

# BROKEN TOYS 43

Broken Toys 43, © Taral Wayne, residing at 245 Dunn Ave., Toronto, Ontario, M6K 1S6, Canada. Dated October (Halloween) 2015. Kiddelidivee Books & Art 302. Issue by issue, we are closing in on the 50<sup>th</sup> and final *Broken Toys*. Will an era end, as it did when the last *Energumen* or *Title* was sealed in an envelope and mailed, or will some other disposable fanzine simply take up the slack? There are certainly others like *Vibrator* and *Alexiad* that can fill the void ... but, of late, I have begun to wonder. There are so few current fanzines that I care to read all the way through that it almost seems as though the end were in sight. And if there are no heirs to our tradition, who will remember us? Well, if an era ends with *Broken Toys*, perhaps not yet our history. There will be somebody to remember this fanzine for a few years more, at least. It is my hope, anyway. Meanwhile ...

## THE BLANK SHEET

What to Write About is a question that faces the writer every time he sits down before a sheet of blank paper, or a newly opened word doc. In the best of all possible worlds, the writer has his idea first, and then sits down to shape it into words. But all too often that's not the case. The writer has a deadline, or has made a rash promise, or, if a professional, needs fifty bucks for likker so he can get drunk, and so the blank sheet comes first. It's happened to me hundreds of times.

That's why a successful writer needs a richer inner life than most people. Unless you have an editor who hands you an assignment, you need the ability to reach inside yourself and pull out an idea that nobody else could have, and then flesh it out with whatever makes the idea seem more impressive than it really was. *I have a rich inner life. Many people have remarked upon it, though they usually use words like, "lost in a world of his own," "head in the clouds" or just plain "crazy."*

*And I have the ability to bullshit. Fluently!*

Still, I've been bullshitting a lot lately, and I'm exhausted. Yet I see my on-line journal has been up for almost three weeks ... I'm sure it's a new personal record. But now, unfortunately, I'm looking at a blank sheet and my mind is just as blank.

So, I thought I'd ask the readers what they want me to write about! Feel free to suggest anything! Ask me why I don't watch *My Little Pony*. Interrogate me about recent animated films I've seen. Ask me to offend other fan artists with my opinions about their work. Do you want to know about "Karno, the Other White Meat?" I could explain why I never finished the third issue of my comic, *Beatrix*. Suggest topics: carpet bombing, anime, Batmobiles, Big Bang theory, Middle Eastern wars, humanoid robots, privatizing space, the Pope, human origins, obesity, Seth MacFarlane, Mecca, the fall of the Roman empire, my childhood or even the weather. Of course, I don't promise to answer even a single one of the questions posed, *or* take up anyone's suggestions.

But you never know ... I might.

Best of all, I have something to post, and that takes up this space for another couple of weeks.

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# The Long Wait For Bragging Rights

Almost two years ago, I departed from my usual procrastination by actually finishing a work of fiction intended for professional publication. I was rather hopeful at the time, though I cautioned myself that there could not be many markets for stories set in William Hope Hodgson's "Carnacki the Ghost Finder" series. I was right. There weren't. And at the time, I encountered a bit of skepticism from some of the readers when I announced in *Broken Toys* that I had written "The Canaries in the Dark."

One letter writer offered me a list of suggested improvements, which I appreciated ... but had absolutely no intention whatsoever of following. I mean, while *I* may not know what I'm doing, what evidence had I that any of my *readers* did? So I went with my own instincts.

The first and most obvious magazine on which to try "The Canaries in the Dark" was *Weird Tales*. Their initial response was quite favorable. A couple of months later I wrote to them again, asking if there had been any progress. They replied that the manuscript had passed the first reading and had been passed to the next editorial level. I believe that was the last I ever heard from *Weird Tales*. Over the next few months I wrote to them repeatedly, and got only silence as an answer. By the first anniversary of submitting the story, I had still heard nothing. On the 14<sup>th</sup> month, I finally wrote to *Weird Tales*:

"I have been putting off writing to you for a couple of months – the occasion for writing was to celebrate the first anniversary of the day I sent you the MS for "Canaries in the Dark." Because I'm two months late getting around to it, the MS has now been in your hands for about 14 months. I am beginning to feel mortality staring me in the face. Will I live long enough to see my first commercially-intended story purchased ... let alone in print?"

Clearly, it was time to write off *Weird Tales*. Sometime later, I talked to a friend of mine who was well connected to the Dark Fantasy network, and he told me that the staff was in disarray and that for all

intents and purposes the magazine was no more. That explained a lot. I began looking for other magazines. Although I knew a few working writers, it was amazing how little advice they had for me. In effect, *they* no longer had to think about selling their writing – they had agents to stay abreast of the field and worry about markets for them. *They* could tell me nothing useful. But I found a few likely candidates on-line and began to pursue them, one by one.

And, one by one, they turned out to be fruitless. One was not buying until near the end of 2015. It later developed that they would not get funding from the Canada Council, for the second straight year, and so would not actually print a hard copy. I moved on to the next magazine on my list. They replied promptly that while they did indeed print dark fantasy, William Hope Hodgson was not what they had in mind. The next prospect on my list also replied promptly. They said they had no problem with the type of story, so my hopes rose. A couple of months later, however, they e-mailed to tell me that they appreciated having a look at my manuscript, but they felt the pacing was a little too slow. The story didn't get to the action in a timely fashion. I began to think about how I might shorten the prologue. But then it occurred to me that they hadn't suggested I make changes and resubmit "The Canaries in the Dark." Reluctantly, I concluded that they didn't really want to see the MS again, even if I did cut out a few hundred words.

At this point I began to lose interest in finding potential publishers, and set the MS aside while I dealt with other interests. "The Canaries in the Dark" might still be languishing in a digital folder if I hadn't finally gotten a break.

One of the means I had adopted to find a publisher was to join a Hodgson group on FaceBook. All I learned from the group was that I had missed a recent anthology of Hodgson pastiches edited by one of the members. I cursed my bad timing, and moved on. But a couple of months ago I got a notification from the group that the Oldstyle Tales Press was taking submissions to a second volume of dark fantasy stories called *The Yellow Booke*. I posted a message to the editor that I had a story, but was the subject suited to their needs? He said it was, and so I e-mailed him the MS the same night.

He acknowledged receipt and I started another, possibly long, wait. More than two months passed without word, so I faced the unpleasant task of lighting a fire under someone's cauldron once again.

That's when I got a break! Before I could write to Oldstyle Tales Press again, I got an e-mail package from the editor. It included a .pdf of the proof copy going to the printer. Hoping against low expectations, I scrolled down to the table of contents ... and there it was! "The Canaries in the Dark" was the sixth of sixteen stories in the volume! There was also this amusing short bio of the author:

"Taral Wayne is a published author of short stories, often of the horror ilk, whose favorite writers unsurprisingly includes the great William Hope Hodgson."

Of course none of this was true. I wondered where the editor had gotten his information.

I wrote back to express my delight ... and my surprise. I had received no notice that the story had been accepted. Apparently, he had written one and believed it had been sent. I brought up the matter of the misleading bio, and wrote a replacement for it that very night:

“A native of Toronto, Canada, the author has been a professional comic artist and magazine illustrator, and has 11 Hugo nominations for Best Fan Artist ... but has never actually tried to write a story for professional publication before. Instead, Taral has spent most of the last 40-or-so years writing humour, personal reminiscences and critical material for the fan press. Growing a little long in the tooth, and wishing to try his hand at something different, he has only recently begun writing fiction, and even those stories have been largely about what Taral knows best – fandom. Even more of a paradox, Taral seems driven to write stories that are not at all the same as the sort of stories he prefers to read! While a big fan of William Hope Hodgson, he confesses that he reads very little dark fantasy. In fact, the most recent work of fiction he has completed is set in a children’s television show – *Fraggle Rock*.”

Perfect, replied the publisher.

So, there it is. It now appears that, short of some calamity befalling Oldstyle Tales Press, I can hang out my shingle as a professional writer. What a laugh.

The truth is, I won’t be paid a nickel. I had originally made that a criteria of publishing “The Canaries in the Dark,” but at this juncture I believe I can no longer be so picky. Not, at least, about *this* story, which probably has no other viable venue than the one it has (finally) found. I *am* entitled to free copies Oldstyle Press’ downloadable library, which is a touching gesture on their part, however, I wasn’t exaggerating when I said in the bio that I read a little dark fantasy. I read a whole lot, years ago, for the sake of my education, and haven’t touched the genre since. The real benefit of publication in *The Yellow Booke* may be that “The Canaries” will be read by discerning fans of Dark Fantasy, and begin to build a reputation. Conceivably – though very unlikely – it could even be picked up for reprinting in a more mainstream anthology.

So my shingle is still swinging in the air, and I’m wondering where I go next. Another William Hope Hodgson pastiche? Not inconceivable – I do have the germ of an idea or two. But I wasn’t kidding when I said the last work of fiction I had written was related to *Fraggle Rock*. And so will be the next one, most likely, and the one after that. I have ideas for several, in fact, and it appears that committing them to paper makes me as nearly excited as I get these days.

Talk about futile endeavors ... those seem to be my especial genius. Were this the Middle Ages, it wouldn’t matter. Troubadours and poets wrote what they pleased. Nobody *owned* Robin Hood, Lancelot or Orlando. What mattered was their creative use. Today we live in enlightened times, when all that matters is which giant media corporation owns our cultural icons. The poet or novelist may *not* write about 007 or Luke Skywalker without explicit permission from company lawyers, whose clients will then possess all rights to the work for perpetuity. Lucky me.

Well, I know a trick or two, and may yet avoid the bottomless abyss into which all fan fiction is condemned to be tossed and forgotten.

*Oldstyle Tales Press (The Yellow Book, editor Michael Kellermeyer),*  
<http://www.Oldstyletales.com/#!/the-yellow-booke---your-annual-journal/czkv>

# CHRISTMAS BEGINS IN OCTOBER

It is a good day when there is someone comes to your door bearing gifts.

