin? And which individual of that species? But even the most religious people have been aware of the problem for many centuries. I must point out, by the way, that according to the Bible that nasty Old Covenant with Moses which you refer to was superseded by the New Covenant about 2,000 years ago, if that makes you feel any better.

The new deal does let me have bacon with my eggs and doesn't require infant genital mutilation, which seems like an altogether better arrangement. Still, doesn't He see every little sparrow fall ... and indifferently turn away? I presume it's because there is someone poking the wrong person or having an abortion that has to be attended to. A Good Christian would say I just don't understand ... of course I don't! How do you understand the irrational except irrationally?

Hope you eventually find a good home from your story. I'd imagine it is difficult to sell a story to a science fiction publication if you don't follow modern science fiction or even like it very much. (Which two traits would describe me). The markets presumably aim to buy what most people today are reading, rather than what people read when we were growing up.

My wife Mary and I have sold twenty or so mystery stories but I haven't bothered to attempt to sell any science fiction for decades, since I (presumably) learned something about writing. There would be no point. Even when it comes to our genre, we write old-fashioned stuff, but there is still a small market for puzzle-oriented mysteries, just as there is still some market, I think, for old-fashioned hard SF stories (both hard SF and puzzle stories being difficult for the magazines to come by, since everyone today fancies himself a literary author!). I don't have the background to write hard SF, and between my ignorance of the current sf genre generally and my distaste for the short stories I've seen, I suspect anything I thought was good (like your Carnacki tale) would be considered moldy tripe by today's editors.

How do you write what you don't like or make editors buy what you like but they don't?

Mind you, I hope you prove me wrong. There are quite a few SF markets. You'd think some editor someplace would be open a good old-fashioned story.

In moments of weakness I have wondered if the Slick Guppies have one small point when they claim that plain, old-fashioned narratives without benefit of metaphysics, literary theory or a social agenda won't sell. Then I think a little harder. So far as I know, there are markets for simple adventure stories, though they may carry little prestige, and pay crap. That's likely true for really "artsy" stories too! It is probably more to the point that there are fewer high profile markets for short fiction regardless of the reader's taste. The complainers are also quite wrong about "plain, old-fashioned narratives." Is there any such thing as a story that does not hold a mirror up to the human condition and reflect the author's interpretation of it? Even if he does not have any new thoughts of his own, he must say something about his beliefs in right and wrong, the worth of things, and whether there is any meaning to life or not. It seems to me the proper measure of fiction is neither to provide some sort of adrenaline-driven entertainment, nor to dazzle readers with perfection of style. There are, in fact, recent examples of works of fiction that succeed in both aims. What matters to me is that the mirror being held up to reality shows some recognizable form of the truth. Whether it is the truth of attending a pro wrestling match, surviving the London Blitz or a painful examination of a failed marriage is simply a matter of taste.

As far as finding markets I'd suggest you consult the SFWA list of qualifying markets for places that pay best and are considered in some sense professional.

<https://www.sfw.org/about/join-us/sfw-membership-requirements/>

Noted. Er ... do they allow the unwashed to view their holy screed?

Men Into Space was one of my favorite television shows of all time. Luckily, when it aired in the US, my bedtime was 9 p.m. (Not sure what time the show came on here but presumably before 9 p.m.) I loved the series mainly because it at least made an effort at realism, as opposed to practically all the other televised or cinematic SF I'd seen. How I would react to the show if I saw it today I have no idea. Maybe I'd rather not know. Kind of depressing to realize that back then I fully expected to see the steady progress into space that was predicted, to the moon and then on to Mars and even to an asteroid. Who knows, I may well see the latter. But the near future didn't go according to plan. On the other hand, although there is no base on Mars, we now have things that weren't predicted, like home computers and DVDs and the Internet, which allow us to revisit television programs that we thought had been consigned to oblivion.

Cosplay would not be my cup of tea either. I'm sorry, but dressing up as a cartoon character does not appeal to me at all. Even when I went Halloweening as a kid, I wanted to be dressed as something spooky, like a ghost or a monster, or neat, like an alien or a hobo. No Mighty Mouse costumes for me, thanks.

Of course, not all cosplaying involved cartoon characters. You can dress up and pretend to be any other kind of fictional character as well – Shrek, Doc Savage, Gandalf, Mr. Data, Darth Vader or Ace Ventura. Even Sailor Moon! Some characters overlap the cartoon, prose and film universes, like Batman or James Bond. Finally, there are generic dress-up subjects, like Goth, Smurfs and Steampunk, where you can make up a character of your own. All the same, it never really appealed to me to try to dress up as one of my own creations ... let us just overlook those silver lamé tunics I appeared in a few times back in the 1970s, shall we?

I'm surprised none of the restaurants around that book store where you attended the signing had handicapped access. Surely that is required in Canada as in the US? But from what you say you made out fine with the pizza, albeit without the company. I agree with Hope about television sets blaring while you eat. I hate the damn things in any public place.

A quirk of the neighborhood's architecture. They were all homes with stoops before conversion to restaurants, and the sidewalks were possibly too narrow for ramps.

I hope there's an easy fix for that \$34 prescription. You're right, specialists, in particular, don't seem to give any thought to the expense of anything or what most people have to live on. I suppose that isn't quite as necessary in Canada. I finally rid myself of the financial albatross of private health insurance for the self-employed a few months ago when I reached Medicare age. Medicare is not free to seniors, but way cheaper than private insurance. My first checkup of the year (I have to show up twice a year or my medications won't be refilled) is approaching next month and I am wondering how that's going to work out, whether I'll be hit with a massive unexpected bill. Oh sure, I tried to figure out the coverage but let's be reasonable. It's flat-out impossible to really figure out what the hell insurance covers ahead of time.

Intriguing story about the young lady who unburdened herself to you about her sexual preferences. Does seem an odd choice for small talk between strangers. But how would I know? Never had a woman come on to me in my life. Now I wonder, at this far remove, do you wish you had taken her up on the offer, if that is what it was?

I can't say I wish I had pursued that opportunity, if opportunity it was. I'd rather make a fool of myself with someone I liked, I think, than a total stranger. However, it was before AIDS and Multiple Drug Resistant Bacteria, so maybe I had better have taken my chances then, eh?

Anyway, hope your health continues to improve and you have better news with that story.

Hotrod 302/Richard E. Wright, Ogre302@aol.com

Boy, do I ever know how it feels. Not on me personally but my mom, who passed away just April 15th due to neglect by MANY doctors. I have been her caregiver for more than two decades and she'd get sick and after any hospital stay that lasted more than a couple days she would be put in a physical rehab place. In one case several things went missing, clothes and other articles. They often would not get her the meds she needed, and when I'd sneak some in for her they naturally got pissy and confiscated it. Trying to hide it we learned they were going DEEP through her things. I hid some in a chapstick bottle. Somehow they found it. I hid some inside the battery compartment of a battery powered flameless candle. They found it. Plus she had to have finances on her to pay for things like getting her hair done. Her credit cards and checks went missing. She called the police and I showed the officer the empty pocket book. So they put her wallet in the safe and when it was time for her to be released home everything was magically there. They release her too soon and she winds up back in the hospital and we take her to a different facility. Turned out she had a bad C-diff infection, (A very contagious bacterial thing. Very aggressive too.) and pneumonia. She is in the hospital a week, naturally often taking a couple hours past her time for her meds before she got them. After four major spine surgeries she was always in chronic massive pain. They hospital sends her to a different facility and aside from the sewers backing up and the toilets flushing themselves (We called it the Phantom Flusher) they seemed to be better. They tested her for C-diff and the first test got lost. The second one got no results, the THIRD one came back clean so they took her off the antibiotics. On Easter she was sitting up smiling waiting for me to come visit. She had her hair done and had been told the following Tuesday she could go home.

