

Broken Toys 31 is brought to you by **Tatal Wayne** and his various invisible best friends, who reside happily together in a reality not accessible to most. They can be reached at 245 Dufferin Ave., Apt. 2111, Toronto Ontario, M6K 1J6 Canada ... or at Tatal@Bell.net. This fanzine is KIDDELIVEREE BOOKS & ART (or EXTRA TATAL TOTALITY) (or TATALBLE MISTAKES) 288, PUBLISHED LATE SEPTEMBER 2014. Now we are 63, and no nearer my life goals than I was at 23.

DID IT EVER REALLY HAPPEN?

Last month I attended a furry meet that had been happening in Toronto every three or four months, for years. Although I had been repeatedly urged to go, the one in August was the first that I bestirred myself to actually attend. There was no sinister reason for this hesitancy. I just expected a much younger crowd than myself, with whom I would have little in common. As well, my mobility was decreasing steadily, and the location of the Islington Fur Meet involved a short walk, a bus ride, a subway ride, and a longish walk at the end that I wasn't keen about ... especially on the way home, at night, when I would be a fairly isolated target dependent on a roller. Not that it is an *unsafe* neighborhood. I had lived there myself, in the 1960s, and knew every inch of it intimately. But after ten p.m., I thought it might be less than wise for a vulnerable person to be out alone.

For those reasons, I kept giving "We'll see" as an answer to every invitation, but wimping out at the last minute. Last month I simply explained that matters were getting worse, not better, and that it would take a lift there and back to get me to attend. I was impressed that the organizer, Dan, managed to swing it. So I finally went to an Islington Fur Meet.

Dan was pretty good about it. I have no complaints about the digs or refreshments. For two bucks, there were munchies and pop. \$5 bought into the stack of pizzas delivered around 9 or 10. There were three rooms to chat in, game or watch videos on the wide-screen TV.

But I was more or less right about not fitting in. I sat in my roller for about four hours, sipping Coke or Dr. Pepper, and in that time was involved in conversation with only one other person. I saw no one I knew – none of the old gang who were furry fandom in Toronto in the early 1990s, when we had our picnics and get-togethers at the Chinese joint across from Krat's place. Late in the evening, I finally got a

glimpse of one face I knew, but she was busy and ran off immediately. Eventually, I asked if it was not too early to be taken home.

I guess it was partly my fault. Everyone seemed to be having a good time, but I didn't know how to break into their computer or card games to start a conversation. Others were talking, but I had no idea about what. I didn't want to watch *Frozen* again. There was one fan who was painting lead gaming figures – trolls or ogres or something. I watched for a minute, until he looked up at me and asked, “Was there anything you want to know?” But there really wasn't anything I wanted to know, since I myself used to paint toy soldiers and figures from my 1/24 hot rod models.

Another fan was working with markers on new artwork. A few prints were laid out on the table, and they were the usual sort of wolf-totem stuff of which I had seen a lot at conventions. I might have struck up a conversation with him by announcing I was an artist myself, but I wasn't interested in what he was doing and imagined he wouldn't be interested in what I did, either. Maybe that was my failure ... to assume I was nobody of interest. But I suspect that was only too true.

Besides, there is something show-offish that I didn't like about pulling out portfolios or comics to show people “who I am.” From my experience, that all too often receives a polite response that doesn't actually hide the other person's indifference.

In the end, I assumed a “fly on the wall” role, which intruded on nobody and passed the time.

Obviously, there was a time when I would have been received entirely differently if I walked into a room full of furies. But was that a good thing, really?

A few days ago, something had me thinking about furry fandom again. I was filing some recent drawings. Their variety and themes gave me a great deal of pleasure as I looked them over, then scribbled a number and date on the back side and filed them away. It was good to be drawing again. The folder for 2013 was much slimmer than this year's, even though 2014 is far from over. What was different about last year, I wondered?

Maybe that was the wrong question. Maybe what had been different hadn't been 2013 so much as the years leading up to it. For several years I had been surviving as best as I could from doing commissioned art, and not doing well enough. I fell into credit card debt to make up the difference, and this led to a whole host of troubles. Yet I was spending my entire time at the drawing board on material that was, at best, a growing bore. Finish a dancing cat girl, move on to a masturbating skunk girl, then on to a mud-wallowing rabbit girl... on and on, without end. There was no challenge to it, the amount of artistry it required fell to almost none, and it left me with no desire to draw anything better. By 2013 I was worn out and had to stop.

As well, I had been picked out of the abyss by city social workers, and finally had enough income to survive again. There was no reason to continue the grind.

I looked at the folders for each year, going back more than 20 years. Each folder held as many as 200 original drawings or hand copies, that altogether added up to at least 3,000 separate pages. But each folder probably held only 30 and 50 drawings that I was still proud of. The rest was fundamentally junk ... turned out at the request of some fan who had twenty-five to fifty dollars to spend so that he could dictate to me the product of his private fantasy.

I have no shame about this. I tried my best, and didn't sit in judgment of the people who wanted these things. But in 2014 I look back and wonder what I *might* have done instead of these endless drawings of cat girls, rabbit girls and skunk girls in erotic situations?

I would certainly have done *some* of these. I liked them as much as my customers. It's only that I had to produce them in such numbers that it burned out their charm. And what of scores of unfinished drawings in other folders, drawings begun for my own pleasure, but were too complicated and had been set aside while I met my customer's needs – then never got around to completing? I would dearly love to have folders full of *that* material going back to the 1990s, even if the folders were slimmer.

Do I blame furry fandom? No, of course not. I did this to myself, of my own free choice. I made a living, after a fashion, and that's not to be written off lightly. And, for a while, it made me a big frog in a small pond.

Yet I can't help think, what if? Here I am in 2014, with, it seems, little to show for it.

Did the good times in furry fandom ever actually happen? It was such a long time ago that I went to cons, knew lots of people, had a good time, saw different cities, made a lot of money and felt this would all lead to something important. It never did lead anywhere, though, and nothing now is like it was then. So, was any of it real? Did it ever really happen? Or would it have been better if it had never happened at all?

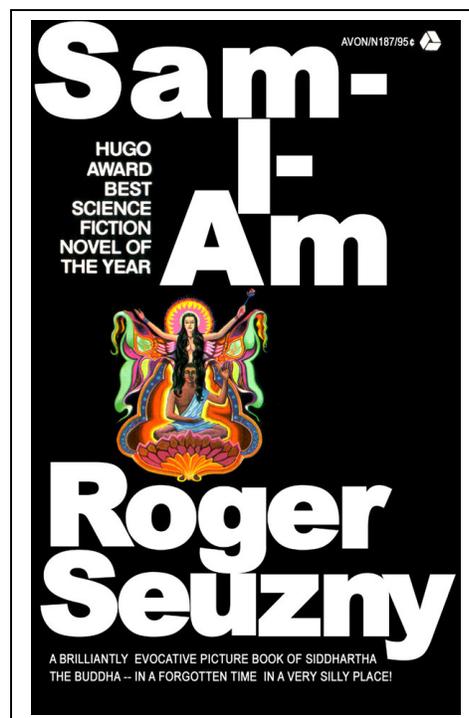
It is probably better not to ask questions like that, let alone answer them.

S U S S I N G Z E L A Z N Y

A while ago, I was re-reading some Zelazny. Roger Zelazny was obsessed with secret groups of sorcerers, gods or technocrats (all the same thing in his books, really), who could mess with reality where psychiatry bordered on myth. His was an approach to science fiction that fit the 1960s perfectly ... but seems a little out of date now that we've taken the measures of psychedelic drugs and Transcendental Meditation.

I read *Lords of Light* with pleasure. *Creatures of Light and Darkness* strained my tolerance a lot more, but I did take satisfaction from reading it with better understanding than I did the first time. I seem to remember being befuddled by much of the book when I first read it in my twenties.

Next I picked up *The Dream Master*, at which point I realized that all three books were in some sense all the same novel, as were the several books in the *Princes in Amber* series. It was in *The Dream Master*, too, that I began to see why people spoke of Zelazny as a poet. Along with *that* realization, I also noticed that I was damned sick and tired of his poetic way of writing.