In this case, I was wakened from my customary daylight sleeping hours by a deliveryman who needed me to sign for a parcel. The sensible thing to do would have been to toss it on the couch and go back to sleep, but I can never do the sensible thing. Instead, I had to open the padded envelope to see what was in it ... *then* I could go back to sleep.

As expected, the envelope contained two softback books and a DVD.

The DVD was of the much-anticipated Season “X” of *Red Dwarf*. I say “X” because it is the producers’ way of saying “forget about the IX<sup>th</sup>, you’re never going to see it.” To make sense of that, I have to go back to season VII, and explain that for some years the Boys From the Dwarf had been not only marooned in space, 3,000,000 years in the future, but had become marooned even from the giant mining ship, *Red Dwarf*. They had been drifting about in one of the auxiliary craft, *Star Bug*, trying to catch up with the *Dwarf*. In series VIII, however, they return to the mother ship to find that it has not only been restored to its original state by nanobots, but the 3,000,000-year-old crew has also been resurrected from the dead. There is even a properly functioning copy of their 3,000,000-year-senile AI, Holly. The series abruptly went from being the story of a handful of misfits and the only actual human being alive in the universe, to a typical army humour situation, where Lister, Rimmer, Cat and Kryten are at the bottom of a large and complex military totem pole. It’s not unfunny, so far as it goes, but the *Red Dwarf* of series VIII is just not the same story as the rest. Finally, *Red Dwarf* went off the air with a cliff-hanger episode at the end of the season.

A few years passed before the Boys From the Dwarf were back in a three-part mini-series called “Back to Earth.” They were clearly older, and there had been changes in the interval. No mention was made of the cliff-hanger that preceded “Back to Earth,” nor any sign that any of the events from series VIII had ever happened.

Then came welcome rumours that *Red Dwarf* would be back as a regular series ... and so it was. While still more changes were made to the sets and costumes, they were entirely appropriate, looking shabby and industrial, very much in the spirit of the earliest series, although the interiors were now dimly lit reds and ochres rather than battleship grey. Once again, the characters were alone aboard the gigantic mining ship, *Red Dwarf*, and whatever happened in series VIII had apparently been wiped from memory. Apparently ... but not quite. There is one mention of the final events in the cliff-hanger episode of that series, and how Rimmer saved the day. But whatever it was that he did is never explained, nor just what the immediate aftermath was. Life aboard the *Red Dwarf* had, somehow, seamlessly reverted to what it had been before. One might suppose those were the events in season IX. But since there is no season IX, we are never likely to find out what those events were.

Having re-introduced *Red Dwarf* on such coy terms, I have to say I’m really pleased with the show. It may be a slightly stale premise by now, but the quality of writing is as high as ever, I think, and the actors have, if anything, settled into a new maturity in their roles. I had viewed the six new episodes on a bootlegged copy before, but now that I have a legit copy, I look forward to seeing them again and again, and to seeing the new special features as well.

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The two softbound books were volumes 2 and 3 of *Magnus Robot Fighter*, to match the volume 1 of the complete set that I already owned.

*Magnus* was the brainchild of the veteran newspaper strip and comic book artist, Russ Manning. I had read that his original intention was to draw an adaptation of Edgar Rice Burrough's *Tarzan* for Gold Key Comics. Manning had drawn Tarzan before, so he was a good choice for the subject, but the idea didn't bear fruit just then. Instead, he created the idea of a physically perfect, scientifically trained hero in the year 4,000 AD, who fought robots rather than Great Apes. Magnus was an orphan, raised by a wise old humanoid robot who taught his ward superior martial arts and gave him an implant that allowed Magnus to tune into robot communications channels. He had no super-powers as such, just a superbly trained body and a mission to protect mankind from its own dependence on a totally automated society run by artificial intelligences. While we humans lay in floating lounges, watching 3D TV and sipping our Sirian brandies in North Am, robots ran our heavy industry, raced cars for our entertainment, and waited on us hand and foot. Rapidly turning into helpless slugs, humanity was vulnerable to its own servants.

Enter The Robot Fighter. As well as an advocate of greater human control over its own civilization, he is a protector. Whenever a robot mind goes mad and orders hundreds of slaved ambulatory units to go on a murderous rampage, Magnus arrives at the nick of time to stop the carnage. With a "spling" or a "wang," his knife-edge karate chop separates bucket-shaped heads from snaky necks. When an evil genius subverts robots to take over North Am's central fusion power supply, Magnus can be counted on to thwart the scheme.

Of course, if that was all there had been to *Magnus Robot Fighter*, it would have been little different from any superhero comic of the time. What was different about *Magnus* was that it clearly felt like *science fiction* to me. Every detail was futuristic. Background events might include an automated hypership launch to the nearest quasar, or "neo-animals" with computer enhanced intelligence! The central conflict was not merely good vs. evil, as in a typical *Superman* or *Iron Man* comic, but man and his relationship to his own most sophisticated creations, artificial intelligence. *Magnus* questioned what our ultimate goals should be, our appropriate place in our own civilization and the ever-widening horizon of our own knowledge. That's pretty heady stuff for 24 cheaply-coloured pages printed on pulp paper!

The art was gorgeous. Clear lines, effortlessly created vistas of the continent-spanning city of North Am, lasciviously sculpted starships, an original eye for attire and convincingly real people were Russ Manning's gifts to *Magnus*. In comparison with the murky renderings and over-muscled grotesqueries of Adams or Buscema to come later in the decade, Manning's art was elegant, his clarity the ideal expression of a future age of enlightenment!

There were only 21 "real" issues of *Magnus Robot Fighter* before Manning moved on. Gold Key continued the series begun in 1963 for another few years, mostly by reprinting the early issues, and then in 1977 the very last issue hit the stands. That should have been the end of the story.

However, in 1991, Valiant Comics acquired the rights to Gold Key's titles, and, under Jim Shooter, updated *Magnus* into an edgy, *realpolitik* narrative ... with very mixed success. I picked up on them, and kept buying through the first ten or fifteen issues before I got tired of all that darkness and cynicism. *Magnus'* character is left untouched but his girlfriend's father, Senator Clain, is revealed as a power-

hungry, corrupt aristocrat. The common masses are oppressed and live at street level, instead of in the soaring towers North Am's elite class. There is a robot underground of AI's who have randomly achieved true self-awareness, and are plotting to win their freedom. In some ways, it was a fascinating iteration of the original vision ... yet it was discouraging to see yet another narrative in which human progress can never be anything but material, never moral or intellectual. The Magnus thread dissolved bit by bit into various crossovers with other books, and vanished, unmissed and unmourned, sometime in the early 1990s.

As a kid, I bought about a dozen issues of *Magnus Robot Fighter* when they first came out, and loved them. But, like many other idiots, I got rid of them, along with my other hundreds of comics, an act I greatly regretted sooner than I could have imagined. Then, in the mid-70s, I managed to buy a number of used copies for a reasonable price from a comics store – probably while attending some Midwest convention. They became increasingly rare, after that, so I thought it unlikely I'd come by any additional issues, or ever read all the *Magnus* stories.

But, then, just a few years ago, Dark Horse reprinted the entire 21 Russ Manning issues in three volumes. I didn't find out about it until recently, however. I bought the first volume the instant I saw it, but unfortunately I couldn't find volumes 2 or 3 anywhere. Until now, that is. Now I have all three volumes in front of me, *including several stories I cannot have read before!* If ever there was a time to order a pizza and take an evening off from my usual round of making myself miserable on Facebook, this is it.

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With the two volumes of *Magnus Robot Fighter*, I came to the end of my presents for the day. It had been a lot like Christmas, even without snow or a decorated tree. Best of all, there's more to come. I have yet to receive the complete *Car 54 Where Are You*, or the copies of the collection in my short story was published! Those are coming later, sometime in the next couple of weeks.

There is one big difference between these gift-days and Christmas, however. At Christmas, the presents are free. I'm very much afraid that I will have to *pay* for all *these* gifts.

It works like this. Now and then, my friend Bob Wilson comes over for an evening. We used to meet downtown in the old days, but over the last few years my infirmity ruled that out. Going to Bob's place is pretty difficult for me, too, so he comes here, a reversal of many years of practice. Bob orders books from Amazon all the time, so it occurred to me that I could do the same through his account, and pay Bob up front. As a result, I've been filling my wish list in an orderly and efficient manner. Soon I will have *everything*. But not to worry – it won't be the end of Christmas. I'll always think of new things to want – the new season of the *Venture Brothers* should be released soon, and what about the re-boot of *The Muppets*? The universe is expanding, you know, and I have to run as fast as I can if I hope to keep up.

# Left Over Parts - *Session 43!*

**WAHF: Paul Skelton**, who dropped me a note to complain about fanzine editors who actually publish on time. Certainly understandable. **Dale Spiers**: Your tour of Ye Olde Toronto was interesting. I've been doing much the same with Calgary, albeit our history only dates back to 1875 and few buildings older than WW1 still exist. ... We get so used to the mundane sights of our town such that when they suddenly disappear, one regrets not having taken a photo. Photography was one of my mother's favourite hobbies. She told me a story about growing up in the days of steam locomotives, but never thought to take a photo of one because they were so common. Suddenly they all disappeared, and it was too late. She always regretted that. So it is a good thing to photograph old neighbourhoods. **Janet Wilson**: who threatened to feed me to Shimmelfinney's cat if I claim once more that *Fraggle Rock* is unpopular. Let me clarify. It is not unpopular. Just unpopular with nearly everyone I know. **David Redd**: who is filling forms for a church grant. I'm not sure if he means to start a church, or wants a grant from his own church to 3D-print the Ark of the Covenant.

