

BROKEN TOYS 17

Broken Toys is a personalzine by Taral Wayne, and while I should be working on the next issue of New Toy, The Louche Knight and artwork I've been paid for, all the material for this issue seems to have come together by itself. This is often the case. The letter column is somewhat shorter than it has been in past, but not by much. Locs are always welcome anyway. As I have for the 22 years, I live in well organized chaos at 245 Dunn Ave., Apt. 2111, Toronto Ontario M6K 1S6. Alternately, contact or loc me at Taral@Teksavvy.com. The date is late May, 2013, and this time around it is ExtraTaraltorality (or Kiddelidivee Books & Art) 267, © 2013 Taral Wayne. Unusual for me, this issue is more or less about books. Go figure.

What Does it Take to Get a Laugh Around Here?

While reading the blog at *File 770* the other day, I noted that among the Top Ten Reads that month, the kaffuffle over *Locus's* April Fool's Day story was at the very top. "WisCon Makes Burqas Mandatory for All Attendees" ran the headline. Although the byline – "L. Ron Creepweans" – left no doubt that the headline was a gag, the fury that followed was a veritable Perfect Storm of Indignation. *Locus* caved in completely.

The art of creating relevant humour inevitably involves putting one's head on a block ... and then hoping it doesn't get chopped off. You must judge exactly how far you can go in poking a sensitive issue to generate a laugh – an inch too far, and the blade will fall. Worse, each time comedy is attempted, there is a different audience. What cracks up a roomful of the easy-going goes totally awry if just one member of the audience wraps himself up in self-righteous indignation and makes a scene. At present, hardly anyone is more sensitive than a Muslim who chooses to be so ... except maybe a Feminist who chooses to be so.

Having said that, I have no idea whether or not *Locus* went over the line with its last April Fool's gag. All I read of the original attempt at humour was what Mike Glycer chose to quote on *File 770*. We won't be allowed to judge for ourselves, because the offending remark was taken down instantly, and – as usual when these things happen – the Underlings were blamed. I doubt we will be seeing Mr. Creepweans again.

Of course, the affect that protest had on *Locus* is often the entire purpose of making an issue politically sensitive – to stifle debate and comment. It sometimes fails ... by making people like me a little more

curious, for example. But all too often, it succeeds. I wouldn't want to have a copy of *Locus* in my luggage while going through Iranian customs right now ... or be seen reading a copy at WisCon.

I was just thinking last night that we hadn't seen a certain, opinionated someone on *File 770* in quite a while. I wondered if Mike had installed some sort of filter that kept him off the *File 770* blog. But then, within hours of the appearance of the April Fool story, there he was ... big and bold as a glass of acid in a 10-year-old-girl's face ... defending the right of the Politically Correct to shut down any attempt at humour that is politically sensitive. I had to laugh, not only over the timing, but over how utterly characteristic his protest was.

I've noticed quite a lot of people who seem to feel any sort of humour that touches on *anyone's* sensitivities is Wrong, and I've given a lot of thought to what sort of thing they would permit the rest of us to find "funny." My first guess was that they would probably approve of The Three Stooges. Who could have a problem with three white, working-class, American males horsing around and making fools of themselves? But then I realized that the Stooges were Jewish, and that would make them *ethnic* humour. And they were injuring each other with poked eyes and slapped faces ... so that would be making fun of *brutality*. Finally, the Stooges are so obviously subnormal in intelligence that their comedy is tantamount to making fun of the *mentally handicapped*. The Three Stooges are obviously *not* funny, then, and should have been required to get serious jobs that would portray their mental handicaps and ethnic backgrounds with proper respect – paperhangers, perhaps, or piano movers. Oh ... except that they've tried those in numerous films, with severely unsatisfactory results. People laughed. Dictators, then? I hear there are plenty of openings in much of the Middle East at present. In their cases, it is the dictators who made the Stooges look bad in that role.

In the end, I decided there was only one Politically-Correct funny joke in all of human history. It was that T-shirt ... the one with an illustration of the Milky Way galaxy, with an arrow pointing to a spot about 2/3 of the way from the core, that reads, "You Are Here." There are a couple of mathematical jokes as well ... but, as we all know, only nerdy guys in thick glasses find math funny.

For some reason, everyone thinks its okay to laugh at *smart* people. Gawd knows, there are so few of them that it's safe enough.

<http://file770.com/?p=12650> (*Top Ten, April Fail's Day*)

You Can Take it With You

I've never understood people who knock "Materialism."

I'm very much a materialist and enjoy the hell out of most of my possessions. I've acquired all manner of things in my 61 years of life (so far), and have gotten a kick from almost all of them. Some of my acquaintances have criticized my packrat habits in the past. They've told me that if I didn't spend all my money on books, movies, music, coins, models, toys and other kitsch, I could afford to hang around with the people I know more often, go to pubs and restaurants, and engage in a more active social life. This is true. I *could* have done that. But I look back on those years and think of what I would have to show for it today, in 2013 ... and the shelves that would have been empty as the price of a social life look back at me in silent accusation.

After one such conversation in which I was warned of my anti-social ways, my well-meaning acquaintance tried to borrow books and CDs from me. She couldn't afford them herself, she explained, because it cost so much for her to eat out as often as she did.

I didn't lend her any.

At issue is not merely how I spend my money, but two broad outlooks on life that have competed for the human soul since the first hominin picked up an interesting pebble ... and stuck it in his mouth for safekeeping. On the one side "spiritualism," and on the other "materialism."

"Spiritualists" tell me that I shouldn't care about worldly possessions, and should seek the treasures of the spirit instead. The message is dinned into us in every way, from Santa Claus to Little House on the Prairie. But what does "spiritual" actually mean? If it means "stimulating the intellect," "encouraging curiosity" and just plain "play," then I'm all for it. These are exactly the reasons I collect such things as old coins, working models and books. If those are not "spiritual" in nature, then what's the alternative?

