

BROKEN TOYS 1

Broken Toys is a personalzines, more informal than New Toy, and in desperate need of a letter column for next issue. As has been the case for more than 20 years now, I live at 245 Dunn Ave., Apt. 2111, Toronto Ontario M6K 1S6. Or loc me at – Taral@Teksavvy.com

ANOTHER NEW START

Taral Wayne

The other day, someone told me it was 2012.

Eh? I replied. There was no answer, since I was talking to myself.

It turned 2012 while I was sitting at the keyboard, no doubt busy with something as unimportant as what I'm writing now. Or perhaps I was erasing spots and unwanted lines from an image file. My eye happened to rove over the tool bar in the lower right corner of the screen, and I suddenly noticed that it was already next year.

I had no plans to celebrate. There was no bottle of bubbly in the fridge, nobody warm to cuddle with on the sofa. No pile of holiday videos to watch. I suppose it might have been nice to watch the seconds tick off, one by one, and suddenly realize that I had one year less to accomplish all the wonderful things I expected I would do in my life... and still haven't.

Instead, I kept on typing or sketching through the rest of the night... Day 365 was pretty much the same as the previous 364.

If I'm smart, though, I'll take myself in hand. I should resolve not to spend too much time on things that really don't matter very much. Pleasant pastimes like hobnobbing with people across the printed page, and doodling odd fantasies about romancing hand puppets or cartoon characters. There is joy in entertaining people this way, even if it makes no money and it isn't likely to put my name in any history book. Lately, though, I've begun to suspect that I'm not even entertaining as many people as I thought I was. Or, I'm not entertaining them enough that they feel obliged to remark on it. I'm confident of my audience of twenty or thirty in fandom, but is that all I should aspire to? Shouldn't I be thinking bigger? Some people are writing for *millions* of readers... can't I aspire to even one or two hundred?

Maybe it *is* time for a change. One very obvious step I could take is to spend less time writing for fandom. This won't please my twenty or thirty loyal followers, of course. If you're one of them, take comfort in the knowledge that'll I'm probably long past being able to change my habits, and will go on

doing the same old thing that I've been doing for the last few years... I wonder, then, if anyone will even remember that I ever had any regrets about it?

Probably not. Were they ever listening? – TW

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

2011 was a busy year, so much so that I'm looking at a notebook that keeps track of what I'm doing, wondering if I shouldn't retire it and start another. Just the list of things I wrote and were published in *Drink Tank* alone will reach 85 items when Chris catches up with me. 85! I know fanwriters who fancied themselves legends-in-their-own-time who haven't written **half** as much as that for just *one* fanzine! I've been a fixture in *Banana Wings*, *Askance*, *Challenger* and *File 770* for a few years now. I've had articles in most issues of Eric Mayer's *E-Ditto*. The list of other titles that have been graced with my fanwriting would do a habitual plagiarist proud. But we don't make legends anymore.

I have to be content with letters of comment that shower me with egoboo.

The trouble is that letter writing seems to be a dying art, along with genuine fan art and actually publishing on paper. The reason for this has gradually emerged. When fanzines can be downloaded anonymously from an internet site, there is no sense of obligation to respond. Downloading the file costs no one anything, and nobody knows you downloaded it. When editors like Chris Garcia state publicly that they don't even *care* if anyone locs, the problem is compounded. It's officially *okay* to be one of the invisible legion of fans who neither create nor support fanzines, just consume them as their natural right.

The rest of the internet calls that a "file leech." It's not meant to be complimentary.

The abysmal truth is that I'm not getting enough of those locs... or that egoboo, either.

Look, it isn't as though I'm an egotistical monster whose appetite for flattery is infinite. My appetite is large, but definitely finite. I'm on record as saying that the reason I write is that I enjoy entertaining people, and I *meant* it. However, how am I to know I *am* entertaining anyone when I step away from the mike and there's no applause from the darkened club? Am I performing to a vacant room?

Surely, I'm not the only performer who leaves the stage wondering if he was a hit or a flop. It's probably no coincidence that the fanzines with the liveliest and most rewarding letter columns are those that are still printed on paper and mailed to the readers. In those, the old relationship between zines and fans still holds. Summed up as *The Usual*, it is the binding that ties the community together. The prediction has certainly been made before, but I'm going to make it again – when the last paper fanzine page comes out of the printer and only downloads are left, I predict the end of fanzine fandom – as we've known it – will shortly follow... *finally*.

