

Broken Toys is a personalzine by **Taral Wayne**, and in no way implies that my other zine, *New Toy*, is a dead letter, just more bite than I can chew at present. The letter column once again surprises me by having letters. Nevertheless, I ponder the wisdom of publishing a list of names of readers who have *never* written. As has been the case for more than 20 years now, I live a desolate and futile existence at 245 Dunn Ave., Apt. 2111, Toronto Ontario M6K 1S6. Contact or loc me at Taral@Teksavvy.com however. The date is mid-**September 2012**, and this is ExtraTaraltorality (or Kiddelidivee Books & Art) **257**. Copyrighted past, present, future & in all parallel Dimensions, especially where corporate lawyers can buy court judgements wholesale.

Down Syndrome

Much of this issue is less than joyful or exuberant – if you’re hoping for a Chris Garcia moment, this issue probably hasn’t one. In keeping with the mood, I’ve designed a more muted logo than the usual brightly coloured ones I’ve used.

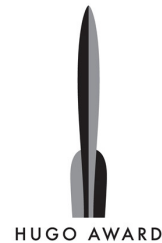
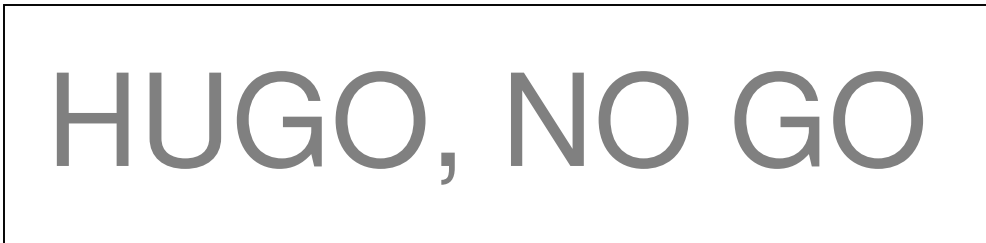
It might lighten the tone a little if I explain that the underlying photo this time is a snapshot taken one Christmas when I was five or six. It’s at my Grampa and Gramma’s place on Grenadier Road, not terribly far from where I live now, and close to where my Grampa worked as a barber. You can’t see the classic, small screen, black and white TV, or the artificial tree with the antique blown glass ornaments – whose survivors I still hang on my tree, after more than 50 years – but they’re in the photo, along with me and my new toys.

Left to right is a tin car and tin mobile home. I have no memory of these, oddly enough, though they’re obviously attractive. But I do remember the tin C-119 Flying Boxcar next to it, *vividly*. I’m wearing fleece-lined ankle-high slippers that I remember as being a little tight. They were a shiny, reddish-brown leather that I much admired. I’m holding a tin DC-9 airliner, by the look of it. My memory of it is not as good as the other plane, for some reason. My grandmother is tapping out a tune on a rainbow-coloured xylophone – hard to forget a thing like that, even though I had no talent and no earthly use for it. At some point one or two of the keys broke off, even though I never played with it. On the floor farther right is a glossy black tin locomotive. I don’t know what happened to it, but it looks so beautiful that I wish I had it to examine closely right now! Finally, the one plastic toy in the

lot – a 105 mm Howitzer. It had an elastic band-powered bolt and shot a rubber-tipped dart a few feet ... this was years before children came equipped with eyes installed so insecurely that they were apt to be put out by harmless toys, you understand. The cannon was a bilious-green, roughly the colour of those little puddles of ichor cats like to leave in unexpected places after they've been chewing grass. Next to me in the photo is a brass artillery shell that my grandfather had converted into an floor-standing ashtray – it fascinated me for hours when I was a kid. I was so disappointed that he didn't leave it to me in his will.

Everything else in the photo is at least as familiar to me today as it was in 1956, or whenever the shot was taken. I don't think I'd want to live there again, but I very often wish I could visit.

That's about as happy a thought as I'm going to have for most of the rest of the issue, I guess...



Last night, I answered a garbled but urgent sounding phone call from someone I knew in California. He was nearly unintelligible at first, leapfrogging over important points to conclusions I couldn't follow. My understanding wasn't helped by his thick, Spanish accent. But as my ear grew used to his speech, I pieced together the following story:

Someone named "Egypturnash" had just mentioned my name online in connection with the Hugo ceremonies.

Gawd. I had completely forgotten about the Hugos, and it was that Sunday night when the results would be known.

In fact, I had hardly given much thought to my personal chances for a Hugo from the moment I agreed to accept the nomination, several months ago, until that call. I thought I had no chance in hell, frankly, and so refused to dwell on it this year.