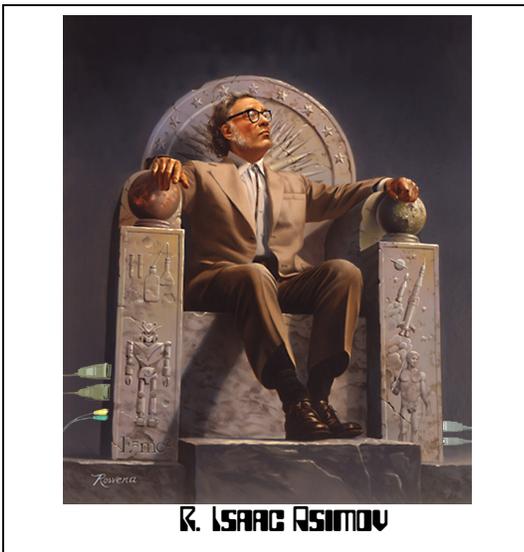
To listen to some people, the ultimate in spiritual values are usually a dewy-eyed, awe-struck, feel-good reverence toward an uninspiring, imaginary being such as God ... ideally to the exclusion of any other wholesome human feelings. Treasures saved up in heaven, goes the sermon, will last forever ... supposedly ... while Earthly dross is under limited warranty.

Be that as it may, what have you *got* after a church service? Absolutely nothing, from my point of view. Zilch. Nada. Bupkis. Even if you come home with a warm fuzzy glow, how long does it last? Seven days, at best. If it *did* last, why would religious people have to go back to church every Sunday? There is no surer proof that "spiritual things" have no more lasting value than a shiny new toy.

To be fair, most people would likely add other values to the side of "spiritual," such as friendship, peace of mind, sense of self-worth, hope for the future. Of course, of course ... I have no complaint with such values. My observation, though, is that they are not in *opposition* to my need for possessions – in fact, the value of possessions is that they can *serve* our spiritual needs.

In a very real sense, most people's "materialism" isn't even very "material." How often have you known someone with a princely salary who owns a large home full of costly furnishings and parks at least one expensive car in the driveway, but who is so busy at work that they are almost never at home, have no time for relaxation or hobbies, and never even takes the car out for a spin ... just for the fun of it. They are too busy making more money to buy *more* "materialist" symbols of their success for any of that. To make sense of this, you have to understand that it is not owning a BMW or having an 84-inch flat-screen TV that interests such people. It is the *success* that these things *represent* that motivates them! And success is actually an abstract value – a measurement of their position in the hierarchy – and has nothing to do with the things that conventional wisdom tell us ought to make people happy. This sort of "materialism" is far more like "spiritualism" in its unworldly quality.

The fact is, you *can* take your possessions with you ... at least as far as you're going. I am an atheist, a rather natural thing for a "materialist" to be, and to an atheist it is perfectly plain that there is *no* place beyond this life for a person to go. When, finally, you get to the point where you have to leave your things behind ... you aren't going anywhere they aren't, anyway.



GOTTA
HAVE
THEM
ALL!

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At times, I've fancied myself a "completist." That's somebody who has to have *all* of something. As a kid, I was most often a completist about bubble-gum cards and comic books. More recently I've been a completist for videos of *Fraggle Rock*, Elvis Costello albums, or Flavian coinage. In between, I was a science fiction completist.

The object of my first brush with obsessive-compulsive disorder was the Good Doctor, Isaac Asimov. I had read Bradbury, Clarke and Heinlein as well, but it was Asimov who most appealed to me. It wasn't for his evocative language or delicate style. Asimov wrote like the list of ingredients on the side of a biscuit box. You always knew what was in the recipe, but were never impressed by the taste.

Bradbury was *all* style ... and most of the time no substance. Vampires sucked electricity from television sets and circus calliopes marched down main streets in small towns to protest recorded pop music. While appealing to mood and sentiment, Bradbury was depleted uranium when it came to literal sense. Clarke was closer to core of science fiction ideas – yet, to me, he was an even more gray stylist than Asimov. Other times, he seemed fascinated with the idea of grand, incomprehensible forces, Cosmic Overminds, in the shadow of which humanity diminished to insignificance. Insignificance wasn't my cup of tea, either. And Heinlein? Everyone loved Heinlein. I never did. His love of human inventiveness seemed to go to the opposite extreme, somehow arrogantly assuming that, in a galaxy of unknown intelligences, humanity was the toughest and most deserving of Darwinian success. Even without alien competition, the human species is sometimes so vile and stupid I'm not sure it will even survive to get off the planet, let alone dominate a galaxy. Heinlein was also bounded by a frustratingly narrow, parochial sense of history. It was a recap of the American Experience, replete with pioneers breaking the sod on Mars to build log cabins, '49ers rushing to the gold rush on Ganymede and Thomas Edison inventing the starship in his garage. Then there was Heinlein's dialog. It was straight out of 1950's family television – "Hand me the fission wrench will you, honey?" "Of course, sweetiecum, right after I adjust the verniers and pour the coffee." I couldn't stomach it.

But Asimov! *Ahhh* ... he was just right for me. Certainly not too poetic. Barely poetic at all, in fact. Oddly, there wasn't much science, so you couldn't call Asimov too dry, either. He didn't puff humanity up too much, nor tear it too far down. As well, there was a grander scope of history to Asimov's fiction than in Heinlein's. It was all borrowed from Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the*

Roman Empire, of course, but no one faults Frank Herbert for borrowing all the history for *Dune* from the Arabs. From childhood, I was a sucker for Roman history, and I have clear memories from when I was very young of trying to find books on the Roman Legions, Caesar's campaigns and the chief figures of the late Republic politics. The Foundation series was *made* for me.

I was just as absorbed by Asimov's robot stories. R. Daneel Olivaw as plainly one of the models for Mr. Data on *Star Trek: The New Generation*. Like Asimov's robots, Data had a "positronic" brain, and was governed by a set of rules that the writers called "The Three Laws of Robotics." Such humanoid robots are wonderful metaphors for how, at one time, fans typically saw their place in society – both superior and inferior to those around them, natural "outsiders." Mere automatons at first, Asimov's robots became more human, and easy to identify with, as he developed the sweeping future history of the 1950s novels.

There was at least one problem with fitting Asimov's early work into one future history. It required that humanoid robots be invented at least *twice*, and *forgotten entirely three times!* Their first invention was by Universal Robotics, sometime in the near future – late 20th century or early 21st. They were apparently invented again at a much later date, at a time when the population of an overcrowded Earth lived entirely in enclosed cities, and the first extra-solar colonies had been established for at least a few generations. Then, as humanity spread through the galaxy and inhabited planets numbered in the thousands, robots were forgotten once again – apparently once and for all, this time. It was hardly the only thing that humanity forgot. They forgot the whereabouts of Earth and that it was the planet of our origin as well.