Good writing should present the reader with clear images, ideas or moods. I don't think the reader should ever come away from the page wondering what it meant or what happened. If they do, the author's efforts to be clever have only gone to waste. You might even say that some writing is too artistic for its own good. Of course, there are some authors of difficult prose who mainly write to satisfy themselves, and are content that they can only be understood by an erudite few. I doubt there are very many of them, however, and in the Science Fiction genre this is simply writing that fails to come across to the reader, rather than something too elevated for me to follow. Publishers will not normally publish a novel that goes over the heads of their readers.

In writing, some words are simply better words than others. They say what they mean better. Take the following examples, spun from nothing in particular:

"It was a 1958 Buick, in all its glistening glory of chrome, streamlined steel, jazzy colours and tailfins as tense and razor-edged as those of a rocket about to launch. At the turn of a key, two hundred horsepower roared to life."

I think that paints a pretty straightforward and evocative picture. Now consider this description:

"There waited a silver-chased chariot, swept steel wings on either side, and borne by four dark litter-bearers in white livery. Two hundred horses sheltered under a chrome-bossed shield, waiting for their Diocles to bid them wake."

Too clever by half. Or entirely! What does it mean, the reader wonders? Why would you want to compare a piece of Detroit iron with a fragile thing like a classical chariot? Are "four dark litter bearers in white livery" the tires with white sidewalls? And who the heck is *Diocles*? (Actually, he was a famous Roman charioteer from the 2nd century A.D., but who could be reasonably expected to know *that*?) This writing is for its own sake, rather than the prosaic task of communicating with the reader.

While reading Zelazny's books, I thought rather too much of his writing verged on a somewhat different sort of bad writing that is slightly related to the obscure verbosity above. While his diction was plain enough, the result was nevertheless a little murky sometimes. Had what I read just happened, or was it in someone's head, a mere vision or dream? If it was a dream, then what did it really matter? And what was I to make of the metaphysical mumbo-jumbo, or the out-dated Freudian analysis? Far from painting precise pictures in my mind, Zelazny tended to leave me wondering what, exactly, I had just read, and how it was supposed to tie in with anything else. Had it *really* happened ... or was what I had just read only an elaborate metaphor or bit of mythology that bogged down the prose for no better reason than that Zelazny liked such things?

Zelazny struck me as a writer trying much too hard to show his erudition about subjects that have little enough substance as it is. Whatever cachet Eastern religions, Freud, Jung and psychedelic drugs had 45 years ago, when Zelazny wrote his seminal work, they have all grown a little long in the tooth by 2014. Today such subjects are mostly regarded as outdated fads, the earmark of a decade looking for esoteric answers to existential problems.

I suppose the same can be said of the preoccupation of the Science Fiction of the 1930s with mental powers and supermen. Or the 1940s' preoccupation with Hohmann Orbits and robots. Or the

1950s' preoccupation with UFOs and the Cold War. Looking back on the 1970s, we may see them as obsessed with feminist dystopias and weird sex. The 1980s? Mercenaries, dragons and gated communities in orbit, perhaps? It's probably too soon to even guess about the '90s.

I'm not being entirely fair to Roger Zelazny. It isn't as though I was at any point confused by his writing ... it was more that the author was leading me through a kaleidoscope of words that just didn't seem to matter. It would have been all the same to me whether the Dream Master created dreams about climbing mountains made of ice cream in a blizzard of icing sugar, or blowing up skull-shaped planets adrift in a space-sea of blood. Neither image would have made any difference, as far as I could tell. I felt a similar impatience with the author's verbatim depiction of a theatrical performance somewhere around page 95 – a highly unlikely stand-up routine where the performer enacted mythology. Did the reader have to groan through every word of that bluster for any reason? None that I could see. I had the strong sense that Zelazny simply enjoyed writing the scenes too much to give much thought to the reader.

Mind you, I am not a strict “functionalist” when it comes to writing. I have never objected to descriptions or digressions that were not strictly necessary to the plot or theme of a novel. As long as writing is interesting in its own right, it must necessarily serve some purpose by helping to set a tone or mood. But whether or not something is “interesting in its own right” is not an objective call. My interest was held all the way through Bilbo Baggins' 111th birthday party in *The Hobbit*. Not every reader can finish it. I read Asimov's explanations of Psychohistory or the Three Laws of Robotics without faltering. Other readers may find them pedantic and quibble about their effectiveness. Mark Twain's discourses on steamboats, cigars or old miners are nothing less than fascinating. Of course, there is a world of things I'm *not* interested in – medieval romance poetry, Catharism, fungi, balalaika music, curling, Welsh, Jane Austin, Paris fashion, watchmaking and yoga are just a few among many. Yet a writer who is gifted at communicating his enthusiasm, and knows where to draw the line, can still draw me into any subject.

But a writer who forgets that he has to seduce his reader's interest is another matter.

Whether Zelazny is just not engaging *me* with the novels I've re-read, or if they simply fail as good writing, is something I'm not sure about. *The Dream Master* won a Nebula in 1965, after all. A good many other SF writers must have thought highly of it, even if I thought it undistinguished. And to be fair, *Creatures of Light and Darkness* wasn't much liked by anyone ... yet, despite certain awkwardnesses and unnecessarily fancy tricks, at least the book held my interest throughout. And clearly *Lords of Light* is the author's masterpiece, a book I thoroughly enjoyed.

Perhaps mine is a personal call only. Do I dare extend my visit with Roger Zelazny by starting *To Die in Italbar* or *This Immortal* ... or have I finished with the author? For the time being, I think I have finished.

Will John Brunner stand up better to a re-acquaintance? *Stand on Zanzibar* and *The Sheep Look Up* are next on my “to re-read list,” and I have fair hopes.

THE HUNDRED YEARS WAR



The CBC has been glutted lately with stories about Canada's involvement in World War I. Readers in the US won't have noticed the significance of 2014 because the U.S. didn't enter the First World War until 1917, when most of the hard work of stopping bullets and breathing poison gasses had already been done. From childhood, I found both world wars fascinating. But as I grew older, my interest dwindled until today, 100 years after the beginning of "The War to End War," I have not the least interest in it. My feeling is, "it was a century ago - get over it."

That may sound callous, but time is a very subjective thing, and it would profit us to think objectively about it once in a while. When I was ten, the American Civil War celebrated *its* centenary! I remember the car trip my family took to Florida for a summer vacation around that time. (It might as easily have been 1962 or '63.) We passed through Gettysburg, where I insisted we buy a toy musket with a real wood stock, metal barrel and rubber bayonet. The percussion lock worked just like the real thing. I even bought a couple of genuine Minié balls that had been fired on the battlefield, and exhumed decades later. I still have them, in fact. When I was ten, they were fifty cents apiece. What they would cost today, I'm terrified to guess. I also possess a commemorate china plate, embellished with the principal generals of the Blue and the Gray. I'm confident in saying that it is worth exactly *nothing*.

Nevertheless, by then the Civil War could not be mistaken for anything but ancient history. The politics were not entirely dead - there were still plenty of Confederate battle flags flying in Dixie, and segregation was a fact of Southern life. Families below the Mason-Dixon Line still prided themselves for their relation to long-dead, backwoods ambushers and aristocratic slaveholders. The South had a long memory. But apart from very real racial issues that remained unresolved in 1960, the Civil War was as distant from the present day as 1776, 1588 or 1066.

The First World War is now 100 years old. Oddly, the machine gun fire and artillery barrages don't seem to have receded as far into today's past as had the musketry and cavalry charges of the American Civil War when I was ten. They should have. A hundred years is a hundred years. Yet we still think of WWI as "modern times."

Perhaps only just barely, though. Perhaps in another few years, when the Guns of August have been silenced for 110 or 120 years, we will finally let go of the first of the World Wars.

I'm actually looking forward to putting the Second World War, Hiroshima and the Holocaust behind us, as well. Let them keep company with the War of 1812, the War of the Roses and the Punic Wars.

