

BROKEN TOYS 26

Broken Toys 26 is a personalzine by Taral Wayne. After several large issues, including a huge Christmas Special, it's time to relax a little, and let my monthly schedule slip a bit. The letter column, however, seems to have its own plans, and is still a whopping 11 pages, so this may not be as short an issue as I had hoped. I have not won a major lottery, nor have any alien super girls swooped down in their star chariots to save me from all this, so I still live at 245 Dunn Ave, Apt, 2111, Toronto Ontario, M6K 1S6 Canada. Send e-mail to taral@bell.net. The date is late March 2014, and this is Kiddelidivee Books & Art 278. "Boooger!"

Disclaimer Just about the last thing I needed was to join an apa. But for some reason, I have, a digital apa called TePe. There's almost nothing about it or my decision that makes sense, but I thought I'd give it a try. The rules allow me to re-use material in any way I like, however. I can reprint material from *Broken Toys* in my new apazine, *Lost Toys*, and – more importantly – I can use material from *Lost Toys* in *Broken Toys*. Those of you who have read one, will see much of the same material in the other. I may be crazy, but I'm not Rob Ford crazy.

Kneecapping the FAANS

I think I may not be able to vote on the FAAn Awards this year. For the past several years, I've made the effort, but with an increasing sense of misgiving when the results were released.

It was around 2005 or 2006 that I began to show more interest in fanzines than I had during the previous decade or so. Within a couple more years, I was flooding fanzines with more and more articles. Then I started to publish again. Two years ago, I began *Broken Toys* and published monthly, all while continuing to write for fanzines. As I've noted before, the strain was becoming noticeable.

Moreover, I was not feeling the thrill I used to feel in seeing my name in print. More and more often I was skimming fanzines that came in the mail or that I downloaded, looking for egoboo or comment hooks, but only occasionally reading a piece to savor it. It was clear that my enthusiasm was wearing thin.

One of the things I did during this period was to vote for the FAAns. My enthusiasm for the “fannish” alternative to the Hugos has also worn thin, however. In the last few years, it seems that mostly the same people are nominated again and again, in every category, and an even smaller circle of the same people wins. You can get even money by guessing that on a random year either Dan Steffan or Steve Stiles will win as best fanartist, with slightly longer odds on D. West or Brad Foster. The rest of the nominees are almost equally certain, since there really aren't all that many of us. It's

the same with Best Fanwriter. Odds were once heavily in favour of Mike Glyer and Dave Langford. Now they're in favour of Andrew Hooper, Claire Briarley and Robert Lichtman. The choice of runners-up is a little larger than the choice of fanartists, but is still quite predictable. Best fanzine will likely be *Banana Wings*, *Trapdoor* or *Chunga*. Best letter hack will be Robert Lichtman or Lloyd Penney, almost without question. Best fanzine cover might surprise us by picking Alan White this time, but I suspect it will be one by Stiles, Steffan or West.

Now, does this seem wrong to anyone? Shouldn't there be more of an element of surprise than this? Either the 75 or 100 voters are not taking a wide enough view of the fanzine field, or the fanzine field is dangerously small.

I don't claim to be an enlightened voter myself. Faced with another blank ballot this year, I realized that I could practically just copy down how I voted last year. Not only have my tastes not changed since this time in 2013, if anything they've narrowed as I pay less and less attention to material at the periphery of my interests. It's gotten to the point where I just don't want to vote and see the same fans win as did last time, even though I had mainly voted for them.

You could argue that for several years now, the same six or eight fans have been the absolute best fanzine fandom has to offer. But I don't believe it could possibly be that clear-cut.

Instead, I think there is a visible pattern to who wins who doesn't, and ultimately the determining factor may be your sociability. Do you go to Corflu? Do you have friends who go to Corflu?

Do the FAAns tend to be merely the Award for Fanzine Fans who go to Corflu? And isn't that the reason we abandoned the Hugos, because they were going mainly to fans who were highly visible at the Worldcon?

You have no idea how much it pains me to write a sentence that Nailini Haynes might agree with.

Whether or not I'm reading too much into this, it remains so that the awards are too predictable for their own good, and that I'm not very motivated to go through the motions again.

Passing the Torch

There was a time when I was the Powerhouse of Canadian Fandom. I know it sounds immodest of me to say so, but what other conclusion could the perceptive fan come to? Consider the facts: I was one of the most active artists in fandom, I regularly contributed articles to a dozen fanzines (and sporadically to more), I published a genzine in recent memory, several one-shots and, two years ago, began a monthly personalzine. As well, I locced – not that I set any records, I concede, but a respectable two or three in a good month.

The runners-up were a commendable lot, no doubt – I won't mention their names lest it seem I'm making personal comparisons, and I don't wish to belittle their significant accomplishments to fandom.

There is one of my peers, however, who I have to single out by name if for no other reason than because he is the cause of my downfall! Yes, I mean you, *R. Graeme Cameron!*

It began with Graeme announcing a new column for the online magazine, *Amazing Stories*. At the time, Graeme had already assumed a considerable burden of obligations. Apart from publishing *Space Cadet* and two or three other fanzines, he also managed the *Canadian Fancyyclopedia* and the *Canadian Science Fiction Fanzine Archive* on-line. Then, apparently not yet convinced that his time

was fully occupied, he launched the *Canadian Fanzine Fanactivity Awards*, taking on the roles of organizer, chief promoter and sole judge of the winners – for the first two or three years, at any rate. Thereafter, he would distribute and count ballots. Anyone would think Graeme had enough on his hands to keep any two fans busy. But Graeme has a mission, you see.

That mission is to educate; to spread a liberal and inclusive understanding of fandom to those who have recently discovered it, and teach them to treasure all its institutions, new and old. At least, I *think* that's it. Having few noble principles left, myself, I have some trouble comprehending idealism.

The pursuit of Graeme's mission was given a considerable boost when he was asked by Steve Davidson, editor of the new *Amazing Stories*, to write a regular column. I would imagine Graeme leapt upon the opportunity with alacrity.

I have had a small place in Graeme's grand scheme of things, too. When he needed an attractive certificate to present to the winners of the *Canadian Fanzine Fanactivity Award*, I was his chosen artist. It helped, I suppose, that there are not a great many other well-known Canadian fanartists, but he might have picked one of less well-known who was just as Canadian. I think I repaid Graeme's trust, by creating a rather spiffy certificate. He seemed to think so, also ... he subsequently awarded me two or three of them. But that, too, was only part of the Big Picture.

I felt similarly honoured when Graeme asked if I'd like to provide illustrations for his *Amazing* column. He sent me the text of "Whatever Happened to Egoboo," a piece about the value of feedback to a fan editor as an incentive to continue publishing. I didn't find it an easy concept to illustrate, but managed to put it into pictures after a bit of head-scratching. The problem was, by then, Graeme already had *two more* articles in mind.