I remember her upbeat "Hiiii sweetie!" She had a little bit of an upset stomach, but so did I, we figured the KFC we had for dinner was bad. She went downhill fast. Ultimately she passed away on April 15th. I held her hand for the whole time as I watched her vitals slowly go down until her heart stopped. It turned out she had blood clots in her lungs. Worse, the C-diff and pneumonia came back with a severe vengeance when they took her off the antibiotics. There are some asses I'm going to hang on my wall. If they had done the tests right and kept her on the antibiotics... she'd be alive right now. Maybe even home. My birthday was the 26th and we were going to cook a big dinner together. Instead I spent the day going through her things just remembering how much fun we had when she was healthy and wondering how I'm going to manage to keep this house while her urn sits on the coffee table.

Personally, I don't blame God. I blame the stupidity of the humans who were incompetent. I'm going to wear their careers like a crown on my head. I'm going to stretch their reputations like a drum and beat it up and down the street. There will be no mercy. I'm regarded as a very black or white man. Either a best friend or evil in ways you only read about. I hope the day comes I can stand my 6' 6" frame up to these doctors, get nose to nose... get eye to eye... make them smell my breath as I tell them *Morti iustum precari non possunt; hoc munus est mihi.* "The dead cannot cry out for justice. That is MY duty."

Nah... Satan is a people.

AAAARRRRRRRAHHHHHGH! I GOTTA GO BEAT SOMETHING UP!

Dave Heren, tyrbolo@comcast.net

That got off to a ferocious start with the image of you ruined and languishing on the brink.

Then you went upbeat and cheerful about your prospects without recanting about the demi-urgic nature of the usual religion pedlars.

The major problem is in all of the claims to supremacy juxtaposed against the realities of the world. You have to have a major case of schizoid mentality to reconcile what is an unresolvable mess.

Couple that with a nasty habit of exterminating dissenting views and the whole idea becomes totally repellent to rational folk.

I do like your rocket model of the A4 which was conceived to go to the moon but was almost built to bomb Wall street.

The model is an archival re-issue of some Willy Ley speculative moon rocket, I think, not the A4/V2 that was shot at London. The original kit's upper stage had a disproportionately huge delta wing, so I whittled it into some I thought looked a little "sexier." The swastikas are only drawn on with magic marker ... someday I may paint that sucker properly.

I liked the photos of your expedition, the solitary life isn't all it's cracked up to be. Isolation isn't as bad as some people make it out to be but you need to roam now and then.

1957 wasn't all that great as I recall, I was just old enough to notice that the adults seemed to be getting nuttier every day. From the CD (Civil Defense) nuts on their lawn every night using binoculars to scan the sky for soviet bombers, they shifted to cringing in fear of Sputnik. We can laugh about it now since

the Russians have celebrated their victory in the space race, but the average nut in USA was aghast at their pristine sky being filled with Commie beep beep.

Living in Canada, I don't think we were quite as aghast as Americans. After all, American plans to stop fleets of Soviet atom bombers over Canada wasn't all that reassuring, either.

I'm surprised Graeme hasn't sent you *Auroran Lights*. It's full of places to get published, if you're Canadian. I am always inspired to do things until I notice they don't want any submissions from the low-ground riff-raff. Perfectly understandable because if you want a national publishing scene you can't dilute it with foreign trash.

Oh sure, I get *Auroran Lights* ... it's just that I only gloss over that particular zine of Graeme's. I usually find it about as interesting as the telephone yellow pages, because that's basically what it is for Canadian fandom. Needing some information for the first time, I did take a quick look through the last *Auroran Lights* for possible publishers ... but my eye's glazed over and I gave up after finding two or three. In any case, that was enough for the time being. I readily concede *Auroran Light's* utility, but with me it's a matter of little need. *Except* perhaps at the present moment.

Glad your opening was only a mood setter not a continuing problem.

Ditto.

Steve Jeffery, srjeffery@aol.com

Good to read that the distressing medical issues you reported in *Broken Toys 37* seem to be clearing up, especially the fluid and breathing/sleeping problems, and you appear to be in a more chipper condition and mood.

I'd not thought of the problems of driving a power chair in snow and icy conditions. That must be fairly scary. Perhaps you should get the back wheels fitted with caterpillar tracks, like a SnoCat.

Better to just not go out in snow if it can be avoided. The main streets are cleared pretty quickly, and much of the year the snow on the sidewalks of even the side streets has melted. In the event of a fresh snowfall, I'll just have to stay indoors for a couple of days.

Fabulous photo of that old 'Fifty Cent Monster' Gestetner. I never had one of these - or any duplicator, for that matter. I thought about acquiring a duper at one time, rather than sneaking out apa contributions on the office photocopier, but the house was pretty full of outdated technology already, and it seemed rather a high-maintenance hobby. In the end, a cheap black and white laser printer seems the more obvious way to go, as I suspect it did with many fans of the time.

I was a bit disappointed that the advertised duper maintenance workshop at Corflu Cobalt didn't actually happen, as I would have liked to get my hands dirty (almost certainly literally, and probably indelibly) having a go at getting one working again.

Mimeos are messy, if that's what you mean. Even with the best of intentions, mimeo ink spreads like Ebola, from stencil to paper, from paper to fingers, from fingers to clothing, furniture, curtains, books,

house pets and family members. Mimeo ink will wash off hands with enough pumice soap, but once in clothing or other fabric it's pretty much there to stay.

I like mechanical things (I don't understand electronics), even if I have no great aptitude for them. Which might explain why I still have a forty-year-old turntable (a Garrard 86 that I bought when I was at university), a Teac 4-track reel to reel, and kept my trusty old WEM CopiCat tape echo unit as part of my guitar effects rig, even though I have a digital echo unit that cost a fraction of the price and does a lot more.

I have a Rega Planar that must be 30 years old. If you want a good quality turntable to play old LPs, it almost has to be an antique. They are still made for audiophiles, but I hate to think what one would cost.

Like I said, the house is full of old tech. We did, though, recently consign the old IBM 8086 XT and its green screen monitor to the great recycle bin in the sky. Perhaps I should have given it a computer museum.

Like you said, *Clarkesworld* probably isn't the place for a Lovecraft pastiche horror story, but there are plenty of other short fiction outlets - more, I think, than at any time since the 1990s, to the point where it's hard to keep track of them, let alone read them. *StarshipSofa* has a number of sister magazines, a couple of which are horror-themed, including *Tales To Terrify*. That might be a good start. And remember that J. K. Rowling was rejected by about 29 publishers before she finally placed the first of the Harry Potter books. Not that that's any guarantee. It is almost completely unpredictable. And unjust, since Diana Wynne Jones had already been writing superior YA novels about magic and wizards for years

Clarkesworld does say on its web page that it publishes dark fantasy, and in my dictionary it says William Hope Hodgson *is* dark fantasy. I guess they mean *contemporary* dark fantasy, with no eldritch horrors or vintage expressions such as "oft times" or "bespoke." While there are alternatives to *Clarkesworld*, it does not follow that I would find them acceptable. A magazine that pays nothing for its material is a bloody fanzine in my opinion. And I have no assurance anyone reads most of these "magazines." These days, any reasonably competent web master can create a page that looks as though it represented LucasCo ... even though its contents may be as wretched as *My Little Pony* fan fiction. At that point, I might as well "publish" the story myself.