NOT ALL HOLES

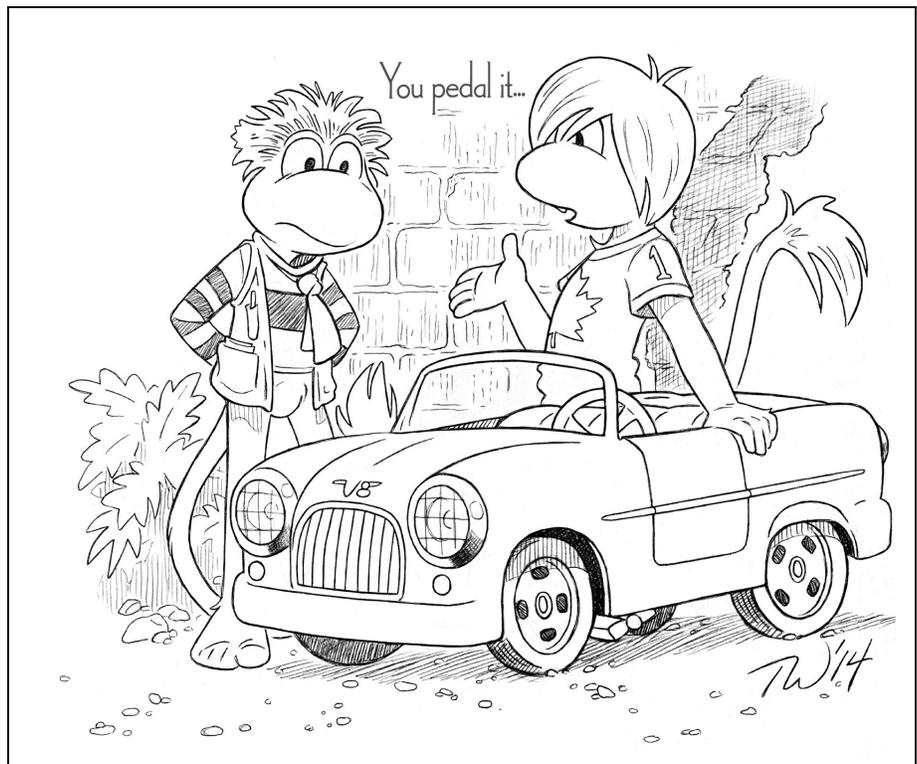
Not all those bumps are potholes – it's a little-known fact that even on Ken Fletcher's Spontoon Island there are *Fraggle Holes*!

There's something odd about space-time in Fraggles Rock. As the crow flies, it is around 12,000 miles from the original Fraggles Hole in Atlantic Canada to the coral atoll known as Spontoon. By underground tunnel, however, it is only

a day's walk from the Great Hall to any of the handful of Fraggles Holes known to the natives of the South Pacific Republic. As a result, it is not unheard-of to glimpse a Fraggles mingling with the common folk ... especially during times of celebration, when they are most likely to go unnoticed.

One of the biggest celebrations of the year is the annual Speed Week, in which racers of every imaginable vehicle congregate on Spontoon Island to compete. The major categories include aircraft, powerboats, sailing ships, automobiles, motorcycles, bicycles, skates, airships, and, where at least two entries can be found, bathtubs.

This year's Speed Week claims a special attraction. For the first time ever, a racing vehicle was entered by two Fraggles – Darl Fraggles and Gobo Fraggles. As the top speed recorded for this pint-sized speed demon during speed trials was a modest 4 m.p.h., it was no surprise to anyone that it came in dead last. However, it was awarded a special prize by the judges as the fastest in its class. After all, it *was* the only entrant powered by pedaling.



Left Over Parts

WAHF:

Hope Leibowitz, tiki@interlog.com

Steve Jeffery, srjeffery@aol.com, who asks if gentry don't read books. (They do, but they won't soil their hands with used ones.)

Bruce Gillespie, gandc@pacific.net.au

Ron Kasman, ron.kasman@gmail.com

Steve Davidson, steve.davidson33@comcast.net

Your last piece on Asimov made me wonder: what happens to Fandom in a post-oil, decaying society.

And then I realized - resurgence! Out come the hand-cranked printers, the hand-cut stencils, and the hand-smearred inks; once again the cross-country adventures to pay a visit or attend a con (except this time it will be overturned buggies and lame horses that interfere).

Perhaps the Golden Age of Fandom is yet before us.

(On the other hand, I've been playing around with the idea of a post-apocalyptic world wherein the only survivors of "whatever" are the attendees at a largish convention. Things look great for a short while - but then the feuds start and we enter the dark ages; armies marching across the continent under opposing banners reading "was a louse"... "wasn't a louse". Foot soldiers are happy to avoid banishment to the propaganda front ... and weapons of mass destruction take the form of illos....)

Somebody wrote a story about a post-Apocalyptic story based on fandom – either Bob Tucker or Robert Bloch. Like most fans under 60, I've never read it. I rather like the idea of a story about fandom, though, when our oil-based civilization is cast upon a simpler lifestyle when oil runs out (assuming we continue to stupidly resist renewable energy sources). I'll have to steal that idea someday. I might even have the nerve to submit it to Amazing Stories.

Walt Wentz, waltw@teleport.com

All in all, I think this issue was more upbeat and wide-ranging than some previous ones.

I can agree, and sympathize with, the comment that there is no way to sell unwanted books, particularly if they are currently popular issues. Rare or expensive books or collector's items, of course, are a different critter entirely. You can advertise them on eBay, or start your own virtual bookstore on AddALL.com, or, if you happen to live in Portland, Oregon, you can haul them down to Powell's Books, the largest and still most successful physical bookstore in this neck of the woods, perhaps even in the nation. They have a

regular schedule for book-buying, although I don't know how their pay for a particular item compares with the price they will charge for it later.

I can sympathize, also, with the loss of special, long-time pets. I still have only one myself, Raffles the Cat Burglar, who began inviting himself in every night to partake of the former pet's dinner, and one morning just sat down and challenged me to eject him. Well, the former pet soon passed on to that great Litter-Box in the Sky, but Raffles has complacently hung on and given good service, or what counts for service in a cat whose primary motivation is food.

I'm quite content with the one pet ... although these days, when I spend half my time commuting 120 miles to visit the girlfriend, I hardly have time to take adequate care of him. Fortunately, my daughter Amber, who bids fair to become a Crazy Old Cat Lady, lives in the back quarter-acre with the nine or thirteen felines of her own cat herd, but still finds time to keep an eye on the house and Raffles while I am gone.

An excellent comment on "What the Past Became." Truly, the Law of Unintended Consequences can be a real bitch. When we insist on fiddling with the natural order of things to suit our own convenience, and then persist in reproducing ourselves to the point that we must fiddle with nature again merely to provide basic sustenance for our swarming hordes ... well, eventually the bill comes due, the piper must be paid, the balloon goes up and all sorts of other untoward and unpleasant consequences ensue. According to news reports, the thawing permafrost is now farting methane into the atmosphere far more efficiently than even our huge herds of cattle and smoke-belching chimneys. And, as you said in your recent note, the Koch Brothers will continue denying climate change right up to the point when they can't light up a cigar in their luxurious offices without setting off a methane explosion.

Our present situation reminds me of one of the aphorisms of my favorite Pole, Stanislaw Lec: " 'A better tomorrow' does not insure you against 'an even better day after tomorrow.' "

Ned Brooks, nedbrooks@sprynet.com

I never had much ambition or talent, so it never bothered me that I am not famous or infamous. I was lucky to have a talent for being happy most of the time. I doubt that you had much choice about being an artist.

I never heard the rumor about mercury being used in the production of fiber mimeo paper, and would have had no idea whether it was true. I still quite a lot of it in the basement. The chemicals used in making paper are nasty enough - the prep school I went to in Rome, GA was sometimes downwind of a paper mill. I think the stink was mostly sulfur compounds from the use of sulfuric acid to dissolve the lignin in wood pulp.

My neighborhood in Newport News, VA went to the devil as well, one reason that I left when I retired. There had been four movie theaters and a good Chinese restaurant and a deli within walking distance - all gone. Here of course there is nothing at all useful within walking distance except a drugstore, a barbershop, and a giant Lowe's hardware. I don't know how long the barbershop will last - I think the barbers are all even older than I am.