I needed a bit more time, I said to him. I'm getting old, and slowing down. My current obligations were already giving me trouble to keep up with. But I agreed to give it a go.

Meanwhile, I wrote to Steven Davidson, warning him not to add my name to the staff just yet – I had some doubts about whether I would be able to keep up .

Sure enough, it's been months, and I'm still poking along with Graeme's second article, a piece about the Tucker Hotel. I have nothing more to show for it than a light sketch. Graeme, on the other hand, has had about 20 columns run on the *Amazing* site – so far ahead of me that he has had to turn to generic illustrations for them. With any luck, I *may* have the Tucker Hotel illustration ready by June. *Sigh*

Clearly I am outmatched. I cannot keep up with Graeme's spate of columns. Added to his other ongoing fanac, this appearances in Amazing have transformed Graeme into a creative juggernaut in comparison to which my Muse has sadly slipped into second place, and been left panting by the wayside. It seems I must formally acknowledge the change of status, and pass the torch of Canadian Fandom's Powerhouse to another. Hail, R. Graeme Cameron!

For me, a long, well-deserved rest.

The Glass Eye Blinks

For the first time in I don't know how many years, I have television again. And what television! Way over 100 channels, wi-fi, hi-rez, wide-screen, and all at a very reasonable cost. And you know what? By the end of the first day, I had reacquainted myself with that old joke: 100 channels to choose from and nothing to watch.

By far the majority of the channels were sports networks. Why a sports fan in Memphis has to have his own channel and a sports fan in Seattle has to have another, I just don't know. It's the same sports. Even in 24 hours, there must be more air time available than major sports to fill it. Nevertheless, there are a dozen or two dozen sports channels.

There are a similar number of music video channels. That's a little more reasonable, I suppose. One is for heavy metal, a second for hard rock, a third for soft rock, a fourth for jazz, a fifth for country, a sixth for Motown, a seventh for orchestral, an eighth for folk, a ninth for rap, a tenth for Latin American, an eleventh for polkas, a twelfth for Arabic pop songs, a thirteenth for the Hindi hit parade, a fourteenth for Polynesian war chants ... and finally six or seven more for movie sound tracks, national anthems and religious music. I can certainly see wanting to avoid what you don't like, but this degree of specialization amazes me. Doesn't it boggle *your* mind to picture someone who listens exclusively to Korean street-dance-rap for hours on end? Yet Gangnam Style went viral.

Then there are numerous iterations of NBC, ABC, CBS, Fox, CBC, Global, City and other network stations. Each has minor program variations from its affiliates in Montreal, Vancouver, Washington or Atlanta. The same multiplicity of similar programming exists among the specialty news channels.

As well, there are the channels for home shopping, fly-fishing, home decoration, cooking, recycling, martial arts, motorcycle restoration, antique auctions, high fashion, game shows and, of course, 24-hour Bingo.

I found it a little disconcerting to notice that there were a nearly endless list of channels not only in French (this is Canada, after all), but also in Chinese, Arabic, Hindi, Punjabi, and Filipino. Is English in Canada on its way to becoming another minority language? It appears so, though we probably have nothing to worry about it in my lifetime. I'm taking lessons in Klingon and Sindarin Elvish, though, just in case.

But of all those channels, the one ones that really matter to me are CBC, TLC, History, Discovery, Comedy, Teletoon, Nickelodeon and YTV. The rest are useless dross or redundant variations.

At the end of the second day, I noticed that I hadn't turned on the television. I wonder if I haven't made a mistake?

LEFT OVER PARTS FOR BROKEN TOYS 26

Bob Jennings, FabFicBks@aol.com

... not so odd was your latest editorial, one of a series, in which you declare you will turn over a new leaf, do new and different things, dedicate yourself to being more persistent and focused on whatever the bright creative beacon is that month. So, this time it's more fiction and maybe more art? OK, go for it. I hope it works out better than those past resolutions to be more focused and dedicated did. Sorry if I sound somewhat cynical here, but this seems to be a recurring theme for you.

And here I had been thinking that Broken Toys has been successfully evolving from issue to issue. Admittedly, old habits such as carping about Hugos and fandom can be hard to break. But I think they are broken. In the early issues, there were frequent political articles. Since then, I've moved toward forms of writing that involve more self-expression, and lately I've experimented with fiction. Probably the biggest change I could make would be to give up fandom. That would be a little extreme, though. Perhaps you were hoping I'd take up Transcendental Meditation or Esperanto?

Shifting *Broken Toys* to a bi-monthly schedule may allow you to shift your time frame to do more fiction writing and finish up some of that old artwork, but I wouldn't count on that. My experience is that people can make time to do anything they want to do if they make up their mind to do it. Time is elastic, and considering how much time most people fritter away in a typical day, finding a few hours to do creative stuff is not really difficult. Of course, time will tell, won't it?

I always had enough time in the past, but I've been growing less motivated over the last few years. Still, my interests shift from one thing to another, and a new balance would hardly be a surprise.

Not too many comments this time round. I have never seen either of the two cartoon movies you discussed, altho I believe the original *Frankenweenie* is somewhere in a pile of cartoon DVDs I haven't even sorted out yet.

I find that I am watching fewer cartoons of any kind these days. A few nights ago I sat down (actually, reclined happily on my bed) and watched a disc of *Family Guy* cartoon shows. I wasn't too pleased. The whole program seemed deliberately over the top with only a few interesting situations and even fewer funny gags. It looked like an imitation of *The Simpsons* done by drugged-out high school students. Maybe that was the effect it was supposed to have.

Then I watched, finally, the *South Park Movie*, and was similarly unimpressed. I thought I was losing my edge, so I slipped in a disc of Daffy Duck cartoons. I liked the two I watched, also the two original Tom & Jerry cartoons and the two random episodes of *Futurama* I tried. I think I am just out of sync with the modern cartoon products, although the new *Lego Movie* is getting all kinds of rave reviews, so maybe I'll give that a try when it comes to the strip mall theater complex. They still offer affordable matinees.

My opinion of Family Guy is that it's a cartoon for people who don't like cartoons. I have perfectly intelligent friends who won't watch Futurama, Duckman, Venture Brothers or Mission Hill (all highly inventive, adult animation) but crack up over Family Guy and South Park for some reason. All I see in it is a callous

willingness to prod sensitive issues (but not intelligently) and a fascination with violence, scatology, and foul language.

I sympathize with you in your memories of your many cats. The last two cats I had died many years ago, and it was a wrenching experience. They lived over seventeen years and were dear family members, so far as I am concerned. I decided not to have any more cats. It just hurts too much when they die, and I don't want to go through that ever again.

I enjoyed your fictional pastiche on the Lord Dunsany Jorkens tales; however I would suggest you change the wording on the final page where the family gathers up weapons to go rescue dear auntie. This being Britain, I doubt the strait old family would have any baseball bats handy. Fire irons, door stops, brass vases and curtain rods certainly, but hardly a baseball bat.