It's amazing what turns up from out the past in remastered form. It's one of the great benefits of living in the digital internet age. In the old days (i.e. any time before the 1990s, when you still had to crank a starting handle to start the TV, and half the world was still in black and white), things you vaguely remembered from your past would have been lost in the ether, never to be seen or heard again. Now there seem to be whole armies of digitally connected fans and amateur archivists busy reclaiming the passions of their youth and making it available online. Like your box set of *Men in Space*. Or in my case, a copy of *The Singing Ringing Tree*, a weird and slightly scary East German fairy tale from the late 1950s and shown by the BBC first in 1964 and then later in the '80s. And also, to my immense surprise, copies of an album by Sindelfingen, a prog rock band made up of a fellow pupils of my old secondary school, who had their first and only LP pressed privately in 1973 in a run of 99 copies (at the time a run of 100 or more would have made it subject to UK purchase tax.) Until fellow prog rock fan Dave Wingrove stunned me by sending me a copy on CD in the 1990s. Since then, it's been posted a number of times on places like YouTube.

Love your impressive collection of rocket models on page 9. Despite the amount of stuff cluttering this

house, I don't really collect: Collecting implies a goal and - unless you are incredibly rich and/or impatient - a reasonably long-term strategy.

Vikki collects. I, on the other hand, accumulate, as you might have guessed from my descriptions of some of the vintage, but still largely functional, computer and recording equipment scattered about the house. I've never, though, been one for collecting toys and models, at least since I was about 12, when I last attempted to build Airfix and Revell kits of planes and ships - including, I remember, the complicated rigging on models of the *Cutty Sark* and the *Santa Maria*. I do like looking at models. I admire the work and painstaking attention to detail that goes into them. It's just I've never felt the desire to collect them myself.

I used to have a large Revell kit of either the *Cutty Sark* or the *Thermopola* (more or less sister clipper ships). It was never finished. Today I have an unbuilt kit of the *U.S.S. Constitution*, a similarly challenging build. I don't know where I would put it if I built it! It must be nearly 30 inches long, from bowsprit to poop deck rail, and perhaps 20 inches from keel to the crow's nest. As for rigging ... I don't think I'm crazy enough to try. I tried rigging a Sopwith Camel once, and the lines were nothing but difficult-to-clean dust magnets.

I had a note to ask you about Cordwainer Smith's Underpeople stories like "The Ballad of Lost C'Mell" as I was reading the second paragraph on page 27 in your review of *The Furry Future*. When I got to the end of the next page, I discovered you'd already been there.

But it does make you wonder how many Furry readers and writers know of professional writers like Smith who have already explored proper character-based anthro stories. Another one might be Sheri S Tepper's *The Family Tree* and maybe (although I'd have to read it again to make sure) John Crowley's *Engine Summer*.

I can only speak from experience, but some furies seem to be well read in SF and fantasy, others are only familiar with obvious titles like *Redwall* the *The Rats of NIMH*... that were popularized by animated versions on TV.

Jefferson Swycaffer, abontides@gmail.com

Sorry to hear of your ongoing health problems, and, yeah, that kind of thing certainly undermines conventional theology. "God is love." Oh, yeah? You wouldn't know it from looking at the world. There is a growing movement among theologians to reduce God's stature from "omni" to "pleni." For instance, a pen-pal of mine, who is studying for the ministry, says that they aren't teaching "omniscience" any longer. They don't hold that God knows the trillionth digit of pi, or the exact coordinates in space of every electron. Instead, the newer view is that God knows what he needs to know, but isn't all cluttered up with pointless data.

Much of this re-assessment does come from the "Problem of Pain." Omnibenevolence and Omnipotence don't go well with a world where a great deal of pain is known.

I have a new theory about God. Of course, since I don't believe in one, maybe I ought to say "a new fictional gimmick." The idea I had is that perhaps God created the universe much the way Sauron created the One Ring. He put much the better part of his power into the act of creation, leaving him far weaker than he had been, and dependent on his creation to rule. In practical terms this means God is not omnipotent at all. In fact, he is vulnerable, since if the world were destroyed, he would in effect be

destroyed with it. Perhaps he would still exist without worshippers, but he would be without form or substance. Perhaps without thought, just a weakened, purposeless spiritual force.

Still...there's a lot right with the world, as well as much that is wrong. I've always loved Ray Bradbury's take on this: "We have our arts so we won't die of truth." We, as creative people, make our own truth. We "subcreate" our own worlds, and write, draw, compose, and make an environment that suits both our aesthetic needs and our moral beliefs. We make, if only in fiction, a better world.

Sometimes it seems to me that the religious impulse is a healthy one, and that sane, sensible people act on it all the time. Where religion goes wrong is *when we believe in it!* Believing in a benevolent Supreme Being who created us with good intentions and will right all wrongs in the end, is an understandable wish-fantasy. It's just that if you act on that belief, no good can come of it. Fantasies about MI6 and the 00 section, about the United Federation of Planets, or a dark crusader who patrols the streets of Gotham at night are also appealing. But few of us are deluded enough to believe these fantasies are real, hence we imprison, torture and kill *no one* on their behalf. Perhaps in the future most of us will have some guiding fantasy that we have freely chosen, with which to satisfy our spiritual needs with, but not to be ruled by ... the way that despotic religion does.

Bradbury's whole poem is quoted here (with some bad coding, but you can still read it.)

http://www.sparkpeople.com/mypage_public_journal_individual.asp?blog_id=1880372

I'd never heard of *Men Into Space* before. It sounds like fun, and definitely an example of "techno-optimism." This is the same motif you find in *Jonny Quest*: technology is both good and bad, but it is our best way of dealing with problems. The world's departure from techno-optimism saddens me – although, to be sure, some of it is well-deserved. Every new technology solves ten old problems ... but causes nine new ones. On balance, we come out ahead. But if you're one of those who gets zapped by one of those new problems, it's hard to maintain the optimism!

I just put up my second book on Amazon: *The Capitulation of the Carnivores and Other Stories*. It's about a vast, multi-millenia war between the Carnivores and the Herbivores. In essence, once they got to their Industrial Revolution, the Herbivores began to win. Half of the stories are about the war, and the other half are about the peace that follows.

This was fun: I went out to DeviantArt.com and looked for art in a style that I liked, for cover-art for the book. I found a guy whose work I liked a lot. I wrote to him and asked if he did commissions, and he said he'd be willing to try. It was the first time I'd ever commissioned art...and the first time for him, too! He sold me a lovely bit of black-and-white -- or gray-and-white, as it is wonderfully shaded and toned -- character art, in a "Furry" style that I think captures the essence of my story perfectly. A very happy collaboration. The guy wants only his studio name to be used, not his real name: CipherAmnesia. Cool name, very nice art!

And Amazon makes it EASY! They've got one of the best user interfaces I've ever used. It's a million times better than the damned screens I had to claw through to register for health care! Amazon gently walks you through the whole process.

I'm gonna keep on doing this!

I wonder how likely anything I published via Amazon would sell more than 20 copies? That ought to just about cover my friends and family, assuming they all buy a copy and don't expect me to give them one. Is it really worth the effort? I may in fact try this someday and find out.