Irrevocably.

Until that day, I'm going to try to make the best of it. Of late, there have been signs that my writing is slowing down a little, and that I'm making my proofreader (Walt) work harder to catch my sloppy mistakes. It must mean that I'm not just bitching – that I am actually enjoying my work less than

before. If I write less, it follows that I'll have less to publish. Looking at my notebook again, I see there are fanzines that I could easily *not* contribute to, for one reason or another. In the case of *Visions of Paradise*, the reason is all too clear. Sadly, Robert Sabella died, late last year. Dave Locke is no longer publishing *Time and Again*. Eric Mayer has finished with *E-Ditto* and I'm unsure of his plans. I can strike both of those off my list of zines open to submissions. Lately, I've been pissed off one too many times by another fanzine editor, and I'll fry in hell before he sees another word of mine. Not that he's indicated he wants to... quite the contrary. Some other zines are huge and lavish, and don't print hard copies. Since I can't afford to print my contributor's copy, nertz to *them*. Other zines are strangely obsessed with publishing reviews, articles on science fiction history, interviews and other ephemera that puzzles me. We're *fans*, aren't we? Doesn't that mean we already know everything there is to know about science fiction? Let us move on, already.

What fanzines are left to me, then?

What do you know! *Banana Wings*, *Askance*, *Challenger* and *File 770*.

Also *Drink Tank*. I've been wondering about *Drink Tank*. First, there's the lack of a letter column and feedback. Also, I've not been crazy about the last 20 or so issues. When Arnie Katz first introduced me to Chris Garcia's zine, it was a frequent, unpretentious fanzine that was mainly about pop culture. That was alright. I read comics, watch movies, collect bubble gum cards and listen to Pink Floyd too. But ever since Chris decided to focus on his "52 Weeks of Science Fiction Films," *Drink Tank* has been almost entirely a film zine. If you removed the few locs and my frequent contributions, the change is even more noticeable. Is this really the sort of zine I want to be writing for anymore? The thought has grown on me that I should begin a countdown, and leave the pages of *Drink Tank* once and for all when I've contributed my 100th article to it.

(Chris will stop hitting me in a little while. Then I can ask him whether it was because I'm thinking of leaving him, or because I said I didn't enjoy *Drink Tank* as much as I used to.)

The downside of quitting *DT* is that it is widely read. You don't win a Hugo by aiming to exclusively please a handful of diehard "trufans." I seem to recall seeing stats over at eFanzines.com that indicate that *DT* is downloaded about ten times more often than its nearest rival. If I have a raging ego to feed, can I afford the extravagance of picking where I'm published on the basis of something as insubstantial as my personal tastes? Well, maybe Chris will finish with his 52 flicks before I reach my 100th article, and *Drink Tank* will be more the way it was again. It's not as though I'm likely to write the next 15 articles by the end of January.

It should take at least until the end of March.

You have no way of knowing it, but I have had two entire issues of *New Toy* almost ready to send to eFanzines. For the most part, the material has been written and set aside. I haven't edited the locs for the next issue, and there's no editorial or cover for the one after, but these are details I can attend to in a lickety-split or two. Last year, though, it seemed that I no sooner finished articles for all my favourite fanzines than the next issues had come out, publishing my contributions and forcing me to start all over again. This year I'll produce *New Toy 4* and *New Toy 5* in the same month... or publicly eat *Drink Tank 300!* I'm sure Chris would consent to print one out for the occasion.

Response to *New Toy 3* was rather sparse, though. Also, editing a fanzine with software as primitive as Acrobat, then converting to .pdf format, is a rather tricky affair. It wasn't much fun trying to figure

out how to insert titles and illos without causing a page of text to vanish and reappear on the following page. Matching the lengths of two columns then reverting to single column took finesse of an order it normally takes to master magical grimoires. Separating lines, once added, sometimes stubbornly refused to go away when not wanted later.

Discussing ways and means to publish fanzines with Eric Mayer, I've begun to wonder whether publishing a genzine, even one that is only modestly long, isn't more of an undertaking that I really want. Perhaps it would be wiser to throttle back my ambitions a little, and produce a zine half the size more frequently? If I did that, should I go ahead with the next issues of *New Toy*, and launch the ensmalled zine under the same title? Or should I publish the ensmalled zine collaterally, with a new title? That way, I would be free to publish a larger *New Toy* with snazzy layout whenever I wanted. Since you're reading *Broken Toys*, you know which way the coin came down.