No matter. By that time Earth was a backwater, largely poisoned by toxic pollution and radioactivity, the natives reduced to impoverished rustics. Rather like much of the American rust bucket.

Don't mistake me. I'm not claiming that the Foundation series was great literature, or that Asimov was highly superior to his contemporaries. My argument is only that his tone and subject matter were more to my liking than were the others. Pity that he stopped writing fiction in favour of nonfiction as the 1950s wore on. It was an even bigger pity that he returned to fiction in the 1970s.

I began collecting Asimov with the basics – his two robot novels, the Foundation trilogy, *Pebble in the Sky*, *The Stars Like Dust*, *The Currents of Space*, and *The End of Eternity*. Although it is not part of either the robot novels or the Foundation series, *The End of Eternity* is interesting because it is a story about time-travel in which there is no space-travel. In the end, time-travel is erased from the time-line and mankind is given a new chance to expand into the galaxy – instead of endlessly revising his own past into ever blander and less vibrant "perfection." I like to see *The End of Eternity* as the unofficial beginning of the whole future history, even though I don't recall ever seeing anyone make the same point.

There was also *Fantastic Voyage*. It might well have been the first genre SF that I ever read. I was in the habit of picking up my father's castoff paperbacks, and this was one of them. Frankly, though, the less said of the book, the better. It was written for the money, and shows it. Even Asimov demonstrated his dissatisfaction by rewriting it many years later. Unfortunately, he might as well not have bothered, since it was an uninspired work both times.

In addition, the Basic Asimov required a number of short-story collections. There weren't many of note, in the beginning – two collections of robot stories, *The Martian Way and Others*, *Earth is Room*

Enough, Nine Tomorrows, Nightfall and Other Stories and *Through a Glass Darkly* were pretty much the lot. *Through a Glass Darkly* was such a slender volume you wondered if they couldn't have found a few more stories if they looked harder.

At that point, my collection of Asimov might have been called "representative." But it wasn't *complete*. Before I would be able to think of myself as a completist, I had to track down the six "Lucky Starr" juveniles, written as "Paul French." Fortunately, about that time they were all reissued in paperback by Signet, so I had no difficulty acquiring them. As juvenile SF goes, I can't fault them. They are a quick, light read for an adult, and the picture of the solar system that they present is hardly more accurate than the one painted by the sort of television SF that had puppet actors ... but much of the adult SF of the time was no better. Today, it's easy to forget that we had no idea what lay beneath the clouded atmosphere of Venus, or what the surface of Jupiter's moons might be like. Until infrared measurements of the temperature of the Venerian cloud-tops revealed astonishingly high temperatures, we could only speculate whether they concealed a world-ocean, a tropical jungle or a desert wasteland. At a temperature considerably higher than the melting point of lead, your money should have been placed on the latter.

But Asimov also wrote mysteries, didn't he? There were only two novels of significance, *The Death Dealers* (which I knew by a superior title, *A Whiff of Death*) and *Murder at the ABA* (also known by the superior title *Authorized Murder*). Neither is a particularly spirited model of the mystery form, and demonstrate that the author is more interested in the puzzle than the story and characters ... a fatal flaw that grew more pronounced in a later incarnation.

With one late addition, the collection of his earliest published stories (*The Early Asimov*), you have the Basic Asimov. One might add these books to your shelves along with whatever non-fiction that suited your taste, and feel that you had a *complete* collection.

Oh, if *only* that were so!

In fact, after some fifteen years of writing mostly non-fiction, Asimov wrote his first non-Hollywood novel in 1972, *The Gods Themselves*. It wasn't a bad book, actually, though it seemed uncharacteristic of the author. Gone was most of the fusty, archaic tone of Asimov's earlier writing. The novel dealt with alien beings, a subject that the author had rarely dealt with in the past. Environmental concerns also hinted that the author had new preoccupations.

Asimov's new preoccupations came farther to the fore in the subsequent expansion of his future history. He began to consciously integrate his robot and Foundation novels into one grand scheme, and moved Seldon's Plan farther into both the past and future with *Foundation's Edge*, *Foundation and Earth*, *Prelude to Foundation* and *Forward the Foundation*. I waited eagerly for first of the new series, but it was a profound disappointment. At a stroke, Asimov abolished Seldon's Plan. It had gone off its tracks, and a new, *environmentally aware* plan took its place. What did Seldon's Plan mean to me, that I felt its abolition so disappointing?

Granted, Seldon's Plan was a ridiculously deterministic idea, based on the notion that mathematics could predict mass human behavior with great precision. We know better now. With access to more powerful mathematics, we know that complex systems are inherently unpredictable, and that seemingly insignificant events can gather force behind them and alter the system entirely ... and yet tend toward a mean center. Well, perhaps mass behavior isn't *entirely* unpredictable, then. It can

surely be forecast as well as the weather. Unfortunately, no weather bureau in its right mind will venture a forecast for more than about a week into the future, or make long term predictions other than cyclic ones, such as that strong El Nino events indicate warmer North American winters.

Whatever the weakness of the idea, Seldon's Plan represented to me the enlightenment that Reason and Science cast upon the darkness of blind historical forces. I lapped it up. And what Asimov's continued future history gave me in exchange was a kind of hippy paradise where we asked the trees and hedgehogs if it was alright before we built a supermarket. Yes ... humanity *has* overdeveloped the Earth, and certainly we should have given more thought to trees and hedgehogs ... but ... sputter ... where's the white lab smock and slide rule? Where's the arrogance of scientism at its best? I will *not* give up wanting a new flat screen TV just so there can be 11 more hedgehogs in the world! The new Foundation novels were just not the same.

Worse was to come. Asimov remarried to another writer, Janet Asimov – a.k.a. J.O. Jeppson. There is some question in my mind whether the newlywed author could have sold her first book if the publisher had not known she was Asimov's bride. Be that as it may, she went on to collaborate with her hubby on a series of children's books based on a cute little robot named Norby – rather like R2D2 – who assists a precocious youngster on his adventures, saving the galaxy from *bad* men and *worse* zyqrforbs. Oh, well ... to be fair, maybe they are no more awful than the Lucky Starr books ... but, in the post-*Star Wars* world, the very idea seems unimaginative and unpromising.