So, had I won, in spite of my ingrained pessimism? No freakin' way!

Eventually, I pieced together enough of the truth from the garbled conversation to deduce that I had *lost*. The first clue was that I got the call from California sometime after midnight, my time. In Chicago, it would have had to be after 11 p.m., and surely the Hugo ceremonies would have concluded at 8, or 9 at the latest. In the two hours that passed since the results became known, I figured *someone* at the Worldcon would have thought to call me, if I had won. No one *had*; therefore...

By now, everyone knows who the fan Hugo winners were. A professional writer named Jim C. Hines; an on-line *Locus*-wannabe; and Mo Starkey.

Each of the winners raises a different set of issues. The first issue is whether a blog is fanac or not. This is a tricky question, and one that I prefer to address by not trying to define what fanac *is*, but by asking what purpose it serves. In the case of Mr. Hines, I would imagine that his blog is part and

parcel of his career, a necessary tool to promote his professional work. It is also possible he writes it just for the hell of it, because he likes to write even when he would not be paid for it. That doesn't mean that Hines' blog does not promote his career, however.

It is a mistake to assume that the digital age has created a "level playing field" between pros and fans. Far from it; the internet may have only made matters worse. It is true that I can post a fanzine on-line and a million people *might* download it. But the plain fact is that they *won't*. Nobody knows who the fuck I am, so they simply don't care that my work is free for the pressing of an "enter" key. A million people know who Harlan Ellison is, though, and will leap at the chance to download his restaurant bill, if he should post it online. The old dichotomy between fan and pro has not been wiped out by the internet: if anything, it has been intensified. Your outreach online is predetermined by your prior reputation, even more than it was when fanac was limited to paper publication.

Taking easy Hugos from babes will become an increasingly popular sport among ambitious young professional writers, you can bank on it.

The second set of issues arise over *SF Signal*. Apart from the likelihood that *SF Signal* makes no profit (as yet), I see no real difference between it and *Locus*. The site also hosts podcasts, creating an uncomfortable overlap with the newly created category for Best Fan Podcast. The site's banner boasts that it has been nominated in *both* the Best Fanzine and Best Podcast categories – so, which is it? Can it be both? The banner also says it is a blog, but a blog has been defined as Fan Writing, hasn't it? Since when did blogs become fanzines as well? I'm fairly certain that the Hugo's rules describe a fanzine as having distinct issues, but there are no *issues* of *SF Signal* – it just goes on and on as the contributors add to it, like a roll of ticker tape.

Finally, there's Mo. I met Maurine at Reno, and she was a nice lady who I liked. There's nothing pretentious or ambitious about her – I'm worse in that respect, by far. I like Mo's work, too, and will even congratulate her for the Hugo she was given in Chicago.

I will say, however, that I prefer the covers she was doing for *Drunk Tank* before Chris Garcia began his "52-Weeks" campaign of reviewing a lot of old sci-fi movies. Since then, her covers mostly seem mainly to be a mash-up of photos she found online – distorted and filtered with Photoshop, then a lurid logo plastered at the top of the page. This is *not* her best work – but that's only my opinion, and clearly the majority of voters disagreed with me.

Where I have a problem with Mo's Hugo is not with Maureen herself, who is only doing what she ought to do as a fanartist. My complaint is that there is a small army of fan artists, who have rendered exemplary service to fandom for decades, who have still not won a Hugo – many of whom have never even been nominated! Newer fanartists really shouldn't cut in line – but they constantly do! Mo, for all that I like her work, has not been doing fanart for all that long and so has yet to render fandom much service. Most of her work has appeared on the covers of *Drunk Tank*, and some in convention publications. Yet it is Mo who has the Hugo, not Steve Stiles, nor Marc Schirmeister, nor Kurt Erichsen, nor Alan White, nor Dan Steffan, nor Ditmar, nor me ... just to name the "usual suspects."

Ah, but *Vox Populi! The Voice of the People!* That the voter must have what he wants is a truism that covers up for many ills. It appears that the voter no longer looks at art in fanzines, and prefers mashed-up photographs over pen and ink and the individual mannerisms of hand-drawn illustration. We must bow to the dumbing-down of the voters.

I just worry about how dumb they may ultimately become before the fan Hugos have no credibility whatever.

I suppose I must be grateful that at least Randall Munroe didn't win – though it was a tight race, from what I've heard.