Alas, I have read no Lord Dunsany and know not this Jorkens. Good idea about the bats, though. They could have been cricket bats, but too late to make a change now. (Except in my archial copy.)

I thoughtt the story was a bit lightweight on the plot (I saw the end coming right after auntie met the stranger dressed all in black silk), but it was fun anyway. I would have tried for a twist ending, having loony Auntie turn out to be the predator instead of Mr. Webb, but that's just me. Do some more.

Since your setting involves a science fiction discussion group set the pub, you might move into Arthur C. Clark's "White Hart" territory and try for some bizarre science fiction concepts next round. The fact that Ainsley is sort of an involved foreign office information gatherer could allow him to meet assorted oddball potential weapons/defense plans that could cause interesting results both at home and abroad.

The thought has occurred to me, but a new idea for a story has not. It could happen, eventually.

Didn't read the poem, since, as previously noted, I am one of those people for whom poetry has no meaning at all. Enjoyed the letter column, but I don't find any special comment hooks there so I'll close off. It will be interesting to see if you decide to wait the full two months before launching issue #26, with a whole new set of resolutions. Or the e-zine might turn into a quarterly now that you have re-established the second most common time-waster of the new century, cable television.

I have to make an embarrassing admission: apart from the first night, I haven't even had the TV on.

Brad Foster, bwfoster@juno.com

I have to admit, after the last two issues, to – slightly – missing the logo format you had established and used for so long, with the image hidden inside the letters. Still, no one wants to get into a rut, especially an artist, so I will suck it up and not complain.

Now that I have the "special" issues behind me, I'll be returning to my regular logos. Probably...

Have no problem at all with any of your plans for the zine – cutting back on pages per issue, a less frequent schedule, reprinting some classic stuff. It's *your* freakin' zine. Pretty much happy with whatever you feel up to sharing with the rest of us, whenever you feel like doing so! Besides, it doesn't sound like less Taral, it sounds like it just opens for more Taral in the text and art departments. It's win/win all the way around! (And, maybe will be another *New Toy* or some other

one-shot zines coming out to take up the gap. I have faith that you cannot stay uncreative for long, no matter how hard you might try!)

“Well, fuck that, Mr. Peabody!” Never knew Sherman had such a potty mouth on him, they must have censored the episodes that I saw as a kid. Or else in my childish innocence I’ve blocked those memories for all this time.

Sherman must be nearly 60, by now ... I guess he's old enough to have a potty mouth.

Speaking of lines in this issue that caught my ear... er, eye... there was also this:

“In those years, I was more or less the least-known, best-known artist in furry fandom.” Sounded a little bit like what I tell people sometimes at the art festivals we set up in. Someone will look at some of my stuff and get this odd quizzical look on their face and go, “Why do I know your name?” To which I’ll reply something along the lines of, “I’ve been drawing for so many years, and have a little bit of stuff show up in a lot of different venues, the odds are you probably have seen something I’ve done: but I’ve never really done enough to make much of a big impact in any single area.” Your “least-known, best-known” is a much more succinct way to put that!

I’ve not seen ParaNorman yet, but your review has certainly moved in onto the list of titles to ask my friends to rent for us to see on their big screen the next time we invite ourselves back.

Cats. I’ve always had a cat in my life since I was a little fan. Sometimes it was just one, sometimes it was multiples. And always had to say goodbye at some point. But, we know we’re going to outlive them when we bring them in – if the choice is between not having that anguish of losing them, but also not having the memories of living with them, I’ll go with having them with me for a short time, even knowing there will be sadness at the end. All things die, but we can enjoy and appreciate whatever time we have together.

Bill Patterson, bpral22169@aol.com

I see your Judith Merril piece caught other peoples' attention, as well.

And not a single lawsuit, so far!

I don't really think you can task Merril with "literary imperialism" in the same way that, say, Sam Moskowitz (whose most influential historical work was being done more -or-less contemporaneously with Merril's) grabbed off all sorts of early literature and held up things like the Epic of Gilgamesh as early science fiction (it's early science fiction no more than it's gay fiction – another bizarre historical claim made of the thing). Moskowitz ignored the context in which the devices he was looking at existed, as if science fiction is primarily a matter of devices and tropes and "furniture," which it isn't.

Once W.A.P. White had blazed his particular vision of "Fantasy and Science Fiction" across the 1950s, Judith Merril followed behind like the little man sweeping up after the horses, saying, look, there's this F&SF stuff being published *all over the place*, and isn't it wonderful??!! And behold, it was wonderful.

Context is all.

In response to Bob Jennings, I would note that the merging of SF into mainstream was at one time viewed as a kind of holy grail. And in fact it did happen, though not in the rather simplistic way people within the genre imagined it might. The experimental fringes of mainstream fiction started using SF tropes in the 1970's (roughly), and by now these furnishings of SF have so entered the toolkit of general fiction that we can get pop bestsellers like *The Handmaid's Tale* or *The Time-Traveller's Wife*. Steampunk features as a plot device in *Castle*, and a popular TV show is made out of the Multiverse concept (several, actually, but only *Fringe* really caught on this side of the pond).

There was the start of a dialog between SF and general fiction, when the postmodern movement was getting under way -- still perpetuated by that sliver of genre writing loosely called "literary" science fiction -- but the "mainstream" of science fiction has more or less undergone a "punk" back to the roots evolution and turned its back on what was once a motivating force in the field.

"Literary Imperialism" wasn't my expression. If comparing how the SF ghetto was absorbed into mainstream, it wasn't like Rome charging in with all Legions bristling. It was more like King Mithradites petitioning Rome to make his kingdom into a province after his death. SF visionaries hoped their genre would be welcomed into the literary mainstream. However, what seems to have happened is that SF has joined the cinematic mainstream instead. Literature has adopted SF ideas. When Margaret Atwood wrote The Handmaid's Tale or Michael Chabon The Yiddish Policeman's Ball, they did not cease to be literature. But the mainstream has been less open-minded about SF writers than SF ideas. Bradbury, Dick, LeGuin and some others are grudgingly accepted, but the rest are ignored.

What does "mainstream" and "literature" even mean, though? The acceptance of the general public is no guarantee of merit. And as far as I can tell, one of my friends comes about as close to defining "literature" as you can come. It's "writing with a serious idea in mind" – to which I will add, "instead of merely a series of exciting events." Even then, some literature does include a series of exciting events, and some genre fiction has a serious idea in mind. I doubt the gap between Sturgeon and Tolstoy is much more than a single letter.

Eric Mayer, groggy.tales@gmail.com

Nice looking issue, which is hard to achieve with "found" art I think. If you decide to do more drawing and write some fiction in at the expense of fanwriting and publishing that would probably be all to the good. Diversify!