I love getting my hair cut, but never go to a barber ... too costly, and most barbers don't take their time. They want to finish and get the next customer in the chair, but it's a leisurely, sensuous time I want from a barber – not a haircut. I cut my own hair just fine. My grandfather was a barber, but you wouldn't know that because I've never published the long, long article I wrote on my grandfather.

The Blockbuster here went some time ago - now I get my movie fix mostly from Bargain Books and Oldies.com by mail, and have an enormous DVD collection. I don't like the Cineplexes and I don't have cable TV. The good thrift store and the good Greek pizza place are 15 miles away - but not far from my sister's house.

Sad about the bookstore, but at least you had it for a while. I have never lived anywhere near a good bookstore.

I can go about a half-mile from here to a movie rental joint run by a Tibetan. He knows my tastes and tends to have what I want ready for me. It costs \$14 most of the time to buy a used movie ... but there are no added taxes, so that's more like \$12. I have also started buying older things I can't get from him from Amazon. I may have to learn to buy books the same way.

Great fanfic about the witch! I have some Steel Eye Span. Not *Rocket Cottage*, but I know I have heard that song about the witch.

You heard it on Parcel of Rogues, which is one of my two or three favourites. Unfortunately, I misidentified the song as one from Rocket Cottage, which it is not.

Much as I like your art, my reaction to art is mostly subconscious and I would have no idea how to suggest what an artist should do. I tried it with Fabian on the Arthur Machen book. It worked fine as far selecting specific scenes in the text to be illustrated, but he did not do the cover I suggested, and the cover he did do seems to me to have bugger-all to do with anything in the book.

Bob Jennings, FabFicBks@aol.com

Thanks for sending along the latest *Broken Toys* issue. So far as your opening essay, I think you are in the wrong religion. The Judeo-Christian tradition, with St. Peter up at heaven's receiving gate and Satan stoking the fires down below, is founded on the concept of human free will. There is no pre-disposed lifeline that you, or anybody else, is supposed to automatically fall into, and if you somehow break out of the intended path you automatically screw things up for everybody else. Other belief systems, such as the Hindu religion, are strong for pre-destination and fulfilling a chosen path, complete with stratified social system and the rest of it, but that is not Christianity.

So, stop worrying. You may have been born with some innate talent in some direction or the other, or perhaps you just decided to become an artist because you thought it was cool. Reading over your fanzine the past ten or so issues, it appears that you have deeply regretted getting involved with graphic artwork for a long time. You can regret wasting your time on that enterprise, but rest assured that if there is a God in Heaven, he doesn't hold it against you whether you succeeded or failed at this art thing you are clearly so dissatisfied with. Dumping on customers and outrageously overcharging for computer generated funny animal pictures, now that might be a punishable offense for real.

I dunno why the fact that your neighborhood is changing should come as a big shock to you. Things almost never stay static for very long. Cityscapes change constantly. If your neighborhood had not developed upward mobility with an influx of moneyed families, it would have down downhill as more poor people, or perhaps more crime became common. Or it might have become an ethnic sub-set neighborhood if a massive influx of immigrants from some overseas culture had decided that settling in your area was advantageous, which would then have inspired lots of their friends and countrymen to also move there because, you know, birds of a feather, as the saying goes.

But cityscapes hardly ever stay the same for very long. The mere fact that human beings age and die off after X-number of decades is a factor that by itself will force neighborhood change. I guess I'm really surprised that you are surprised by the changing panorama of human events. How long has it taken you to realize that the world turns and things change whether you are ready for the change or not? Most people learn that small fact of life much earlier than you seem to have.

Enjoyed your unpublished letter about Isaac Asimov. I agree with most of it. However, I don't see science fiction going away, and I also don't see the lights going out when the oil runs out, or civilization crashing down in ruins because of some technology glitch. Future civilization-wrecking disasters have been part of the science fiction canon almost from the very beginning, but if the past two hundred years has shown anything about us, it has demonstrated over and over again the almost limitless adaptability of the human animal. When things turn the wrong way, we invent something else to make life work better anyway. I don't see the crops drying up and blowing away, the agri-green revolution continues to produce new wonders every year. We might be brought low temporarily by some worldwide epidemic of horrendous proportions. Ebola looks pretty grisly right now, but then, back in the middle ages the Black Plague did one heck of a number on Europe, and smallpox almost ruined the Roman Empire, but you know, humans survived and changed their society for the better anyway. I remain cautiously optimistic about the future of both the human race and human civilization. And science fiction too. Like it or not, the Internet has generated an explosion of science fiction literature, some of it pretty good reading. The beat goes on, just with a new presentation platform.

Richard A. Wright, (HotRod-302), Ogre302@aol.com

I have doubts about my worth all the time. It doesn't help that most of my RL friends, no matter what, are never impressed with what I accomplish. The mechanics are afraid of my Camaro or it's just not their style. One of them thinks it's literally trying to kill him. (I also agree. It seems to be a living thing with a mind of its own.)

I show them something kewl and they're "Yeah, yeah." almost like my reason of existing to them is to make themselves feel better.

But when my time comes in the next plane of existenc, while I will wonder if I was on the right track, I wont have much regret. One, sadly, is my involvement in furry fandom. I made some good friends. I also made a LOT of enemies. I invested enough money in commissioned art to buy a base model 2010 RS Camaro.... and I'm too ashamed to show it in public. I have to show it in the anonymity of the Internet. So all the original art sits in a plastic tote for the rest of my life. I so much as MENTION, "Yeah, I have

this anthropomorphic character I created who appeared in a few indy comics!" I get something like I got the other week. "OH YOU'RE A FURRY! COOL! Go to Rocky Mountain Furry Con?"

"Nah. I don't really associate anymore. I'm old school and there seems to be no room for relics like me that don't rely on sexual content."

"Naw! Furry is for EVERYONE! Once a furry always a furry!" (At that point I was ready to put his lights out. But it was at work and it was a customer I dread seeing again). Before he brought up how he thought the plushy from the Dish Network commercials was sexy... At least I had the heat to blame for why I was sweating so bad. My nerves were shot when he left.

Whoa... I got way off track on that little rant...

AH yeah, the Montreal Screwjob... I knew the term immediately and wondered "What's it gotta do with Taral?"

I was infamous enough for furies to tell me they were going to hire Lyonlover to kick my ass. He doesn't seem the type to do that sort of thing. He seems like good people. If I were still on FA I'd ask him if anyone brought it up. But hey, to be told they were going to hire a hitman... that ain't bad.

But I do recall seeing your stuff a long time ago... mingling with the Karno and Dean L. Norton and Terrie Smith stuff. That's a pretty good height in my opinion. If I had YOUR artistic talent I probably would still be half sane. At least I could have gotten my concepts out there. As long as I didn't go crazy spending ALL my time doing it. Shit... did that anyway. Just invest enough money for a NEW CAR on hiring others to do it.

When you mentioned restaurants closing because of unreasonable rent it made me think of a local legend in the same trouble. Right now I think the guys who make *South Park* is helping keeping it going. Casa Bonita! Oh what a place... food is only okay but the restaurant itself is what you go there for. That was a nice part of town, too, but now it's a shit hole neighborhood. Twice someone tried to carjack my niece near there. Sad... good Chinese is hard to come by... too.

Oh... and I thought me and Danny Koker were the only ones who use "Kitschy."

When you mention the high-rise apartments it makes me think of a new fad a few states have to help with the homeless. Micro houses. Nice but tiny little houses that are \$250 to \$350 a month in rent. I never have seen one but I imagine they fill up REAL fast. I saw plans for a community of those. Basically a nice little bedroom/living room/kitchen and a bedroom. Kind of like a New York apartment only cleaner as long as it was cared for.

Brad Foster, bwfoster@juno.com

Super-keen graphic image for the logo for this 30th issue of *Broken Toys*. With just about anyone else doing a zine, I would assume they had gotten the photo image from somewhere else, but having seen what you have created in the past, have to ask: did you make that image yourself? Regardless of if found or made, very cool indeed.