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***Michael Kesselmeier, editor & publisher of Oldstyle Press, [mgkellermeyer@gmail.com](mailto:mgkellermeyer@gmail.com)***

I want to reiterate just how important your piece is to this collection; I combed through dozens of stories and was thrilled when I came across yours. It really has that quality of writing which makes me pay attention and think, and it has stuck in my mind since I first read it. I am a HUGE Carnacki fan, and eventually I will edit an anthology of Hodgson's, so I was thrilled with your story. You were absolutely true to the spirit of the original, but still creative and unique. Very fascinating to read, very well-written, and a great asset to this anthology. Thank you so much for submitting it; I hope that you keep writing, and I heartily welcome your submissions every July-September when I'll start compiling that year's *Booke*. Your work is always welcome at Oldstyle Tales.

Now a few quick words on perpetuity: the platform I use makes it so that it will stay up indefinitely, until Amazon disappears, or if I choose (which I won't) to halt the ordering process. Another cool feature is the fact that this can be edited at any point: if, five years from now, you note an error (I hope it doesn't take that long for it to be spotted!), I can go in and change it if you contact me, so if you see anything you don't like, let me know – I'll make it right.

Lastly, remember that you now can ask for PDFs of any of our stories. We currently have Poe, Blackwood, Wells, O'Brien, Jacobs, De Maupassant, Dickens, Conan Doyle, *Frankenstein*, *Dracula*, Victorian ghost stories, and more. This year E. Nesbit and *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* will be out, and next year M. R. James, J. Sheridan Le Fanu, and Henry James will appear. So don't hold back – if you see something you like, ask away, and if you would like a hard copy, they're all on Amazon.

Again, I really want to thank you for your work; its high-quality writing that makes me proud of what I'm doing and proud of this under-appreciated, often lampooned genre. I think your story and the others clearly demonstrate that there is more than jumps in horror fiction – there's literary power.

My best wishes, and good luck on your present and future projects.

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**Eric Mayer, [groggy.tales@gmail.com](mailto:groggy.tales@gmail.com)**

I should first point out, to avoid misinterpretation, that I was upset when I wrote you about Ned's death and despite what it might sound like, I don't actually sit around hoping for fans I dislike to die. Although I'm sure if any such fans read this, they will claim I said as much. But it seems to me – and probably it isn't true, but it feels like it – that good people, with positive things to offer, tend to die young, while evil, destructive types go on and on. George Harrison is taken away early by brain cancer but Dick Cheney gets to war-monger endlessly, not even stopped by the loss of a heart. It's frustrating and sad.

While there have certainly been fans I would have been tempted to back a truck over, I don't think there are any that I wish dead, either. Just barely, though. As for Dick Cheney, can there be better evidence of people who have made pacts with the Devil? Funny how the Christian right adores him.

Ned Brooks is certainly in my personal faanish Hall of Fame. I corresponded with him – sporadically it is true – since the mid-seventies. He consistently locced *Groggy* and when I resumed publishing electronically, he – almost alone amongst my old correspondents – continued. And just as you describe, each of these many locs spawned a back-and-forth discussion, sometimes about very esoteric matters indeed.

When I published *Groggy* I had a hard time finding colored Ditto masters. Ned came to my rescue by sending me colors not available in the US: orange and yellow in particular. So any of the hectographed *Groggy* covers featuring orange or yellow are thanks to Ned, and to Eric Lindsay who also sent me some straight from Australia.

Ned tended to pack stuff he sent in any old newspapers or periodicals he had handy. One time he sent me the second issue, the BW original series, of *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, as packing!

Cowabunga, Dude! I bet you could buy a lot of bling with what that sucka' would sell for!

After I dipped my toe in fandom again around 2005, I briefly joined a private faanish list and, as one does, albeit unwisely, I scanned the group's archives for my name. I found that in 1999, when I had been entirely absent from fandom for years (and in my own mind permanently gafiated), Ted White had on some pretext written a long screed against me, calling me a hypocrite among other things. I wasn't surprised, since Ted has long demonstrated a penchant for mischaracterizing those he dislikes to suit his own preferred narrative, especially if they are absent or dead. Of course, as he well knew, I wasn't even anywhere around fandom let alone on a private faanish list, and so had no chance to defend myself. But Ned spoke up for me. It took real character to defend a faanish nobody (who wasn't even around anymore) against the revered White. Ned was a great guy.

Ted, unfortunately, seems to believe that it is necessary to raise his already well-elevated stature still further by tearing down the stature of others that he may not even particularly dislike. It seems to be just *mano e mano*, to show who's top dog. I'm sure most of us are tempted, now and then, but Ted's made the practice into his signature style.

So now Ned's gone, and the fandom that's still worth belonging to is further diminished.

No disputing that. In fact, I've had to "bury" so many of my correspondents in the pages of this fanzine that I'm thinking of a memorial page for them in the final issue. To everyone reading this ... try **not** to be on it!

Having said, that let me pivot back to your opening comments. I am sixty-five, and share your puzzlement about what to do next. What can my goal be at this point? Is there enough time for there to be any significant "next?" If I have failed to achieve anything like what I had once hoped by my age, why should I think I can make good in the relatively little time I have left? But really, I guess at some level we both know we are doomed to carry on trying to create stuff until it kills us. Hey, they say the journey is more important than the destination, but still I would've liked some better scenery along the route.

There is a Tim Powers novel in which he introduced me to a genuinely novel idea. One of the characters has the unusual power of recognizing something as the final time it will ever happen in his life. As long as the event is an uncommon one, like buying suede shoes or ordering from a French menu, the presentiment has little meaning. One can live a long and fruitful life without artichoke. But when he gets that little warning when he hears *a telephone ring*, it's another matter! I think what we are beginning to experience is that telephone ring.

Speaking of creating stuff, no matter how you cut it, you've published more zines than me. The discussion prompted me to try to recall my own efforts. This is just off the top of my head. I don't have my zines any longer and, honestly, don't care:

**Groggy:** My perszine, some issues with hectoed covers which ran from the late seventies into the early nineties. 41 issues I recall.

**E-Ditto:** My first pdf personze. 17 issues.

**Revenant:** My second pdf perszine. 10 issues.

**Deja Vu:** Xeroxed combo small press and fanzine. 6 issues.

**Tedscan:** Limited circulation one-shot.

There was also a mini-zine sent mostly to small press people, *Frazzle* which lasted maybe six issues and was mostly text. I'm not counting dozens of mini-comics.

Then there are apa zines, 3 issues of a title I forget for Mike Gorra's HOAX apa. Around 25 issues of *Wooly Yarns* followed by *Egregious Tales* during two stints in e-APA and this far 15 issues of *Vexed* for the TePe apa, along with a *Vexed* collection sent out generally.

That's what? Over 130 I guess.

I've kept a running total of my pages since the beginning, but had let it lapse about the time I began *Broken Toys*. At the time, the approximate total was 2,836 pages. I just did a quick count in my head of the pages in each issue of *Broken Toys*, *Lost Toys*, *The Great White Zine*, *The Slan of Baker Street* and one insignificant one-shot called *Scanners Live in Vain*. The number of pages I've published since January 2012 is 1,080 ... give or take the odd error in addition. Grand total is 3,916. Not all that many, compared to many publishing prodigies.

Of course in a way the mini-comics are zines, and Mary and I are up to issue 95 of our every other month *Orphan Scrivener* newsletter which, in addition to news, features an essay by each of us.

Nope, still can't get to 300, even if I throw in the newsletters I published for the Rochester Zoo

volunteers and for the Orienteering Club for years.

Can I count the magazines I crayoned and stapled together when I was a kid?

Man, 300 issues.

Will I ever get to 400? Damn ... there's that telephone ringing! Not at *this* rate...

On a less pleasant topic, don't remind me about cleaning. Our well water practically rattles the pipes, it contains so many minerals. The sinks, the bottom of the showers and the toilet bowl turn bright orange almost overnight. We try to keep up as best we can. As far as cleaning soap, one might well ask, who soaps the soap? My grandmother made her own primitive soap out of fat and lye, big flat yellow slabs. She'd break pieces off and chuck them into the clothes washer. It seemed weird to me. Today you can find a hundred different types of cleaners for different types of cleaning, but are they truly necessary? One thing I learned from my parents was that no matter what sort of soap you use, you also need enough elbow grease.

Orange deposits would indicate iron in the water, I think. Around Toronto the problem is calcium, which in time leaves a grayish scum in cups, and a beige build-up around drains and in the toilet. Most of Toronto's water is run-off from limestone formations north and west of the city.

Soap is soap, and you can usually use one form for any other. The differences between most household cleaners are mostly a matter of convenience ... and scent. There are alcohol or ammonia-based cleaners for tough grease or windows, and chemicals to remove scale build-up, and so on. The rest is marketing. You can wash dishes with hand soap or laundry detergent ... makes no difference.

I think the best piece this issue is your brilliant evocation of urban change. Really fascinating. Perhaps I was primed for this sort of thing because I am reading a collection of essays by John Updike, in some of which he tells about revisiting much transformed childhood haunts. It takes a lot of skill to write a piece that seems a companion to an Updike essay, without coming across as simply terrible by comparison. Very impressive. And, I hope you will forgive me, but I have already rattled on way too long, so like the Updike essays I will just savor it without trying to come up with suitable comment.

I'm going to make a strange confession. I haven't actually read "Fall of Empires." Because Walt, my proofreader, was shortly to be out of town again, I was in a rush and sent him the finished first draft without revision. Perhaps I should make a point of reading it; I was afraid it was not an inspired piece, but I may surprise myself.

By the way, I am happy the inspectors have not been heard from again.

*You're happy?* Probably best not to count myself lucky just yet. It may draw them back.

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**Dave Haren, [tyrbolo@comcast.net](mailto:tyrbolo@comcast.net)**

You had me cringing for a second with your announcement of life horrors. Then it turned out to be the usual litany of too much time wasted in the art of thinking about meaning.

Your thoughts are important, but in the greater scheme of things missing a few meals would be more important.

That's the advantage of having a plastic (variable) mind that is always rearranging priorities on the basis of the externals. Be glad you have the Fraggles; a refuge from the world mess is nice, and highly underrated by fools who live in a Dantean circle of hell they insist is the "reality."