According to Asimov, his wife wrote most of the six books. He only polished and revised ... indicating that they probably *needed it*. And his name was printed on the covers to enhance sales. I should remember to put Asimov's name on *my* first book ... for the same unselfish reason, of course. For what it's worth, though, Asimov's admission that he is only nominally the co-author does leave the completist collector off the hook. I convinced myself there was no reason for me to buy or read a single one of the Norby books ... and I didn't.

If Asimov had left matters at that, I would have added the extended family of Foundation novels to my shelf, along with a couple more collections of short stories, and been satisfied.

I did mention that Asimov wrote mysteries, didn't I? Ha, ha, ha, ha, haaa....

He does. Since the novels and early SF crossovers, Asimov's mysteries have mainly been in either the Union Club or The Black Widowers. He once explained that they would all be the same series, but for magazine copyrights. They *might as well* have all been Black Union stories (or whatever) since they were without exception among the most wretchedly lame mystery stories that I've read, and would be inadequate even to justify self-publication. Clearly, these stories represent the Good Doctor at his laziest. They show that he has been mainly interested in "ideas" all along, and regarded character, plot and mood as encumbrances. Without a single exception that I recall, the late mysteries follow a monotonously skeletal outline – a guest is announced at the monthly dinner, he or she explains the mystery, a few of the members offer plausible solutions that are incorrect and, last to speak, the club's headwaiter gives the correct answer. The answer is never especially believable, of course. The whole point of these abbreviated sketches is that they are *tricky*. Apparently there is an audience for this kind of thing, but I'm partial to mystery fiction that's *fiction* ... not a Rubik's Cube sketched out in prose. There are, astonishingly, 11 volumes of this.

Late in life, the Good Doctor decided he had avoided writing fantasy long enough. He began a new

series of rather sparse little stories about an other-dimensional imp named Azazel. Bright red and only about an inch tall, Azazel would have been mistaken for a devil in the Middle Ages – or by some members of Congress in the present day – but is in fact a member of an advanced technological civilization, whose “magic” creates more problems for the narrator than it solves. Slight in themselves, the stories at least possess *some* entertainment value.

Add to everything so far another seven or eight collections of late (and lesser) Asimov short stories ... also a volume of early novellas in their original magazine versions ... and a pair of illustrated collections of old robot stories ... and a 1989 novel called *Nemesis* that was so unmemorable that I can't tell you the first thing about it. Whether or not you feel it necessary to own copies of the numerous biographies that the Good Doctor has written, I leave to your taste.

At this point, you might imagine you have finally gathered together a complete collection of Isaac Asimov's fiction.

Alas, you'd still be wrong! You would still not have exhausted all the works needed for a *complete* collection! Although they are not written by the Good Doctor, there are three “must” novels written by Greg Bear, Gregory Benford and David Brin that continue the Foundation series even *farther* into the future, each adding its own increment of new developments. They are not especially compatible stylistically, and even introduce ideas that are less agreeable than “thinking” ecologies – such as an invisible network of super robots who undermine human developments so as to keep it stable and “safe” from itself.

Not even *that* is the end of the Asimov canon. Robert Silverberg has rewritten and expanded upon three of Asimov's stories, creating novels from *Nightfall*, *The Positronic Man* and *The Ugly Little Boy*. They are not bad in themselves, but one wonders if it was inspiration that led to their writing, or whether Silverberg simply needed a new Mercedes to park in his driveway.

Sigh Finally. Yes, *finally*. That *is* the end of it.

And I had them all. Nearly ...

Not in first editions; heaven forbid. Who is that rich and that wasteful of their money? But I had *almost* all of them in one edition or another. I simply refused to buy the two “new” robot collections, as they included only one new story in each, and I didn't give a fig for the illustrations. Some of the later short story collections were cheaply bought, as well, and rather ratty. I read the newer books first – the “in the worlds of” stuff that Asimov hadn't actually written, then *Azazel* and Asimov on Science Fiction (a tedious and unrewarding chore *that* was!) then finally the time came when I began to read *Magic* and *Gold*. That was the point where the intellect rebelled!

In a dozen novels and short story collections, the Good Doctor had fallen from one of my favourite early writers to a embarrassment. Oy.

So ... I decided to *sell* some of the later collections – I sold *Gold*, *Magic*, *Buy Jupiter*, *The Winds of Change*, and *The Bi-Centennial Man* ... it was a better movie than a short story, anyway. I'm looking really hard at *The Early Asimov*, *Alternate Asimovs* and all those Lucky Starr juveniles as well. The Silverberg and faux Foundation books could easily follow. In short, I'm no longer an Asimov completist ... not even notionally.

I used to have all the Heinlein as well ... not that I could stomach reading anything after *Friday*. For that matter, trying to reread some of the older stuff from the Golden Age gives me the fantods. I sold off everything newer than 1973, along with his collected letters and other ephemera.

I never did quite have all the Philip K. Dick. The man must have written thousands of short stories, most of which were never available in mass paperback editions. Even if I had been willing to pay the typically doubled price for small press trade paperbacks and limited edition hardcovers, it's doubtful I could have found more than a smattering of them. I gave up on Phil Dick without coming anywhere close to complete.

I had all of Doris Piserchia, even the two novels under her "Curt Selby" pseudonym. After I read about three-quarters of them I realized I'd had enough and didn't want them. This led to selling all but one or two. I pursued Gene Wolf for a while, until I realized that he wasn't interested in telling stories that made linear sense ... or were remotely interesting in themselves. I kept only the older work that had made his reputation. Similarly, I wore out all desire to own all of Samuel Delaney, Ursula K. LeGuin, Johanna Russ, R.A. Lafferty, J.G. Ballard and any number of other writers I once pursued with fannish enthusiasm. No more of *that!*

I still collect die-cast cars, but since I have no more space I go easy with them. I continue to collect Roman coins as well – but I'm in no danger of overindulging myself with tiny bits of bronze and silver, either. *Especially* not at the sort of prices they go for of late!

In fact, just about the only thing I'm completist about collecting now is *myself*. Without a doubt, I have the world's most complete collection of Taral there is, or likely ever will be ... but, dammit, even I'm missing *some* of my work.

