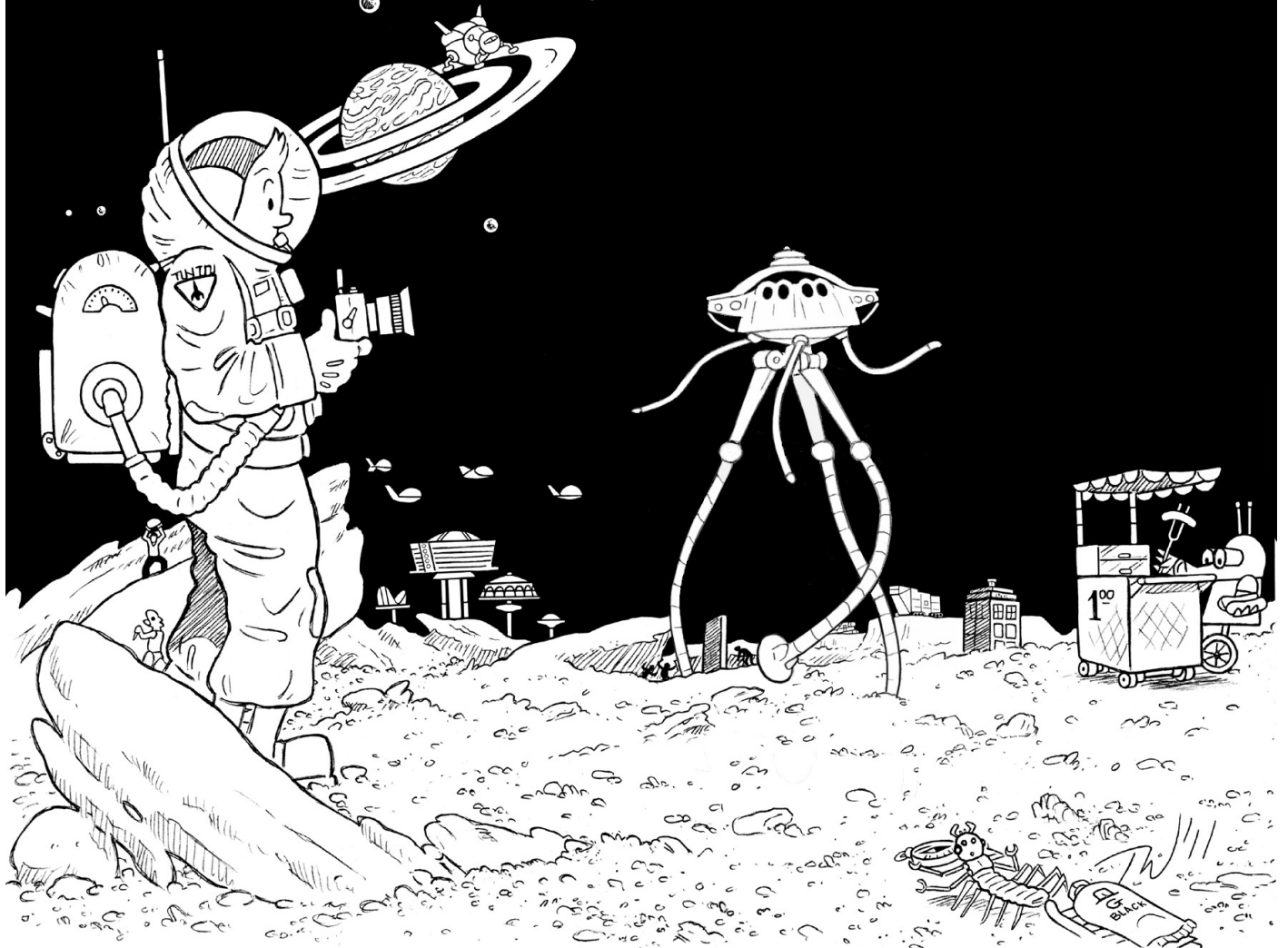
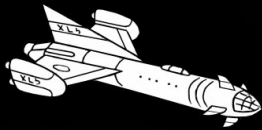
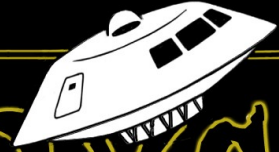


Issue 74

DARK TOYS





Welcome to the revival issue of Dark Toys, an irregular, relatively simple personalzine by **Taral Wayne**. This is issue 74. The previous issue was number 10 of *The Balobius*. The issue before was number 12 of *Rat Sass*. Before that there were 51 issues of *Broken Toys*. Unless I've miscalculated that brings me up to number 74. My address is 245 Dunn Ave. Apt. 2111, Toronto Ontario, M6K 1S6 Canada. Phone me at (416) 531 8974. This is Kiddelidivee Books & Art 335. **April 2023** of the Common Era.

How I Hate Tuesdays - The weather has been shitty and unpredictable lately, and I'm forced to go out into it ... drat. Yesterday I had to go out to do my banking. I encountered no hold-ups, and I had relatively little trouble negotiating the foul streets. The snow had thankfully mostly been removed by the city, and was only troublesome for me and Traveling Matt in a couple of spots. On the way home, matters took a different turn. I decided that it would be a good time to bring home a few items from the supermarket, and this led me to take a different and more risky route.

The first leg was no problem, as it followed another major street. Getting to the Supermarket was trouble-free. Not so much once I got to the supermarket, however. As I shopped, I got into an altercation with a freakazoid in the supermarket. He was standing oblivious in the middle of the aisle and was blocking everyone. I sneaked around him, but unfortunately brushed by his bag or snagged his coat - whatever it was I didn't have much chance to see, because he whipped around and immediately became abusive, shouting that being crippled was just an excuse not to be careful. We ended our little exchange with a mutual "fuck you."