Ron Kasman, ron.kasman@gmail.com

I got around to reading it [the last issue]. I always enjoy your writing. It reads like a conversation with you, and I know how hard it is to do that.

I have also been trying to get published, but I am at the front end of it. I am optimistic, but not with the publishers I have names of. I don't think they will see me as an undiscovered genius, for obvious reasons. I am hoping that one will see me as a good risk, but I can't count on that. I have already been rejected by one who no longer wishes to publish, but to be a paid imprint for people who self-publish. He added on the internet that he would publish with him, SLC, taking the financial risk under certain circumstances – I suppose if Todd McFarlane asked him to print his latest, SLC wouldn't say no. Anyway, SLC, who is Dan Vado, turned me down bluntly and quickly. The rest may allow my memory of them to fade or they may turn me down but I suspect that I am not in that little niche they are looking for. What does that niche look like? Well, they don't want superheroes. I assume that they know they can't compete with established properties. They want adventure stories sort of like old pulps. And some want arty stories and arty art. My story is more like a Seth Rogan movie. We will see.

My fear is that there are 100 million wanna-be writers in the world, yet only a single billion readers.

I like good pizza too. The extra salt is my favourite – bacon, anchovies and olives.

Milt Stevens, miltstevens@earthlink.net

In *Broken Toys* #38, you are about as cheery as a Kurt Vonnegut novel. I think the Church of God the Totally Indifferent appears in *Sirens of Titan*. Vonnegut was a negative guy under just about all circumstances. Personally, I regard the neutrality of God as a good thing. If things go wrong, it's just because things go wrong. God isn't really out to get me.

There was a church of some totally non-committal belief in John Brunner's *Shockwave Rider*, as well. It's quite true that there's a lot of comfort to believing in a less than omnipotent God. You don't have to go searching for meaning in every misfortune, because Shit Just Happens. But in a universe in which God sees every little sparrow fall – and does nothing about it – you have to assume that when shit happens to you, it happened because God willed it so, and then you wonder what you did to deserve it. It can't help but led to paranoia, intolerance of deviation, and severity toward transgressors – the exact opposite of what the biblical Jesus was supposed to have taught.

I don't recall the television show *Men in Space*. I very much remember Sputnik going up. I was 14 at the time and already collecting science fiction. I felt validated when Sputnik was launched. See folks, I wasn't as crazy as you thought I was.

Sputnik led to much weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth in the United States. Our educational system was to blame. All Russian students were brilliant, and all American students were lunkheads. The educational system responded by trying to turn all students who were at least a little smarter than a house plant into engineers. They tried it on me. They proved beyond reasonable doubt that I had no aptitude for being an engineer. Science was OK, but it was really the fiction in science fiction that interested me.

So much wasted effort, when you think about it. In the end it was German rocket scientists who ran the American space program, just as it was Japanese math whizzes who keep American science alive today. Imagine if World War II had been lost and all those smart guys had stayed home! Well, if it's any consolation, you'd probably still make the best special effects movies.

Now that I think about it, there are quite a few furry characters in regular SF. There are the Underpeople in Cordwainer Smith, the Hokas, and the Chanur in C. J. Cherryh. Our natural prejudice in favor of mammals is really pretty reasonable. It's difficult to imagine how civilization would be transmitted from one generation to the next without raising your own offspring.

Let's try not to think about Wookies or Ewoks.

The thought of doing cosplay has never crossed my mind. The same could be said for costuming in general. I suppose I don't really like being looked at. It's not that I mind being casually eye-tracked. I mean I don't really like the idea of being the center of attention. I'd much rather do things behind the scenes. When I was a kid I did most of my imaginary play inside my own head. That way people couldn't see if I was doing it wrong.

They also can't nag you into doing it their way. Sometimes I wonder if that's why writers write. Is it a form of cosplay where *they* call *all* the shots?

Graham Charnock, graham@cartiledgeworld.co.uk

I always enjoy receiving your fanzines Taral, but am a bit disconcerted by the increasing amount of what can only be called *medical notes* in *Broken Toys*. It's inevitable, I suppose, that the older we get the more medical issues concern us. I have my own (nothing really compared with yours, and I am at least mobile enough to walk down to the office every day) but am determined not to let them pre-occupy my fannish writing. Enough people have already done that to put me in half a mind of compiling a fannish anthology called "I Told You I Was Ill" (Spike Milligan's tombstone).

Believe me, I myself would rather be writing about something other than kidney stones, water filling parts of my body it shouldn't and how creeping weakness makes it hard to wash myself, etc... Oops. Haven't mentioned that before now, have I? Keep me in mind when you compile than anthology. I'm sure I can come up with a dozen other fun-filled revelations.

Having said that: I saw a disturbing accident emergency programme yesterday which featured a guy who had hurt his big toe and neglected it. The toe turned gangrenous and had to be amputated. Snip snip. But the arteries had calcified and there was no blood circulation to the area to keep it healthy, the gangrene spread, and he ended up having his leg amputated below the knee. The cause: diabetes. I will now be especially looking after my feet. I'm hoping my diabetes is mild and fairly well controlled. My brother is eighty and has had diabetes for twenty years so I hope I am genetically pre-disposed to withstand it. I'm reminded also that Mike Moorcock lost part of his foot due to gangrene resulting from a 'dancing accident' and diabetes, (I won't be doing any dancing in future!) and also the famous British Fan Ella Parker had both legs amputated. And Keith Roberts, too, was I believe another famous fannish amputee. Makes you think.

Diabetes is dangerous, so I'm glad it's one thing *I don't* have ... so far. I've improved my diet a lot, but losing weight seems just a pipe dream. Maybe if I could actually do physical things I'd have a better

chance. Anyway, that guy who lost his big toe, then his leg, was still rather lucky. He might have lost more bits until he was just a head in jar next to Hitler.

Brad Foster, bwfoster@juno.com

38 issues, you just cannot be stopped!

Good grief! I sure hope I can. I'm seriously thinking of drawing *Broken Toys* to a close with issue 50, in fact. Then, when the desire to pub my fan writing becomes irresistible, once or twice a year, I'll revive my old zine, *New Toy*.

One of the side benefits of never having seen any reason to believe that any of the gods actually exist is to -not- have to wake up in the morning with the sense that there is a God glaring down at me in anger. It does help the day start off a lot better without having to deal with that! Since you noted later that you also were in the same place, can I recommend knocking off even the fantasizing about it? Or, if you have to, come up with a cooler god than those presently on offer?

I was mostly saddened to read this opening, since things have been on such an unusual upswing for you for quite some time now. Of course, you were just setting us up, since only a few pages later we find out that things are not as bad as we were dropped down to. My heart can't take this roller-coaster ride, Taral!

I admit it ... I manipulate my readers shamefully.

And hey, what's this? Not just a leveling back out, but a first step up – actually sending writing out to non-fan venues? One might even say "pro"? About freaking time!!! Now, don't think too much about it, just keep doing it. Screw all the fan stuff-- you're going to be that "overnight discovery" that had only been working in obscurity decades before getting noticed. But, ya got to get it out there for that wider audience to see. Keep it up!!

In fact, screw reading anymore of my blah-blah locs. I'm shutting this thing down, now get back to writing!

Assuming I ever sell anything. I seem to excel at writing that is utterly uncommercial. I don't think I could write an earnest, dead-pan serious, literarily mature and deeply thoughtful piece of speculative fiction in the contemporary mode. I don't think I can write in the Terry Pratchett mode, either. For some reason, I have to write about Captain Crunch in Never Neverland, or aliens consulting Sherlock Holmes about a murder that may or may not have caused a time-paradox.