Left-Over Pieces

Eric Mayer, groggy.tales@gmail.com

Granted, even back in the Seventies when I was active most fans probably thought of fandom as something encompassing more than fanzines. Still, if you insist on not defining what your activity is at all, you can't complain when others claim your name.

If the truth were told, a lot of fans define "fandom" as "me and my friends" with "me and my friends," differing for every individual fan who defines fandom that way. Now it may be that fandom truly is nothing but "me and my friends," in which case it is, well...a bunch of friends rather than any sort of hobby or activity or community.

It is interesting that you rarely if ever hear about left-wing violence. I can think way back to the Weathermen in the Sixties. But basically violence is part of the right-wing mindset and not part of the liberal mindset.

I don't think the Weathermen can be called "Liberals." Although grouped at the left end of the political measuring stick, the two have nothing in common. As Marxists, they had none of the earmarks of Liberalism. Instead, they were dogmatic, intolerant and, of course, violent. Now, who would that remind you of? The extreme Right, which is where Marxists properly belong.

Congratulations on getting the disability. Things work the same way here in the USA. Disability applications are initially refused almost as a matter of course. A doctor once told me that many people who need disability the most never get it because, ironically, they simply are not able to jump over the hurdles placed in the paths of applicants.

Another fine issue. I'm afraid I am a little rushed and disorganized right now since we are finishing up the tenth mystery and want to get it sent off in a couple days.

Plug for Eric and Mary Mayer's mystery novels, set in 7th century Byzantium and featuring the emperor's Lord Chamberlain, John the Eunuch, solver of crimes by necessity. Check the page at Poisoned Pen Press.
<http://www.poisonedpenpress.com/one-for-sorrow/>

Walt Wentz, waltw@teleport.com

Got the last issue of *Broken Toys*, and it looks good. As usual, I found a few typos that I missed in two readings... [*Walt is my proofreader*] none of them that change the intended meaning, and none important enough to issue emergency corrections.

I think "Pay More and Save!" is spot on, and should be publicized at least as widely as the Wal-Mart ads. Particularly among our governmental agencies. The homely platitudes of our thrifty ancestors, especially "you get what you pay for," now seem to enjoy about the same respect as a safety inspector in a Chinese fireworks factory.

Whenever I mention the general damnability of Wal-Mart ... its abysmal negotiating policies overseas, its abominable human rights, environmental and labor policies here at home, its magnetic attraction for crime, desperation and gullibility ... some well-meaning soul will pipe up: "Oh, but people shop at Wal-Mart because they are *poor!* –" Yes, and perhaps they are poor because of Wal-Mart... Because they have no choice but to buy cheap, defective, un-repairable merchandise again and again, rather than buying one solid item and keeping it; because the small shops that once offered local variety, choice and employment, and formed the core of American small towns, have been demolished by the bulldozer called "economy of scale;" and above all, because the "Wal-Martization" of American industry has shipped our factories and jobs overseas. When is the last time you have heard the phrase, "living wage?" It has become unmentionable in "polite" company, tacitly dropped from the lexicon of American industries and their complicit politicians, because so many foreign workers are desperate enough to accept a "dying wage" in locked sweatshops overseas.

But I rant, and the day is proceeding apace... and now we must all tend our gardens.

Fred Patten, fredpatten@earthlink.net

It occurs to me that I should respond some day if I want to stay on your mailing list. Especially after your warning. I have been enjoying *Broken Toys*, even if silently.

*My warnings we directed at fans whose addresses I lifted from another mailing list. Those I did not know personally, had never seen in fanzines before and did not hear from after emailing several issues of **Broken Toys** were in danger of being rightfully pruned. Although mailing a digital copy costs nothing, the lack of response raises a legitimate question – do they read them, or even **want** further issues?*

Since there are a lot of "where we are now" comments from My Generation of SF fandom, here is my own report. I have been bedridden in a convalescent hospital ever since a major stroke in March 2005 left me paralyzed on my right side. Very fortunately for me, Medical and Medi-Care decided that I was qualified for government medical insurance even though I was not quite 65 at the time and totally uninsured, so I have had all my horrendous medical expenses covered. I am probably healthier today than I would have been if I hadn't had a stroke, because I never went to a doctor back then, and the convalescent hospital staff checks my blood sugar and gives me pills several times a day.

Also very fortunately, my sister Sherrill visits me several times each week, and takes me out in my wheelchair about once a week to see a movie or meet with visiting fans at her apartment, where she has fixed up one room as my library with my SF art and some awards hanging on the walls. She takes me to the weekly meetings of the Los Angeles Science Fantasy Society every so often. She bought me the MacBook Pro laptop computer that I use to stay active in fandom, typing with one finger. Kay Shapero, an L.A. fan, has set up a web page for me: <http://www.kayshapero.net/FredPatten/fred.html>. I don't get out of the Los Angeles area today, but I was the Fan Guest of Honor (in absentia) at BayCon in San Jose in 2009, and I will be at RainFurthest in Seattle this August. Thanks to being in an area of multiple public libraries (the LAPL, the Los Angeles County Public Library, and the Burbank and Glendale public libraries), and the ability to request books online and have them sent to the branch library closest to me, where my sister can pick them up and bring them to me, I am keeping up with the latest SF. David Weber and John Scalzi are my current favorite authors. I also review books on three web pages; AmoXcalli (<http://amoxcalli.ginaruiz.com>), Animation World Network (<http://www.awn.com/category/columns/fred-pattens-book-reviews>), and Flayrah (<http://www.flayrah.com/user/234/stories>); and I have a weekly column, "Funny Animals and More", on Cartoon Research (<http://cartoonresearch.com/index.php/category/funny-animals-and-more/>). So I am keeping busy even if I have been bedridden for the last eight years.

John Purcell, j_purcell54@yahoo.com

Well, Taral, I finally have some free time available to do some "fun" writing, so here is a long-awaited letter of comment that I've been wanting to write, but simply didn't have the time to do so.