When it came time to check out, it was just my bad luck to encounter the same idiot in my check-out line. By then, he had apparently forgotten all about me.

Now he was "helping" other customers ... none of whom had asked for any. He got abusive to one of those as well, but at least his memory hadn't improved. He attempted to "help" me as well by filling plastic bags (that I don't think he paid the cashier for) even though I was trying to fill my ample back pack instead, and had cloth bags of my own. The plastic bags were next to useless since they were stuffed any old way, and wouldn't fit in the back pack without some shuffling around.

In the end, I got everything squared away... by then the meth-head or half-wit who had originally begun my troubles was long gone. Or so I thought. As I left the supermarket I found him outside, with a powered chair of his own. He had been walking around earlier, so he was plainly not disabled, so it never occurred to me that it was *his* scooter! He obviously didn't need it. I presume he had commandeered it to carry his groceries home because he was a lazy fuck! ... or had he even *stolen it*?

Annoying as all that had been, I had not yet encountered a serious problem. But problems began as soon as I left the main street and began driving up my own street. As I feared, one home owner had left the sidewalk un-shoveled, and I couldn't get through the narrow path that pedestrians had plowed through in single file. A couple of hundred feet back, I was able to get down the curb from a driveway. However, I had a problem returning back up onto the curb in order to get home. I thought I had found a way, but it was a deception. To my dismay, I got stuck in a hole full of mud and slush only *50 feet* from the entrance to my apartment building! I don't know how I managed to get Traveling Matt so thoroughly mired in the muck, but the chair would simply not budge from the morass it was in, no matter how I gunned it or turned. I even got out and tried to push the chair forward. Fortunately, there was no shortage of people who were passing, so a few stopped and immediately pitched in to extract me. Meanwhile, I stood aside, feeling like a fool. It took the entire combined efforts of three grown men to get me out, too! Traveling Matt is no aluminum walker, but a motorized vehicle that weighs two-hundred or more pounds!

When I got home, I not only found I was muddy, the chair soiled and mud on the floor in my apartment, but the control arm on the chair was twisted so that it drooped to the ground. I patiently cleaned everything up, got out of my messy clothes, and unloaded my groceries. Then I spent a while trying to see what the problem was with the control arm. I was lucky and it was a simple repair, but by then I was exhausted. I *hate* winter. And in a day or two I'll have to go out again, for a routine monthly blood test.

Going Cold Turkey - What a frustrating week! Bell mandated an unwanted upgrade of my services, and on the appointed day a service technician arrived to install a new modem for my connection. I don't know why - the old modem seemed to work well enough. Bell told me that the service technician would appear in one to three days, my understanding was that that the business would be done. Aw, but not so fast! My phone was still working, but (try as I might) I couldn't connect to the internet! Mail and Google denied me access across the board! I ended up spending a couple of fruitless hours on the telephone with different operators from Bell, diagnosing the problem, before it was admitted that my equipment must be at fault. Bell would ship me a new modem as a replacement! To my surprise, the new modem arrived by Fedex, with no technician to install it, so I had replace the faulty modem by myself. Having as far successfully managed to swap the equipment - as far as I knew - I logged onto the internet. Or so I *hoped*.

I was still denied access to the internet! I tried email, with the same result. So I spent the rest of *that* evening over the phone with Bell, as well. Eventually, the operator who worked with me conceded defeat. I got quicker service this time, at least, and a live trouble-shooter arrived to spend an hour with my computer, eventually coaxing Bell to grant me full access. Now, after six days of tearing my hair out, I'm back online!

One doesn't realize how *much* you depend on the internet until ... you do without it. Sure, I was able to work on the computer, I use Photoshop or Microsoft Word, but I couldn't follow the news or weather, find a good synonym, pay a bill, remember how to spell Jared Leto (don't ask) or find out whether the proofreading I was waiting for was finished yet. *Very* aggravating. On the other hand, I did watch a lot of *Beetlejuice* and *Tick* cartoons on DVD. Sigh. In desperation, I even did a little bit more work on a half-done drawing and finally finished it. But if this is *inspiration*, I don't recommend it!

Time Out - A month can't go by without something to complain about. This time, my bathroom sink stopped delivering an adequate flow of water. In fact, it had suddenly skrunk to a mere trickle. The toilet flushes just fine, and I get all the water I want in the bath tub. But I get only a dribble from the sink - where I wash, brush my teeth swallow my dozens of pills daily. I stuck it out for about a month, figuring that the building was undergoing maintenance. But as time went on, nothing changed. The water still sputtered or dribbled out in amounts inadequate to moisten dust bunny, much less a wash cloth. I asked around, but the neighbors reported that their water was running. Clearly, I was going to have

to find the building maintenance number, and call for someone look at my problem. At the first opportunity – that is to say, when I was awake in the morning – I called Toronto Community Housing and asked when they would send a plumber.

They were very helpful, and told me that I would be given at least 24-hour warning before the plumber came barging in. Swell. A few days later, I found a notice stuck on my door. The first thing I noticed was that I was being given prior notice for the plumber to arrive on the *same* day that I got the notice! Not much of a warning, to say the least! Then I realized that the day on notice was dated *the day before* – that is, I got the notice the day *after* the 24-hour warning I was being given. I was sure nobody had come by the day before, since I sleep lightly and even a reasonable amount of knocking would have woken me. I waited the rest of the day, but no one appeared that day either.