Bob Jennings, FabFicBks@aol.com

Received *Broken Toys* #38 a week ago. A few random comments...

I was struck, while reading your review of the "Furry Future" book, by your comment that some of the stories might have been perfectly salable to a pro-mag, if they been written and submitted back in the early 1960s, but that they were clearly unacceptable by modern science fiction standards.

Uh, how would you know that, since you claim to have virtually no interest in science fiction any more and don't read the stuff yourself? You noted that some of the stories seem to employ creaky science and

antique premises more akin to the science fiction stories you read as a youngster, but there are still plenty of stories being published with vintage viewpoints, and in fact, so far as creaky science goes, there is a whole sub-set of the science fiction, a successful one, called steampunk, that might be interested in such stories. Not that I think many outlets that pay for fiction would print too many stories about anthropomorphic animals, but a good story is still a good story, and editors are always on the lookout for well constructed stories with good development and a solid plot.

I don't read much SF anymore, but I used to read lots, and haven't forgotten what it was like. Even in the 1980s and '90s, most of the genre had grown more sophisticated than the mainstays of the 1950s. Of course, the best writers of any decade are timeless, and reward reading in any age. What changes, though, is that you usually can't sell a story that simply repeats what has been done before ... however good it was. I'd also like to point out that I may read little SF written in the last 20 years, say, but I am not without sources of information, including people who *write* contemporary SF *professionally*, who have even won Hugo awards for it. So I feel at least somewhat clued in.

Of course you also mentioned that only a few of the stories in this collection passed that quality bar, in your opinion, but there is still room for all kinds of stories in the genre.

It would be interesting to learn what kind of sales figures this collection enjoyed. Clearly furry fans would comprise the bulk of the copies sold, and the cover price might be off-putting, considering the people it is primarily aimed at. If there is an electronic version selling for less than the print version the sales numbers might be larger. In both cases it would give an interesting overview of the percentage of furry fans actually willing to invest in science fiction dealing with their hobby. I'm sure that if sales were really good Fred Patten would decide to do a follow-up volume. Maybe he's already working on one. I suspect the basic costs of acquiring stories and doing the mechanical setup for a project like this are not large.

Of course there is room in the genre for many kinds of SF. But I wasn't talking about kinds of SF, but old ideas that few readers are interested in any more. Or at least few editors. It must be admitted that there is a readership for stories that are exactly like those Poul Anderson space operas of the early 1950s, or exactly like Heinlein juveniles. They read those stories when they were 12 and their taste has never changed. They intend to read exactly the same stories until they die. That's fine. All genres have their equivalent – readers who still devour Zane Grey or Agatha Christie, but can't abide Larry McMurtry or Lee Child. Too lit'ry. The stuff they like is still published for them, and will be for as long as enough copies can be sold to pay for the printing. But nobody imagines that imitations of old chestnuts, that bring nothing new to the table, are the *best* their genre can produce today. That would take a certain kind of blindness to the difference between one's personal taste and the consensus among critical readers. I happen to love *Fireball XL-5* ... but that doesn't make it great SF cinema.

Your follow-up paragraph about science fiction literature being incorporated into the mainstream is interesting, and sorta true, so far as it goes. Mainstream science fiction tends to appeal to the more mature and sophisticated reader, the person who cares about character depth and human interactions as well as good writing in addition to a plot where things happen.

However, be that as may, I don't see SF becoming absorbed completely into the mainstream and vanishing as a unique literary viewpoint. Science fiction and fantasy themes have been part of the general literary world from sometime in the mid 19th century; there just weren't a whole bunch of the things coming out on a regular basis.

The same can be said for detective mystery stories and westerns. There have been some memorable westerns that are clearly quality literature, just as there have been award-winning mystery and suspense stories that pass the test of L*I*T*E*R*A*T*U*R*E, but that hasn't stopped the flow of high-tension mystery thrillers or detective stories. The public's fascination with westerns seems to have passed, but there are still fast-action westerns being published, and a small but dedicated clientele willing to buy them.

I think the same is already true of science fiction. In addition to so-called mature and sophisticated Science Fantasies, it is worth remembering that the eleven Martian novels by Edgar Rice Burroughs are still in print and are steady sellers a hundred years after they were originally written. So are the works of "Doc" Smith, and epic space opera novels continue to be published regularly. There's room for all kinds of stories under this umbrella, and I really don't think science fiction is going to be totally absorbed by the mainstream literary world.

I agree with you there. As with Westerns, Mysteries, Sea Stories and others, genres will always be with us. Along with Zane Grey and Agatha Christie, Burroughs and Lovecraft will probably be published for the foreseeable future. But the better examples of any genre are usually adopted into the mainstream literature – which just means that a well-read person will be as likely to have read *Brave New World* or *Left Hand of Darkness* as he is to have read *Catcher in the Rye* or *To Kill a Mockingbird*. There's no conflict between low-brow or high-brow readers on this matter. Or shouldn't be.

I remember that TV show *Men Into Space*. I was sixteen when it first aired. I was already deeply into science fiction, and I remember the program being exceedingly dull. I didn't fault the abbreviated special effects or backgrounds, after all it was TV and budgets were probably limited. But I thought the stories were plodding; more like science lessons than science fiction, especially compared to the material being presented in those issues of *Astounding* and *Infinity*, among other publications I struggled to afford each month.

I am somewhat surprised that the series survived at all. A lot of TV from that era didn't. I am not so surprised that somebody put out the series on DVD. I have a friend in the OTRadio club who has a business unearthing lost movies and forgotten TV shows, especially cartoons, and putting them out as salable DVD sets. A lot of his success depends on how cheaply he can clear the rights to the older material, since often times the ownership is fragmented and difficult to resolve. He's much happier when he can find something that wasn't copyright renewed. Maybe that's the case with *Men Into Space*. I can't imagine anybody paying much for the rights to re-issue that series on DVD. I certainly will not be a customer. I have no nostalgia for that program and I am pretty sure the stories wouldn't hold up well fifty-eight years later, but I might be wrong. I'll read your future review of the series with interest.

I was no less surprised than you. But I suppose its reputation for a certain "reality" has led more people to remembering it than some other early SF television programs. Then again, we do remember *Rocky Jones Space Ranger*, *Tom Corbett Space Cadet*, *Captain Video*, *Science Fiction Theater*, *Space Patrol* and all sorts of truly abominable crap. I wonder if in fact anything *has* actually been forgotten? TV nostalgia buffs have long memories.

I have some fond memories of doing mimeographed publications, primarily fanzines. I saved up and with help from the parents got a good Sears closed drum machine that performed exceedingly well for quite a long time. I learned how to cut illos into wax stencils, not just dent the stupid things, and over time learned art tricks such as feathering to get large black areas, using discarded fountain ink pens to produce very fine lines, using magic tape to cut in the electrostenciled photographs I used from time to time. Learning how to smoothly slipsheet is a talent all in itself, as you well know.

What distinguishes the mimeo master from the merely skilled is the ability to slipsheet while *cranking* the mimeo at the same time.

Then, alas, when I was away at college one term my parents shoved the machine up into the cold attic and parts of the under pad were damaged. I tried to use it later for some apazines, but there were big blank blotches here and there, and nothing I could do would correct the problem.