False Dawn

Lenny Bailes is apparently telling people that “prodom is the new fandom.” I think I know what he means. In modern Megafandom, the majority of fans seem to believe that whatever pros write or post without being paid for it, is fanac. *Fans* do not fanac, they are only expected to read, watch, and buy things at conventions created by pros. Pros are creators. Fans are merely consumers. But, plainly, this is not the entire story. The truth is more that the focus of fandom has shifted away from solitary activities like writing or drawing, and toward participatory social activities like costuming, filking, seminars, panels, roleplaying and so on.

In any case, Lenny's observation is not only loosely applicable to the Hugos, it also seems to be valid for the Canadian wannabe SF award, the Aurora.

To be begin with, I have to confess that I was nominated for an Aurora this year. In all the I-don't-have-any-damn-idea-how-many years that the Auroras have been presented, I had never once been nominated for one – until now.

Excuse me if I say that this is a stunning indictment of Canadian fandom. It suggests an isolation from the rest of fandom that one would normally expect from a former Iron Curtain nation – but, in fact, Canadian fan groups are usually closely tied to American groups over the U.S. border. So, it seems a bit of a surprising situation that although I have had 11 Hugo nominations, been a Worldcon Guest of Honour and have won the Rotlser for my accomplishments as a fanartist, I have never made enough of an impression among my own countrymen to be nominated for an Aurora – until this year.

I think this can only be explained one way. Canadian fans are nearly all convention fans. Those who aren't can be summed up in one or two digits. There is virtually *no* old-school fanzine fandom in Canada. The number of active fanzine fans who are not Trekkies, gamers or whatnot in this country can be counted on your fingers, with a thumb or two left over. The population of Canada is around 35,000,000. The population of the U.S. is about nine times that number, or 315,000,000. Imagine if all of American fanzine fandom consisted of fewer than 100 individuals – a number smaller by far than the attendance of some Corflus.

Having said this, I think you can understand why I have never taken the Aurora seriously.

But would you have guessed that my disregard was so complete that when I was nominated earlier this year, I never bothered to mention it to anyone? It's true. When someone mentioned my nomination on Facebook, I couldn't very well ignore the comment; but I never spoke a word of it anywhere else. That's how much I cared, I'm afraid.

This year's Auroras are already old news, and have completely justified my silence. I was up against two other nominees in the Fan Other category. I had been nominated on the basis of the artwork for a certificate I designed for Graeme Cameron's “Canadian Fanzine Fanac Awards.” The second nominee was Lloyd Penney, whose nomination was based on his thousands (maybe millions) of letters of

comment. The third name on the ballot was that well-known “fan,” Peter Watts. He was nominated for the lecture he gave at the Toronto SpecFic Colloquium.

Wait, come again? Isn't Peter Watts a professional writer? Isn't the Toronto SpecFic Colloquium an academic event, neither run by nor attended by fans? Is an academic lecture a kind of fanac I've overlooked?

Lenny Bailes's dictum has struck again. A pro has stooped to take a fan award, the better to illuminate his abundant ego. (Instead of *my* far less well-nurtured ego.)

Not that I had doubted for one moment the outcome of this year's Aurora. Judging by a rare, from-the-heart, bitter comment, Lloyd had been hopeful of winning, and was not the least bit happy to see another fan award placed in the hands of a pro. For once, Lloyd and I are in *complete* agreement on something.

LEFT-OVER PIECES

Kent Pollard, kentpollard@gmail.com

Here I sit, the day after Convention, having just read BT6, and freshly made to feel like a poser by learning that you've contributed to more issues of one Fanzine than I have read in total. Still, I am earnest, and eager, and have only a slight majority of my best years behind me. I shall soldier on.

I was pleased to see *Goblin* win the Graphic Novel Aurora, and less pleased to see the Fan Other result. It's interesting that after two rounds of drop-offs, the winner had not picked up a single vote, but merely won because 22 ballots were exhausted, giving them a majority of the remainder.

I consider Convention to have been a success, this year, despite it being a different sort of animal than most. As usual, the filkers were treated as also-rans, and the lack of any art at all is frustrating, since that is my favourite gift to bring home for my wife and friends from a convention.

I will, however, comment that I feel the artists are being mistreated by the category modification that passed. The new rules mean that a person who does 99 pieces of genre fan art, and sells one piece of genre art "professionally" will be categorized as a pro for the Art Category, while someone who produces one piece of genre fan art, and sells 99 pieces of non-genre professional art, for a \$100K will be considered an amateur.

Eric Mayer, groggy.tales@gmail.com

Thanks for *Broken Toys 6*. I caught you with my 6th issue of *Revenant*, but since it's the last, you are sure to win that race, so never mind about not keeping up with Arnie!