I had to call back to city housing to ask what happened. The operator said the visit was *supposed* to have been logged, but I said it obviously never happened. The voice at the other end sighed, and commented that sometimes there are typos, and booked a new appointment for me. This time I stressed that I'm normally a day sleeper, so knock *loudly* and *more than once* – don't just tap lightly on my door, then rush to the elevator after a ten-second wait. This time, I would also make sure to hang my "I am Home" sign of the door. As well, I hoped that the clock wouldn't be running backwards a second time. It's bad enough that the clock goes backward and forward twice a year, without time going funny whenever it feels like it!

This time, however, there was no 24-hour warning. The next day the plumber was banging on my door as though he meant to break it down. Well... I can't complain about getting what I asked for, now can I? After he left, the first thing I did was turn on the cold water tap – and promptly shot a huge puddle of water on the floor that I had to fetch the mop to clean up. Somedays your wins are only partial.

Shot in the Dark – Yesterday, I broke my favourite shot glass. No, I *don't* drink whisky. Can't stand the stuff. But I need my shot glass for a *very* important job – I fill it with numerous pills four times a day, and then *swallow* them. Unfortunately, I fumbled the glass and dropped it, shattering the thick glass all over the bathroom floor. Gingerly, I picked up the fragments, which consisted of four or five large pieces. But there were also at least two dozen smaller shards, some as small as a fingernail clipping, and as sharp as scalpels. I searched carefully, taking care not to cut myself. After a few minute's inspection, I thought

I had gotten them all. But, later that night, I discovered that I had missed *one*, a piece not as large as a peppercorn. I barely felt stepping on it, initially thinking nothing of it ... just a prick on the bottom of my foot.

I plucked the glass out of my sole, and safely discarded it. But then I noticed the spreading pool of blood underfoot. It was quite a gusher, and continued to bleed far longer than I expected. The sole of the foot is suffused with blood, however, and can bleed quite copiously ... which is odd, when you think about it. You have no choice but to walk on your feet. You expect them to be tough. However, your feet that are engorged with blood, potentially limitless reservoirs of it, that can bleed you out in minutes. In my opinion, this doesn't seem like good design.

Perched precariously on the toilet, I elevated my foot, then using a pad of toilet paper, applied pressure. Then I waited then to see how long it would take for the gusher to slow, and hopefully stop. To my relief, the flow of blood showed signs of diminishing after only a couple of minutes, and then stopped entirely. The next logical step was to clean my foot, so that I could better assess the injury. As I thought, it was not very deep or extensive. I've had worse bites from hamsters. Worse than rodent incisors are those cuts made by slivers of glass that are as delicate as rime ice, that can get into the wound, work themselves deep, and are very hard to extract without leaving painful slivers behind. Fortunately, this was a very simple affair this time, and cleaned up quickly.

Not quite so simple was mopping up the pool blood on the floor, which I had spread half across the bathroom floor. I had no choice but to get pail and water, and soak it all up by hand.

And then, *finally*, I could go to bed without bleeding all over the bedsheets.

Next day, I had to go to the kitchen to look for my *second best* shot glass.



Dark Matter - Letters

Eric Mayer – 27 Dec 2022

I did receive your new story. I'm just running behind. Don't know about you but we've been enduring a hideous cold spell. Not only sub-zero temperatures at night but also gusting winds. Winds lead to downed trees and branches and power outages. Power outages during cold weather lead to the pipes in the unheated crawlspace beneath the house freezing since they are protected only by heat tapes. So far we've avoided the worst but it's been nerve wracking. Nevertheless I read and enjoyed *The Balobius* and have begun reading your latest Fraggles Rock story, *Doc's Back Door*.

Try not to fall behind ... I've already begun a new story, this one mercifully short, and called "What If, Unca' Darl?"

God yes! Christmas day I couldn't sleep for the cold inside my apartment. I bundled up warm, with a heavy sweater, and slept on-and-off as best I could in my office chair, using a weak space heater to add a few degrees to the 60 degrees inside. It may have dropped to 58 for a while. It also took almost two days before the temperature was normal. I don't even want to think about the temperature outside!

As for *The Balobius*, you may have reached the end of that tale (tail?) but *Dark Toys* is a nice title. And starting a new title at issue 73 is audacious! Okay, it makes sense as all the issues being part of the "Toys" series. Anyway, science fiction has a history of authors tying together into a coherent fictional universe as many of their books as possible. You are following in the footsteps of the greats. You are also giving yourself a goal: to get to issue 100, no matter what the title is by then...

It occurs to me that since *E-Ditto* was clearly an offshoot of *Groggy*, down to repeating covers, I could put out *Groggy 59*. If I characterized *Revenant* as a *Groggy* supplement covering my activities while out of fandom I could add another 10 issues. Which would cover almost all of my publishing. Unlike you I never published much, nor did I publish a wide variety of zines. My few zines were all much of a muchness.

You might have made history if you had only begun counting down from 100 to the first and final issue! That would have confused everyone, especially collectors and archivists.

Like you, I've become the oldest of my small and now practically extinct family. I say oldest because words like "elder" or "patriarch" (ha!) imply some familial connection which no longer exists except in the strictly biological sense. It feels strange to be old. We all know it will happen if we live long enough but do we really believe it? I'm not sure I did.

Since I've always been a loner -- sounds better than hermit -- I'm not much bothered by becoming increasingly isolated but I do miss those who are gone. These nights, my dreams are populated mostly by dead people. If I told a doctor that he'd probably put me on meds.

You might not have a busy social calendar but you still lead a more thrilling life than I do. Heck! You go out and have blood work done. Talk about excitement. I sit at home and stare at my veins.

Fandom would be a lot more fun -- at least for people like me -- if there were more fans like Heath Row for whom the "usual" still meant something. I got back into fandom temporarily in 2005 after I discovered .pdf zines and realized how few locs were being written. I thought I could make a contribution by loccing.