Having published nothing of my own at all last year, it must seem like an awful case of hubris to suggest pubbing two issues this year, and beginning a new title altogether. But that's far from the end of it! I have all my old Canadian Fan History articles to edit into a one-shot volume. And I really **must** finally release the scans of *Ah, Sweet Idiocy*. The original intention was to produce ASI along with other material as a CD-ROM, as I had done for *Energumen*. Sales of the *Energumen* disk had not been terribly encouraging in the short run, though. (Especially considering that Mike Glicksohn bought the first ten off the press!) I wonder if there's even as much of an audience for ASI as there was for *that*. But I'd hate to simply upload the scans to Bill Burns' [efanzines](#) without any of the supplemental material. Whatever I do in the end, I will try to do it this year.

And now, for something completely different, I would like to pull a squirrel from a hat. However, I am unable to do this. I could present a complete list of all the fanwriting I did last year. I could list all the fanwriting I did last year... but perhaps *now* isn't a good time. *Never* probably is. — *TW*

ALL GOOD THINGS, EVEN FURRY

I'm told there is some sort of a furry fandom in Toronto. Back in the 1980s, I know for a fact there was one. It consisted of me; a guy who called himself "Hepzibah" at first, then "Kratsminsch;" Kevin Duane, who used "Assinio" as his alias; "Scout" and a few others I knew as Dan, Tom, Steven, Mike, Allan "D'Otter", Mel, Peter, Amanda, Terry and so on. I've misplaced a few names along the way, and I didn't met them all in that order either.

They were a mixed lot.

Assinio was from New York, and had a background in science fiction fandom and comics. Furry fandom appealed to him because of devils of his own, which I won't name lest they feed a stereotype about furry fandom that is already troublesome enough. He moved to Toronto in the late 1980s, and appears to have called my number almost as soon as he had moved the last of his stuff into his apartment.

Krats I had known from the most ancient of days, when I was active in the local Toronto science fiction club. I don't know exactly when he began appearing at meetings. Probably around 1981 or 1982. He initially gravitated toward serious book collectors, and I was slow taking note. By the time I

was involved in furry comics and Krats had established himself on the Muck, we already had a longish history. Running the Trap Line BBS made Krats something of a focal point of the local group.

Tom was an oddball, who might almost be described as the opposite of Assinio. He was positively squeamish about adult material in funny animal comics, and more than usually interested in European funny animal stories. Tom was so European in his tastes and outlook that he almost seemed to be from one of the Benelux nations. In fact, he was a banal Torontonionian. Some of his education was in Quebec, however, and that may have given him the Old World air he seemed to have.

Terry ran a website of his own. It featured art that Terry scanned and uploaded to his site without permission or notice – which led to a rather long period of acrimony with Krats and me. I used to call him Terry and the Pirates... to distinguish him from Terrie Smith, a noted artist in California. In time, the Pirate came over to our way of thinking, but in another way he had the last word – piracy remains a problem in furry fandom to this day. He and Assinio got along pretty well, so it wasn't long before the three of us were driving down to the American East Coast for Philcon and Anthrocon.

Dan was a computer whiz who almost nobody ever saw. Mike was into costumes, and drove up from London, Ontario to meet with the gang at the Chop Suey joint across from Krats's place. Allan was another legacy from the SF club, who I first got to know about the same time as I did Krats. He is about the most mild-mannered person I've ever met. Mel didn't run in our circle or anyone else's – she was an artist who was usually surrounded by one or two admirers... and liked it that way, I'm sure. But we heard from her from time to time. There was another Terry as well, but this one published a fanzine called *Fang, Claw & Steel*.

Not least was Steven. Steven wasn't all that much into furry fandom, but was sociable and found his way into our group in some shadowy way that makes me want to thank whatever random forces were at work. He turned out to be a pretty good friend as well as unusually level-headed for a fan.

A couple more years brought Todd Sutherland (Scout) and Chuck Davies (Ferris) into the group. Then Andrew, Cargo, Silfur and others who I never got to know very well. They swung differently, or swung both ways – I really didn't swing at all. Despite it, I got to know Todd particularly well for three or four years. He was an artist and not bad as a word-smith either. The friendship unraveled later, for reasons never very clear to me. The others drifted away from our original group, having their own agenda in furry fandom.