You're right, in *Fanstuff* Arnie discusses topics that have been debated for years without ever being resolved, kind of like a lot of the more popular questions of philosophy. What do I mean when I say I see fandom? What, if anything, is outside fandom? But those are the best sorts of conundrums to talk about. You can never spoil the discussion by coming up with an answer. Such topics are like an eternal wad of chewing gum that never loses its flavor.

I agree with Mike Glycer. Don't stop writing for *Drink Tank*. Don't write for every issue, but keep contributing. I suspect *Drink Tank* has one of the largest circulations of anything on *eFanzines*. (Second to *eI*?) And I'll bet the average *Drink Tank* reader would be more likely to vote for you for the Hugo than the average reader of, say, *Banana Wings*.

Then there is the question of whether people came from Mars. Of course not. *I* might have come from Mars. Sometimes I feel like it. But everyone else? No way. Okay, you might have come from Mars too. Or wherever Saara Mar comes from.

An Earth-like planet called Kjolala by some, at the edge of the Pleiades Cluster, about 400 lightyears away.

I missed that *File 770* exchange. Who the hell could take offense to an innocuous joke like that? Oh, wait ... some assclown who thinks someone can bless a marriage because he plays a space captain on *Star Trek*! Silly me. (Or is that legal these days?) You could be right that the person is still seething about something that happened thirty years ago. For some fans, time stands still apparently. Not to mention emotional development.

My opinion is that virtually all medications have some kind of side-effects on virtually everybody, and so usually it is a case of balancing the side effects against the benefits. It isn't that unusual that the side-effects are worse than what's being treated.

John Purcell mentions the small cottage Mary and I own. It is a matter of us needing only what we can afford (very little) which as John points out is usually not the case. Following the horrible Nineties (divorce, child support, loss of work) Mary and I found ourselves homeless, jobless and living with relatives in Pennsylvania. Our kids were grown, luckily, even if I was still paying for mine. We decided to find a house we could afford to pay off with our minimal income from freelancing before we were ancient and doddering, and have managed to do so.

That's a fantastic anecdote about the kid with the dollar!

And finally, a nice illo to close the zine out. I am warming up to these critters.

I have to admit that I won't miss Revenant too much. Though it's good to see anything you publish, Revenant was a little too much like visiting an empty room in the house, in which a relative has passed away. I can't wait to see what you do next. I do hope you don't just hang up your propellor beanie for another 20 years.

Obviously, you don't want to do eFanzines again -- too frequent, and the allusion to Groggy and the ditto age has worn out its appeal to you. But you have not yet begun to run out of possibilities!

Eric later wrote: I honestly don't know what sort of zine I might do next. Although, if I hang up my propeller beanie for another twenty years I'll probably be too dead to reappear. Depressing thought.

Hope Leibowitz, tiki@interlog.com

Wow, that is a great story about getting a free walker! And definitely good luck. Plus, you are so lucky to have so many places to go that are right in your neighborhood. Walkers can be very expensive, though someone told me recently it is possible to find one for around \$150 or so.

I did some shopping with Google, and indeed you can buy a new rollator (I found out later they aren't "walkers") for anywhere from \$100 to \$150. Some are a bit more and some really nice ones are up to \$450. But the \$150 ones seemed good enough for the likes of me.

All those pills, that is scary. I hope the increased dose is working.

I can sleep, and I'm not actually in agony moving around, so I take that as a "yes."

Having had lunch with Bob Wilson today, I knew you had a walker, as he mentioned it. But not the whole story to go with it.

That whole fandom-defining thing is way too annoying for me to pay much attention to. Core fandom? Somewhere I might even have the button, with an apple core, but I don't take it seriously.

As to "pre-diabetic", it doesn't mean one is sick, only that one should lose weight by eating less "crap," or bam! Diabetes time.

So it isn't enough to call people who are overweight "obese?" We have to throw a scare into them, too?

I've been using a cane for close to seven years, and it helps a bit. Mostly because without it I tend to walk a bit lopsided. The cane is always on the side of your stronger leg. But I'm so used to it that now that my stronger leg is the one with the titanium knee, I can't seem to manage switching. Plus it is more awkward having the cane on the same (right) side as my purse, as I'm right-handed and need that hand to do stuff, like get out my Metropass.

As to sitting for too long, I've read stuff about that too. Sadly for me, my feet hurt too much if I stand for more than about five minutes, so standing a lot isn't an option for me. And right now, sitting at my computer, my knee (replacement one) is hurting. Soon (the 21st) one year and two months since my replacement. I have to get back to doing those exercises every day, but just can't seem to. Why does getting old have to be so hard for so many people?