I wasn't exactly a voice crying in the wilderness. More like a voice trying to harmonize with Lloyd Penney. Actually his output far exceeded mine. I would imagine he'll need to cut back on loccing now. I'm happy to see a good guy get an opportunity to edit Amazing. As "lucrative" as writing locs no doubt but there's a chance to do some good for the SF field. Unfortunately sf fanzine fandom will be even poorer than it already is when it comes to loccols.

Anyway, fans have largely abandoned the idea of "paying" for zines with letters. In fact they've abandoned zines. It'd be fun if they made a comeback, like vinyl records. Well, not really like vinyl, which is about a physical object vs. a...um...metaphysical...digital... non-physical file. I don't miss paper. But the format of a zine strikes me as different than most of what's on the Internet. Each issue is a finished self-contained package, not just one in a series of blog entries, or tweets, or an evolving website, etc. I suppose a newsletter is similar. I'm struggling to define what it is I like about zines. Maybe I prefer them simply because they are what I got used to.

- Eric Mayer

Eric Mayer – 28 Dec 2022

I was a bit groggy when I last wrote, and still am to an extent. I said I didn't mind my increasing isolation much since I've always been a loner. But, of course, I'm not really in danger of being isolated as you are since I have Mary here with me. A stupid thing to say but my excuse is that our plumbing has me sleep deprived.

You see, the water pipes running through the unheated crawlspace beneath the house are protected by heat tapes but the tapes only reach so far into the hole where the pipes emerge from the ground. In the past they have frozen, and I've had to slither under the house and blast hot air into the hole with a heat gun which does not amuse me, especially in 0 degree weather. In that section of plumbing water only moves when the well pump goes on to bring water to the pressure tank in the house and, of course, still water freezes quickly. The "solution" when it temperatures drop

below zero, as happened last week

(coupled with high winds) is for me to stay up all night so I can run water to force the pump to run at intervals, hopefully breaking up any ice that's forming. I try to catch a few hours sleep during the day but I have a very hard time sleeping during the day. Three all-nighters in a row pretty much exhausted me.

How did the arctic blast affect you? Not too badly I hope. We are now having a warm-up thank goodness! It just reached freezing outside for the first time in five days.

At the first opportunity I bought a new, heavy duty space heater that keeps me as warm as toast. I'm almost sorry that it's turned out to be a unusually warm winter after all, and I haven't actually needed the new heater so far. It's soon to be April First, too!

I enjoyed Doc's Back Door which, I take it, will not be your final Fraggles tale after all.

Your comments about "Doc's Back Door" may puzzle readers of the present zine. It's a 16,000 word short story in my Fraggles Rock saga, and the 9th in the series. In fact, I've already written the 10th, "What If? Unca' Darl." There may be as many as three more such stories before I've used up my ideas. Neither story is short enough for a small, personal zine, so they will likely be run separately at some point.

It made for quite a departure in that it took place almost entirely in Outer Space rather than the Rock. (Alternate title: Fraggles in Outer Space) You did write about Kiki's reaction upon venturing into our world but it was interesting to see how different Fraggles reacted, according to their varying characters.

I noticed that Uncle Traveling Matt didn't show up and I wonder if he was aware of Doc's move and what would have happened had Doc not moved back?

So far, I haven't written about Uncle Matt, but have mentioned him at least a couple of times. Once to mention that he is uncomfortable around Darl since Darl is from Outer Space and actually knows things about the human world that Matt clearly doesn't.

I liked how you depicted the plight of undersized Fraggles trying to cope with the simplest tasks in our world, although the Fraggles probably didn't like it. And the story also highlighted how alien the Rock is when it comes to any modern convenience we take for granted. Not to mention no one wanting to go for groceries, which I suppose would have been a bit awkward. (I sympathize. We've been snowed in here since the beginning of December and I really need to get to the store during this coming thaw).

Apparently none of the Fraggles have any urge to relocate to Outer Space ... even if it fascinates them. Even Darl seems to have no nostalgic thoughts of returning. Well,

maybe I should say regrets about leaving since as a Fraggles it would no longer be possible for him to return.

In one of my stories, "Where the Magic Is," Darl does reflect on his change from time to time. It begins, "There were days when Darl just had to see the sky again." I think that sums it up well.

Which brings me to Doc and the main story line. You did have me wondering if Doc would also turn into a Fraggles -- or die. You did a good job of directing the reader's expectations first this way then another. Rather like mystery writers' turning suspicion on different characters as the book progresses. And then, in a nice "twist" you confound those expectations with another outcome altogether. But what's really nice is that, when one thinks about, Doc recovering by finding a new friend is much more likely than his becoming a Fraggles and less dire than him dying.

But what happens next? Now that more Fraggles know about Doc and the way to Outer Space and have some experience there, wouldn't that affect life in the Rock, attitudes there? My memory is awful but I think you said you had other Fraggles stories in mind but maybe they would precede this Doc story and so wouldn't deal with the effect of the whole gang living in Outer Space for awhile.

I've been putting it off for a while, but it seems that the time has come when Darl has to face Cantus the magical minstrel, and confront his inability to sing as other Fraggles do.

Well now I need to get back to catching up on my sleep and waiting for the ice and snow to melt enough to get out to the store. - Eric Mayer

Bob Jennings - 28 Dec 2022, fabficbks@aol.com

Received *Baloobius* 10 a few days ago, but I've just gotten around to reading it and that I would shoot off a few random comments.