I did find a major bone to pick with your last page. I know Bodē's brother has tried to pick up where he left off. But I find it hard to believe he has returned from the grave to give us more Junkwaffel, even though we desperately need his humour in these times. Zines are getting better all the time – not only is there someone named Crotch Thunder, but now Vaughn Bodē has returned from the grave... : ^ )

Katz is the invisible Russian submarine of Swedish waters fame. About time for him to resurface with another raft of ancient wisdoms for fandom.

I'll miss Brooks' zine, and I am horrified when things like that happen. We had a railroad club member who was clinically blind fall off his roof into a bamboo bush while trying to fix his TV antenna. He lived, but it was a nasty experience. I asked him why he didn't ask one of us for help, and he said he didn't want to bother anyone. The idea that losing him would bother everyone a hell of a lot more didn't occur to him. Independence is not a virtue once you pass a certain age, you possess a lifetime of facts no one else has, and need to be repaid for the efforts you put into getting them. The idea of a solitary human is the rankest kind of Bullshit fed to people to control them. We are a social species, more like a wolfpack than any other mammal type. Just because someone with an agenda fed us a false narrative doesn't make it true. You only have to look into the average person's eyes to see how it has ruined their life.

LOL, see how easy it is for me to get onto the soapbox.

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**Steve Stiles, [stevecartoon2001@gmail.com](mailto:stevecartoon2001@gmail.com)**

I feel like I'm sort of in a similar place as yours. Mobility isn't an issue, but my usual manly stagger has been replaced, more often than I'd like, by a pathetic shuffle: I have chronic leg pain, an ache in my calf muscles that waxes and wanes, and this has been going on for about five or six years now. A bad reaction to statins is my doctor's guess – which seems to be all the motherfucker is capable of doing – but the pain was supposed to eventually go away, and it hasn't. Often I hardly notice it, but yesterday was a real bitch that had me gulping ibuprofen like M&Ms and applying ointments and hot and cold compresses all day long. Sooner or later, when the cash flow improves (all our bills are coming all at once now, and the expected money that was supposed to be coming our way about now isn't), I want to get several pairs of compression stockings and see if that helps.

Statins can do that, and may give me a little problem, also. In my case, the aches and pains have become minor and easily borne. At one time, however, it was quite a major problem that drove me to seek serious painkillers. I don't think it could have been wholly the statins at the time, but some quirk of twisting my back, perhaps? Because I recall a distinct event. I got out of bed (on the wrong side, naturally) and there was a sharp, agonizing burst of pain that held me paralyzed for several minutes while I debated with myself whether to call 911. It gradually faded over the next hour or so, but remained at high levels for a couple of months. But there had been minor discomfort before, I think, and that might have been the famous statin side effect, just as the minor aches I have now might also be caused by statins.

Then again, maybe not. To tell the truth, I've had so many different issues with my health over the last few years that my memory of it all has grown quite hazy. In any case, I have two suggestions – no, not

cannabis. I'm sure you tried that. It did me no good at all. But you might try a different statin. The other thing is consult your doctor to make good and sure that you really need to be taking a statin. Recent studies show that doctors have been far too ready to put (especially) men on a statin despite no good evidence of its benefits for anyone who has not had a cardiac event. It is not at all clear that statins do remove cholesterol from the blood of healthy people.

I suspect that the three-mile hikes I took Tuesday and Wednesday set off the muscle throbs, so to a lesser degree mobility *is* an issue; I really enjoy walks, need the exercise, and hate being cooped up behind these four walls. Equally important are museum tours, which involve a lot of walking; both Baltimore and Washington, DC have many marvelous museums, and regular art fine art fixes are necessary for my morale. It's kind of a religious experience for me; even art produced by misogynists, drunks, and violence-prone sociopaths can have spiritual qualities: a paradox, for sure. (Are powered chairs allowed in art museums? I've never noticed any.)

Toronto has an art museum of some little note. I've seen it, but drew little inspiration from its largely second-rate acquisitions. Its has a Warhol, for instance, but not one people regularly see in art books – a four-colour mash-up of Little Lulu or something. Our art museum also has a large collection of early 19<sup>th</sup> century landscapes and seashores with waves dashing up against cliffs. In the right mood I might find that inspiring, but, in the main, no. We also have the *world's leading* collection of Henry Moore. Big fucking deal. The Kline Gallery north of Toronto, that houses the Group of Seven, is a much more to my taste – but it's north of Toronto and quite out of reach.

The Royal Ontario Museum is a place I'd like to go back to, though. It ought to be wheelchair-friendly, so I could get Traveling Matt in. It's downtown, but I ought to be able to reach it okay. I would worry a little about how much reserve endurance Matt's batteries would have, though, to tour the museum. It would probably make more sense to use the TTC's Wheel Trans Service to get there and back.

Other frustrations: You've probably noticed that from time to time I've mentioned a Big Project I'm supposed to be working on. Well, I *am*, but there are big frustrations that I'm contractually not allowed to mention, so I can't even have the sweet satisfaction of bitching about them, damn it (let's just say that the project management is the equivalent of the Keystone Kops to law enforcement). Meanwhile I've been cleaning up all my underground pages for a hoped-for eventual Kindle/print on demand anthology, *The Best Of Hyper Comics*. 94 pages done so far, but my hand-lettered dialogue for a lot of those pages I did for Denis Kitchen was really atrocious, so I've been adjusting word, and even letter spacing, on each page with Photoshop; it's incredibly tedious but necessary work.

At least you've something for which to hope for the best. About the most I look forward to is writing three or four more *Fraggle Rock* stories like the last one, that I can't possibly publish or make a dime from.

I'm 71 years old: these two gigs might very well be my Last Hurrahs in comics, although I certainly hope not! I desperately want both to be a critical success; it puts a certain amount of pressure and anxiety on me.

I think I have an issue of *Hyper* that you may have sent me, a few years ago. And I've sure I have some of your comics in other undergrounds. So while you may not have been as prolific or high-profile as Gilbert Shelton or Robert Crumb, you've at least had a career in comics. Compared to that, my two issues of *Beatrix* and a half-dozen very short stories in other furry comics don't add up to much. As well, nobody respects furry comics. Any time I show *Beatrix* to a regular comics fan, you can see his nose wrinkle up in distaste. They don't look at the craftsmanship or

read the story. I had plans for other issues, but editors kept wanting to turn the book into a team-effort, in order to go bi-monthly, and the only offers were royalties on sales – i.e.: zilch. I gave up. I was making decent money selling prints and folios at furry cons, so why knock myself out for nothing?

Then there's fan art. At the beginning of this year I submitted a number of full-colored cover art pieces to various fanzines. They were terrific. They have yet to see print. I had a three-week lull to do fan art in July, and so I produced eight more color covers (also terrific) and an equal number of b&w gag cartoons: I do this for fun, and really enjoyed what I had done, and I loved them all, but who do I send them to? (Could I have been making freelance money instead?) I think most fanzines have a backlog of my material already, which is indicative as to how fanzine fandom is shriveling on the vine. Well, I guess I'll save the backlog for next year. I'm already planning two more insulting "Losing The Hugo" gags – I do believe in making lemonade from those lemons!

I've given up almost completely. I don't know which zines you think are "cool," but most of those I liked have had very few issues lately, and who wants to be bothered with *Tightbeam* or the like? *Alexiad* shrinks your art down to thumbnail size and has no cover. So there seems little point to going to the enormous trouble of colouring anything – since I tend to use blended colours and shading. I don't really even go to much trouble to submit b/w filler art. If anyone asks, I give them a bunch of whatever is at hand, but I'm not asked often, and it may be two years before I see any of it used. My once superb system of keeping track of what art is in whose hands and whether it has been published has totally broken down. Which means I cannot guarantee anyone exclusive rights, nor that what I've submitted is EVER used! What's the point, anyway? I get little thrill from fillers being published, and any old flash-in-the-pan can come along and snatch a fanart Hugo in their first year or two of fandom, then vanish from fanzines with it a year later, as Maureen Starkey did.

I guess I was one of those friends you sent copies of *Fraggle Rock* to. Thanks; I appreciate it and got enjoyment from them. My face didn't light up, but it did show my dimples! I certainly can appreciate the missionary impulse: when I was a preteen I discovered *POGO* and gave an anthology of the strip to a good friend so that he too would discover the joys of Walt Kelly – he used it as an album to post stamps in. My most recent missionary impulse was ignited by agoraphobic genius Pendleton Ward's *Adventure Time with Finn & Jake*. Set in the Land of Ooo, 889 years after an atomic war, and featuring characters like Ice King, Lumpy Space Princess, Princess Bubblegum, and Marceline (a thousand-year-old teenage vampire rock n' roller), this series belongs in the Inspired Lunacy Hall of Fame, along with *Krazy Kat*, Harvey Kurtzman's *MAD*, *Rocky & Bullwinkle*, Jack Cole's *Plastic Man*, et cetera, and everyone should rush out and buy all the DVDs of the series!

A friend of mine in California loves curious old pop culture stuff. One year, for Christmas, I send him a costly 1/32 scale reproduction of a Chrysler Airflow – a nifty streamlined four-door from a period when cars still had floating fenders and bullet headlights. It was too far ahead of its time, though, and a market flop. The repro had opening doors, an opening trunk, an engine under the hood and steerable wheels. Also, its own clear plastic case. The next time I visited California, I couldn't see it anywhere in my friend's place. However, we visited another cartoonist's place later, and that's where I saw my expensive Christmas gift! My friend had given it away! I guess he only finds the *real* antique interesting. Well, I don't have \$50,000 to spend on gifts...

(I also like two other so-called children's cartoon series, *The Regular Show* and *The Amazing World of Gumball*, but not as much.)