Hope

Brad Foster, bwfoster@juno.com

Regarding your comment that – having contributed 100 pieces of writing to *Drink Tank*, yet not having been nominated for a Best Fanwriter Hugo – should you then “retire” from *Drink Tank*... well, if that was your only reason for sending him articles, then yes, I guess you should. However, if you just find you enjoy writing all these varied pieces, and then sending them to zines, then you should continue to do so. Personally, I hope I will continue to see *both* articles and art with the Taral byline/signature showing up in large quantities, and for some time to come. But, that’s just me. I like it when other people put in lots of time and effort to write and draw things I find entertaining.

“Tough Room” sent me to the interwebs and the F770 blog to see if I could find the exchange referred to, because of course I had to see what it was all about for myself. Looks to me like you made a joke, and the reply was a weird interpretation of it. As you say: “Tough Room”! I’ve had similar reactions from other people about something I might have done in passing years ago, of which I have no memory, but for which they have obviously been nursing a burning grudge for quite some time. I ignore them. Fortunately there have only been a few hundred.

The final posting from your number one fan there made me smile. And yes, I believe I agree with Mike—no need for you to write anything else there. The exchange speaks for itself at this point, quite nicely.

From “Anything for a Buck”: I love the phrase “Fans arrive at conventions pre-broke.” I know that’s true in my own case. We wander about the room, drooling over all the books, art and knick-knacks that catch our eye, and pray that we can not only sell enough stuff of our own table to cover the bill for the con, but maybe, *maybe* make a ten- or twenty-dollar profit so we can pick *one* thing out of all those goodies to take home with us.

I’ve done drawings for little kids for a quarter. However, since I tend to just doodle for my own amusement at these things, it’s not like it took much more effort, and, at some cons, even a quarter crossing the table my way was most welcome.

Hey, good timing – got to the end of the issue, and “The Dark Crystal” is about to start on TV – I’ve not seen that in decades, so it’s time to close this one out!

Lloyd Penney, penneys@bell.net

I’ve got plenty of zines to catch up on, and like you, I’m not going to the Worldcon, so I might as well get with it. Here’s some comments on *Broken Toys 6*.

I never cease to bask in the warm, golden glow of being second best to other amusements.

I had a designated acceptor at the Auroras as well. Looks like I needn't have bothered. As with the Hugos, the pro writers nominated their own stuff for most of the fan Auroras, and they got them. The category we both were in was won by local author Peter Watts for a single lecture he gave at the Toronto SpecFic Colloquium. I know Graeme Cameron has been promoting nominating and voting in the Auroras through his zines, but when this kind of result happens, it's difficult for fans to care ... seeing the pros might snaffle the fan awards.

Arnie's zine *[Fan Stuff]* carries the cachet of recalling the history of fanzine fandom, but I am finding out how many people are getting a little tired of his attacks on Nalini Haynes. She's already said she plans to ignore Arnie's pokes, and will do as she pleases with her zine. After all, it is hers. The whole thing is reminiscent of similar attacks on Cheryl Morgan years ago. It does get tiresome.

Cheryl Morgan came to my mind also. I found her vision of fandom at odds with mine, but why argue with a person about what they want? It's not anything they are required to justify. What brought on the storm of unwanted advice were statements made by Haynes in Dark Matters that seemed to say she should be subsidized by fandom to publish, and be paid to attend conventions. If so, Haynes had apparently not yet learned that fandom runs on mutual favours and exchanges, and no fan is entitled to more than any other. Perhaps that wasn't what she meant to say, but it brought a superior-sounding loc from Robert Lichtman that ignited a rather spirited defense from Haynes – along the lines that the best defense is an offense. That's where Arnie stepped in, to fuel the fire. Of such are fan feuds made.

For many years, I found fandom to be largely humorless, negative and unhappy. I changed my opinions for a while, but am tempted to change back. I still hear of legal actions here and there based on what some see as slander, but I've never seen such a case go to court. If we're as slannish as we think we are, we can suck it up, and let the other guy be a fool in the eyes of others.

Too much money is spent on the military everywhere, IMHO, but when I see the US military budget is over \$1 trillion, all I can say is that is utterly gross, and a pure waste of money. Makes me wonder what the military reaction would be if their budget dropped even a few billion...I am sure they would be unhappy, and I wonder if they would try to do something about it?

Half of Congress would be reminded that there will be no cushy jobs representing Lockheed or Blackwater after they left politics, and the budget would be quashed.

Delphine Woods (current name, I believe) was at the Reno Worldcon, and we greeted each other like long-lost friends, which, I guess, we were. I have business cards from her under other names, but some of us change our names from time to time in this fandom.