I was interest in your comments about the Star Trek: Picard series. I'll take your word for it that the series has nearly fatal plot flaws. I have never been much of a Star Trek fan, which always strikes people as odd, since I'm such a hard-core stf fan. Maybe it's because I came to the original TV series after having already read a lot of science fiction literature and having already seen more than my fair share of sci-fi movies, good, bad, and awful. I thot the original ST series had some good stories, and a bunch that sure weren't very good, and the same went for ST: The Next Generation. After that things sorta blurred. I never watched any of the other series with any degree of regularity, and was never involved in the Trek mythos that has proved to be such an enduring and pivotal segment of stf fandom. Thanks for your comments; they were helpful. Note to self - New Trek Picard series: don't bother. I have too many other things to do with my time than to squander it on a series that has significant unresolved plot and structural problems.

There are a fair number of people who are opposed to immigration totally, basically because the new-comers are different from us. Prejudice seems to be one of the genetically ingrained qualities of the human race. We are conditioned by millions of years of cultural evolution to regard anybody who is new, different, or strange as a potential enemy, and immigrants fall into that classification automatically. They (an all encompassing word that allows us to dehumanize the whole lot of them), *They* speak a different language, *They* have different religions, *They* wear different kinds of clothing, *They* often have different shades of skin color and very likely *They* don't even bathe frequently. Who wants them around stealing jobs from native born folk and running down property values anyway?

On the other hand, as you note, immigration helps mix up the population. The melding of different ideas and peoples invariably makes things better for the whole of society. Immigrants usually also come with a determination to work and make things better for their families. That means they are willing to work at lower paying jobs in inconvenient time periods so they can provide for their families and see that their children have a better life.

More realistic problems come from immigration and explain in part why many governments are not especially happy to see large-scale immigration into their nations. One of the first concerns that nobody wants to talk about, is where the hell are these people going to live? Right now all of the westernized nations of the world and many 2nd tier countries are facing severe housing shortages. The construction of homes and apartments cannot even keep up with the nominal population growth of these nations, with homelessness becoming an increasingly severe problem almost everywhere in 1st world nations. Now, add in X thousands of immigrants pouring into the country and the question is, where are these people supposed to live?

Then there is also the question, what are these people going to do to earn a living? Many immigrants come with viable job skills, but many do not, and the other problem people don't want to talk about is that because many newly arrived immigrants are not fluent in their new nation's language, they automatically cannot take on jobs that require decent language skills. There are any number of stories about immigrants who cannot find jobs in their chosen profession because they cannot speak the new language well enough to make themselves understood, and being understood is absolutely necessary for most technical and management careers.

In my own personal experience, my dentist is a fine young woman from China, whose command of English is so poor that I cannot understand what she says. Fortunately, she had sense enough to employ a staff assistant to translate for her. Without that language aide I would no longer be her patient, and in fact, the aide related to me that a lot of new patients do not come back because they cannot understand her and it bothers them even with the translation person provided.

That's in Canada and the US, but about some other 1st world western nations? The employment situation in the UK and France, for example, is so dire that a considerable number of native born, well trained workers cannot find gainful employment, and there is certainly no employment opportunities for most of the newly arrived immigrants. The back pages of the newspapers are filled with stories of riots and chaos that periodically erupts in places like France or Italy caused by immigrants who want to work, but can't find work. They can't earn enuf money to even buy food, much less afford a decent place to live.

That's just the tip of the iceberg. There are some other problems that also come with immigration, but now imagine instead of each nation having a quota system that there was absolutely unrestricted free immigration from any nation to any other place in the world. What might happen? What would surely happen is that a flood of people fleeing brutal dictatorships and impoverished nations like Somalia where civilization has basically ceased to function, would flee for lands with stability and economic security. The top tier westernized nations would soon be hosting millions of new immigrants, and all those problems would escalate dramatically.

It's a trick question. Many people support the ideal of legal immigration, but there is no ignoring the dangers and problems that unrestricted immigration could and would cause to the stability of the host nation. Unfortunately, the politicians we vote into office to deal with these kinds of hard problems seem determined to ignore the entire problem and Do Nothing. Doing Nothing is not a viable solution, but it does open opportunities for radicals and extremists to get elected to office, because in the long run, any solution is better than just ignoring the problem.

There have been changes made to the treaty between the US and Canada that govern refugees trying to enter either country from the other. I can't say I fully understand the issue, but critics are already crying that it's a humanitarian crisis. But is it, or merely closing a loophole to better control migration? Why, even, are people so determined to cross from the US to Canada, and vice versa? I don't know...

Someone getting shot in your apartment building is a different animal. There's no telling what happened, a testosterone fueled confrontation that erupted into violence, a drug deal that went bad, women at the cause, or just plain loony tunes random violence. I would have asked more questions myself, but then, maybe you didn't really want to know all the details. The shootings might have involved somebody you knew personally, and that would have been a very uncomfortable situation.

Enjoyed the rest of the issue and the letter column, but no immediate comments come to mind so I'll close off. Looking forward to the next issue you put out, whatever it might be titled.

- Bob Jennings

Lloyd Penney – Penneys@bell.net, 7 Feb 2023

Who cares about pubbing your ish? Well, the last of us seem to, and you never know, it might come into vogue again by kids who want to do something their grandpas did. Always possible, and can't discount it just yet. Everything old is new again, as the old song says.

Dark Toys? Unloved Toys? Whatever title you decide upon, send it along. Fandom is now not what I remember, mostly because we stay in one general place/interest while fandom, in its every changing manner, will swoosh past us, and leave us in its dust.

A wise fan says, if not even the dust is noticed, was it ever there?

Would I want to leave Canada and move to a foreign country? The only one I can think of is Great Britain, not that it's all that great right now, and sanity there is in short supply. The country to the south of us is the world's greatest and most powerful insane asylum, and while much of Europe seems to be quiet, the madness much of the world is afflicted by, courtesy of Trump and his star pupil Putin, there is terrible political nonsense mostly created by right-wing groups who want the best for themselves, and not for you. I have been to a few other countries, and the one I am living in is fairly good.