*I'd love to take the credit for creating the image of the quartered glass of wine, but it was a photo I found on-line. When I saw the photo, though, I knew immediately that it would make a wonderful logo. What I did do, was smooth out the pixilation -- it was a fairly small file -- by airbrushing over the rough spots. I stretched the sides out to fill the margins, and then lettered over the image with a font called *Appendix*. It was then pillow embossed and made 40% translucent.*

Self doubts? Oh yeah, been there. Actually, there is one very specific moment I hit a dozen or so times every year. I've been setting up and selling my art prints at various art festivals around the country for years. Nothing huge, but we make a little profit and helps to pay the bills. I've been doing it a –long- time. And still, it never fails that each and every time when the festival first opens for people to come in, I sit there and have to argue my brain to calm down, as there is always a voice in the back explaining to me how this time, everyone has caught on to what a joke I am, that no one really cares about any of my scratchings, and that I will never sell another piece of art again.

Every. Single. Show. After decades, that voice still pops up every time. When the first customer finally gets something, even if it is a little two-dollar item, the voice finally shuts down. But I know it will be back again—along with the one that whispers at me whenever I send out a new piece of art that people don't really like my stuff, they are just being nice to me. Doubts, they are always there.

Of course, I have no other skills of any sort, so I'm stuck with making those marks on paper. And while it's bad to have those feelings when I have to take my drawings out into the public, it's good that the actual *making* of the art brings me pleasure. And I guess, in the end, that's a pretty good thing.

Of course, I had to look up “bibim” online. Seems it's short for “bibimbap”, which sounds like one of many variations of an Asian rice dish, just with it's own regional name. Just one of many such things that have a lot of different names, but are all pretty much the same thing. Reminded me of a great stand-up bit by Jim Gaffigan:

“My favorite food is Mexican food, I used to be a waiter in a Mexican restaurant in Indiana. Now that's where you go for Mexican. Mexican food's great, but it's essentially all the same ingredients, so there's a way you'd have to deal with all these stupid questions. “What is nachos?” “...Nachos? It's tortilla with cheese, meat, and vegetables.” “Oh, well then what is a burrito?” “Tortilla with cheese, meat, and vegetables.” “Well then what is a tostada?” “Tortilla with cheese, meat, and vegetables.” “Well then what i-” “Look, it's all the same shit! Why don't you say a Spanish word and I'll bring you something?”

The trick with Mexican food is whether its soft or crispy... at least with tacqueria food. Real Mexican food is more like other European cooking. It's as if people spoke of McBurger fare as "American" food and were surprised you also ate pork chops, baked potatoes, boiled peas and carrots and so on. I like "Mexican" food myself ... but finding something other than Taco Bell or Americanized Tex Mex is difficult in Toronto. Apt to be a little pricey, too.

In the twenty-five plus years we've lived here, I've watched the strip of shops a block up from us change over completely three times, and figure they'll do it a few more before we are no longer here ourselves. Favorite things leave, odd things move in, get new favorite shops, then those move. Ah, life ...

Jane Jacobs, the urban philosopher, said that healthy cities underwent constant renewal. Older neighborhoods revitalized, and newer ones declined, making economic space for start-up industries that initially require low rents. So change is just a feature of any city that's working, as it should. What was remarkable about gentrification in Parkdale, though, was that my neighborhood has been resisting it for decades. No matter how much developers tried to lift the neighborhood into higher rent status, the residents keep it down. But it seems as though the developers are finally getting the upper hand. Large-scale change suddenly came all at once.

Loved "These Goodly Gifts," especially the line: "A Bok dated 1966? Bok died in 1964... or did he? I shuddered."

Let's see, only 60 more issues to go until number one hundred. Better get to planning that one!

Well, that might give me about even odds of winning a FAAn for best fanzine.

Jefferson P. Swycaffer, abontides@gmail.com

Thank'ee for the latest copy of *Broken Toys*! Here is a shot at a LOC. By the way, I've admired your art for a long time. I think you and I met once, very briefly, at a ConFurence. Anyway, I like your art style: you have a wonderful mastery of "line." I can draw only just well enough that, when I draw a bear, people don't say, "Um, is that supposed to be, like, a horse or something?"

Broken Toys: Wonderful title: vaguely forlorn and wistful, evoking a kind of nostalgia for the days of yore. (As Walt Kelly went on, at this point, "My what?") When I was a tad, I had that really cool Man From U.N.C.L.E. Thrush sniper rifle, the one with the keen IR scope on top. It had a view scope you could look through, and when you pulled the trigger, silhouettes of guys would pop up and down, indicating that you'd got 'em.

Naturally, I broke it. Kids are clumsy. Part of why we love 'em, and part of why we don't let them handle the fine crystal.

A Life Misspent? Well, sure, we all get that at some point. Have we lived up to our full potential? (Hell no!) Have we accomplished all we expected to? (Hell no!) Has our existence, like George Bailey, made the world a better place? (Well...probably, yes!) Now, me, for my part, I'm comfortable. I saved someone's life once, and, as far as I'm concerned, that justifies my existence. I've done what I was sent to do.

(My sister and I were rock-climbing, and she started to slip, down a particularly nasty steep place. I scrambled around just in time and caught her by the ankle.)

A lot of people have a very similar justification for their existence, in having had kids of their own. That's a good one too.

Ron Kasman: I'm kind of a half-hearted exercise enthusiast. I walk. At least three times a week, at least two miles. No matter how damn hot it gets (and right now, that's plenty!) It isn't really solid exercise; it isn't the *vigorous* exercise the doctors recommend. But it's a good sight better than nothing. Plus...where I live (sunny San Diego) there is a *beautiful* network of trails called Mission Trails Regional

Park. It's a delight! Gradations from easy little 1/10-mile ambles to a nasty 13-mile bugger that I've only been able to do once. And, as the movie said, "A river runs through it." Okay, you guys who live in wetter country than I do can laugh. The San Diego "river" wouldn't count as a "stream" in places like Maryland. But, hey, out here, it's all we got!

Mark Manning: I have to say, I never cared at all for Lucille Ball's comedy. I just don't like "comedy of embarrassment," and that was her specialty. But... Have you ever seen "The Dark Corner," a noir mystery flick with Mark Stevens, William Bendix, and Clifton Webb? Lucy is the perky secretary working for the tough-bitten private eye. She's BRILLIANT! She absolutely masters the role. Seeing that was the first time I ever found myself appreciating her.

Robert Jennings: "There have always been jerks and insane dorks in SF fandom." You say that like it's a bad thing! That ain't a bug; it's a feature! SF fandom lets people like *me* become members! To paraphrase Groucho, "I wouldn't want to be a member of a club that kept me out!" SF fandom isn't just a club scene: it's a hospice for the socially hopeless. It's where we go when no one else will let us play. We're all the fat kids that always got picked last for softball in grade school. And, by God, I wouldn't have it any other way.

Well, okay, of course, there is such a thing as taking it too far...

Milt Stevens: "I've never been one of those people who get misty-eyed about the idea of life in the state of nature." I'm with you all the way! Civilization, rah rah rah! Among everything else -- clean water, medical care, something to read, and a decent chance that the Mongols aren't going to ride over the horizon tomorrow and pillage my home town -- we have an incredible degree of personal freedom, something almost totally missing in pre-technical societies. There, the Chieftain, the Shaman, and the Big Man totally control every aspect of life. It's like a wolf pack: if you ain't the Alpha, you better get really good at sniffing butts. People say our lives are too tightly controlled: they don't know for crap! Live in a small village in New Guinea for a while...

Milt Stevens, miltstevens@earthlink.net

In *Broken Toys* 30, you are contemplating the meaning of life. Doing that can drive you COMPLETELY BONKERS. Imagine yourself sitting in your pyramid after a hard day of chanting Om, Om, Om. Suddenly, you have a flash of insight. God meant for you to be an insurance salesman. You rush out and find a street corner. You begin preaching the word. Insurance salesmen are God's chosen people. If God can love insurance salesmen, he must love everybody.

Some people believe that God has a plan for everybody. That's a totally horrifying idea. That would mean God plans for some people to be insurance salesmen. In reality, I think God planned for you to be an oxygen breathing omnivore. (If he didn't, he really is having problems.) Beyond that, it's your ball game.