That was the first split in the local furry fandom, although I don't think we realized it at the time. Small get-togethers had become very large for awhile, then there were two sets of get-togethers, then still more events... few of which I kept abreast of.

At some point it became obvious that both loosely defined groups had fallen apart. The BBS was offline. We had stopped getting together, either at my place or at the Chong Ching. After a couple of years, no one stepped forward to throw a room party at the local SF con. Tom moved to Winnipeg, Silfur and Cargo left for the West Coast, Todd gafiated from the fandom entirely. Terry stopped driving to East Coast cons. Assinio got into trouble with the autocrat who ran Anthrocon. Not much was left to hold onto in my group – just Krats and I. Whatever happened to the crowd centered around the Isabella street apartment, I don't know.

A few years later, Krats and I parted ways as well.

But I'm told there *is* a furry fandom in Toronto.

I first became aware of something stirring a couple of years ago, when I heard of something called the "TorFur List." I logged in once, looked at it for a while, and pretty much forgot about it afterward. It seemed to be little more than a long list of names and addresses of people who had joined, but I recognized *none* of them. There were a number of comment threads, but none that I felt compelled to join. Whoever these people were, they didn't seem to be doing anything that I greatly cared about.

To some extent, I was in touch through e-mail with one of TorFur's guiding lights... a local fan named "Dan Skunk." He seemed a bit intense, in a way I recognized as common in any fandom – particularly among people who discover *far* too much meaning in fandom for a mere hobby. Instinct prevailed, and I politely declined a couple of get-together invitations.

I asked around a bit. Lisa, a friend of Steven's, seemed to know some of the new people. She confirmed my prejudices – they were mainly young, reared on TV fare that was a far more recent vintage than my own viewing preferences, and generally regarded fandom as a stage for costuming or role-playing. She said it wasn't for her, and I didn't think it sounded like it was for me, either.

A little while later, I heard there was a commotion of sorts among the local furries. Dan Skunk and the others were in a feud over leadership, and now there were *two* furry lists for Toronto fandom. I think I joined the other one, too, just out of good form. So far I haven't noticed any profound difference in either one, just a matter of who's calling the shots.

From what Lisa tells me, the little bit that I've heard through the old gang and dribbles of news along the grapevine, the new Toronto furries have their own regular get-togethers. One is at a place called The Old Spaghetti Factory. If your tastes aren't exotic, it's not a bad place to spend \$14.98 on 15 cents worth of pasta, 45 cents worth of sauce and \$1 worth of ground beef. Cheaper to eat at home. I gather, too, that the initial description of the gang as mostly young, mainly into goofy costumes and under the apprehension that Pokemon and Picachu are classic furry characters is, essentially, still correct.

They are running a con now, also, called *Furnal Equinox*. 2012 ought to make the second or third year. If it didn't cost \$40, I might drop in to scope it out. But since \$40 is about my entire month's disposable income at present, I don't think I will. In any case, I've been given to believe there's nothing there that would interest me – costumed guys who want to be called Pookifur or Blüdwolf. One con photo on-line shows a couple of hundred members, the front rows all in doggy pajamas – it was enough to turn *me* off.

The lack of curiosity seems mutual, too.

I'd really like to be more positive about the reappearance of furry fans here at home, but find it hard. Been there, done that, moved on, you can't go home again, run out of clichés.

So they say there's a furry fandom in Toronto... I suppose it depends on who you talk to. – *TW*

ROTSLER GOES WEST

A while ago, the File 770 blog site announced that the winner of the Rotsler award for 2011 was D. West. It hardly surprised me. We are rapidly running out of practicing fanartists with enough history to merit rewarding. A short list I informally submitted to Mike Glycer included only four or five names – and one of them was D. West.

But D. turned it down. Food for thought, there. But, in the absence of any statements from D. it would be hazardous to try to guess what he was thinking.

It wasn't long, though, before D. spoke up and said what everyone *thought* he was probably thinking. Rather than put words in his mouth, let me quote D. himself from File 770:

“Rotsler may not have meant any harm (and may even be said to have acted on generous impulses) but in the end he did do harm, effectively by a kind of artistic dumbing-down. (“Hey, you don’t have to think about it, and it doesn’t have to be good — it just has to fill the space.”) He was not the only offender, but he was certainly the most prominent. So, an award for fan art with Rotsler’s name attached may also not mean any harm (and may even be said to be based on generous impulses) but I don’t feel I can have anything to do with it. To reconcile acceptance of this award with my opinions on Rotsler’s work and the effects it has had on fan art would require a feat of mental and moral gymnastics beyond even my capabilities. Thank you anyway for the compliment of choosing me, but you will have to find a recipient elsewhere.”