Don't forget Xi Jinping, who also wants to reshape the world by re-establishing China as the center of the universe, starting with the forcible re-conquest of Taiwan. We have made options for us to watch as the world goes down the toilet. In the short term, I would like to have visited the United Kingdom myself, but – in its infinite wisdom – fandom decided against my winning TAFF when I ran. Now I'm too old, feeble and crotchety. I would also like to have visited France and Italy once in my life, despite the gloss of both nations having worn off a bit. At this point, I can't even get to Etobicoke.

We have enjoyed *Star Trek: Picard*, and season 3 looks like it will be Next Generation Redux. That's okay, because I guess we have to find Brent Spiner some work, doing some iteration of Data.

I have the impression that we will be seeing Moriarty again. As good guy or bad, or something in-between, we can only guess.

Many people asked, how incompetent is Jason Kenney, and could there be anyone worse than him? Albertans said hold my beer, and Danielle Smith is there, making Jason look good. Smith was the leader of a separatist party, and now that she is in power with the UCP, she is finding out just how loony a lot of her previous thinking was. I believe the province is due an election soon, so perhaps the province can ditch the crazy Right, and bring in the NDP, who did NOT lose billions of dollars the last time they were in power... more UCP lies.

The local...really?

Feel lucky that I didn't name it Penney Lane. Or Bad Penneys. Or worse, Qui Mal y Pennese which is downright atrocious French.

Mask requirements have been relaxed here, and conveniently, the provincial government will no longer announce the numbers of COVID cases and deaths. You don't want to be safe? Fine, go ahead and die. We have every intention of surviving this pandemic, so we still mask up. We've had five shots, and we plan to ask in the near future about getting a sixth. We have plenty of stupidity in Canada, an over-supply. Maybe Eric would like to import some more?

Most of us cannot recall when our reigning monarch was not Elizabeth II. Even as Charles turns 75 very soon, it still kinda feels like *The Windsors: The Next Chapter*, with all of the intrigue and scandal of a fairly generic soap opera. I have seen advance mintings of British ceremonial coins. Also, Australia has decided that with the passing of Elizabeth and the imminent crowning of Charles, they will put indigenous/aboriginal artworks on their new bills.

I'd like to see Charles on our coins, but perhaps only on the Loonies and Twonies. We have already replaced the monarch on our paper money, and now we seem committed to replacing our prime ministers with whatever politically popular activists are current.

One thing I have always liked about SF conventions is that they sell memberships, not admissions. They have been set up to encourage you to not only buy your membership, but also participate as a panelist, or artist, or some other kind of presenter. Admissions let you in, but there seems to be the hidden admonition to come in but Don't Touch Anything!

Editorial work beckons, yeah, yeah, coming...so I'd better get to it. Thanks for this series of zines, and by all means, send me your next. **- Lloyd Penney**

"But then there was Ted White. Although he had nothing else to say, he spared no effort to ensure that every shortcoming of Morty would be held up to the light, and the writer's inability to compare with his betters made manifest ... yet not a single word of even faint praise. Is this not why we love Ted so?" -- my letter to Rob Jackson, in response to the release of Inca 21 at Corflu 40 at the end of the month.

Prodigal Trek

The other day, I watched season one of *Star Trek: Prodigy*. If you haven't heard of this, I very nearly didn't myself. It is new in the Trek franchise, produced by Nickelodeon and is designed for younger audiences. It is similar in one respect to *Star Trek: Below Decks* – both are animated. Yet, they are *different*. *Below Decks* is conventionally animated. It is oriented to a young audience, but one that also includes older fans in their thirties, forties and even older. *Prodigy*, on the other

hand is, is geared toward the videogame age group, and tries hard to look the part. Tattoos and piercings are the norm. To be blunt, it is deliberately gratifying its target audience with their own rebellious instincts.

Is this a bad thing? I don't know. Maybe. Maybe not. What media doesn't manipulate its target audience? It may depend on your age or your taste in entertainment. I had a mixed reaction to *Prodigy* – neither positive nor negative. The premise begins with a young rebellious prisoner on a mining colony. More characters are introduced one by one, then conspire together to escape. They discover a ridiculous McGuffin that aids them in their escape plans, and the chase is on. Will they be recaptured? Will the McGuffin be taken by the bad guys? Will this rag-tag band of teen-age refugees finally learn how to run the McGuffin like pros, and outsmart the grown-up pursuit? You know they will...

What else could you expect, since young audiences like nothing better than outsmarting adults? I don't really fault the transparent appeal to the audience's age, but it might have been made a little less implausible.

There are many pluses on the balance sheet, however, including lavish computer animation, decent dialog, voice acting and plotting. It does have a Star Treky feel... with plenty of canon and self-references. The episodes have much the same sort of Treky pseudo-science, and emphasis on ideas as well as action. On the other hand, the action is often way over the top. The animation is based entirely on a video game aesthetic, and nothing is on-screen for long without violent camera angles, exaggerated perspectives, breakneck action, special effects and explosions.

I think what I felt least positive feelings about was the idea that a miscellaneous group of teens could escape a prison planet, find a lost, top secret Star Fleet ship, manage to take off with it and not crash into the nearest planet, run it without adequate training and overcome every problem thrown at them successfully. I was a teenager once ... I had trouble doing my grade-11 homework, let alone piloting a starship. I was considered quite bright, too, but still I was no Wesley Crusher. This is a lazy plot device common in the genre of Young Adult entertainment, and partisans would probably react quite angrily if I knocked it. So, I'll let that pass.