By this time I had a real job with real money coming in, so I bought a used electric Gestetner, and even sprung for an automatic cardboard drop slipsheet attachment. It was heaven! Like stepping up from a cheap Chevy auto to a Cadillac. I used that machine for almost everything, right up thru 1999. I still have the machine, and I might have considered still using it for short run fanzines like apazines, except when I checked on it again a few years later on it turned out that the mechanism that lifts the paper tray up so the automatic feeder arm can work was frozen or something. I'm not mechanically inclined at all, and getting it repaired would cost about seventy bucks, maybe more, so I graduated seamlessly to the computer age.

Yeah, printing with the use of a computer is far easier than using a mimeo machine, but I still have plenty of fond memories of the era when a well-mimeoed fanzine was a big fannish plus. But even if the old machine was magically fixed, I doubt I would go back to using it for anything today. Time marches on, and many things do indeed improve as the future unfolds.

Allan Maurer, allan.maurer@gmail.com

I've been reading zines at efanzines and started sending locs partly because of something you wrote in *Broken Toys I* about folks downloading and reading but seldom responding.

It must be true ... the alternative is that they aren't downloading *Broken Toys*, either. Yours may well be the first loc I've gotten from someone who wasn't on my direct e-mail list!

As a longtime fan, I've been reading print zines I subscribed to or picked up at conventions for decades, and only responded to those infrequently and I've read my way through whole sequences of zines on efanzines.com.

In addition to seeing your work in other zines, I just started reading *Broken Toys* (and will undoubtedly read your other zines as well.)

I was stuck by the last line in your opening essay, "If there is a god I'm convinced he and Satan are one and the same."

Story in that, somewhere.

There's a great many stories to be written about the bible as though it were ordinary fantasy, but interpreting the canon in different ways. I doubt I'll write them.

I was also struck by your point about being a doer: seems to me that doing, making, creating, is a feature of real fandom - fans make stuff. Fanzines, jewelry, costumes, fiction, weapons, props, dolls, toys, conventions.

It was good to hear, after that opener, that you're feeling better and things seem to be going better for you, though. I've been dealing with the first serious medical problem I've had since childhood and I'm ready for 2015 to be over. Where are the keys to that Time Machine? I keep misplacing them somewhere...

In fact, the new dosages and meds have me feeling far better, and getting out of the house somewhat regularly to use the chair has also been a big boost in morale. Now all I need is a fuller social calendar.

Re your story marketing problems: this is a good resource:
<http://www.cs.cmu.edu/~mslee/mag.html>

Here's another: <http://www.ralan.com/>

Just guessing from your comments, but *Beneath Ceaseless Skies* might be a good place to try. Also, *Strange Horizons*.

I'll keep those in mind. I may need them, if not for the current story, for possible future reference.

I confess, I was a little disturbed by Bob Jennings' comments on people who eat beets, since borscht is one of my favorite dishes and fresh from the garden beets are nothing like the soggy things you get from a can. But hell, maybe I am a "hybrid creature." Not a few friends think I'm an alien and have told me so.

The only beets I know anything about are probably canned or from a jar. I've never had borscht. Do you eat it with or without sour cream?

With all the discussions I read about the fate of traditional fanzines in Hugo balloting, I'd think someone would organize an event to present SF Fanzine Awards (and turn the tables to nominate and give awards to novels, stories, etc. as well as fan writers, artists, and zines.) Have some annual event, come up with a catchy name for the awards, and open balloting only to people who publish, write for or loc fanzines (or some other set of criteria).

You've been living under a rock lately, haven't you? There are the FAAn awards, presented every year at Corflu. Not only members of the con vote, but also any other fanzine fan who can show involvement, or that another fanzine fan will vouch for. It seemed to work well enough for a number of years, but of course had no prestige outside a small circle of fanzine fans. In the last few years, though, the results have been far too predictable ... in fact, far too similar from year to year. This may be a result of a shrinking number of fans participating in the FAAn awards, or perhaps a cause of the spreading indifference. You could argue it either way. It seems clear, though, that the voter base is very small, and that many fans have lost interest in the FAAn awards. I have more or less withdrawn from commenting.

Meanwhile, I'm on to some of your other zines. Thanks for loading them up on efanzines where I can binge.

Ron Salomon, fanboy@rcn.com

I've read about some of your health problems and empathize and I will leave my personal recent Adventures in Hospitals out of this message. Now I am thinking of LBJ and his scar. Now I am

thinking of LBJ and the tossing of dogs swung by their ears. Now I am thinking of the dog Cleo from the '50s TV series *The People's Choice* starring the late Jackie Cooper. I really should stop thinking, shouldn't I? I am distressed to read about your physical travel/movement limitations. At conventions nowadays you need to have a constant eye out when walking to panels/art show/hucksters' room etc. to avoid all the fan-controlled scooters zooming around. And certainly my travel suitcase has gotten progressively heavier as the years go by. I have un/consciously isolated myself outside of cons by avoiding fan-gatherings and clubhouse meetings for 40 years of NESFA membership and I have yet to attend an official NESFA meeting and only last year had gone to my first and only "other meeting" at Gerri Sullivan's Toad Woods/house as I lucked out and got a ride, which otherwise I could not have gotten to on my own.

I would probably not have written about recent difficulties with my health had I known they would be so protracted. Once started, it hardly seemed right to leave the readers hanging, believing that I was on death's door. So far as possible, I also attempted to make my trials entertaining. Each little piece had its own tone and conclusion.

The cost of con-going certainly curtails my distant traveling, and my income has been going down while expenses continue to go up, so I will not be making the Grand Tour of East Coast/Midwest cons as I did last year. I have been receiving just a handful, if that, of fanzines regularly and my FaceBook appearances have been few and far between, so I heard only well after the kafuffle of the Sick Puppies movement.

Count yourself lucky about the Sad Puppies business. It has been entirely dull and pointless – like listening to two colleges of hierophants argue over the dual nature of Christ. Anyone sensible would quickly see there was no answer and head for the exit. But *not* true-believers in science fiction. The science fiction faith is one I left behind quite some time ago, so I've had as little to do with this latest round of bullshit as possible.

But after a 30+ year absence from some regional cons I was overwhelmed by the number of familiar badges (the connected faces not so much as those years of life have led to many changes) seen and the number of fans who remembered me, and I found out at one con about an unknown fork in my life's road that I hadn't known existed until now, which would have led me to a completely different life – if only She would have said something back then. Oh well.

One always wonders about points in one's life where things might have unwound completely differently ... instead of just unwound. I know of at least one in my life ... but think I made the right choice for both of us. She's as happy as she's likely able to be, and perhaps so am I.

Sunday morning visits to the chapel/tabernacle of fandom is not so much a problem for me as I still stay up many a night at a con to greet the sunrise before heading to bed for a few hours of sleep. You are a highlight in that corner of the brain remembering memorable con doings, stand tall in my mind, and I have probably told you many a time about all-night schmoozing with leftover awake fans post-room parties and bumping into you near dawn at one ancient Disclave, chatting with you until after 5 AM, and then waiting outside, shivering, for the sunrise which would coincide with the local convenience store's opening to get snack/junk food and drinks.

That is *very* flattering. I half-seriously worry that when I'm gone it won't really matter to anyone. Everything I had written or drawn or published will be forgotten, while the centenarians of fandom haggle over the last disintegrating scraps of old issues of *Hyphen* or fading marker scribbles by Bob

Shaw. It probably shouldn't matter to me ... after all, I won't even know. But that rich life replete with family, accomplishment, and experience seems to have eluded me, so I grasp at straws.