I'd like to draw more than I have been, lately, but it won't necessarily be in the form of fannish article headers. I like cobbling together internet finds with Photoshop fonts, for one thing. For another, an original drawing takes an awful lot of work just to start some routine bit of fanwriting!

I like the idea of you running some of your E-Ditto pieces in *Broken Toys*. As I've said before, judging from the sparse comments, neither *E-Ditto* nor *Revenant* had many readers, and I felt especially bad that frequent contributors like you and Brad Foster received nothing for your efforts.

With ezines it's very hard to say whether anyone reads them or not. Download statistics may be relevant ... or may be badly misleading. Locs are a poor measure too, since it seems only some two dozen people loc with any regularity, and many of those won't loc an ezine. EDitto lasted through enough issues and garnered at least some critical praise that I can't imagine nobody reading it. But, perhaps there wasn't enough fan gossip and fan politics to become a hit on its own. Such success I've had with Broken Toys seems to have been partly the result of aggressive promotion and whiny hand-wringing. Maybe that's what it takes if you're not the focal point of Brit fandom or the Permanent Floating Corflu Party?

Yes, it is unfortunate how cats get old so soon and die. Coincidentally, my last cat, Sabrina, died almost exactly three years ago to the day I am writing this. She was twenty-one, and had been with me through thick and thin – family traumas, divorce, remarriage, various moves and employment upheavals. By the time she died, she was the last remaining link to a life that was long gone. She had become increasingly feeble, and probably feeble-minded as well. I think cats deteriorate mentally as they age. Amazing how we will put up with ancient decrepit animals relieving themselves wherever the urge hits them. Sabrina in addition developed a total fixation on me, to the point she would stand at the top of the stairs and meow piteously for me every time I left the office to get a cup of coffee. I've read that is common in old cats. I never worked at the computer but she was perched in my lap. And in fact, when the time came, she died in lap. It's the first time I have ever observed the exact moment of death, and I hope it is the last. At least by going quickly, at home, with little discernible suffering, she spared me the misery of having to take her on that last trip to the vet.

The decade during which you were going to furry cons, I was going to weekend orienteering meets. And here we are both back in a moldy old SF fanzine. Sad, isn't it? Well, my bad back put an end to my "athletic" endeavors, and it sounds like weird furry con policies helped put an end to your con attendance and sales opportunities. I sometimes wore orienteering gear to go crashing through the woods: long sleeved nylon jersey and tough "thorn knickers" with padded lower leggings to protect shins from collisions with rocks and sticks. All in club colors. Pretty weird, but not as weird as furry costumes. Hey, how about furry orienteering where people dressed as animals go crashing through the woods?

Fly on the Wall is a great little story. Your description of what a human fly might act like are particularly amusing and clever. If a little creepy! Having a human fly settling on one's hand...ugh! Probably you ought to try to sell this somewhere, although it is rather an old-fashioned tall tale isn't it? I'm not sure how it qualifies as a story about fandom but then I was never good at literary analysis, even though I have a degree in English Literature. I suppose it makes sense for an eccentric to tell such tales at an sf club gathering. One of the few audiences that would stand for it.

I would be happy to find Fly on the Wall a real publisher if I could think of one that would be interested. While it's only "fannish" fiction by a stretch of the imagination, it's not an SF or fantasy story either. What is it? Nothing marketable, at any rate.

Some of the comments in the loccol about Judith Merrill reminded me how much I hate self consciously "literary" science fiction. Generally it strikes me as being just plain bad literary fiction, penned mostly for an audience of wannabe bad literary fiction authors.

Stephen King once remarked, cruelly but accurately, that literary magazines are only read by writers who want to get published in them. Give me an honest hacked-out bit of entertaining pulp fiction any day, rather than some drivel by a writer whose only aim seems to be to impress readers with his literary skills. There's plenty of brilliant books written which don't need to go through the motions of being great literature, and a well written, honest-to god-sf novel is just as much literature as any other fine novel.

Steve Jeffery, srjeffery@aol.com

Thanks for *Broken Toys* 25. Much as I enjoy reading and responding to it, I hope you don't start thinking of it as an obligation, a chore that prevents you having time for other stuff you enjoy, such as drawing or writing fiction. That would rather defeat the object. If slowing down to a two-month schedule frees you with time do other things you enjoy as much (if not more) then go with it. As long as you're more organised than me: I am the master of distraction. Every time I've pulled back on one activity with grand plans to do something else in its place – catch up on the countless unread books from Christmas or even my last birthday, get back into making music, learn some more programming tools and languages – I end up frittering the time away in all sorts of displacement activities. You can always tell when I need to do the accounts: the bathroom ends up sparkling.

Used to be a similar tendency here. Now haven't the physical energy to do much cleaning, so I just read more.

1992 was probably around the time I had been in fandom or a long (and short) enough time that I wanted to do everything: conventions, fanzines, apas, cartooning, reviewing , editing, running a fan club and being co-opted onto the BSFA committee. Although perhaps not filk or costuming; even then, that was probably taking things a step too far. (As Arnold Bax once said, "You should try everything once. Except incest and folk dancing.")

I was three years into discovering that fandom existed and attending my first con. Needless to say, it couldn't last, and I'd scaled back drastically on a lot of those by the time 2000 rolled around. I don't regret it. It was great fun at the time. I just wish I knew where I found all that enthusiasm and energy, and that I'd bottled some it at the time for later.

I talk about the "old times" with a friend of mine – for us it was the early 1970s – and not only did we have the energy to stay up all night, walking around in strange places at 1 in the morning before ending up in some donut hole – but it all seemed so terribly important! An issue of club politics, the reputation of some writer, the date on we'd hold a convention, all mattered about as much as if it were a trade deal with the Soviet Union during the height of the cold war. We agree that it's probably that sense of importance that we miss most, even more than the energy. At our age, increasingly, nothing seems terribly urgent or significant.

Watching a Tim Burton movie is a bit like watching one by Quentin Tarantino. They are full of references (too full in Tarantino's case) to other films and genres. I've not seen either *Frankenweenie* or *ParaNorman*; they've yet to roll around to TV or DVD. I loved *Coraline*, enjoyed *Up*, and currently *Despicable Me* and *Despicable Me 2* are firm favourites on the DVD player. God, I remember watching a short animated film called *Luxo Junior* by a new outfit called Pixar in 1986 (check it out on YouTube). The technology of 3D digital animation has moved on hugely since then, but it's still hard to beat in terms of the expressiveness of the characters. Especially when the 'character' is an Anglepoise lamp.

Both movies are out in DVD -- that's how I happened to see them and come to review them.