Remember, I'm an old fogey and the enemy to everyone who is free and cool! To my way of thinking, the spirit of Star Trek is best demonstrated with narratives about problem sharing ... not rebellion against parental authority for its own sake. There is certainly a lot of rebelling in *Prodigy*. Arch villains pursue the fleeing young prisoners and their starship through the entire first season. This is the morality play stuff you expect from Star Wars rather than Star Trek, and is a little disappointing. On the balance, however, I think the series stands up pretty well, and can be enjoyed without reservation.

Strange New Trek

I heard good things about *Star Trek: Strange New Worlds*. I waited for the DVD for ages with crossed fingers, hoping for the best. A couple of weeks ago, the disks appeared at Walmart and I eagerly hurried home with a copy. There were four disks with ten episodes and a modest number of special features. Ten episodes are not very many and I'm minded that it took *The New Generation* two whole years, and 48 episodes for the series to establish itself on solid footing. How likely is it that *Strange New Worlds* can find its way in only ten episodes? So I didn't approach the new series with overly-demanding expectations.

The early adventures of the USS Enterprise begin well. The Enterprise looks almost exactly the same as the Enterprise in the years before 2226, with updating to bring the interior sets more in line with current budgets and effects. I think they are too luxurious looking for what is supposed to be a functional quasi-military vessel, full of engineering and science labs, but that is a minor thing. The crew is mostly unfamiliar to us, but includes Captain Pike, Ensign Uhuru, and of course Spock. Completely new are ships doctor Joseph M'Benga, Nurse Christine Chapel, Una Chin-Riley ("Number One"), an Andorian engineer named Hemmer, Erica Ortegas (helmsman), and La'an Noonien-Singh (head of security).

This is about where I start to have problems with the show. There are entirely too many new characters, too many of whom have not established sufficiently different personalities. "Number One" for instance, is secretly a genetically engineered human, and executive officer. Noonien-Singh's family was murdered by the Gorn, and has understandable issues. Ortegas is a bit of a wise-guy. She also has an outrageous Mohawk haircut. Nurse Chapel is a platinum blonde who wears white. The problem is that while they have various markers to tell them apart, they really didn't seem to have very different personalities. Even Uhuru seemed rather the same and most easily told apart by having her hair shaved to a nub. This may sort itself out with more episodes – ten is not very many. But the engineer has not such trouble establishing himself as a unique individual. Pity they killed him in the next-to-last episode!

There was also a subtle change in the character of Captain Pike. In *Discovery*, he is more in the mould of the young Kirk, and is a take-charge sort of guy. For *Strange New Worlds*, he becomes more of a moderator and diplomat. The original series is focused mainly on Kirk, with Spock and Bones as the principal secondary characters. SNW, on the other hand, is clearly an ensemble series, in which the stories are spread evenly among the characters, and doesn't focus on the captain. By all accounts, this is quite deliberate. This doesn't ring true to me. A command structure such as Star Fleet should be strongly centralized, but Pike barely seems in charge at all. Maybe the 24th century is more equalitarian? But Kirk would have put up with allowing his subordinates so much autonomy.

I think the final thought I'll leave you with is how many plots in Strange New Worlds seem to be derive straight from other sources. For instance, the Andorian engineer is telepathic, but *blind!* Now, where have we heard that before? Doctor M'Benga has a daughter dying of an incurable disease, and has hidden her in the transporter beam's matter buffer. I could have sworn that Scotty did that first on the USS Jenolan as an emergency measure, 80 or 90 years in the future. And the *ship's doctor* devised this expedient? In one episode, aliens are hatched in people's bodies just like in *Alien*. In yet another episode, the plot uses the same idea that Ursula K. LeGuin explored in *The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas*. It seems to me that such a one-for-one retelling without credit is close to plagiarism. What else I may have missed, I can't say from one viewing.

Still, there is a great deal about Strange New Worlds that is good, and I want it to have a fair chance to find itself, as well as deepen the characters. It will probably take time, and the series has probably made it more difficult than should have been the case. The second season has been scheduled, so presumably the cast will return to the studio in Toronto's west end to continue the never-ending adventure.

I received this email the other day from Bob Wilson. He wanted to fool around with a chatbot, and downloaded an app. After a bit of thought, he gave the AI a workout, by assigning it to write a television pitch about Toronto fandom in the 1970s. But let Bob tell the story in his own words...

FandomBots/Robert Charles Wilson

Thought you might get a kick out of this. You know about AI chatbots like ChatGPT, I presume? The ones that are threatening to put writers out of work? I gave ChatGPT's OpenAI program this prompt:

"Please write an outline for a television comedy-drama series to be called "The Derelicts." Set in Toronto in the late 1970s, the series focuses on the interactions and adventures of four characters: Taral, a talented but unemployable young cartoonist; Phil, a brilliant but talkative and easily angered amateur scholar, also unemployed; Bob, an aspiring but unpublished science fiction writer; and Victoria, a brilliant but timid young woman who is marginally employed and whose apartment is a recurring location. Other locations include a cheap Greek restaurant called Plato's Symposium, and various bookstores and pinball arcades on Toronto's Yonge Street strip. All four are science fiction fans and members of a local club called the Ontario Science Fiction Society ("OSFiC"), and their activities include publishing science fiction fanzines and late-night walks through the city."

The chatbot responded with this:

Title: The Derelicts

Genre: Comedy-Drama

Setting: Toronto, Late 1970s

Main Characters:

Tara – A talented but unemployable young cartoonist

Phil – A brilliant but talkative and easily angered amateur scholar, also unemployed

Bob – An aspiring but unpublished science fiction writer

Victoria – A brilliant but timid young woman who is marginally employed, and whose apartment is a recurring location

Other Locations:

Plato's Symposium – A cheap Greek restaurant.