As far as it goes, I still think fandom is a frame of mind. When I first encountered this semi-organized madness back in the early 1970s, I really didn't know what to make of it all except that it was fun to hang out with people who enjoyed science fiction books, magazines and the visual media side of the genre. Science Fiction was just about to really explode back then – to a certain extent it already had, thanks to the burgeoning *Star Trek* fandom that was starting to really kick in at that time – and if a

body wanted to pursue all of the various aspects of fan activity, you could be a member of a local club, pub fanzines or write or draw for others who pubbed fanzines, get into role-playing games, be in an apa, and so on. It was still possible to be an omni-fan in 1973-1975, but there was such rapid growth at that time that it soon became apparent a person could O.D. on fanac. Many a fan burned out from trying to do it all, and that was not a pretty sight.

The way I look at fandom and how it fits into my life now is that science fiction fandom *per se* has become the mainstream after undergoing a mega-growth spurt during the late '70s and on into the 1990s. Once the Internet kicked into gear (thank you, Al Gore, for creating this monster), the potential for new forms of fan activity exploded in our faces, which soured many an Old Phart Fan (hereby labeled traditionalists) and made them feel as if they were being shunted aside for being in the way of "change."

Face it, fandom has always been a rolling sea of changes. As much as I enjoy old-fashioned paper fanzines and going to cons for the huckster room (oh, sorry - "dealer's room" now) to fill holes in my book and magazine collection, the main reason I stay involved in fandom is because I have made so many friends over the years. As far as I'm concerned, that's the glue that holds fandom together: friendships. While the young 21st century fans may look askance – there! I worked the name of my fanzine into this! – at us traditionalists as we reminisce for the olden days while weary tears plunk into our bheers, we really should remember that we were once like that, too. Change begets change, and I'm not afraid of it despite my 40 years of being involved in this nuttiness. Some traditionalist fans pine for the glory days, and, well, that's okay as long as they are willing to share their stories from Ghu knows how long ago. I definitely enjoy these stories; it's one of the things that helps me learn what has gone before. There will probably come a day when people like thee and me will be sitting on a convention panel regaling an attentive audience of young fen with our tales from the "old days" of fandom at the beginning of the 21st century. What a concept!

Oh, well. The bottom line to me is that each of us needs to keep our fannish experiences in perspective. I accept the fact that Science Fiction is now the Mainstream, but that doesn't make everybody who watches *Fringe*, *Big Bang Theory*, *Warehouse 13*, and other stfnal television shows or "blockbuster" summer movies fans. Those are media fans, and they tend toglom together accordingly, just like we did back in the day. If there is a constant, that is it: we form friendships with other fans who share our interests. After all, isn't that how science fiction fandom began in the first place? Sounds to me like the process continues apace. And I for one don't mind that at all.

The thing about change is that it's never superficial ... never for long, at any rate. We turned in our mimeographs for Xerox copiers and still retained our soul, but I think there have been too many changes, one on top of the other, for too long. Fandom is not who we used to be. It does not do the same things it used to do or attract the same sort of recruit. We went to bed as Latin-speaking pagans, turned over in the night as Christians speaking Greek, and have woken up next morning as a bunch of Arab-speaking Muslims. Was it a good thing? I guess it is, if an Arab Muslim is what you always were.

Lloyd Penney, penneys@bell.net

Thank you for *Broken Toys 16*...I've just locced Chris Garcia's last three *Drink Tanks*, so I thought this would be the logical step forward from that. Also, it's next up as well.

The way you and I use the term 'fandom' implies a network and community, as tenuous as it seems sometimes. Even if there was a different way to pronounce it so it implies a certain group, fannish notwithstanding, I doubt we could make current SF consumers understand the difference or care about it. All I know is that our numbers are dwindling, and their numbers are increasing. Fandom won and lost at the same time.

I've had my share of interests in fandom, some I still have, others I've discarded, and a couple I've pick up along the way. Trufannishness is perhaps a conceit, but it's also the secret handshake to show that you've accepted into the tribe. Fandom, should the term continue past our own days, will not be what it once was, nothing like what we'd recognize, and it's been doing that for generations.

Now that your disability has been officially recognized by the powers that be, may you get what you need to get life back to relative normal. Being dicked around by a government lackey is no fun. I've had to do something similar with Employment Insurance here and there...it's working fine now, but fighting the automatic e-mails, and pressing numbers at the right times, is a royal pain. We shouldn't have to fight for what we've paid into.

*Now I'm fighting to become officially bankrupt. The obstacle? The legal aid society called St. Christopher House, that is supposed to assist people with bankruptcy, won't return my calls ... or my social worker's calls. Without legal help, bankruptcy costs a fortune! How insane is **that**?*

The loccol...Chris, next time in Toronto, we should go to the Jewison estate, which has been converted into a facility to support Canadian film making. I doubt they'd let me in, but you've got the cred to get in and make yourself at home. When it comes to sending e-zines as attachments, the only point I make is that e-mail can take some, if not all, of the formatting out of an e-zine, and attaching the Word file, for instance, will retain the formatting.

Brad Foster's loc...I wanted to make a living with my writing, and back when I made that decision, it was possible to do that. Today, it's not likely at all, but I have to continue to try. I have a job interview on Wednesday, and my desperation levels are starting to rise. The resumes continue to go out. I should be sending them out instead of writing this loc, but I'd prefer to get caught up this way.

Ron Kasman's remark...a while ago, there was a comment online about how there should be a convention where the older fans could gather and reminisce about the way things used to be, party together, etc. I replied that such a convention does exist. It's called Worldcon. Our last Worldcon was the one in Reno...that was quite the family reunion, and in some rooms, I may have had the darkest hair of anyone there.

*Worldcon is for older fans with **large amounts of money** they feel they can afford to spend on air fare, hotels, eating out and – increasingly – renting a mobile scooter to get around the immense spaces in convention centers. A lot of older fans don't have that kind of dough anymore, making fandom more and more a hobby for the moderately affluent, childless couple.*

Your Aurora nomination...I nominated you, and I suspect folks like Graeme Cameron and Garth Spencer nominated you, too. Your artwork is seen by a good number of American fanzine fans, and that's where your Hugo nominations come from. But, there are so few Canadian fanzine fans and Canadian fanzines, so no wonder those few Canfanzines extant may not know your work.

That has been the criticism I've had about the Aurora's fan categories all along. Although, if you overlook fanzines, the fan Auroras are actually well suited to modern fandom, which largely doesn't see the point of emulating obsolete media and skills. Of late, I've been arguing that the drift toward confusing non-commercial pro activity with fanac has been making the fan categories altogether unworkable, and that they may as well be abolished.