Imagine a caveman sitting on a log looking dejected. He thinks he should have become a gorilla. He realized this whole Homo erectus thing is a bad idea. If things don't change, people like him will be paying income tax in a few hundred thousand years.

I liked “These Good Gifts I Give To Thee.” I like fannish frippery as well as the next fellow, but I’d demand more if I was going to sell my soul. I’d hold out for at least being William Randolph Hearst. I think living in a palace and owning a publishing empire would be fun. I’d also want Marion Davies included.

I guess that’s why “I” refused her gifts... If I had really been offered anything I wanted, it would certainly not have asked for anything as prosaic as all the egoboo fandom can provide. If what I’ve had is any indication, ten times that would not have been not enough when I could wish instead that one of my fantasy worlds were real! If I could be sampling the lakes of Titan right now, why would I care about a being Past President of FWA or winning DUFF?

As far as science is concerned, I think the “goshwow” advances of the 21st century are going to be in genetics and biology. In SF, genetic engineering used to be the province of mad scientists, and it always went wrong. SF writers now accept that genetic engineering is going to happen. So what are we going to call this new age of self-improvement? Borrowing terminology from Bruce Sterling, we might call it The Age of the Shapers. Maybe Humans 2.0 will think of something better.

Speaking of Montreal screw job, I once saw a voice synthesizer manufactured by the National Screw Company. It had a keyboard with phonemes rather than letters. I have no idea what that might mean. I doubt it’s significant.

Steve Jeffery, srjeffery@aol.com

Luckily, I think, I have never had any illusions about having a first class intellect, heavily underlined (if I needed the hint) that I needed to work hard to keep up with others who breezed through school and exams on almost no effort, and I graduated from a provincial redbrick university, (rather than Oxford or Cambridge), with a respectable, but hardly stellar, second class honours degree. Sufficient to get me a job, but not an invitation into academia (and, based on what I've heard from those who went down that path, a life of vicious and petty infighting over grants and tenure positions). In that, at least, I think I may have taken the better if more traveled path, if only for my mental health rather than kudos and reputation.

Any illusions I might be an (god forbid) intellectual, had I secretly harbored them, were firmly knocked on the head by Sue Townsend's *The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole*. I did try a goatee, but decided I looked too much like my dad (especially when I started to go grey) but have never managed to carry off wearing a black roll neck and beret, let alone manage to learn how to click my fingers while uttering "Cool, Daddio." (Still haven't learned to click my fingers).

I love those books, though they puncture any illusions that bookish people such as ourselves may have had about their intellect or place in the world.

As for artistic pretensions, again, no illusions about this. I flooded fanzines with hopefully amusing if inexpertly executed cartoons during the Nineties and early Noughties, but I haven't put a pen to paper for nearly a decade now. Truth is, I'm content to be a dilettante, or at least not motivated enough to put in the hours and hard work necessary to elevate an amusing hobby into anything more. It was fun at the time, and I look back on it fondly, but I was never going to be a Big Name Fan (even in the small pond of SF fandom, or even smaller puddle of SF fanzine fandom), and that's OK too. At least I've kept myself

occupied, amused, and (I like to think) intellectually curious, and free of any unresolved Cinderella complex that some fairy godmother (or talent show producer) would wave a magic wand and bestow me honour, status and prestige as a reward for a life of (in the main) domestic and professional drudgery. Besides, I've always thought glass slippers were a particularly hazardous form of footwear to run down steps in.

In that time in fandom I've seen friends we made in the early days make good, sometimes spectacularly so, like Neil Gaiman or Kim Newman, and I'm pleased for them whenever I see them on TV, or hear them on the radio.

There are different means of visible success. Some of my fannish friends have been well paid for their professional skills. A few of them have been writers of some reputation – Phyllis Gotlieb and Bob Wilson, for example. One owns a business whose net worth theoretically puts him in the millionaire class. Another is a professor of Islamic and Medieval history, teaching at Nipissing University. There are a few, however, like myself, who seemed unable to achieve their potential ... at least as I see it, and maybe so do they.

Yes, I have regrets about my life (who hasn't?) but they're personal, and I'm not going there. Much as I like the openness of fandom, I don't regard it as a place for the confessional. (And no, this isn't a barbed comment on others who feel more comfortable with that.)

“Too much from the heart” seems to be the main fear among fan writers. I agree, though, that fandom isn't the place for the Emo Queen. Then again, nothing could be more boring than the dedicated, rational fan writer who knows his place is analyzing science fiction, and keeps his personal life out of it. I could always read Locus for that sort of BS...

"Horselips"? Or Horslips, a Celtic folk rock band of the 1970s (the name apparently based on the spoonerism 'The Four Poxmen of The Horslypse') who achieved some critical acclaim and a minor hit with the album *The Táin* and a No. 1 single (in Germany) with 'Dearg Doom'. Oddly, someone played this on the radio a few days back. I've not heard it in decades.

I did enjoy “These Goodly Gifts”. I was always more of a Fairport Convention fan than of Steeleye Span (certainly after they abandoned more traditional folk for pop and teamed up with a Womble as their producer.) But the old stuff, like Alison Gross, Long Lankin and the Lyke Wake Dirge, is still good. You can't beat a good murder ballad. Kylie might be best remembered for her tiny gold hot pants, but her best artistic move was to team up with Nick Cave on “Where the Wild Roses Grow.”

If you like this sort of stuff, have you come across *The Child Ballads* by Anais Mitchell & Jefferson Hamer? It's got some excellent versions. Or the Unthanks?

My taste has shied away from the outright rock renditions of Steeleye Span at their most popular, but neither have I grown overly fond of the purest British folk tradition either. Too tame. But it's difficult for me to generalize, since I haven't heard the earliest Steeleye Span albums in decades, nor heard more than three or four albums by other bands. I think I didn't find enough in the genre during my first enthusiasm for pop music to delve into it far enough.

Lloyd Penney, penneys@bell.net

Sorry it's taken so long to respond to *Broken Toys 30* ... time never allows, other responsibilities, and work pressures. I suppose it's better than unemployment, but there are times I wish I could take a few months off just so I can do the things I want to do, and then go back to the things I have to do. Never happy...

We all waste some time, and we find our own definition of that. One man's waste of time is another's pause for rest, or chasing of something valuable to someone else. Have I wasted my life? I didn't get all the things done I wanted to, some things I aspired to, but didn't quite get there...I have some achievements and I have been happily married. Not a waste at all, I am pleased, and best of all, I have some years left to aim for other achievements, and see if I can reach them.

At this point, I don't know what's left to achieve. I can draw more, publish more, write more, but what this accomplishes I'm no longer sure. The possibilities seem out of my hands.

Not every fan sees fandom as an arena in which to aim for and reach some form of achievement. Most see it as a social venue, and find they've arrived if they feel a part of it, and have a circle of friends to be a part of.

Some level of gentrification that is bearable is when stores come into your neighborhood that you like, or would be comfortable eating or shopping in. Higher levels usually mean foods you've never heard of, or merchandise you wouldn't want to buy, or good stuff at prices you can't afford. Where I live, the local bakery shut down, and a Quizno's went in its place. Also, the local Blockbuster shut down, and a Tim Horton's moved in. The jury is still out in this. Down the street, a Rabba was built, with Timothy's Coffees of the World inside it. Is there that much coffee in the world?

According to Frank Sinatra, "Way down among Brazilians, Coffee beans grow by the billions, So they've got to find those extra cups to fill, They've got an awful lot of coffee in Brazil!"

The local...the last time I wanted to get rid of books, I did my research by finding out where the used bookstores were, and then calling them. The only place at that time willing to accept used books was Treasure Island Books in Oakville. That was probably 10 or more years ago. Today? I might weed my collection a little bit, save them for Ad Astra, and then put them on the freebie table. Whoosh...