Bookstores and Pinball arcades on Toronto's Yonge Street strip.

Plot:

The series follows the interactions and adventures of the four main characters who are science fiction fans and members of the Ontario Science Fiction Society ("OSFiC"). The group is struggling with unemployment and underemployment, and often finds solace in their shared passion for science fiction. They spend their days publishing science fiction fanzines and frequenting the local bookstores and pinball arcades on Yonge Street.

As they navigate their day-to-day lives, they often find themselves in absurd situations, like trying to scam their way into a local comic book convention or attempting to start their own publishing house. Their antics are often fueled by their unique personalities, such as Phil's quick temper or Bob's overactive imagination.

The group frequently meets at Plato's Symposium, a cheap Greek restaurant where they discuss their latest projects and brainstorm new ideas. Victoria's apartment also serves as a recurring location where they often gather for impromptu game nights and movie screenings.

Despite their struggles, the group maintains a strong bond and supports each other through thick and thin. The series explores themes of friendship, creativity, and the challenges of finding one's place in the world.

Episodes:

Pilot – The group meets at OSFiC and decides to start their own science fiction fanzine.

"Con Job" – The group attempts to scam their way into a local comic book convention.

"Publish or Perish" – Bob decides to start his own publishing house and enlists the help of the group.

"Pinball Wizard" – Phil's obsession with pinball leads the group on a wild adventure through Yonge Street's arcades.

"The Great Debate" – The group argues over the merits of Star Wars vs. Star Trek.

"The Rejection Letter" – Bob receives a rejection letter from a publisher and struggles with rejection.

"Game Night" – The group gathers at Victoria's apartment for a game night, but tensions rise when Phil becomes overly competitive.

"Lost in Translation" – The group attempts to translate an obscure science fiction novel from Japanese.

"The Big Break" – Taral gets a big break when his cartoons are featured in a local newspaper, but struggles with the pressure of success.

"The End of an Era" – OSFiC is forced to disband, and the group must find a new way to stay connected.

I don't know about you, but if I was a network executive, I'd greenlight this in an instant! - TW

Wheels Don't Fail Me Now!

Bit of a scare today. It think it was the first time I'd been out of the house since last week, or earlier, when I and Traveling Matt got stuck n the mud just outside my building. I got dressed for the weather and plopped into the chair, and started to roll. To my surprise, the chair did a sharp right turn into the right wheel. Nothing would make the right wheel turn! With only the left wheel responding, I was proverbially dead in the water ... or the mud. I messed around with it, trying to get the wheel to respond, with no luck. Without the right wheel and motor, I wasn't going anywhere at all. I kept at it and finally the wheel began to budge. I think what happened was that mud from my last outing had dried around the wheel bearings and immobilized it. I was able to get out today after all! Speaking of Traveling Matt, I need to speak to the manufacturer about replacing the old batteries. They are still good for around the neighborhood, but soon I will be having trouble going as far as Dufferin Mall. I'll be able to shop locally, but no DVDs, no toys, not food court or anything else I might need. I have the \$800 or more that I'll need, so it's a matter of contacting the manufacturer ... and waiting. That's one reason I want to get started on this now. I could eke out the battery's life a while longer, but I don't want to be stuck in the middle of summer!

And the last words for this issue. Ted White wrote a letter to the recent Inca, who took his precious time to see that the world was kept informed. I wrote back to Rob Jackson about the piece of fan fiction he published. You can read it in Inca 21. "Although he had nothing else to say, Ted spared no effort to ensure that every shortcoming of *Morty* would be held up to the light, and the writer's inability to compare with his betters made manifest ... yet not a *single* word of false praise. Is this not why we love Ted so?" Yes, how could we not?

Traveling Matt on Last Wheels - 8 April 2023

Bad news. A friend of mine came over on Thursday, and we were going to go down the street for dinner. I got dressed up, plopped down in Traveling Matt, ready to go, and dammit if the left wheel didn't seize up just like last time! Apparently, the problem wasn't - as I had thought - mud dried around the left axle. This time no amount coaxing would get the left wheel to work, and all the chair would do is make right turns in a tight circle. In the end, we had to give up, and we ordered in a pizza. Naturally, it is a long weekend, and there's little I can likely do about the problem for now. We did call an emergency number for the manufacturer, and we did get a *live* operator. But all she did was tell us that she'd "get someone." But after a wait, all that happened was that a recorded message started, then told us to leave a number. I did, but could have done better if I hadn't been so flustered. I wonder if anyone will even phone back? My experience with this outfit has not been good - slow, cavalier and expensive. This is all on top of my replace the heavy batteries in the chair with fresh ones, an expensive order in itself. For the time being I'm *seriously* inconvenience. I cannot really even leave the apartment, although I can use a walker to reach the elevator with difficulty, if I need to check my mail. The walker isn't very useful, however, since I don't need it for *support*, but to sit and rest when my legs give out somewhere after 50 and 100 feet. I don't get a lot of mail this in early month, anyway. But I have doctor's appointments that I now have to phone and cancel, and then eventually re-book ... but I don't know *when*. I also have only limited groceries on hand. About a week's worth, and I'll run out of coffee beans as well, so I'll have to settle for more expensive ones from the supermarket rather than from the farmer's market. A friend of mine, Steven, says he can shop for my needs if necessary, so I won't starve. But, if I haven't got Traveling Matt fixed by the end of the month, I'll also run into problems with paying my rent and utilities! At this point, I'm not worrying about the long term, since there is always some remote possibility that the %\$#@! repairs can be made quickly. In the meantime, I did what I usually do when I'm landed in a huge, unasked for, mess. I sleep for about 18 hours and let dreamtime soothe away some of the anxiety ... then try to get back to work as though it will solve anything.

- Endit