I was quite sad to hear that Ned Brooks died. Once again the world has been diminished for me. When then fan artist Colin Cameron and I had been stationed at Ft. Eustis, Va., in 1966, Ned was good enough

to let us crash at his house every weekend, so that for two days out of seven we could pretend that we were living a civilian existence while we were stationed there. It was *very* appreciated! Ned was an extremely nice person. It's also saddening that Colin died a few months earlier (possibly from Agent Orange poisoning gained from helping to protect a right-wing dictatorship from a left-wing dictatorship).

The Zine Artists website is quite an asset, and thank you and Alan White for it! It's a pity that you haven't gotten anything from Dan Steffan yet. Possibly he's burned out and recovering from the effort of producing *The Mota Reader*: a magnificent tribute to our much-missed Terry Hughes. Dan has had a remarkably impressive record in fandom; besides his always fine cartooning, *Blat!* and *Boonfark* stood head and shoulders over the majority of fanzines of those times. I'd say that *Mota Reader* is now the jewel in Dan's fanac crown. It will certainly win the Best Fanzine award at next year's Corflu, and I hope everyone who plans on attending the Worldcon will nominate it for the fanzine Hugo (it won't win, of course, but it should be nominated).

I wonder if that means I shouldn't bother scanning the actual *Mota* for eFanzines next year, after I've shut down *Broken Toys*? It was on my short list. There would still be some value in pdfs of the actual pages, I think, unless Dan is reproducing the art, the letter column and format.

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## ***Philip Turner, [farrago2@lineone.net](mailto:farrago2@lineone.net)***

Have you ever seen the American cop show *Life* starring Damian Lewis (British) as Detective Charlie Crews? Box sets of series 1 & 2 highly recommended. Crews is very into Zen as a way of battling adversity. Maybe the **Order of Decrepit Old Blokes** could try a version slanted toward our own particular circumstances.

Although I re-acquired cable about a year ago, what I cannot seem to re-acquire is the habit of using it. So I haven't seen, or even heard of this cop show. Cop shows were not, as a rule, my favourite sort.

The Buddha says the Universe will be a better place if we complete all our "to do" lists. Yet skeptics still insist that the Universe doesn't give a rat's ass either way. If everything is connected, we can be sure that someone else's efforts will achieve that which we are failing to get done ourselves. And yet a still, small voice continues to mutter that our turn for external fulfillment will never come around. In the Karmic Circle, what goes around comes around. Which makes it a great pity that inspectors of all sorts will never live long enough to collect everything that's coming to them. The human body is not built to last forever. (Reassuring but v. gloomy.) Free-fall constitutes a time of endless opportunity, which is cut short instantly and violently by the *splat!* of landing on a hard surface.

You don't say as much, but I assume these are quotes lifted from the show?

We actually have the "new prohibition" getting off the ground here, with an arm of the government ordering "people of age" to downsize to free up family homes, especially those with spare bedrooms full of stuff which, the government casually assumes, the owner will discard. Of course, the woman who had the temerity to unleash this view on an unwilling nation was slapped down, but it's a fact that no idea in politics is ever bad, it's just out of its time and some bugger will try it when he/she thinks he/she can get away with it.

I wasn't expecting a law ordering people to downsize – how would you even write such a thing so that it didn't controvert every constitutional guarantee on the books? But since we seem to assume that there is

no upper limit to population, and that bigger cities are richer, more productive cities, I can only guess that someday we will all live in shoeboxes ... with one other family. And that desiring privacy or unnecessary clutter will be worse than an eccentricity, it will be an anti-social crime. In context of an overpopulated world, this would only be moral and sensible. So what's so fucking great about having more and more people is what I want to know! Planet Earth was doing perfectly well with two or three billion human residents. Ten billion will only make our species poorer.

Green for garden refuse, blue for paper and cardboard, brown for bottles and tins, black for everything else. Guess who has had 4 bins wished upon him by St. Ockport Borough Council? Yes, you have to clean the goddam soap. And the soap dish. And the bit at the top of the liquid soap dispenser which you have to press to disgorge the contents. The world is wall-to-wall filth.

Earlier this year every apartment in my building was issued a free plastic container for kitchen slops, to be taken out back to a compost bin when filled. For one thing, the container is actually a repurposed diaper pail, just like the ones you buy your Huggies in at the supermarket. It's rather small, so emptying it often is unavoidable. The compost bin is out back of the building, so the trip involves a walk to the elevators, a ride down, a walk through the back of the building and out the rear doors – which may expose you to severely inclement weather much of the year. Then back. I think you can count on it consuming about a quarter of an hour. It doesn't sound like much, but if you're a busy person and you have to do this every couple of days, it's an irritating imposition. However, it's far worse if you're impaired. For me to use this stupid little recycling scheme, I have to maneuver my chair out the door first, then the reverse. Before I had Traveling Matt, I had to use a roller, which was slow and exhausting. The trip was more likely to take half an hour than fifteen minutes. So, I wonder how many of these stupid little diaper pails have actually been used, and how many loiter in a corner of the kitchen where they are out of the way ... as mine does?

Pan American Games? Ptui! Didn't half screw up the start of this year's CFL season with teams like the Argos out on the road and exiled from their home stadium. Your "Fall of Empires" article reminded me that it's many years since I last felt the need to go to Manchester even though the big city is just 25 minutes away on the train. They've been messing about with the place since Mr. Hitler did his town planning there. (And the IRA.) No doubt I wouldn't recognize the place now – an experience my late father had when he went in search of the areas he grew up in and found them no longer there.

The Argos used to play from University Stadium, downtown near the U of T. I had believed they transferred from that venue (admittedly small and exposed) to the Rogers Stadium, the big new gazillion-dollar dome near the lakeshore? If not, why not? What else is that eyesore good for, if not the handful of professional team sports we play in this city. Do we use the bloody thing only for baseball and basketball now? What rot.

**Final thought:** if the Universe is the product of Intelligent Design, what sort of total tool built one which isn't self-cleaning?

One who didn't have to clean it Himself, obviously.

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***Tom Turriffin, [tom.t@shaw.ca](mailto:tom.t@shaw.ca)***

For me, realizing the extra complexity of living as an independent adult didn't so much come from the cleaning, but from becoming aware of the bric-a-brac of material possessions. In 1996 or so, in the months before I moved into my first apartment, my parents suddenly started taking me on walks to

garage sales and buying me things, without asking for any input from me, so I ended up with an assortment of used cooking pots and silverware, none of which matched. Ho hum, I thought.

It was when they bought a used vacuum cleaner that my brain clicked, "Oh dear - I hadn't thought of that." Among other things, they gifted me an old bed - I think the box spring must have dated to at least 1970; I was still using it into 2014. They gave me some cheap bookshelves they'd received as collateral from two (ex-) friends who'd screwed them over. And my dad gave me a cardboard box with an assortment of old tools - a hammer, screwdriver, etc. I still have the box. It's kind of a link to that transition period.

So here I am in my first apartment. Stepping out of the shower with a wet plop - Oh, I need to get a bath mat. Blow my nose - Oh, I need to buy some garbage bins so I can throw stuff away. A lightbulb burns out ... Crap, I need to buy a \*ladder\*, because my ceilings are 10 feet high!

Want to hang something on the wall? Nails. Extra drinking glasses for guests. An ashtray because you've got a friend who smokes. A table so you can sit and eat. A floor mat to wipe snowy boots on. Curtains for privacy. Curtain rods and hooks so they'll stay up. A toilet plunger, because ... things happen. Each week, I had a new list of things to shop for. This went on for months.

Cooking, I think, was the other big learning curve. To this day, I still have huge gaps - I've never cooked a steak, or roasted a roast or a whole chicken. I'm terrible at barbecuing. However, I discovered the usefulness of having a microwave, a tool that I didn't grow up with. I also found out that in a one-person household, food expiry dates are suddenly important, since there's a good chance things won't get consumed in time. Living alone, you become the master of what you eat, and how much; another thing I wasn't good at. After moving out, I gradually gained weight, and 20 years later I'm still fat.

When I moved into my house, I was lucky to have generous friends. One of them gave me his old lawnmower, and more importantly, the long extension cord that has been so useful as time has gone by. Another friend taught me that my furnace had a filter I needed to replace from time to time. As the seasons changed, I bought a garden hose, a rake and a snow shovel. If I were rich, I'd probably replace all my furniture, most of which is cheap and flimsy, plus second-hand stuff, plus a few things cobbled together from boxes and planks. I also wish I had a sense of how to decorate.

Still, once you get all the things you need, you settle in and feel like you've made your place into a proper home. I can't help but wonder what the transition would have been like if, instead of living on my own when I first moved out, if I'd had roommates instead?

It really does seem like modern life needs a tremendous assortment of tools, accessories, materials and knick-knacks to get along. You can't imagine needing a corkscrew ... until someone brings a bottle of wine to a dinner and you can't open it. You've never needed a remote, but the new TV came with one. When you warmed a frozen lasagna in the oven, you suddenly realize what pot-holders are for. Etc. And once you have all this stuff, there's none of it you can get rid of, because you are bound to defrost the freezer, mend a tear or polish your shoes again. What would an Ice Age nomad, who carries *everything* he needs in life on his back or makes it on the spot, think of us?

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**Milt Stevens, [miltstevens@earthlink.net](mailto:miltstevens@earthlink.net)**

In *Broken Toys #42*, you are wondering about the purpose of life. That should keep you occupied for a while. The structure of the usual question implies that there is one purpose to life. There could also be none, or several.

Maybe you can't really have no purpose at all, because you would still have to survive. If you aren't going to bother to survive, then there are no further problems.

You can have several purposes, depending on context. You can have purposes for yourself alone, for yourself in relation to society, or yourself in relation to an abstract system. I think it was in existentialism that you got to choose your own purpose. I wonder whatever happened to existentialism.

For most of my life, I don't think I really thought about there being any overall purpose to life. Life was a matter of getting past the problems of each day until you reached some place you might actually wish to be. I had only the vaguest notion of what that place might be.