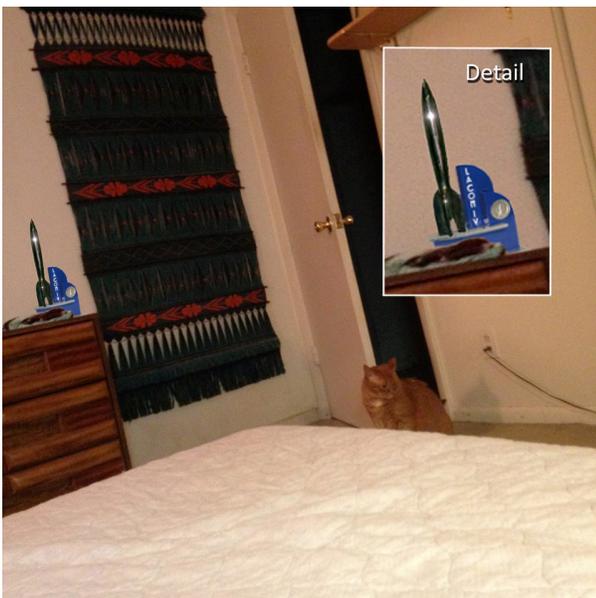
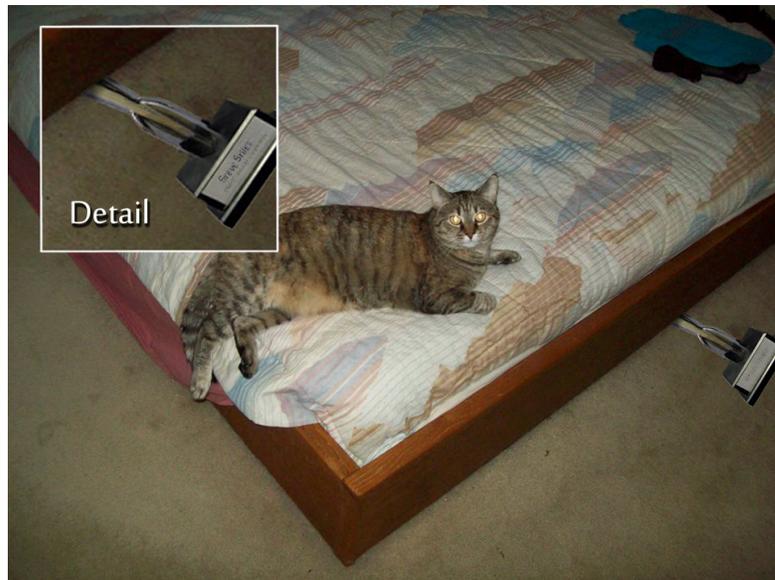
We've spent a little time in Hamilton over the last couple of years, and Keith Soltys is right, it is a nice city. We've gone to the Locke Street Festival, not this year, but the two years before, and had a great time in one of Hamilton's premiere shopping streets. Been down there for a party or two as well.

My lack of interest in modern-day SF is indeed all me. I am sure there's some great stuff out there, but I have never had the ready cash to buy newer reading materials, so eschewing the new stuff and going for the classics is what I've always done, and had to do.

Anyway...take care, many thanks, and I am sure you're working on *BT31* right now. Hope this helps to fill the local again. See you.

Notional Enquirer Exposes
HIDDEN HUGO CACHE

Secret Photos taken of the Stiles Home Reveals
that the Artist has been Secretly Winning Fanart Hugos All Along,
Playing on Fannish Sympathy!



Exclusive to the Notional Enquirer. Following a tip from a fellow fan artist who prefers not to be identified, our intrepid reporter T. N. Tinn arranged to be shown through the quarters of zillion-time Hugo “nominee,” Steven Stiles. Our informant, an intimate companion of Stiles who prefers not to be identified, pointed out the numerous locations where the coveted award can be found in their home. “This one, you may recognize as the Hugo Steve supposedly *didn’t* win at LACon IV, in 2006.” Not to be taken in by a cheap replica, our reporter examined the theatre marquee-shape carefully. It appeared to be authentic. “Next to it is the 2005 Hugo that he *didn’t* win in Glasgow.” And at the other end of the dresser, she pointed out another rocket on a plain base that appeared to be a “retro” Hugo. “That’s not all,” she said, cryptically.

Taking our reporter on a tour of the house, our informant pointed out the locations of several other glittery prizes, all but out of sight on high shelves, behind books or, in one case, carelessly stashed under the waterbed. As well as at least 11 Hugo awards, our reporter discovered a tottery stack of framed certificates and plaques in one corner next to the television. “I’m not quite sure what all of those are,” our reporter was told. “Various Rotslers, FAAns and other trinkets of fannish esteem.” What appeared to be a Nova stood next to the toaster in the kitchen.

The question we need to ask is how has Mr. Stiles in fact won so many of fandom’s most prestigious awards, and yet given the appearance of having *lost* them? An ex-member of a past Worldcon, who prefers not to be identified, explained. “It was a simple matter, really. Mr. Stiles gave each of us \$50 to announce that someone else was the winner. The substitute was also given \$50 to step up on the stage and receive the award, which of course was taken from him the instant he or she left the stage, and then presented to Mr. Stiles in the wings. Or, if he wasn’t attending, it was FedExed to him that night.”

A well-known Texas fan artist, who prefers not to be identified, confirms this. “It’s true. I have never come closer than *second* to

winning a Hugo. In reality, they have *all* been Steve’s. It was mighty nice of him to let me hold so many of them, even if only for the briefest while. I was terribly afraid I might drop one!” The 2009 winner of the Hugo for Best Fan Artist also prefers not to be identified, but adds, “What luck! That year it was a tie, and both the real winners gave me fifty bucks! That’s \$100 in cold, hard cash! No wonder I was dancing on the stage, and swooping the Hugo around like a toy rocket ship! You think a mere *award* would make me behave like a drunken fool?”

The question, of course, is why would Mr. Stiles resort to such deceitful behavior? The answer can perhaps be found in Stiles’ own words. In a 1994 loc in a fanzine that does not wish to be named, Stiles said of Grant Canfield. “There’s no question in my mind that Grant deserved a Hugo years ago. In fact, so many people claimed that they infallibly voted for him, that I wondered how it was that he ever lost. Then it came to me that losing the Hugo year after year might have been the main reason why people kept voting for him, even after he no longer contributed to fanzines. If only such fannish determination to ensure that a fan artist got his Hugo was working to my benefit!” Indeed, it appears that Mr. Stiles’ stratagem has worked beyond his wildest desires, winning him Hugo after Hugo for the past 20 years.

Confronted with these revelations, the president of the permanent floating committee for the World Science Fiction Convention, who prefers not to be identified, said only this: “There is no proof of these allegations. Anyone could have Photoshopped those awards into photos of the Stiles household.”

“So you are denying the charges?” responded our skeptical reporter.

“Not until we have spoken to our lawyers,” said Mr. Standlee, who, of course, does not wish to be identified.

In as much as our reporter dropped one of the Photoshopped awards on one of Mr. Stiles cats, causing much commotion and a shredded trouser leg, we stand by the facts as we’ve given them! Would we make up unbelievable stuff like this?



SONG OF SAARA

Saara Mar

I am oldest. I am first. I am Saara Mar.

There is no doubt in my mind that most of you have never heard of me. The rise of my kind has been rapid, and we have spread through many media, outpacing the ability of any culture to forge a lasting, common awareness.

I am the original “furry.”

* * *

Dispute this if you will, but before the Earliest were even a seed in the minds of their creators, I was born of the yearnings of Taral Wayne. He was a youth of 14 or 15 years, whose life up until that moment had consisted of regular uprootings. Between 1951 and 1961 he had known ten different homes, and had finally settled into his first long stay in any one of them.

The neighborhood was Etobicoke, an older suburb of Toronto that had begun to grow in the 1930s, yet had not quite finished filling in the final undeveloped lots with new streets and homes. His father had taken a job as an assistant to a veterinarian whose place of business was on Bloor Street, next to the shallow, meandering Mimico Creek. Taral’s family lived in the four-room flat over the animal hospital.