This afternoon, we plan to go and see the new Trek movie, and see if it is as bad as others say it is. Afterwards is the Third Monday pub night in the west end at Orwell's Grill & Pub. Take care, and see you with the next issue; good luck with the Aurora, we won't know who wins it until October.

Steve Stiles, stevecartoon2001@gmail.com

Nice 3 Stooges *Broken Toys* header. Am I the only one who ever commented on your consistently imaginative and attractive titles? However, I'll have to add that I never cared for the Stooges when I was a little boy; I had the impression that they smelled bad and that was something that couldn't be condoned. Besides I had been exposed to Laurel and Hardy prior to the Stooges and Stan and Ollie had a much higher form of comedy – brilliant, in fact, which left the knuckleheads far behind in the dust. Some twelve years ago, after my career in comics had evaporated, I took a job in a Random House warehouse – an environment not unlike the factory in *Modern Times!* – and ran into Curly's granddaughter, who was working as a packer. At the time it seemed strange that a member of the Howard family should be working in a menial job, given the endless Stooges reruns of their 190 shorts on TV; perhaps they had bad contracts with Columbia?

*It was Ronald Reagan who ensured that the third generation of Howards would have to work for a living. As president of the Screen Actors Guild, he cut a cozy deal with the studios that robbed entertainers such as the Stooges of residuals earned from television showings. Millions watched *The Three Stooges* on TV, but they got nada for it! All thanks to Mr. America. He also finked on his fellow actors to the FBI during the Red Scare.*

I don't care to define what part of fandom I belong to (or perhaps *fragment*, or many fragments, would be more accurate) but I do know, deep in my trufannish iconoclastic heart, that my part of the fannish pie is the *superior*, more *authentic* strand – and that is, of course, the component weaned on Pogo and E.C. Comics!

Congratulations on your good luck on getting disability, which sounds as difficult to get in Canada as it is in the United States – I remember that rich brown had an uphill battle getting his, having to go through three hearings as I remember, although he was clearly in no shape to hold a 9 to 5 job. rich was fortunate in that he had his daughter, Alicia Kim Brown, go to bat for him on the successful third try.

WAHF

Alan White, podmogul@cox.net

Kjartan Arnorsson, kjartana@comcast.net

Dave Morris, Fiawol@aol.com

Keith Solytys, keith@solytys.ca

Robert Lichtman, robertlichtman@yahoo.com, who said, regarding those who do not write locs, “*Sadly, I'm one of them. I've gotten into the habit of downloading, browsing, and then filing the PDFs...a habit perhaps created by seeing previews of so many of your pieces in advance and sometimes commenting then.*” Also “*Thanks for sending the 100th Article DRINK TANK. That was a good piece, and one worthy to go out on, DT-wise.*”

Ned Brooks, nedbrooks@sprynet.com, Who is not related to Ned S. Newt, but expressed himself on expressionism: “*I never thought much of the "abstract expressionists" - what the hell are we to imagine they are expressing? Lack of talent and imagination? Of the abstract artists I can see something in Miro and Kandinsky, if only a pattern that is pleasant to look at.*”

David Langford, drl@ansible.co.uk, who reveals that, “*Sometimes I wish I'd had the sense to take a long break after the 100th Ansible. Or the 200th. Or the 300th.*” There’s always the 400th.

E.T Bryan, abpix.gremlin@verizon.net, Who seems to be under the illusion that we Liberal types can tell which end of the gun is blunt. “*Re: Knee jerk liberals gunning down large numbers of NRA white males. Note to homicidal knee jerk leftist H8ers. The bullets come out of the blunt end of the gun, be sure and aim accordingly.*”

Ron Kasman, ron.kasman@gmail.com

We Would Also Like to Hear From: Teddy Harvia, Steve Green, jtmajor, Colin Hinz



PLAY TO WIN

For the second year in a row, I’ve been nominated for an Aurora.

What’s an Aurora, you ask? Think of it as Canada’s *answer* to the Hugo ... except that we didn’t quite understand the *question*.

I shouldn’t say things like that. It was a cheap shot, and I do too much enjoy my own witticisms ... yet there is something clearly different about the Aurora.

For one thing, the Prix Aurora Award – as it is officially known so as to comply with our national pretense of bilingualism – has been presented more or less regularly since 1980. Over the same 33 years, it is arguable that I’ve been one of Canada’s best-known fans ... everywhere except in Canada. It was only last year that I was nominated for an Aurora for the *first time*. And, of course, I was roundly beaten – by an academic who gave a scholarly dissertation at a university seminar.

That’s the other odd thing about the Aurora. It has three categories for fanac, and, way back when, I originally had a hand in framing each of them. I proposed one award for organization – such as chairing a con, raising a fund or plotting an assassination. Another award was for publication – which I proposed for publishing, writing, drawing or loccking for fanzines. I assumed – rightly, I believe – that Canadian fanzine fandom would never be large enough to justify splitting fanzine activities into their own separate awards. The last category was a catch-all, named simply “Other.” The scheme

made perfect sense to me, but it seems to have miscarried from the start. The Aurora award for publication became *for publishing a fanzine only*. However, writing, drawing and locking for fanzines were somehow moved into the “Other” category, without my noticing. This must have made sense to somebody, but made less sense to me than the model I originally proposed. As a result, contributions to a fanzine are now measured against everything from costume skills to game scores ... and other, quite silly things as well. I would not be surprised to find Canadian astronaut Chris Hatfield on the ballot next year, for his live stream from the International Space Station.

Some years later, a fourth category was added for filksinging.

Consequently, I never expected to win. A few readers, (with memories that I envy), might recall that I didn't bother to even mention in *Broken Toys* that I had been nominated for the Aurora last year. That's how important it was to me. I will be beaten again this year, too. I have been nominated in the “best fan publication” category for *Broken Toys*, but I have only seven Canadian fans on my regular direct-email list. For the record, they are Lloyd Penney, Hope Liebowitz, Garth Spencer, R. Graeme Cameron, Felicity Walker, and Robert Charles Wilson. In addition, I send copies on an irregular basis to Murray Moore, Robert J. Sawyer, John Mansfield, Eugene Heller, Rene Walling and Julie Czerneda. I met the last three at Anticipation in 2009, and as they've been good enough to remember my name on subsequent meetings, I put them on the mailing list. As well, I mail *Broken Toys* to a handful of friends who I don't think of as fans ... even though they are pretty fannish. If all those I've named voted for me, I'd muster 11 votes. That might actually be enough, given the number of nominees and the small voter base of the Auroras, but I've reason to think that no more than 6 or 8 of them are at all likely vote, period. And who says they would vote for me?