I'd forgotten about Merril's "That only a Mother". That was written in 1948, probably just as the true effects of radiation poisoning from the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki were becoming known, and almost a decade before the tragedy of Thalidomide. Like most people, though, I largely know of Merril as an editor and anthologist and champion of the New Wave sf of the 1960s (even if *England Swings SF* is a really naff title). *Pace* Bill Patterson, though, I don't think sf readers "turned their backs" on experimental sf. The 'New Space Opera' of the nineties and

noughties was a reclamation and rediscovery of a neglected and somewhat derided sub-genre following from Vernor Vinge's *A Fire Upon the Deep*, but in the hands of Iain M. Banks, Al Reynolds, Charles Stross, Ken McLeod, Linda Nagata and others, it incorporated a lot of the techniques that had been discovered and adopted from "literary" sf and bears very little resemblance to its progenitors of the 1930 and '40s.

I think I agree with you. Modern SF is a lot more sophisticated as fiction than the average tale in 1975, but doesn't demand the reader perform mental gymnastics either. Advocates of experimental literature sometimes forget that most experiments are failures -- that's why everything we read isn't like Finnegans Wake. As a means of telling a story, James Joyce's masterpiece was not ideal. But most stories are rather like Catcher in the Rye.

Timothy Marion, timothe.marion@rocketmail.com

I originally saw the 30-minute short, *Frankenweenie*, at a very vulnerable time in my life. I had been keeping and caring for Hope's cats ever since she went to Canada, including Rikki, with whom I felt I had a special bond. I thought those cats were going to last forever, and I surely treated them like that too. The two cats, littermates, died just before I saw this short movie (in the early 90s). I surely must have cried my way all thru those 30 minutes, no exaggeration.

We have a lot of interests in common, but certainly very different perceptions about same. In the middle of your write-up about the new version of *Frankenweenie* (which I have never seen, and probably never will see for reasons I will reveal later), you criticize (I assume) the movie *The Creature From the Black Lagoon*: "...disastrous results that shout 'padding' in the same ear-splitting shriek of the bikini babe at the Black Lagoon, just before [he] grabs her." What the female swimmer was wearing was actually a one-piece bathing suit, not a bikini, and at that tender point in movie making history (1954), there really wasn't all that much underwater photography available of beautiful women swimming. It may look like padding to you in today's context, but at that time, underwater photography was relatively innovative...especially underwater photography in 3-D, which is how the movie was originally presented.

The "padding" I meant was in the bra section of her bikini, not the scene itself. But metaphors sometimes don't carry across well, despite the author's intentions. It's been a very long time since I saw anyh of The Creature Etc. I don't recall the bathing suit with any clarity.

You say you don't recognize many of the references in *Frankenweenie*, but then answer your own question when you say you didn't see the James Whale *Frankenstein*. Yes, and other readers might point this out also, the windmill was a reference to *Frankenstein*. Surely that movie is accessible enough for you to watch it before you ask questions in print about another movie which references it. (No biggie, but I'm saying *saying*...)

Obviously, I recognized some. The one about the windmill was a lucky guess – not the first time I've hit it right by accident. I recall one time when I was arguing with someone about The Scooby Doo Movie (which I didn't want to see but ended up seeing anyway, eventually). The other guy said it had a surprise ending and I'd never guess who the bad guy was. I then astonished him by telling him it was Scrappy Doo ... but it was only a guess, based on it being about the last thing anyone would guess. But a lot of obvious references in Frankenweenie looked like references to something, even though I had no idea what.

But I have to confess that as soon as I see Tim Burton's name now I start to get turned-off, and this is due to the travesty/tragedy of his and Depp's disastrously myopic vision of *Dark Shadows*. Hey,

since those old TV shows might come across as corny and melodramatic to a young person today, why not turn a loving tribute into an outright comedy? What a laff-riot...in someone's imagination. The most disappointing thing was Burton and Depp saying in interviews how much they loved the old show. For all its low-budget kitsch, any one episode of the old series had more meaning, taste and insight than that entire tacky movie. After seeing how irreverent they were to the beloved source material, and after seeing what a bad movie it was, I don't ever intend to waste my time or money in Tim Burton's direction again. And that's definitely saying something, considering how much I enjoyed (and even continue to enjoy) *The Nightmare Before Christmas*. The loss of so many cats thru one's life could be compared, in literature and movies, to the remorse immortal vampires feel when their human, or even vampire, companions die. Thinking specifically of the loss felt by the main character in the *Interview With the Vampire* movie.

Was very disappointed with Lloyd Penney in your lettercol, whom I normally regard as a positive voice of restraint, without necessarily relegating him to be a Pollyanna. I can't believe he wrote about the controversial Judy Merril, "I frankly am glad she's gone." Brrrr! I didn't even say that about Phat Skank when she died, and she spread pornographic slander about me through both Minneapolis and New York fandoms! Since that was all the way back in the mid-'70s, and she hadn't shown any acrimony toward me since then, all I said, in a DNQ letter to someone, was to express incredulity that she had died. Not that I think everyone should be like me, but I really don't think it looks very good on Lloyd to gloat over someone's death. If we are happy about anyone's death, it should be for the sake that they no longer have to endure this Vale of Tears.

Lloyd likes to stand for the Voice of Reason, while other people fulminate about "trufans" and "fakefans," but when you touch him – say, over losing the Aurora last year – he turns out to have a few "Dark Shadows" of his own. It seems Judy must have offended him at one time. His letter was the first I knew about it.

On the other hand, it was a relief for Lloyd to express himself honestly about his and Yvonne's prospects of having Christmas with her family, "...always a fight, always lectures from older sister, guilt for all, and dissatisfaction over presents." I hate to say it, but it's actually a relief reading something like this, since ordinarily I feel like I am the only one I know who comes from a dysfunctional family. It's no wonder that I moved so far from home (from Newport News, Virginia, to New York City) and why I, mostly, just wanted to stay in my new home, by myself, year after year. Surely children from abused or dysfunctional households end up feeling happiest when they're by themselves. I wish parents who pride themselves for being "strict" would realize how much they drive their children away from them.

That's why I have to agree in spirit with Milt Stevens when he expresses so much dissatisfaction with the commercialization of Christmas and the burden of buying presents for everyone that he would rather pass out checks or gift certificates. This would surely be the best solution for those relatives with whom one does not interact but who still deserve some sort of friendly gesture. There is also something to be said, of course, for picking out just the Right Present for someone whom you know well, or at least, interact with frequently. That, I think, starts to encapsulate the meaning of Christmas for me – thoughtful, not wasteful, gift-giving.

Nothing says "Merry Christmas" like a fancy, three-speed, torquing vibrator, and an extra-large tube of K-Y jelly. Yeah, sometimes a gift certificate *is* more thoughtful. I agree that Eric Mayer's previous letter was bitter, but I should not have been one to criticize considering my own letter in that issue was more bitter by far...