I would love to have an extended conversation with you and I would greatly enjoy discussing bureaucracy: Canada vs. America, and what both countries do and not do for their impoverished and unhealthy citizens, to take place at a convention we could both afford to attend. Although that might bore you half to death and/or cause much aggravation to afflict you.

But, yes, while I say I haven't much enjoyed a convention in years, what I really mean is that I haven't enjoyed them as I did in the old days, when a fascinating conversation lurked in every dark corner of an unfamiliar hotel, when a simple meal of burgers and fries was an adventure with twelve unknown apostles, when no night was so long or dark that the sun didn't rise on a whole new day of exciting new experiences ... but it hasn't been that way for a very long time. The fans I knew seem always to be in a rush to get away from me, to listen to some writer talk. They put on suits to eat in fine restaurants I can't afford. And they go to bed before one a.m. I find that even I'm more concerned about my next meal and getting a good night's sleep than I am about discovering a new-found friend's thoughts. I'm guessing it's age and familiarity at fault ... but sometimes I think it's actually that the 1970s were a better time to be a fan.

Hope Liebowitz, tiki@interlog.com

Well, now I'm really rather envious, as you can go to the CNE and I can't. Well, not without a lot of pain. Charles loves the CNE but he has been going alone the last few years, as the walking is just too much for me. I hope you have a great time with Simon and Victoria. But it is *Summer*, as Fall doesn't start until around September 21st or so.

The calendar and seasons in Toronto don't seem to match up very well. I've thought that since I was a kid. Around here, the Ex is traditionally seen as the end of summer, regardless of what astronomers say about the position of the sun in the sky. By the official start of Fall, it is usually already cool and not summer-like at all. And by the time winter has officially begun, we've already had freezing temperatures and snow once or twice. The Ex is the beginning of school, too.

You will probably hate the idea, but could Charles rent a wheelchair to take you around the ex? Maybe even rent a powered one, so that no one is in charge of you but you?

As to that bar we went to after Bob's book launch, I just got a tiny Caesar salad as we'd had a huge breakfast, so there was nothing to complain about regarding the food. True, the menu didn't look that great, but I'm not likely to be there again, but I can always find something unless all there is on a menu is pasta and pizza. Last time that happened (a Serial Diners anniversary) I ordered nothing. It wasn't the place we were supposed to go, a Mexican restaurant, as they had a big birthday party and couldn't seat us.

That was sad about not being allowed to watch *Men Into Space* because it was on at 8:30. You'd think parents could make an exception sometimes. I have no memory of what my bedtimes were during my childhood, but I do remember reading in the bedroom with a flashlight under a pillow when I was supposed to be asleep.

Good anecdote about why you don't do cosplay. I never even got into costumes, wearing them, or going to many masquerades. I remember I went to one that was 4 1/2 hours long (maybe a Discon) and that

was it, except when Jason Taniguchi was doing his one-person show at Ad Astra right after one so I could get a seat. But they were short, thankfully.

R-Laurraine Tutahasi, laurraine@mac.com

I haven't seen *The Bishop's Wife* in so long that I don't even remember the scene you describe. I suppose that means I should watch it again this year. If I remember correctly, it gets rerun around the holidays every year. Of course I know next to nothing about old coins.

Oddly, I never saw *The Bishop's Wife* until last year. Maybe it doesn't rerun in Canada, but I can't think of any reason it wouldn't. Victoria Wayne gave me her old videotape when she and Simon replaced it with a DVD. It completely revised my opinion of Hollywood religion – where everyone behind the scenes is actually Jewish, but pretends to be Catholic on screen. Apparently, some movies were made about *Anglican* priests too... The coin in *The Bishop's Wife* is seen so clearly that you just can't help see it's Hadrian on it! All you have to know about coins is what Hadrian looks like, which isn't such very esoteric information. Caesar never wore a beard.

I love peach schnapps, though these days I use it as an ingredient for fuzzy navels. I don't think I've ever had peach brandy.

Your photo of Traveling Matt doesn't show a place to put your feet, but I suppose you must have that part folded up in the picture.

I found a good match for Matt online, with the foot tray folded down ... I even labeled it. Mine doesn't have a head rest, though, so I faded it to 65% along with the background – for better clarity. (Photoshop is just SO useful!)

To Steve Stiles's concern, I've seen ads on TV that imply that mobility chairs are covered by Medicare.

I'm pretty sure I've seen jeans with elastic waistes in catalogues, but maybe they're only available for women. I don't spend any time looking at men's clothes.

You may be right ... but I don't spend much time looking at women's clothes ... at least not the kind anyone but Britney Spears would be likely to wear, and I suspect that skin-tight dresses that look as though they might fall off at any moment are not really very comfortable. I probably wouldn't wear them even if I could.

I think you're lucky to see air shows from your windows for free. The last air show I saw was free. Every Fourth of July, there is a free air show over water that can be seen from Tacoma, Washington. That was a few years ago when Westercon was in the Seattle area. Where we live we occasionally see A-10s from Davis-Monthan in the sky, but they're being phased out.

Yeah... from what I've read, the Air Force doesn't like them because they aren't sexy enough to fly. The Army wants them from the Air Force because they're *really* goddamn useful! The Army may not get them, though.



Thanks for republishing your favourite articles. I think Chris may have sent me *Drink Tank* at the beginning, but they just piled up in my computer, and I never found time to read more than a few of the earlier issues. It's only been in the last year or so that I started out printing out zines that were sent to me or that I was alerted to by the editor/publisher. I don't seek out zines in efanazines. I do LoC, if late, every fanzine that's sent to me by e-mail or mail.

As I've long feared, as useful as eFanzines is in theory, it is a passive receptacle that people do not really interact with the way they do with a fanzine sent directly to *them* – whether by post or by e-mail.

And that's a wrap on the second *Broken Toys* lettercol in a row that **Lloyd Penney** has missed. Has anyone checked with *File 770* to see if he's been laid up in hospital lately?

I watched *Big Hero 6* the other night.

Am I right, or was *Big Hero 6* promoted as a major event among this year's animated films? Of course, Disney *always* promotes its films as though they were instant classics, surpassing every previous animated film. But we learn to ignore what Disney says, and just watch the movie...

And *Big Hero 6* has its merits ... just not very many of them. It is spectacularly animated, but then we live in an age of surfeit of spectacular c.g.i. animation, and *Big Hero 6* is neither better

nor worse than most of what has been filling the big screen lately. It's hard to imagine how it could be bettered. To try to judge an animated film on the basis of its c.g.i. these days is, in fact, rather pointless.

Instead, we are left with having to judge the film for its story. Imagine that!

It is clear that Disney has given us a sort of homage to Japanese TV anime. All through *Big Hero Six*, I kept thinking of the cheesy TV anime I used to watch back in the 1980s, when it first became a Big Thing here. Although the Disney film was produced with a huge budget instead of approximately \$419.60 per episode, it is set in the pseudo-Japanese background of "San Fransokyo," where half the population is Asian, and the non-Asian characters have the same Japanese obsessions with advanced robotics and martial arts moves. When Hiro and his friends showed themselves in their new "hero" costumes to battle the villain, I was instantly transported back to 1986 and *G-Force*.