I think I always wanted to be a literary gentleman in the country. I suppose that is pretty much what I am now. I could describe myself as a professional science fiction fan. Fandom, fanzines, and books are what I deal with. I don't have to pay attention to much else. I still do pay attention to the rest of the world so I will have something to write about in my locs.

Part of me also wanted to grow up to be a character in an Oscar Wilde play. I must have been born that way, but I didn't realize it for a few decades. I love being a wiseass. I love making flippant comments. I think I'd rather make a clever comment than an accurate one.

Previously, I've mentioned that my reading software has problems with some of your fonts. In this issue it is with the letters, but not with your comments on the letters. In Adobe, you might try View/Read Out Loud and then View/Read This Page. The letters produce gibberish. I copied some of that text and pasted it in Word, and it looked like gibberish. Word couldn't identify it as a font. I know my letter was originally written in Word, so it has been converted to something else that doesn't work for me.

The Voice function in later versions of Adobe doesn't seem to work well with my early version of Adobe Acrobat, and there's nothing I can do about it but revert to a few, commonplace fonts, which would rob me of much of the pleasure I get in publishing a zine. Now, if I were a certain type of Britfan, I would be purblind to the value of anything but words, and gripe about having to change fonts at all, for anything, or leaving margins or spaces between paragraphs ... I might even argue about the proper spacing after the period. About the only thing I could do about your problem is send you the Word doc instead of a .pdf. You can then change the whole damn thing into Arial 12, if you want.

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**Paul Skelton, [paulskelton2@gmail.com](mailto:paulskelton2@gmail.com)**

*Aaaargggghhh! You monthly publishers are doing my head in! I had two zines to which I owed a response. I just wrote a LoC on the latest Vibrator, so figured now I could relax a bit and re-read Banana Wings so that I could finally catch up, went into my inbox to find one of Graham's e-mails to respond and attach it to (always safest, I find) and there discovered that Broken Toys 42 had arrived. Christine Lavin sang of being in "a constant state of want." I seem to be in a constant state of owing response. I appreciate that this need of mine to respond (hopefully in an interesting manner) to every issue of every interesting fanzine that I get is a cross I have to bear because I have a need for it to be so, and is not of your doing ... but have you ever thought of going six-weekly? I recently downloaded your first ten issues and binged on them over a 3-night period. Excellent stuff, and thoroughly enjoyed ... particularly as, since you didn't send them to me, I don't have this inbuilt need to respond to them. I would by now have downloaded the next ten issues, except I have not yet found a way to delete the first ten. I have them on my network drive, so have no need to clutter my tablet with them. Ian Maule, at the recent Barcon, said I might need to connect my tablet to my laptop, and delete them from there, but this seems awfully primitive. [From earlier e-mail]*

That was supposed to have nothing to do with my eventual response, but then this eventual response doesn't seem to have much to do with whatever that eventual response might have been...and some of the seeds of this are in there, so I figured I'd best just continue.

Unfortunately Cas (rather selfishly I thought) chose that very weekend to come down with a recurrence of an abscess under one of her teeth. This meant that household chores had to take precedence whilst she lay (wracked) on her bed of pain. And there could be no consumption of alcohol (got to watch those drink-driving levels) whilst I held myself ready to run her after lunch to the emergency dentist in Urmston, and then dash back to the pharmacy in our local Sainsbury's before it closed at 1600 hours. Sunday opening times can be a bugger! So nothing got typed and no response was made. Which brings us forward to today (the following Wednesday), though in the meantime I took Ian's advice, connected the tablet to my laptop and deleted your first ten issues. I then downloaded the next ten, and started reading them.

Firstly, somewhere in those issues was a discussion of e-reading and e-zines. I actually prefer an eReader for books, but not for fanzines. For fanzines I like paper copies, because when reading them I can put little pencil asterisks in the margins, and providing I get to it promptly, these will guide my response (I don't have to LoC books). I can't do that with e-zines. Actually, I probably could if I knew how ... but I don't so I can't. So to adequately respond to *Broken Toys 42* I'd have to re-read the whole thing, and make notes the while ... which isn't really where my mood is at just at the moment.

I admit to being a bit puzzled by deleting the issues as you read them. Did you tear up copies of *Mota* and *Spanish Inquisition* after you read them? Or is it the paper that makes fannish writing worth keeping? There's no harm done, however, since back issues of *Broken Toys* can be downloaded from eFanzines at any time. As long as eFanzines is online, anyway. That's likely long enough for us.

[The rest of Skel's letter has been rather severely edited because of its great length and certain digressions. But I think I've retained its meaning in full. By the way, Skel says he didn't tear up his old fanzines. But he can explain all that in his *next* loc ... when he writes it.]

The other thing I read there was where you mentioned getting around to writing "When Willowdale Burned," which of course appeared in the very issue of *Banana Wings* to which I have yet to get around to responding, but to which Phillip Turner responded in your fanzine. He conflated this with your piece about the fire inspectors in *Broken Toys*, with some deft, wry humour. I had intended to do something similar, but rather in my response to *Banana Wings*, and definitely not with a humorous slant.

I intended to VIEW WITH ALARM. But now I don't think I should. No, more accurately to say that I still think I should, but not in the pages of *Banana Wings*, but rather in a letter to you.

What I don't feel wrong about though is my response to *When Willowdale Burned* although at the same time I am aware that what gets written in fanzines is only ever part of the story. Even so, let's look at what got printed in that *Banana Wings* article. You wrote...

"The water from the phosphorus would have ignited the potassium instantly. Most likely, the burning metal would have dried out the phosphorous enough for it to ignite too, a few moments later. In fact, there might have just been a whopping big explosion that shot flaming shrapnel in all directions."

Then you go on to say...

“It would have been a hell of a headline next day, you have to admit – and the authorities would quite unreasonably have laid the entire blame at my feet, as though I *meant* for someone to smash the jars and endanger the neighbourhood.”

Earlier on you wrote...

“I had no doubt the frantic janitors would point their fingers squarely at the previous occupant of the house, which would be me, and I would be held responsible for all the unimaginably horrible consequences.”

...which seemed to me initially to imply that you wouldn't really have felt responsible had those dire consequences taken place in those specific circumstances. But the thing is, Taral, surely it would be **your** fault. You'd be the one responsible for the stuff being there in the first place.

It's down to you to make sure that the stuff *isn't* there. Which is where I really become worried, because you say the stuff is still, some twenty-five years later, sitting in your kitchen, and you ask...

“But what if I ever have to move again?”

What worries me is what if you **don't** have to move again?

You detail the steps you have taken in your unsuccessful attempts to dispose of it over those twenty-five years. Do you expect to have another twenty-five years to do it, and yea or nay, do you anticipate any better success? When the inevitable happens, have you taken any steps to ensure, as a last resort, that appropriate posthumous steps are taken to safeguard these elements?

I am reminded of the time we were clearing out Brian Robinson's house after he died, and we found a hand grenade. Cas was all set to pull out the pin, just to see what it did, on the grounds that it *had* to be a dummy. I knew Brian, so screamed, “For Christ's sake don't!” We handed it in at Stockport central police station ... which later had to be evacuated when they discovered it was indeed a live grenade.

Later they picked us up in a squad car and drove us round to Brian's place to ensure there was nothing else dangerous. There they spotted lots of bullet cartridge cases. Brian was a pistol enthusiast and belonged to a gun club. He loaded his own ammunition. There was a jar of mercury on the mantelpiece. They asked about his pistol and I pointed out the safe in the front room, saying that if there was one it would surely be in there. They took the safe away too.

Thanks for the “warning,” but I think it is probably stronger than necessary. For one thing, the chemicals are dangerous, but not quite on the scale I wrote about. The major danger would be to anyone who was next to the trash dumpster if anything happened. The row houses were in fact too far away to be in any danger. And while the smoke from a fire would likely have been toxic, it would not be dense enough to harm anyone a few yards distant. The danger was exaggerated for effect in what was, clearly, an imaginary scenario.

I have also devised another plan to get rid of the damned stuff. There's a firehouse not too far from here. I've been going by and eyeing the station, trying to decide how to get in and if there's anyone around to talk to. Once I decide to bite the bullet, I'll haul the stuff there and ask the fire department to take the stuff. Or I could just chicken out, and leave the stuff in a box with a note, “please take in these dangerous substances – their name is Bruce.”

Late update. A while ago, I *did*, in fact, visit the local firehouse and asked them what to do about my dangerous chemical situation. They were curiously unexcited, but gave me a city number to phone and ask for a pick-up. Apparently, it will cost me nothing and it didn't seem as though I'd be in any trouble.

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## ***R-Laurraine Tutihasi, [laurraine@me.com](mailto:laurraine@me.com)***

We still enjoy *Rocky Jones Space Ranger*, though I'm sure we'd both admit the stories are rather silly. Neither of us saw *Science Fiction Theater* growing up, but we got a set on DVD and enjoy them. They are not technically well made, but the stories themselves frequently are good, in our opinion. We also enjoy the introductory bits.

I don't mind Stan Lee popping up in Marvel-related movies. I usually don't notice, just as I usually didn't notice Hitchcock's appearances in his movies.

There are places other than churches and registry offices where one can get married. I've been to weddings at hotels and people's back yards as well as in churches, not to mention conventions.

One can be married on shipboard, by the captain ... at least in movies. And I've seen news video of couples married after popping out of airplanes, and parachuting to the ground. I know couples have exchanged vows underwater, in scuba gear. They've probably been married in emergency wards, moments before death. About the only places people have *not* been married yet are fresh train wrecks, meat packing plants and the planet Mars.

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## ***Steve Jeffery, [srjeffery@aol.com](mailto:srjeffery@aol.com)***

I stay well off Facebook, Twitter and the rest of social media. The best advice I ever saw for any of these was, "Don't read the comments."

I haven't looked at my LiveJournal (remember that) account in years, and I probably don't know how to log in anymore. I wonder how just many of these dormant accounts are out there, littering the Web like discarded sweet wrappers. Linked-In is just confusing. I've never really got a handle on it, and I'm well past the point where I'm thinking about how to enhance my career prospects.