Keith Soltys notes “your frustration about finding a typo in the last issue just after sending it out. It’s a simple fact of life that no matter how well you proof a document of more than a few pages, there will always be typos.” Yes, I think of it as one of the principal corollaries of Murphy’s Law of Fanzine Publishing. My grievance with the typos in *Broken Toys* is that I frequently get the impression that you retype my letters in toto, which feels silly since you can simply copy the text in unformatted. The result is that my letters, or at the very least, my first letter, was riddled with typos. Or is it your proofreader who is directing you to make these typos? If so, this could be called Murphy’s Law of Seek-Wentzlia Proofreading.

As you surmise, I cut and paste, rather than re-type. Walt has proofread every letter column since early days, so I don't know why there would be more typos in your letters than before. One possible answer is that we standardize punctuation ... but I think you'd have said it was changes in punctuation in that case. The other possibly answer is that you make more typos than you remember, and Walt doesn't catch all of them. I know for a fact that he doesn't. But we do the best we can.

Okay, all right – I admit this issue has far fewer typos. So far I have only seen one word left out and one extra comma. And Randy Byer might feel prickly about your typing his name as “Randy BrYer,” I think. (That is, if I’m not confused and have his name wrong myself.) Also a backward set of quotation marks in your faan fiction.

Your faan fiction was immensely entertaining...up until the obvious end. The amusement value of this story slipped up on me without my noticing – at first I was tittering, then I found myself laughing hard enough to cry for a moment. But the end, where everything that was implied before was stated outright, was just a disappointment – an unfunny anticlimax. I’m sorry, but I have to admit that’s my reaction to much of your more formal writing – I think you’re an excellent wordsmith, but sometimes your main point, or finish, seems either murky, nonexistent or anticlimactic. Well, that’s my feeling, anyway. Remember I did like your Carnacki story. My “Lovecraft story” (inspired by the supernatural detective movie *To Cast a Deadly Spell*) continues apace, with my adding a few more lines every day.

One of my corespondents, who asked to see the Carnacki story, had much the same reaction – he knew what was coming. Unfortunately, he didn't seem to enjoy the ride all that much either, and pretty much advised me to scrap it after Weird Tales inevitably rejects the MS.

Milt Stevens, miltstevens@earthlink.net

In *Broken Toys* #25, you talk about some of your problems with conventions. While my situation is quite a bit different, I’ve also been noticing some problems. At a couple of conventions, I’ve been on the program for quite a few years. I may not be a draw, but I know quite a bit about science fiction and can fill in on a lot of different panels. Suddenly, I’m not invited anymore. I compare notes with some other guys, and they are no longer being invited either. What do we have in common? Well, we seem to be male, white, and old. This seems to be a policy decision.

I'll print this, but I suspect you are going to be badly raked over the coals for suggesting that knocking old, white males over the head isn't the only right thing to do, to save fandom or society.

They may think that getting rid of old people will attract young people. I don’t think that necessarily follows. They may think we will pay for memberships if we don’t get them for free. That doesn’t necessarily follow either. I have no intention of buying a membership to these conventions, and

money isn't really the reason. If I were offered a free membership, I still wouldn't be interested in attending. Being on the program was what I did at these conventions. Without that, I have nothing to do and too much time to do it in. I guess I really don't think these particular conventions are very interesting. That does seem to be the case.

I never really thought about that, but I think you're right. Being on program is one of the things that keeps one busy at a convention. At the last local cons I attended, I believe I was under-employed, having but a single panel to sit on. It didn't bother me, since I don't like watching panels to begin with, and have a hard time understanding why anyone would want to watch me at the front of the room. But it did leave me with little to do at a small con with next to no dealers' room and an art show smaller than the amount of unfinished work on my desk at the moment. This year I only got an e-mail reminder that there was only a month until the con, and did I have any suggestions for programming? I went to the website, found it had changed since the year before, and gave up. Not that I had any ideas that I hadn't had the year before. In the end, I just didn't go – the main issue being my difficulty walking. But some other older, local fans I've talked to also complained that they feel sidelined these days. Maybe it's a fandom-wide conspiracy? ;)

Hot Rod-302 notes “The US is the only country that watches other people drive oversized trucks for entertainment.” He talks as if that’s a bad thing. Would he prefer a country where they play polo with human heads? Personally, I don’t even understand soccer rioting as an entertainment.

Actually, I said that as a throw-away interlineo in the previous issue, and HotRod commented on it. It just struck me as odd. But better than soccer, you're right. I've never heard of a Monster Truck Rally riot, or it tying up the evening news on TV for a week.

However, my nomination for the dumbest sort of athletic activity in the world is running the bulls. Intentionally putting yourself in a very narrow street where a bunch of very irritated bulls will appear and try to dismember you doesn’t sound like much fun from my point of view. Staying home and watching the whole thing on television is a much better idea.

There's also that town with the big tomato fight... but I'd rather get hit with a squishy tomato than a ton of enraged bull on the run.

I liked your story. My initial thought was to drop the framing device and sell it as a straight horror story. Of course, it depends on what you want to accomplish. The framing story lightens the effect and allows the reader to accept the whole thing as a tall tale. I don’t know how straight horror markets would react to that.

I have no idea what the horror market is like these days, except I doubt there's much room in it for tongue-in-cheek, which The Fly on the Wall would be even without the framing device.

Lloyd Penney, penneys@bell.net

I hope I’m not too late with getting some response off to you for *Broken Toys* 25. Congrats on 25 issues, and let’s see what you’ve got this time.

Over the past month or so, I’ve let zines pile up...I know I should respond, but I am still job-hunting, and with little or nothing to show for it, and that way lies depression. I am fighting it, and Yvonne helps so much, but I find that when I can put the job hunt aside, I will write a loc or two, and feel

better. I need to get back to something that makes me feel like I am accomplishing something, and I suspect you're the same, ...you've enjoyed producing the zine and writing the articles, but you want to get back to your art.

I always liked the Sherman and Mr. Peabody cartoons, so I had some hopes for this new movie. Will I go? From what I've seen, not a hope. Too modern, too hip. I think I shall save my money for something like *The Grand Hotel Belgrade*, I think it's called.

I haven't seen much of the new Sherman and Peabody movie, just a review on the CBC. It looks okay, but given Hollywood's penchant for revisionism, it's hard to know what to expect. Thankfully, it is quite impossible for it to be worse than the gruesome Rocky and Bullwinkle movie that was made a few years ago!

With my parents, pets were not for me. We were lucky to have gerbils, but they don't live very long. Over the years, I have enjoyed other people's pets, and they have made their mark on my life. What I wouldn't give to see ChatChat and MomCat again. Both of them made life much happier for me at important times. Cats and other pets have so much to teach us when it comes to love and responsibility, and at the end, grief.

The locol...given Rowling's penchant for strange names, maybe Myasthenia Gravis should be the next Professor of Defense Against the Dark Arts at Hogwarts. We've got to give Ms. Gravis something to do...

Like kill him off? I could live with that.