*So I've heard... *ahem**

Folding up for now...have to see a doctor tomorrow. It's a real pain, but I am told I will feel better afterwards...hope they are right. Thanks for this issue, and see you with the next.

Yours, *Lloyd Penney*

WAHF Ned Brooks, nedbrooks@sprynet.com – Hi Taral - Thanks for the zine. You missed the whole drama of me losing the DSL modem, the motherboard, and the printer to a lightning strike. It got the doorbell as well, I have installed a knocker.

I'm kind of glad to have missed your computer getting fried by lightning. The air must have been blue... and I don't mean from the static charge.

Well, I was certainly "blue", waiting to hear if the hard drive was gone as well.

WAHF Andy Porter, aporter55@gmail.com – Have you ever thought that maybe you're cranking them out pretty damned frequently? I've got a whole bunch of them here, plus the shorter stuff you send through. They're accumulating...

I remember when a week didn't go by without Patrick (then only) Hayden didn't run off 50 copies of his latest one-sheet one-shot. I know... I was there to slip-sheet, half the time. He's save up postage money by going without cigarettes for a couple of days, then start the next one ... after all, there was a Slaps, Faps, Baps, Graps, Whozapa, Shazapa, Apadapa or some other deadline looming. Less than once a month, I publish no more often than I need to, and less often than Fan Stuff or Drink Tank!

WAHF E.T. Bryan, abpix.gremlin@verizon.net – I liked the “I only have a dollar” story. Funny, but I’ve met that same kid – or more correctly the same con act – more than once at San Diego Comics Con. Also, I’m glad you’re getting hinky about the Hugo. As official Codgers, it’s our right to be rude and cranky. Also to annoy people by pretending to be deaf. Besides, the Hugo folks deserve it. Any decent award would allow a limited – very limited number of wins and then separated by a substantial number of years. Anyway, good luck again this year – maybe ignoring it will convince the gods of fan awards that it would be amusing to award it to you.

Not likely. Knock-knock jokes are “in” with the gods this year.

WAHF Jim Mowat, jim.mowatt@gmail.com – Thank you Taral for your delightful missive of words, letters and mighty punctuation collected together under the banner of *Broken Toys*. I know not what it is, nor what it should do, but I shall clasp it to my manly bosom and love it anyway. There were tales of *File 770*. There were accusations leveled (and the occasional metaphorical edged weapons) against thee of diabolical curmudgeoncy. Such are the slings and arrows of outrageous Fortune. May such strangeness and charm long continue.

"I finally managed to sum up my attitude to the Hugos when I wrote to Steve Stiles yesterday; ‘You can't polish a turd, but you can roll it in glitter and call it a rocket’ " – Kim Huett, Sept 2012

Bullwinkle's Mythology

'*Twinkle twinkle, brave Greeks in a boat / Across the wine-dark sea did float...*' First lines in the epic retelling of Homer's *Iliad*, "*Delenda ex Troiayano!*" performed in Rome in 68 AD by Nero Claudius Caesar Augustus Germanicus – commonly known as the Emperor Nero – and generally thought by most later historians to be the reason Nero's rule was overthrown in that year.

1. And the Meek Shall Inherit the Bill

According to a recent news item in the BBC, the ultra-wealthy are hiding at least *\$21 trillion* from the rest of us – and from taxation. The amount may be as much as *\$32 trillion*. That's \$32 followed by **twelve** zeros, or *\$32,000,000,000,000!*

To give you an idea of what it means for this amount of money to be bled from the world economy, consider that the *combined* national *and* private debt of the United States of America in June, 2012, was a mere \$15.5 trillion. Tax the ultra-rich at 90% – as we did in the 1960s and '70s, when our *parents* had it so good, and before *we* fell for the Irish malarkey of Ronald Reagan's "New Morning for America" – and the entire debt would be gone. Poof! With a surplus never before seen in human history. That's how gigantic this theft from the public purse is.

The elite like to call it "private property" and pretend it is therefore sacred, but their wealth is anything but private. Unlike your property or mine, it was accumulated by manipulating the law, by seeking exemptions from taxes and regulations that we don't enjoy, and through sweetheart deals with the government – ours and others. It's hidden in offshore havens that have no investment taxes – havens closed to the rest of us. It's defended by armies of lawyers and crooked politicians who can be bought for five figures (a pittance to billionaires). Their "property" is protected by "corporate rights" that makes it exempt from public accountability, full liability and fair taxation – "rights" that the state grants imaginary "beings" that far exceed any rights that real people have. Furthermore, the ultra-wealthy own the media, and feed the public doctored accounts and a steady stream of propaganda that depicts the ultra-rich as benevolent, deserving servants of the public. A more honest description of these piranhas might include insatiable greed, sociopathic disregard of individuals and the community and a lust for domination that a Roman Emperor would envy. These are people who literally cannot look at a small business without the desire to take it from its owner and reduce him to an employee. And then, "to serve the public better," they make deals with their own kind to reduce the consumers' choices – and raise prices to increase profits. They already own most of the world's wealth, but will cheat, lie, steal, bully and – where local conditions permit – torture and murder to increase their already obscenely large slice of the pie. Any ordinary person who was this twisted, this obsessed with a single goal, would be deemed insane. But instead we put up statues in their honour, and tell our children to follow their example.