It has to be said that I’ve had my issues with Rotsler’s art myself. It’s facile, but more resembles a sort of imagistic hand-writing than actual drawings. When you’ve seen one Rotsler sock-puppet face, you’ve seen them all. Yet, the impact of Rotsler on fandom has to be measured against other matters than just draftsmanship. In many ways, he was the right artist at the right time. His drawings were tailored to fannish interests, and perfectly matched the state of the art of fanzine reproduction at that time. Unlike similar artists – such as Ray Nelson or Bob Shaw – Rotsler’s output lasted decades. It’s hardly odd that he had left an impression behind. It is a little odder how that impression could become outright adulation, and how it lasted decades after his effective retreat from fanzines. But what is fandom if not fond of its traditions, eh?

But I question whether it is just Rotsler’s “primitive” style of drawing that D. objects to. That would be too simplistic of him. Also, by some schools of thought, the “primitive” style of Fieffer, Thurber or UPA Studios is the quintessence of hip and sophisticated – niggling little details, such as how many fingers or indeed even how many dimensions, are unimportant so long as the artist communicates effectively with the viewer.

I think it is more likely that D. is thinking that while Rotsler was capable of doing better work, he only did what was “good enough” for fandom. However, what the scope of Rotsler’s abilities actually was is a little hard to say. Some of the comments left on File 770 seem to imply that he was not exactly stretching himself. But I’ve seen Rotsler’s more conscientious work as well as his scribbles – it’s passable. Perhaps the best thing I can say about Rotsler’s “serious” illustrations is that they seem aware of their limitations and never vainly push their boundaries.

None of which seems relevant, anyway. What has anyone's opinion about Rotsler's art to do with the award? It has been pointed out that the Hugo is given for writing the best science fiction of the year, not for writing science fiction the way Hugo Gernsback did, or for writing SF that the editor of *Amazing Stories* would have even been willing to publish! From what I've read, he hated almost all SF written after World War II because it didn't promote science. Clearly, anyone who turned down a Hugo because its namesake was a rotten writer with outmoded ideas is reading far too much into a name.

As does D.

So, why has he surprised everyone with this act of gratuitous grandstanding?
I suspect because it *was* gratuitous grandstanding, and D. ought to have known it would be seen as such.

If D. has refused the Rotsler on the grounds that the award encourages the "dumbing-down" of fanart, it follows that D. feels that the artists who have accepted it are "dumbing-down" fanart too. D. doesn't really have to accuse the previous winners with being "dumbed-down" themselves... I think, it is strongly implied, though. At the very least, D. has said he is *more honest* than other artists who might have accepted an award they don't respect. Either way, D. is hoisting himself onto the moral high ground, only to discover it is a moral quagmire.

If Bill Rotsler is to be condemned for "dumbing down" fanart with slipshod draftsmanship, meaningless quips and doodles meeting a bare criteria for design, what can one say about D. West's art?

A great deal of his work consists of three or four nearly identical panels, with sketchy figures that show little in the way of facial expression, no background, a fixed point of view and a lot of text. But in fact, D. is capable of *much* more.

I almost hate to bring it up again – because I have ground this axe before – but some years ago, in the fanzine *Lagoon*, D. performed an artistic *tour de force*. He discussed a number of popular fanartists of the time, and provided a sample drawing for each. The drawings are unsigned, so the unwary readers would naturally assume they are by the artists under discussion. In fact, D. drew them *all*, showing a highly developed ability to mimic other artists' styles. As an artist with an interest in mimicry myself, it didn't take me long to discover D.'s trickery – especially when I came across his attempt to imitate yours truly. But in almost every case, D. was very near the mark and I doubt many readers realized they were being had.

If D. is capable of a high level of skill, why does he rarely demonstrate it? Perhaps he feels that in most cases the subject or the medium just doesn't call for that degree of effort. But doesn't that drag him down to the level of *Bill Rotsler*? When D. refused the award, was that not what he called "dumbing down" fanart?

It's what I call being hoisted by one's own petard. – TW

[Original story <http://file770.com/?p=7612>]

[D.West articles in *Lagoon* 6, locs from *Lagoon* 7 <http://www.cartiledgeworld.co.uk/dwest.html>]