I know at least one person who won't. That brings me to the story I wanted to tell when I first began this idiotorial.

Even though I hadn't mentioned it online, someone I didn't know sent a message on FaceBook that congratulated me for the Aurora nomination. Being too garrulous for my own good sometimes, I wrote back to say that I really didn't take the business seriously. As I related the story to my friend, Bob, the Auroras worked well enough in the professional categories, honoring both the most popular Canadian writers, as well as others whose reputations had been made entirely within the country's borders. This was said to avoid offending *Bob*, who had won a couple of Aurora awards for novels. But the *fan* Auroras had always fallen short of their intended noble goals, and largely been given to performing monkeys, mimes and mediocrities. I only spoke the truth ... as I saw it.

I might have thought about my answer a moment longer. Whoever the well-wishing stranger was, he was mortally offended.

“Don't tell me,” said Bob. “He'd won the Aurora.” Not at all. I said to Bob, “He was the winner of *four* Auroras ... and he wondered whether I thought he was a performing monkey, a mime or a mediocrity.”

Maybe I should have just wrote back to the guy, and told him I considered him only “a mediocrity.” It's not like I had any idea what he had done ... even after I was informed of his elevated status. It would have been more diplomatic than “performing monkey” ... an expression I use for jugglers, impressionists and contortionists, who do their thing on stage. All I wrote, though, was that I had never heard of the guy and regretted that I'd caused him offense ... but I really could *not* take the

Aurora at all seriously. Never heard back from him, so I presume he prefers to remain in a huff and that I needn't be worried about getting *his* vote, at any rate. I wasn't going to win, anyway – doubtless the Aurora for best fan publication will go to a Klingon Song Book, or a Johnny Depp fanfiction mag. Crap. What does it matter? Can I be “honoured” by being recognized as Best Multi-Media, Vaguely-Science-Fiction-Related, Publication, Blog or Podcast of the Year?

At least the pin for being nominated looks nice. I'll toss it in with the various other nomination pins collected over the years, and one of these days I'll wear them in public all at once. Maybe I can win an Aurora for that.

For a list of winners: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prix_Aurora_Awards

On a semi-serious note, there are several other nominees for “Best Fan Publication” this year. I actually recognize two other than my own ... which is a vast improvement over previous years. One of my rivals is **Felicity Walker**, who has done an admirable job editing the British Columbia SF Club's newsletter for the last few years. It's not an easy job, and one that is likely to be overlooked by almost everyone. Then there is **Graeme Cameron's *Space Cadet***. While I sometimes pull his leg for pedestrian layout and design, it is a personalzine with solid material from issue to issue, and I think the best contender in the lot. I wish him luck. As for the others, two are blogs that I've never heard of, much less read, and the final nominee seems to have a connection with a short-story contest – just what it is, or why it is a *fan* publication, I have no idea. I wish Felicity and Graeme luck ... but it would be best if they didn't take the award any more seriously than I do. I may not know what it is, but that short-story contest thing has “Aurora Winner” written all over it.



TRICKY DICKS

Some years ago, I happened to pick up a used paperback. At the time, I didn't usually read this sort of mystery ... for that matter, I still don't. But who could resist a title like “The Old Dick?” Especially by a writer with the improbable name “L.A. Morse.” I thought a moniker like that surely had to be a put-on. “L. A.” (as in Los Angeles, home of hard-boiled mysteries) and “Morse” (as in “code”) – what else could it be?

It turns out the name really *is* Larry Allan Morse, and he is the author of several other works, including “The Big Enchilada,” “The Flesh Eaters” and “Sleaze.” Although he was born in Southern California – as you might suppose of a writer in this genre – he moved to Toronto in the late 1960s. It should be possible to stalk the man and shake him down ... given a good enough reason.

Returning to “The Old Dick,” the novel is literally about an old dick – a tough-minded, elderly, ex-

private investigator living in near hand-to-mouth retirement in Los Angeles – and his buddy, an equally hard-up, retired cop. Into their declining years intrudes a superannuated racketeer they put away years ago, who comes to them with a kidnapping problem. Through numerous unexpected twists and turns, the novel ends on a *totally* unexpected and satisfying double-double cross. The story is tough, the language cynical and the characters hilarious. You don't often read about hard-boiled detectives who worry about incontinence or finding the right denture adhesive. The story isn't played for laughs, though. There's grief. Some of the twists are downright nasty and not in the least funny.

It's exceptional for me to read a mystery that isn't set in first century Rome or medieval London more than once, but I've not only read "The Old Dick" three times ... I own *two* copies of the first edition.

I'm astonished that "The Old Dick" was never produced as a motion picture. It has all the goods. Both Jake Spanner and Patrick O'Brien are described in detail, making it hard to believe the author didn't have the same actors in mind that I did. No one I know could've stepped into Jake's shoes better than Art Carney. And as for the red-faced, huffing, puffing, overweight retired cop – who could've been better than Jackie Gleason? Lady Luck gave me the wink for the role of the racketeer, Sal Piccolo, as well. Abe Vigoda was perfect for it.

Since the book was written in 1981, there were six years in which "The Old Dick" could have been produced with the ideal cast. Then, unfortunately, Gleason took the long sleep in 1987. Not all was lost. A recast easily puts John Goodman in Gleason's place. When Art Carney died in 2003, though, the chance to make "The Old Dick" – as it should have been made – slipped away for good.

There were a couple of times when I could have bought "The Big Enchilada," but balked at the cost. A few years later, and it's funny how three bucks doesn't seem like such a big deal anymore. Now I curse my stinginess. It won't do to simply buy a later reprint, either. I've seen the covers. They stink. I'll settle for nothing less than the first edition and the cover that matches my copies of "The Old Dick," thank you. However, I may be missing little. The later books by Morse are about Sam Hunter, a more ordinary *young* dick ... who has none of the chutzpah of a genuine *old* dick.

"The Old Dick," L.A. Morse, Avon paperback 1981