It's quickly becoming a late Saturday night, and I am listening to Randy Bachman's music show on CBC Radio 1. I am banging away on the keyboard, and now find myself dealing with more typos and more yawning. I just want to go and lie down, the last thing I'd want on a Saturday night. Serves me right for not enough exercise, and probably too much coffee. Thank you for this issue, and I hope issue 26 is still in the preparation stages. See you then.

WAHF, the verbose Mark Manning, tandmark@outlook.com, who said "thanks."

Perchance to Dream

Why is it that I have trouble sleeping at night? I used to sleep like a log. My only complaint in the years before I was 60 was that I sometimes fell asleep before I could rescue Spock and Kirk from Darth Vader, or that I wouldn't have time to explain to Sherlock Holmes how The Joker got away.

There were occasions when sleep *wouldn't* come that easily. The first night of any camping trip typically left me wide awake in a hot, sweaty sleeping bag, lying on uncomfortably stony ground for seven or eight hours, now and then peeling the bag off me to slip out of the tent for a piss while Victoria snored in the other bag. Mind you, I experienced some epiphanies in such moments. I was literally gobsmacked when I stepped out of the tent and stared right at the face of the Devil's Tower, silvered by the full moon as the Pleiades rose over its summit. The scale and majesty of the sight was breathtaking. *Close Encounters* isn't a patch on it. On a different trip, I stepped out of the tent into the desert, the Badlands of South Dakota all around me, and the silver arch of the Milky Way overhead. But most of the time, crawling out of a sleeping bag like a moth emerging from its

chrysalis with a full bladder is merely irksome. Outside is only darkness, and the ground is dirty and stony under your bare feet, then next morning you have to brush bits of leaf and bark out of your sleeping gear.

As I got older, sleep became gradually more of an unpredictable prize. I slept long, irregular hours that left me wide awake for the next day and a half. As long as sleep was inevitable, though, I didn't mind very much.

I began to become alarmed about my sleep a couple of years ago, when I caught a flu or cold and couldn't sleep a wink for three or four days. It wasn't because my head was stuffed up or my nose ran incessantly – though it was and it did. I simply *could not sleep*. As soon as I came anywhere near sleep, my breathing would grow heavy, my heart start pumping as though to put out a fire somewhere and my body would demand I get up. Twenty minutes later, I'd start to nod off in the middle of a book, and lie down again for another try at sleeping. The same thing would happen. My thoughts would grow disorganized as I drifted off to sleep ... then bam, bam, bam, my heart would slug as if at baseballs, and I'd be breathing as though I'd just finished 25 push-ups. My body just wouldn't let me sleep.

It went for four days like that, with one or two periods in which I caught perhaps three or four hours of slumber. I looked into everything as a possible cause – including the stimulants in an inhaler I briefly used to overcome wheezing. Nothing seemed plausible. But I got over the cold eventually, and began to sleep normally again. It was just an unusual symptom of that strain of virus, I reasoned. Hopefully, I'd never get that strain again.

Vain hope; I caught it again that very winter. In fact, I've had it two or three times more since then, if it even *is* the strain of cold or flu that's responsible. All I know is that the new paradigm for me is that if I come down with the sniffles, I can expect to give up sleep for the next three or four days. Strangely, I can drop off into a deep, profound sleep in mere seconds while trying to work at the computer keyboard. No matter how hard I try to resist nodding off, I'm apt to find myself unexpectedly impacting the display monitor with my nose before I even realize I'm at risk.

Now I have lost all confidence in my ability to sleep. Most nights I lay my head down on the pillow and fuss about my position. I have to favour my sore leg, and keep the ball of the other foot off the mattress because it gets painful after a few minutes if I don't, and I seem to focus on my chest going up and down, up and down with every breath. I can no longer abide any weight at all on my chest, and since I sleep on my side, that leaves me with the awkward problem of what to do with my upper arm. If it isn't forward of my center of gravity, it drags me over onto my back. But my sore leg won't let me lie in *that* position. Sleeping has become a nightmare.

Nor do I have a Devil's Tower to enthrall me in my sleepless torments. Instead, I sit on the side of the bed, rocking gently back and forth in an effort to relax and perhaps feel ready for another crack at the pillow. More often than not, that's when I fall asleep. Usually I catch myself falling over, but more than once I've ended up on the floor, grateful I haven't cracked my skull. But lay my head on the pillow, and it's wake-up time again! I wish I knew what the fuck was going on.

Lately, I have been adjusting. When I begin to nod off at the computer, I just lean back and sleep. I can snore away a good hour or more, and wake up fresh as newly opened Champagne. In bed, I've found I can sleep if I'm propped up into some degree of a sitting position, or, oddly, leaning on one elbow, with a small pillow between my shoulder and jaw. After a little more practice, I think I may again be welcome to the restorative bosom of sleep on a regular basis. But not before I have warned Steve Zodiac not to trust the scheming robot, Bender, of course!

Snow Job

My friend Bob lives just north of Toronto, in a suburban co-op. It's a nice place, but the neighborhood is desperately dull. Whenever I've visited, we usually sat around the house, talking. I remember going out to *do* something only twice. One time, we went for a walk along a well-manicured stretch of a small stream that I wasn't sure was entirely natural. It was pleasant enough, but – without interesting bedrock, gravel bars or even unplanned ripples that I can remember – it wasn't exactly exciting. The other time, Bob and I walked along a busy four-lane boulevard for about a mile until we came to Value Village, the local discount emporium. We looked at the used books for a while, and then walked *back* to Bob's place the same way we came. After having seen the Value Village, Bob assured me that we had fully explored the neighborhood amenities.

But his neighborhood is not entirely without eccentricity. A couple of years ago, I wrote about an incident with the police that took place in the street, right outside Bob's kitchen window. While detaining a suspicious van for dope, the police looked everywhere but the one, most obvious place. After the suspects drove away, the cops did a double-take when they noticed a plastic zip-loc bag on the tarmac, exactly where the departed van had been parked.

I phone Bob at least once a week, just for the sake of conversation. During a recent call, Bob told me that he had done a record amount of snow shoveling this winter. No wonder – it's been one of the snowier winters in Toronto in recent memory, and officially the coldest in a very long time.

One of the eccentricities of Bob's neighborhood is that he has immigrant Russian neighbors to either side of him. The language barrier is not insurmountable, but, sometimes, casual exchanges lead in unexpected directions. According to Bob, he was shoveling snow during one of the recent heavy, recurrent snowfalls, when the neighbor's wife waded over from next door.

"I blow you," she said in heavily accented English.

"I'm sorry, what was that?"

"I blow you?"

Once again, Bob expressed his puzzlement, and the neighbor's wife repeated, "Blow you! Blow you!"

Bob said he was on the verge of answering something like, "I'm terribly flattered, but, really, no thanks..." Thankfully, he kept dumb long enough for the lady to turn in her tracks, go into the neighboring garage and emerge with a power snow blower.

"I blow, hokay?"