Always a dangerous ploy to give somebody a present of something based around your own sense of nostalgia unless you know they share your tastes, or you know theirs (possibly by sneaking a look at the lower shelves of their book and DVD collections).

I've never watched *Fraggle Rock* (It's a Muppets type thing?), but I know I'm on relatively safe ground with my brother where *Danger Mouse* is concerned (and my father likewise for anything to do with Rupert Bear) but neither really share my enthusiasm for Winnie the Pooh (before Disney ruined it by covering it with saccharine). Still, it would be boring if we all liked the same thing. It would probably also mean the marketing suits had finally brainwashed us all into submission. Long live weird, unexplained (and unexplainable) idiosyncratic passions.

Cleaning my keyboard at work is a daily ritual. I really should stop eating breakfast at my desk while catching up with emails. Every time I turn it over and give it a good shake, a cupful of cereal crumbs falls out. And then I have to clean the desk.

I can deal with cleaning the soap, although that usually takes care of itself whenever I drop in it the bath, but I didn't expect to have to clean the bottles of various cleaning fluids under the bathroom sink. Even the washing machine needs to be cleaned occasionally. How on earth does the little compartment you put soap powder in become so dirty after a while? It's only had water and soap in it, after all. Strange.

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## **Lloyd Penney, [penneys@bell.net](mailto:penneys@bell.net)**

Thanks for issue 42 of *Broken Toys*...it's taken me a while to get to it, but I can respond before you get issue 43 out. Time to get going.

You might have had longer to respond than you think. I have some material prepared for *BT 43*, but I'm not remotely ready to publish, and I'm *deep* in procrastination mode. Of late, I've been drawing and watching movies rather than writing. I think I've only completed two articles this month, which is not at all enough to fill an issue, and time is running out. I suspect the October issue will be quite late ... although it's in no danger of being published after the November issue, at least. At this rate, I wonder if I'll even make it to issue 50?

No problem with sadness, ennui and loss. I hope putting it all onto electrons in this issue is cathartic. If life is in freefall, or you've lost some direction, or can't figure out what to do first, I rely on lists. Rather than try to keep track of all my things to do, I make lists. I think I spend less effort and time trying to see what I need to do, and more time actually doing things. The lists give me some direction. Definitely colder than last weekend, which was colder than the weekend before. On the radio, I've heard a four-letter word beginning with S... snow. It's coming.

Soon it will be time to break out the skis and install the seat heater for Traveling Matt.

This coming weekend, we have two shows to go to...one is a sale of movie props and clothing supply down near the lakeshore, and the other is an antique show. I understand your remarks about Facebook; while I largely enjoy the site, thanks to a few bigmouths who are only too eager to take offense at nearly nothing, I will take a vacation from the site until my outlook improves, and the bigmouth moves on to other prey.

I may go to a coin show this coming weekend ... weather is what will make up my mind. I can stand a bit of chill, but sitting in the rain for an hour each way is another matter. At the moment, Sunday is looking a little better than Saturday.

Ned Brooks' passing was a shock for all of us. I'd never met him, and I wish I had. We will miss his writing, and his assorted publications. I would wonder what would happen to his amazing house-sized book collection.

I believe his family has some idea of its worth and what to do with it. As long as they don't ship it to me! I have enough problems with too many books.

The local...it's been a while since there's been a Katz zine. Hope it arrives soon. As far as clan goes, I am from the sept Thomson on my mother's side, clan Campbell of Argyll. We seem to need to own things, which goes against the apparent fannish packrat status. So much of what you want can be downloaded, so music and movies and TV episodes can be seen online, and we don't really need the DVDs those MP3 files are written upon. Yet, we seem to like having the DVD and case and liner notes.

There have been times where I'd like to buck the trend, and ditch my fanzine collection. Maybe I'd give them to Murray Moore so they wouldn't be too far away, and I wouldn't have to cart them too far.

I'm not sure Murray would let you see them again. They're protected by Goblin spells, I hear.

My loc... I am not sure if Chris Garcia's Exhibition Hall is defunct, but with Chris now being the father of twins, I am sure there won't be too many Garciazines in the future.

I've done what I can, and I have to get it out, so here you are. Always looking for more from you.

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## **Brad Foster, [bufoster@juno.com](mailto:bufoster@juno.com)**

Issue 42 opens here noting it is "late September," so I'll open this a month later, noting it is "late October" for my loc. And, I'm really only finding time for this after the local park Arts Fest flooded-out and had to be cancelled. So I have a weekend open I had not planned on, and am using that to try to catch up on the months and months of backlogged emails and letters that have been stacking up here. Might even get it all answered by the end of Sunday ... then it can all just stack up again for a few months ... as seems to happen more and more often, lately.

I'm with you there, in a way, on feeling I am just not getting done those things that I both *want* to get to, and *need* to get done. I need to come up with some project that puts my ass at the drawing board each day to actually *draw*, rather than the million and one distractions that seem to get in the way of making a living. Oh, and maybe not working so hard to correct everyone who is "wrong" on Facebook would free up some time, too. I'll have to look into that idea as well.

The flooding that opened up this weekend also threatened to pour water into the studio once again. We had the same problem last Spring, and the pumps and hoses and such that I meant to fix and get installed properly have been sitting, untouched, all summer – until now that I *have* to get it done. This is no way to run what used to be an organized life.

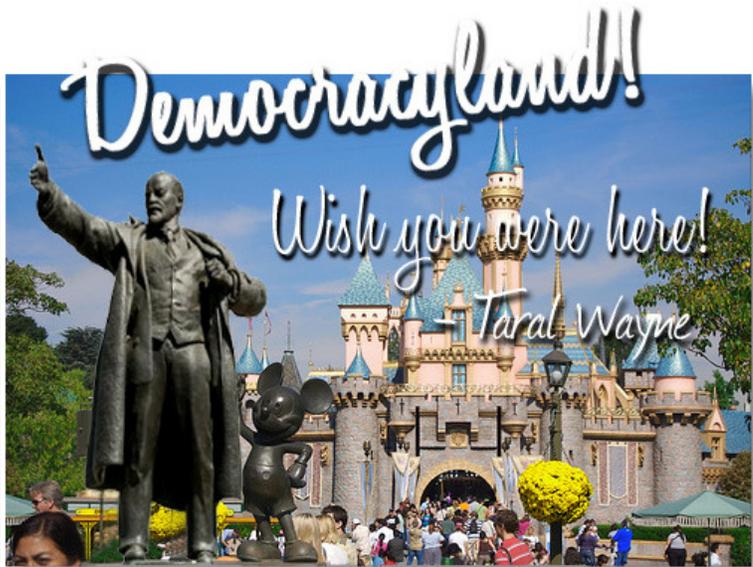
Heck – you don't need to read any more of the usual wandering, sad excuse for a loc that I usually send. I am going to go draw something, and create something of actual interest. Or, maybe, go file some papers that are stacking up over there ... or organize all those matted prints I need to inventory ... or ... well, something!!!!

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“Once again, I would like to thank the voters, and show my appreciation to the concom for leaving this lovely award in the dumpster where I was able to find it!”

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Eric Mayer



Walt Disney is not infrequently cited as the quintessential American businessman, a perfect example of the unique Yankee Know-How and the Entrepreneurial Spirit. As far as it goes, he may have been. He certainly believed that *he* possessed those virtues, and doubtless he seized every opportunity to employ them for his own gain. But just how did this towering figure of Free Enterprise look at *other* people and *their* right to a self-actualized life?

Perhaps a statement that Disney made in an interview about the construction of Epcot center in October 1966 will enlighten us. His original plans were sweeping. Epcot was to be not just an exhibition for environmental futurism, but a living, working community with permanent residents. He made this statement to the press just a couple of months before his death, so I believe it can be construed as his final word on social engineering.

*“It’s like the city of tomorrow ought to be, a city that caters to the people as a service function. It will be a planned, controlled community, a showcase for American industry and research, schools, cultural and educational opportunities. In Epcot there will be no slum areas because we won’t let them develop. There will be no landowners and therefore no voting control. People will rent houses instead of buying them, and at modest rentals. There will be no retirees. Everyone must be employed. One of our requirements is that the people who live in Epcot must help keep it alive.”*

Let’s look at this vision of the future, item by item.

*“It’s like the city of tomorrow ought to be, a city that caters to people as a service function.”*

In plain English, this means the city does not belong to the people, nor will it be *of* or *by* the people, as either Pericles or Lincoln would have advocated. It will be sold or rented to them on someone else’s terms.

*“It will be a planned, controlled community, a showcase for American industry and research, schools, cultural and educational opportunities.”*

This means private interests like Monsanto, Burger King, Microsoft – or Disney – will decide by absolute right what your children will be taught, whether you will have a minor league hockey team in your neighborhood, and which motion pictures will be shown in theaters. There will be no vox populi.

*“In Epcot there will be no slum areas because we won’t let them develop.”*

Harder to be sure about that one. Disney might have meant that enough money would be spent on behalf of the poor to ensure they lived in conditions the rest of us would be comfortable with. But his complete statement hardly bears this out. More likely, he meant that the poor would be expelled from Democracyland, to become someone else’s problem. Or they would just be ignored. In reality, then, the slums would still exist but be ignored –officially off the books. Drawing attention to them would be criminal disinformation.

*“There will be no landowners and therefore no voting control.”*

This one is easy. Property will belong to the state or corporation, and there will be no democratically elected municipal government.

*“People will rent houses instead of buying them, and at modest rentals.”*

There will be no right of private property. People will have homes only as long as the state or corporation allows them to, and at whatever fee Democracyland sets. There will be no market competition in a real estate.

*“There will be no retirees. Everyone must be employed.”*

This one is a bit enigmatic. Surely he wasn’t suggesting euthanasia as soon as anyone can no longer hold a job? Perhaps all Disney meant was that anyone without gainful employment would be expelled from Democracyland. In that case, one has to assume that the rule extends to the unemployed and those who are, for whatever reason, unemployable – the crippled, the senile, the autistic and, of course, all artists, musicians and writers. Even so, who decides what employment is? Is a volunteer social worker or nurse actually just “out of work?” How about politicians, since they obviously have no function in Democracyland?