The ravine of the creek next to the animal hospital was mostly wasteland. It was shallow, prone to flooding and not wide enough any sort of development. To either side of the slow-moving, brown water were jumbled gravel beds, in which could be found the fossil remnants of ancient shellfish. The creek

grew livelier as it flowed on south to the lake, following a twisted, overgrown course between steep banks of earth or shale. The way was nearly impassable in places, but widened now and then into a tiny fenced oasis with a set of swings and a slide. Collapsed retaining walls, long-vanished footbridges and other debris of past floods littered the creek bed all the way to the distant lakeshore.

A broad stretch of the creek north of Bloor, however, was a natural flood plain, and so had been designated a park. It was periodically mown, but mostly grew weeds, especially along the banks of the creek, which were usually thick with burrs, milkweed, Scotch thistle and anything else that was hardy enough to endure the spring floods. The lower end of the park was a primitive baseball diamond. The upper end abutted a hillside that formed a natural toboggan run in the winter. A little farther upstream, the CPR's trestle marked the end of Taral's familiar neighborhood, and the gateway into the tantalizing unknown.

As a boy, Taral spent much of his time out-of-doors, just messing around by the creek. There was much a boy with inner reserves of imagination could do. He could be a giant, whose sweeping club knocked the heads from the foot-soldiers of invading armies of dandelions. He could walk tightrope on the drooping cables alongside a dirt parking space. He could search for fossil shellfish in the shale bedrock, or for bits of half-billion-year-old coral strewn in the gravel bars. He could wade the rusty water, braving slippery, fuzzy slabs of broken slate on the bottom. He could float his Revell and Aurora warships, cursing because they wouldn't float upright, and soon filled with water through seams that were never tight, no matter how much glue was used to cement the halves together. He could skip rocks. He could watch the muskrats, or try to catch crayfish. He even took the standing dare to bend over and duck-walk up the pitch-black storm sewer until he came to a flood room, dimly illuminated only by light shining through the vent holes in the manhole cover overhead. Those quarter-sized spots of light appeared to him just as the finger holes must look to an imp trapped in a pitch-black bowling ball.

There were almost an endless number of things to do. But he mostly did these things alone.

What were missing in Taral's life were friends.

Taral had had few friends in his life, a direct result of his family's annual moves up to the time he was 11. No sooner did he learn the names of a few of his classmates than he had to pack his things in cardboard boxes and start over again in some other part of the city. More than once he moved out of the city altogether, to where the roads were dirt and the neighbors too far apart to know anything about. Whatever social skills he was meant to learn in these formative years were given no chance to develop. It was only after he had finally unpacked his things in the flat over the animal hospital that he had the time to make any friends at all. One of those was too young, and clung to childish games that Taral outgrew. The other grew up too quickly, and was soon tinkering with cars and preoccupied with dates.

This left Taral with far too much time that he had to fill on his own.

* * *

So he created a friend. I began life on a sheet of paper, somewhat awkwardly posed by a hand more familiar with the lines of a '32 Ford or a Phantom jet. My anatomy came from an Eaton's catalog, my name from a love of sibilance and long vowels, my character from the crystal Ontario winter. Strangely, I have always been at home in the cold; Taral hated it.

At the time I was a sort of space princess – part *Star Trek* and part Edgar Rice Burroughs, with a little of *The Metal Men* somehow in the mix. There was only one of my kind in those days, although between Taral and I we could never work out just what had happened to the rest, or what I was doing on Earth. Judging from the name of my planet and a few other words that popped into my mind when needed, my people had spoken a language that was something like Japanese, or maybe a little like Welsh.

For the short time that *Laugh-In* was on the air, Taral insisted on drawing me painted like Goldie Hawn dancing in psychedelic body-paint. Fortunately, that was only a passing phase. It had far-reaching implications. In one of my more dramatic portraits I was painted like Actaeon, half transformed into a deer.

Later on, I graduated from mere body paint to actual fur, and my colours changed from tawny natural hues to a spacier blue and white. I lost the vestiges of tail and horns at the same time ... thank goodness! Tails are so awkward when you want to sit down, and horns get in the way of a hat.

Throughout the most intense period of my physical development, my back-story grew. I was not the only Kjola, just the only one on Earth. My presence here became a non-issue – I had stumbled upon the Earth by accident, and didn't want to be taken to anyone's leader, or to save the human species from itself, or anything like that. But now that I was here, I wanted to see a movie, order a pizza and pick up souvenirs from the ocean bottom where the *Titanic* sank. Earth was backward, but colourful, if not downright eccentric.

My alien technology, which Taral could never describe, conveniently became invisible – hypertools that existed in space-time bubbles and worked by merely thinking. This saved him a lot of time spent on designs that would no doubt have ended up unsatisfactory after a little while, anyway. Everything grew from that line of thought – technology that was so advanced it no longer even seemed like magic. Arthur C. Clarke was passé. My technology looked like a cartoon, except nobody is supposed to laugh when I open cupboards in the air or make an E-Type Jaguar appear from nothing.

* * *

Wonderful as all that was, it was the friendship between Taral and I that mattered most. On a lazy summer night, when the air was still warm and heavy after a hot day and there was nothing to do, we would go for walks. We might follow the creek, up- or downstream, led on by the city lights dancing on the moving water. Or we might take the back alleys behind the busy, neon-lit façade of Bloor Street.

“Ow,” he would say to me. “I don't know how you can walk these gravelly alleys in your bare feet.”

“Well, maybe you should put your shoes on, then,” I'd answer. “You're not me, made of force fields and bio-metal and super-powered.”

“Good point. I envy you, though.”

Of course, we did much more interesting things when Taral went to bed. When he closed his eyes, I could show him my starship, or we could fly over Mt. Everest to look down on the climbers. We shared many of our best adventures just before he fell asleep.

Our time over the animal hospital ran out, though, when Apollo 8 circled the moon. When we watched the astronauts from Apollo 11 climb out of the lander, it was on a television in a shabby farmhouse on a

dirt road out in the country. Odd as it may seem to anyone who has had fantasies of country life, it was pretty drab. The lay of the land was undramatic, divided into farms, commuter homes and small businesses such as a tannery and an apiary. There was nowhere to go that was worth the effort of going to, and nothing much to see where we were. Still, some nights we stole out Taral's bedroom window in the middle of the night, just because the full moon was so incredibly bright and beautiful, and took turns pushing each other in a tire swing near the old barn. There was no one around, no one awake, so the inconvenience of bedclothes was left behind.

Winter came, and the depth of the snow was staggering. A two-inch snowfall threw the city of Toronto into a state of panic, but where we lived, a few miles outside the small mill town of Acton ... *that* was nothing. I would stand in snow halfway to my knees in the flimsiest of tunics and stare back at the house, where Taral was leaning on the windowsill, looking out through the glass at me. Nothing I could do could budge him until he returned to bed and freed himself from the waking world. Then all bets were off, along with boots and winter coats. Now and then he had to go out into the real winter, though, if only because it was his job to take the garbage down the hundred yards of driveway to put it out next to the mail box for pickup.

One frosty night, he stopped long enough for us to stare up at the stars. There were so many of them, even to merely human eyes! In those days, hundreds of stars were visible even in the well-lit city. But that was *nothing* like this. They glittered like ten thousand drawn swords, and were so bright that on a moonless night they struck sparks from the snow. We watched the heavens together for several minutes, not yet willing to go our separate ways – for Taral to return inside and for me to remain outside.

After a while, he said, “Saara ... I can see it all moving. The planets are flowing in their orbits, the stars turn like a distant flock of gulls in our galactic arm, and in the distance streams the frozen river of the Milky Way. It's all so real, right now, as though it had never been more than a painted ceiling before.”

“Welcome to *my* world,” I said ... for all things are real that way to me. But it was too cold for Taral, and time for him to go in. That was all right. I could wait for him until he slept.

* * *

All that was long before anyone else in the “furry” pantheon. Erma Felna was not yet a single drop of ink in the pen of her creator. Nor was Cutey Bunny, nor was anyone else even a thought yet, as far as I know. In the late 1960s, they were ten or fifteen years in the future. I was the only one of my kind.

I am not alone anymore. Many now have their furry avatar, their alter ego or their imaginary friend. It is so common as to be almost a fashion statement. Yet still I am Saara Mar, first and oldest, and I will wait for Taral always.