And I almost forgot ... we elect their servants to office, to ensure that the vicious circle goes round and round again.

Do we deserve the governments we elect? Of course not. Might as well blame the victim for her rape.

2. No Longer a Ghetto

A few days ago, Mike Glycer emailed me a message. It said, “For God’s sake, don’t comment on the most recent posting on my blog! The readers will crucify me!”

Naturally, I was intrigued and immediately typed in File 770’s URL. It was the first time that day I had heard the news of the tragic shooting in Aurora, Colorado. I read the piece soberly and wondered just what Mike was afraid I’d say.

Probably some of what follows below...

My first thought when reading the article was, “Wow! So alert, he breaks the news before anyone else!” Then I found the same story all over the CBC and *Toronto Star* websites. I presume it was on the BBC, Fox, CNN, Al Jazeera and even Pravda’s webpages too.

Some time later that evening, something else occurred to me. In a very perverse way, the shooting at Aurora proved that the Science Fiction, Fantasy and Comics genres have finally been absorbed into the mainstream! I figure that’s exactly the sort of comment that Mike was terrified I’d leave on his blog. Guess I can’t blame him.

The first time I voiced this thought was on *FurAffinity*, an artist’s site I belong to. It’s really a much more intelligent site than it sounds, and the membership includes many artists who would actually put most fanartists to shame. I post there routinely to sound out my ideas and often compose rough drafts there that I later polish into my usual, superbly crafted and under-appreciated fan articles.

Now and then I hit a sour note, though. When I suggested that Aurora was our genre’s “coming of age” event, I blew a note so flat and loud that I wonder that I wasn’t reported to the United Nations Judicial Committee for committing a hate crime. I didn’t think the idea was that intrinsically offensive, but obviously I hadn’t found the right wording to avoid a knee-jerk reaction. It gave me a considerable number of things to think about.

First, why is it we *must* care about the unfortunate 12 dead and 58 injured at the premiere of *The Dark Knight Rises* in Aurora? If we heard on CNN that 58 people were killed and 12 injured in a bus going off a road in Mexico, most of us wouldn’t bother to stifle a yawn. People are killed by the hundreds every moment, all over the world. Perhaps a saint would care, but the rest of us would be driven insane if we truly undertook the burden of sympathy for so much pain and suffering. So we don’t care; it’s as brutal as that. If some one particular tragedy is brought to our attention, we say we care, and we mean it ... as far as it goes.

What is it about the mass killing in Aurora that makes it different from a bus crash in Mexico or a capsized ferry in the Philippines? Is it just that the people in Aurora were Americans, and mostly white? No, I think we’ve evolved a little higher up Darwin’s scale than that. Instead, it appears that we grieve for the victims of the shooter more because they were attending the premier of a *Batman* movie. A *Batman* movie.

Does watching a *Batman* movie really make a person one of us – a fan? People seem to have reacted instinctively as though it *did*. I suspect it’s a holdover from twenty or thirty years ago, when only geeks and nerds flocked to see such films. The thing is, today that’s no longer so. *Everyone* watches

movies about guys in tights and capes who fight crime, as well as movies about space ships whizzing around the galaxy fighting hostile alien species, and movies about kids earning their degrees in wizardry who fight an evil sorcerer with a fixation on snakes.

And that was my point. We don't *own* this stuff anymore. Sure, twenty years ago, the genre began to receive critics' approval, the attention of intellectuals and acceptance by the general public. But we hadn't been dragged down to the level of "reality TV" yet. We were still not on a level with 9/11 World Trade Center collector's plates for only two payments of \$19.95, nor Sarah Palin singing the national anthem to open baseball games. Now we are. The general public, in its tens of millions of uneducated, unsophisticated minds, have accepted Science Fiction, Fantasy and Comics as mainstream entertainment. In no other way was it possible that a 1-in-10,000,000 fluke such as a crazed gunman, looking for an opportunity to show the world he wasn't going to take it anymore, would pick a friggin' *Batman* movie to make his point.