*“One of our requirements is that the people who live in Epcot must help keep it alive.”*

Mandatory civic duties. This is an open invitation to abuse. Fines for not voting, penalties for not mowing your lawn every Saturday morning, daily calisthenics at work, your children enlisted into the Little League or some other team sport whether they like it or not – these are just minor nuisances, perhaps. But more sinister obligations are possible, such as military service, spying on your neighbors, and compulsory membership in The Party.

Holy Gated Communities, Batman!

Disney was hardly an unusual member of his species. Scratch the surface of many icons of the American business tradition, and you will discover an egotistical control-freak who thinks he is smart enough to determine how the rest of us should live. Edison belonged to this tribe, as did Ford. Next time anyone tells you that some prominent Capitalist has our best interests in mind, think about those towering examples of the genus and ask yourself how genuine their concern for the common man really was.

Or, like Disney, were they nothing more than run-of-the-mill Marxists hiding behind their immense personal fortunes?

# Every Good Neighborhood Has One

-A Halloween Story-



When I was a boy, the year drew to a close when the days shortened, when the air grew frosty at night, when leaves turned gold and fell and the wind taught them to play cat-and-mouse games around our feet. Soon, it was once again Halloween, a magical night of liberation and revelry before the paralyzing snow. That was long ago, however ... before Halloween was signaled by the cheap holiday merchandise that appeared on the shelves at Wal-Mart and Target just days after Columbus Day.

I was only eleven or twelve, and already beginning to wonder if I was too old for Trick or Treating. After all, my big brother Doug was just two years older than me, and already he was saving up to buy a car the moment he was able to get a driver's license. Every week he would show me a picture in one of his racing magazines. "That's the car I want," he'd say, pointing to a sporty, rear-engine Corvair Monza, or a convertible Mustang. He looked longingly at it ... but next week it would be something different. In the end, he bought a second-hand '61 Pontiac Laurentian, which was neither sporty nor fashionable, but *was* cheap.

As well, my dog-eared copies of *Famous Monsters of Filmland*, with their covers falling off from obsessive re-reading, were beginning to seem like kid's stuff. Clearly, I was growing up.

All the same, that year the weather for Halloween was gorgeous – just as though lifted from the pages of a DC comic. A gibbous moon darted from one pearly, backlit cloud to the next, and bare trees stretched their skeletal hands upward to grab for it. Underfoot, thick carpets of leaves skirled with every step. Thankfully, there had been no rain to turn them into a soggy, slippery layer of linoleum.

As usual, I had asked if I could dress up as an astronaut, or an alien. As usual, there were no such costumes for sale, and no one in my family had the know-how to make one, so I ended up dressing as a Beatnik, just like my idol (after John Glen), who was Maynard G. Krebs. When I had first asked to be an astronaut or alien, four years ago, I had had to settle for being a matador: I didn't even know what a matador was. In subsequent years I'd settle for cowboy, pirate, hockey player or ghost ... but my heart was never in it.

Out on the street, all that was forgotten. I didn't care if I was dressed as a horse's ass, as long as I was carrying a sturdy paper shopping bag with string handles from Eaton's or Simpson's, and as long as it was *big* enough for all the candy I could imagine ... and I was an imaginative kid. I went from door to door, sometimes ringing, sometimes knocking, and often in the press of other trick-or-treaters who had their bags held out, open and imploring. Needless to say, one got a lot bruised apples that way – just like the ones you threw away from your school lunch every day – not to mention rice-crispy squares that were doomed to be crushed to lumpy paste at the bottom of your treat bag. But the handfuls of miniature chocolate bars, cellophane-wrapped caramels, orange and black Halloween toffees in twisted wax paper, jawbreakers, Tootsie-Rolls, candy cigarettes, jelly beans, Scotch mints, licorice twists and all the other enticements for the sweet tooth *more* than made up for the occasional disappointment.

A full bag of candy was more precious than a chest of pirate gold! A decent-sized bag was hard to fill, though, taking miles of walking, hours of knocking, and more than self-respecting kid's share of "Oh, aren't *you* cute? Margaret, come here and see this adorable Batman." No "Batman" *ever* wants to be called "adorable." Unfortunately, because it took so much effort to fill your bag, a few of the older kids worked out an easier way. Never mind the Spanish Main, we had our own sort of pirates.

What happened this Halloween happened near the Old Hansen House.

Every good neighborhood has one like it. Normally, the kids of my neighborhood never went near the joint. For one thing, it was on the outskirts of town, at the end of the road, and faced nothing but a wood lot, so it was out of the way to begin with. The most important reason that no kid would be caught dead near it, however, was that it had an uncanny reputation. No one knew the real story – rumour had it that someone was murdered there, or that a demonic cult met in the basement, or that it had been built over an Indian burial ground. We all knew the stories were rubbish, but there was no question that the old house had been abandoned for as long as any of us could remember, and had an undeniably creepy air about it. The downstairs windows were boarded, the shutters hung crooked on their hinges and peering into the widows of the second floor was like looking into the blackness between the stars. The only sensible response to the Old Hansen House was a shudder and a rapid retreat back the way you came.

What most kids didn't know, though, was that they came close to the old Hansen place every day, because of the way the streets wound around back on themselves, so that the grounds in back of the old house were, in fact, on Bradbury Street. If you had ever climbed the five-foot cast-iron fence and penetrated the thicket of twisty old maples between numbers 129 and 131, you would have been able to see the abandoned house was only a stone's throw away. The other side of the lot was a cramped little parkette that not even the pigeons would use. Since Collier's Variety was on the corner of Beaumont, however, only a block away, we kids regularly hung out much closer to the Hansen place than we knew. Because I had once shot a plastic glider into the trees, and didn't have a dollar to buy a new one, I went after it. There was a loose iron paling that I could pull aside, allowing me to squeeze through. I found my glider, all right, but to my dismay found myself looking straight into the fathomless windows of the Hansen House. This was knowledge of some importance, I thought, so naturally I kept it to myself.

It was near this spot, on this particular Halloween, that something a little out of the ordinary happened.

Earlier in the evening, I had almost filled my bag when two older kids, who made no pretense of costumes, came up to me and said, "Give us your bag, squirt, and we won't hurt you."

I wasn't so easy to intimidate as that, so after handing them my bag I bravely demanded, "Just dump it into your own bags, why don't you, and give me the empty one back? I'll be able to start over if you do." I guess I must have given them a scare all right, because that's just what they *did* do.

Having a bag to start over with, at least, I beat a hasty escape in the other direction. But, after collecting only what earlier trick-or-treaters had left behind, my heart was no longer in it. I started back home, returning the way I came. Since I lived at the other end of Bradbury, I turned onto it with my head hung low. When I looked up, I discovered just about the last two people I expected to ever see again, the two candy-thieves! They were walking along Bradbury, sizing up new victims. While I followed them, the thieves innocently passed by several groups of much younger kids. It was quite obvious why. Those kids were escorted by an adult supervisor, who would grind any pirating teens into the pavement had they dared attempt a candy hijacking. Sooner or later, though, they were bound to find another victim.

When their next perfect victim finally appeared, it was opposite the empty stretch on Bradbury. I saw them approach a girl who looked a couple of years younger than myself, wearing a long black dress, as though for a funeral. She was carrying a funny sort of bag, too – not a paper shopping bag like mine, but cloth, and, as far as I could tell from a distance, embroidered. There was something very fishy about the tableau – the two 14-or-15-year-old creeps, and the little girl in her drab get-up.

“Give us your candy, girly!” I heard them say, while the nastier-looking one of the two snatched the bag from her hands. They pushed the girl aside and began pawing through her bag, apparently not finding quite what they expected. They frowned, but after a moment spilled her bag into their own, and strode off, laughing.

There was nothing I could do but watch.

I walked over to the disconsolate girl, and said, “Too bad. The bastards took all my candy too!”

She looked up at me with huge, dark eyes that contained all the melancholy of the world, but she said nothing. I picked her bag up from the sidewalk, and noticed that it was very old and worn. In fact, the girl herself seemed rather old and worn, somehow, though she was scarcely nine or ten. Her skin was pale, her hair drawn back into pigtails; the dress she wore was strange and old-fashioned. I guessed that she had been made up as a witch, perhaps ... and had lost her pointy hat and broom.

She took the bag from me, careful not to touch my hand.

“What’s your name,” I asked? “I’m Russell. I live down the street ... that way.” I pointed.

She looked down the street, forlornly, then turned her gaze back to me. But she still said nothing.

“Are you okay?” I asked. She didn’t reply. I noticed the chill, then, and realized it was late enough that I should be getting home. On impulse I said, “Hold out your bag!”

She didn’t respond to that, either, so I pantomimed with my bag. Reluctantly, she imitated me, holding her bag open too. I nodded and poured half the contents of my bag into hers.

The girl looked up at me with such astonishment that it made me feel real good. I emptied the rest of my bag into hers, and was rewarded with a genuine smile from her pale, pinched face.

Then she turned from me, walked toward the iron palings that fenced off the Hansen place, and *passed through them!*

At least that’s what I *thought* she did. Once I screwed up the courage, I went and looked for that loose paling that I had once pulled aside to squeeze through. Surely *that* was the explanation for the girl’s disappearance. I found it, all right, though I must have not been seeing straight, since it was not exactly where I thought I had seen her go through the fence. Still, that *had* to be the explanation!

All the way home, I mulled over the experience, wondering whether what I thought had happened had really happened. Every good neighborhood has a haunted house, it goes without saying. But a *real* haunted house, with *real* ghosts? That’s just the stuff of stories.

All the same, I wouldn’t have cared to be either of those candy-pirates after they ate what they stole from her . It couldn’t have been healthy.