Ho-kaaaay. Enlightenment dawned, and Bob relaxed.

Well, what would *you* have thought she meant?



Theodosius II
402 - 450 AD
(Emperor of East,
Longest reigning
emperor, 48 years.)

Mark Antony
AR Denarius
32 BC, Athens
(NB: Bankers'
Proof Marks)

Trajan
AE Quadrans,
101 AD, Rome

THREE COINS FROM THE FOUNTAIN

Most of my Saturdays are pretty slow, even boring ... and when along comes a weekend in which I have something to do, often it's *too much* to do! This Saturday was one of those weekends.

For some time I had been waiting for a friend of mine to get over his uncanny streak of bad luck. His house had been hit by a tree and left without power during the recent ice-storm. He needed surgery in a rather tender area. Finally, his car was broadsided, and then written off by the insurance company. But time changes everyone's luck sooner or later, even my friend Steven's. I was waiting for a lift, you see. My ability to walk has been deteriorating, driven by the double-whammy of muscle weakness and neurological pain. I decided I could not get by any longer without a "rollator."

I had had one of these foot-propelled hospital gurney-and-lawnchair arrangements before. It was someone's cast-off, and it had been cast-off for good reason. No brakes! The wheels were worn, and wobbled. The grips slipped off the handlebars. It was huge and barely fit through store doors, and it weighed a ton. It *did* fold up ... but would not stay folded unless tied. I gave up on it early, leaving it at the Sally Ann for someone needier than me.

But, eventually, I became needier myself, and asked Steven to take me to the medical supply store to look into buying a brand-new one. Naturally, that's when Steven's astonishing streak of rotten luck began. The next few weeks were torture for me, as well, as every expedition out of the house was both painful and impeded by the record snowfall.

As I said, though, bad luck usually comes to an end, sooner or later, so this Saturday Steven said he was free to take me to the medical store, in his new car.

And I lived happily every after, correct? Not exactly. Just as I said at the beginning of this account, whenever I have something to do, or somewhere to go, there are usually other things to do or places to go, or both. In this case, the Saturday in question turned out to be the same Saturday that the coin show was in Toronto.

Normally, I attend the show with another friend, Simon, who also collects coins. The problem was, how was I supposed to take advantage of Steven's ride, and also meet Simon at the coin show? I was unable to even reach Simon by phone in time to discuss the matter.

Well, priorities are priorities. Steven drove me to the medical supply place a little before lunch. We were finished far more quickly than I expected. The sales person showed me a snappy little number in metal-flake red, with locking brakes, a storage compartment under the seat, sturdy wheels and comfy back rest. It folded, and stayed folded. It was lightweight, and marginally smaller than the antique I had discarded. All for \$175, including taxes. I paid cash.

It was still early enough to attend the coin show. Steven said it was just as easy for him to deliver me to the downtown hotel where it was being held as it was to take me home again. I decided on the spot, "Why not?" Maybe I would run into my other friend, Simon there, after all. It would also give me an opportunity to test-drive the new rig.

I have little to say about the show. It was a medium-sized room in a new hotel, crammed with tables and dealers trying to sell their Denarii, Shekels, Pfennings, Prutahs, Groats, Reales, Rupees, Loonies and hundreds of other denominations of coins to spendthrift fools like me. I located my favourite dealer, Robert, and began combing through his trays. In recent years, prices have been growing inexorably, and as my collection also grew, the sort of material I'm looking to add to it also grew in price. A rather common sort of Roman silver coin that was worth \$75 ten years ago is worth almost twice that today. If it is at all scarce, and not too similar to one I already own, it might be \$200, \$300, \$400 ... or far, *far* more. I drooled over a silver Cistophorus from the reign of Claudius, but who has \$1,200 for a bit of whitish metal about the size of a quarter, bearing the likeness of a turkey-necked geek who stuttered, liked to gamble and drank too much?

But there, between two Denarii of Septimius Severus that I wasn't interested in, was a tiny speck of bronze by the emperor Theodosius II! It was small, but marked at only twenty-five bucks! I didn't have a single coin by this nonentity who reigned in the Eastern half of the Roman empire between 402 and 450 AD. He was made co-emperor by his father, another nonentity, at the age of 9 months. He eventually died when he fell off his horse at the age of 48, having done literally nothing in between. Yet that accomplishment alone made him the longest-reigning emperor in nearly 1,500 years of Roman history! I paid for it on the spot, getting a 1950s-vintage fiver in change!

I was also tempted by another small bronze coin, called a Quadrans, struck under Trajan. Four of them made up an As (pronounced "Awz"), four of those made up a large bronze Sestertius, and four of *those* were worth a silver Denarius. So a Quadrans is a very small change in both respects. Even so, it was a bit pricey. It was in very fine condition, though, and on the reverse side was the club of Hercules. I had a number of Quadrans struck by this or that emperor, but none with a club. I put it aside for consideration. Then I hit paydirt. A worn but respectable silver Denarius from the year 31 BC, struck by Mark Antony! I had nothing like it. I wanted it. The trouble was, the price matched its scarcity. Think three figures, and the first digit wasn't "1." It wasn't even "2." I had to think about this...

In the meantime, although I'd been keeping an eye out for Simon, I saw him nowhere. I asked Robert to set the Antony and the Trajan Quadrans aside for me. I hoped I might strike a trade with Simon against the intermittent photo-restoration work I do for him. Usually, Simon attended a collecting group's meeting downstairs, so I barged into their room looking for him. I had never attended one before, expecting them to consist mainly of a lot of stuffy old men with money to burn and fusty British upper class accents. Actually, there were only two people there, and both friendly. Neither had accents of any kind, unless it was Canadian.

But no Simon. Other members began to arrive, and I attended the complete meeting. I even spoke, briefly, showing the file card drawings I do of my coins to identify them, and to record what I know of them. Eventually, the meeting ended, but *still* no Simon. Oh well!

I went back up to the convention floor and found Robert's table again. I had to have the Antony *and* the Trajan, but naturally I wasn't carrying *that* sort of money with me. Robert and I have done deals like this before, though, and he let me have them at a favorable discount, and allowed me to pay the balance over time.

I won't be writing about any *new* coins for rather a *long* while, though.

Still no Simon, and the room would close in an hour. He evidently wasn't coming. Rush hour would start soon as well, so it was clearly time to start for home. Fortunately, there was a streetcar stop right in front of the hotel door, and it took me directly to Dunn Avenue, where I live. A short walk up Dunn finished the breaking-in of my new "wheels," and then I was home.

New wheels for myself, a ride in Steven's new wheels, three exciting new coins for my collection and a bit of time out of the apartment ... and in the sun, too. Not a shabby way to spend a day. Inevitably, the next three or four weekends will be without incident ... but I suppose life has to be that way, lest we take excessive interest in it.



The Travelling Wilbury and my cat, Sailor