Which was what I had tried to say in the first place. Hopefully, this time the readers will concede me my point. If not, please send all complaints to <http://file770.com/>

3. Year of the Jackpot

As though the Aurora shooting wasn't enough, of late the news has been *full* of violent and disturbing stories that are easily a match for it.

If you hadn't heard of the Miami face-eater, for instance, you've been living on another planet. To this day, no one knows why a naked man pinned down an alcoholic bum in Miami, and began eating his face. When the cop who arrived tried to disengage the naked cannibal from his prey, the man turned and growled at him! The cop shot him dead – four bullets were required to stop him – and now there's never likely to be an explanation.

Easily as grotesque as the face-eating incident was the young self-proclaimed porn star in Montreal, who murdered his gay lover and then mailed various body parts to government offices. The weirdness didn't end there, either. The killer kept websites on which he showed videos of himself torturing and killing kittens. He boasted online that he had slept with Karla Homolka, one of a pair of notorious Canadian serial killers from a number of years ago. The odds that this is true are essentially zero, but clearly the killer enjoyed attention. The victim's identity was unknown at first, but he was Lin Jun, a Chinese national attending Concordia university in Montreal. He chose Canada after a careful study, I read. Canada's fairly liberal attitudes about homosexuality were likely one of this country's selling points, I suspect ... though his family vigorously denies that the young man was gay. Meanwhile his killer, after doing everything he could to draw attention to his crime, fled the country. A few days later in Germany, he was so easily caught that nobody is quite sure whether he was serious about getting away.

Although the murder rate in Toronto is about the same as it has been for many years, death by *gunplay* is up by more than 60%! Most of those have been the usual sort of sordid killings – a squabble in a strip mall outside a Chinese restaurant or convenience store, or simply a body rolled under a bush in a suburban parkette. In some cities, the slums are downtown. Toronto, though, is one of those cities where the well-to-do live downtown or in the older, established residential neighborhoods. Recent immigrants and the poor migrate to the bland, flimsily built hi-rise complexes and cheaply constructed row-houses of the suburbs. One such suburban ghetto was the scene of an annual block party about a

week ago. Two of the celebrants got into an argument, reached for their guns and settled it in what passes for a civilized fashion in gang culture. They appear to have shot each other, but 23 others were injured. In the days that followed, there were two more fatal shootings in the city, widely separated, but possibly related.

Not long before all this, a man walked up to a customer in the patio of a Sicilian gelato café, and shot him in the back of the head. The shooter was wearing a day-glo construction vest and helmet. Although this took place in Little Italy, it isn't thought to have anything to do with the mob – it may have been over a woman. Rather to my surprise, the gelato place was well known to me. Steven and I – the Steven I write about so often – have enjoyed the gelato there many times, often on the same patio. Much to our delight, nobody ever took a shot at us ... though once the waiter was rude.

About a month earlier, there was a shooting in the Eaton Center. The Eaton Center is possibly the coolest place downtown – a two-block long, glass gallery, several stores high, with multiple mezzanines and hundreds of shops. A gigantic flight of steel geese fly from the ceiling, while many floors below ornamental fountains dance to music. One afternoon some total git pulled out a gun and started blasting – one dead and six wounded. Nobody is sure why.

By a very strange quirk of fate, Jessica Ghawi, one of the survivors of the Eaton Center shooting, later attended a premiere presentation of the new *Batman* movie... in Aurora, Colorado. This time she was one of the unlucky.

You have to ask yourself – *what the hell is going on?*

In 1952, Robert Heinlein wrote a story that appeared in his collection, “The Menace From Earth.” It concerns the theories of a statistician named Potiphar Breen, who speculated that human destiny is controlled by cycles, and that significant events in history occur when a number of cycles coincide. He came to the conclusion that almost without exception, every one of the major cycles he has been tracking would peak that very year, in 1952. And so they did. The story ends with “...something funny happening to the sun.”

The idea is compelling, but I think Heinlein was off by 60 years. Could it be that, not 1952, but 2012 is the real “Year of the Jackpot?”

AFTERWORD – If you haven't read it yet, I advise you go right over to eFanzines.com and download a copy of “The Slan of Baker Street,” a one-shot in honour of Stu Shiffman. As likely everyone knows by now, Stu suffered a stroke in June, this year. I figured, what the hell ... maybe this would cheer him up. It would cheer me up, I'm sure. The contributors include Rob Hansen, Andrew Hooper, Kurt Erichsen, Alan White, Steve Stiles, Brad Foster, Sheryl Birkhead and myself. Download two, if you like ... they're free.