The problem I have with all that is that I long ago grew bored to death with Japanese anime. While it was refreshing in many ways in the 1980s, when I first became acquainted with it, anime quickly settled into its own rut, and has only dug it deeper in subsequent years. There are exceptions – most of them made by Ghibli Studio – but Japanese television animation has become every bit as formulaic and repetitive as the Hanna-Barbara series that dominated American TV animation had become by the 1980s. The homage to anime might have been heartfelt, but it might just as easily have just been an seriously belated attempt to cash in on a genre that has now become tediously mainstream.



The story is straightforward enough. Hiro is the kid brother who is street-wise and in danger of going bad. He likes to take part in robot matches with his homemade, deceptive but deadly creation. Big brother Tadashi straightens him out, however, and points him in the direction of joining a university robotics program, studying under Dr. Callaghan, a robotics pioneer. Hiro invents “microbots,” millions of tiny robots who work together to form any shape and can do almost anything, controlled telepathically by a headband. Then, disaster! A fire destroys his invention, and kills both Dr. Callaghan and Hiro’s brother. Or ... *have* they been destroyed? A mysterious stranger in a kabuki mask appears, controlling Hiro’s microbots. Hiro blames the stranger for killing his mentor and brother, and the stranger begins his war against Hiro. The rest I’ll leave to your imagination. It actually won’t take much imagination to work it out. Of all the plot twists – even the very last one that turns around a tragic ending – there was only *one* that I didn’t see coming.

I don’t know whether to say that the viewer’s ability to second guess the plot every step of the way made *Big Hero 6* a poor story, or not. It is still a vastly entertaining film, due to well-realized character relationships and a generous dollop of humour. Baymax, brother Tadashi’s robot creation, is a particularly likable character in his own right.

I mixed feelings about another of the characters in *Big Hero 6*, though. The gang from school (assembled and armed by Hiro to fight the microbot thief) includes a comic-relief character called Fred. Fred is a stoner hippie type, straight out of the 1960s, who may well have popped a out of the same mold as Shaggy of *Scooby-Do Where Are You*. Unknown to his friends – until they need a place to regroup after their first battle – he lives by himself in a huge, palatial mansion, served by his own butler. His fabulously wealthy father lives in seclusion on an island somewhere in the Caribbean. I might have had no problem with any of this if Fred were not so *obviously* Shaggy, in every way that mattered.

We *do* eventually meet Fred’s father, by the way. If you sit through the long, long credits, you will be rewarded with a “bonus” final scene, in which Fred accidentally discovers a secret room behind a painting of his father. The father looked familiar ... somehow. Inside, Fred finds costumes, weapons and other evidence that *his father* is some kind of superhero himself! Just that moment, who should appear at the door? Yes, dear old Dad. That was the moment it sunk in who Dad was:

This was the one time I was actually not expecting what came next.

It was Stan Lee.

I don’t know about *you*, but I am good and fucking tired of seeing that old phony in every Marvel action film, and he’s begun turning up in Disney’s animated films as well! But Marvel is now Disney’s boy-toy, and *Big Hero 6* is vaguely based on a Marvel comic that first appeared as a few issues in 1998, then again as a mini-series in 2008. (Don’t bother to look for them. They bear almost no resemblance to the movie.) I suppose the film’s origin made it almost inevitable that Stan Lee would make an honorary appearance, but his shtick has become insufferably cute.

Me, I don’t begrudge Stan Lee the credit due for editing Marvel comics through its formative years in the 1960s ... but what about Jack Kirby, Steve Ditko, Roy Thomas and many others whose imaginations also created the Marvel universe? Why are *they* neglected now, while Stan smirks at us from movie after movie after movie? ‘Nuff said?

Big Hero 6 (November 2014) came out at nearly the same time as *Boxtrolls* (September 2014) and *The Book of Life* (October 2014). If you like animated features as much as I do, there’s no reason you shouldn’t see all three. But whichever way you look at it – DVD or Netflix – if you have to miss *one*, you’ll miss less if you don’t see *Big Hero 6*.

FATHER OF THE BRIDE

It only occurred to me a little while ago that my sister, Christine, had been married a little more than 25 years ago. I suppose it means that she and her husband David are no longer newlyweds. That they have two grown sons over twenty is a dead giveaway. But living alone, immersed in my own small world, seems to insulate me from the swift passage of time.

Normally, a father gives away the bride. A father was not an option in my sister's case – he was *persona non grata* in the family. I'm not even sure Chris even *informed* the old man of her marital status. Under the circumstances, she turned to me as the next-best thing to a father to give her away. I was flattered, but naturally had misgivings.

The least of my worries was that I didn't own a suit. In fact, to this day I have never owned a suit. Somewhat more of a concern was that I just don't feel comfortable in a church. It isn't that I expect everyone in the congregation to turn their heads and glare at me, instinctively aware that an atheist has intruded into their sacred space. The problem is that I feel like a hypocrite being there. I'm afraid I might overcompensate in trying to behave as though I was anywhere else, and ostentatiously scratch my ass or use profanity just a little too loudly. However, once Chris extracted from me a solemn oath to behave, I was made the Father of the Bride.

Her sole concession was that I was allowed to wear a black knit sweater and dark grey pants rather than a monkey jacket and dickie.

I don't think either Chris or David is religious, though perhaps one or both believes in a God. They may have chosen to be married in a church mainly because a church wedding is a more momentous occasion than standing in front of a guy in a cheap suit in a shabby government office. A church wedding has *style!*

The church chosen was a small, simple wooden hall with a steeple over the entrance, the sort of church you associate with rural hamlets, covered bridges and split-rail fences. It had loads of charm. As you'd expect, the church wasn't in Toronto ... but the city has grown up around its surroundings so quickly that today you can find many untouched pockets of the 19th century embedded in the suburbs.

The church's interior inside was simple. The altar was at the far end of the aisle from the entrance. However, to reach the aisle you first had to climb a flight of stairs from the front door. My part in the wedding was to accompany my sister up the stairs, down the aisle, and leave her to face the music in front of the preacher.

We began at the bottom of the stairs in good order, arm in arm, taking solemn, measured steps. But on the second turning of the stairs, some fool had left a pile of leather-bound bibles stacked on one of the newel posts! Although I had navigated this obstacle successfully in trial runs, this time I must have not tucked in my left elbow quite far enough, and the sleeve of my loose sweater brushed the bibles. Since this was the take that mattered, naturally the two-foot stack tipped over ... and out of the corner of my eye I saw them fall in slow motion.

That was when I was forced to reveal to the world that I was Spider Man in real life.

You may remember how Toby Maguire discovers his spider powers when he spills a tray of food in the school lunchroom. Adroitly twisting this way and that, he catches every single item with the tray in the blink of an eye, and walks away from the incident as though nothing had happened. So it was in that frozen moment when the stack of bibles tipped over. Somehow, in a single step, I caught the entire collapsing stack of books with one hand, balanced them and slid them back where they belonged ... and continued to mount the stairs as though nothing had happened to disturb our dignified progress.



I could never even have proved it happened ... except that someone in the pews had a video camera, and was in the perfect place to film the whole thing. I only knew it later, when my sister showed me the tape.

Damn, that looked impressive! If only I had a copy of that tape to show to the next person who called me a klutz!

The business with the bibles was, tactfully, never mentioned again. I suppose it is expected of a Father of the Bride, and a superhero, to step aside and let the bride and groom be the center of attention.

But to me, the “I do” at the end of the ceremony was more like an anticlimax.

English: Forbidden unless mandatory, except when American usage is different from British.

Endit