

SPACE CADET

#16

(OR: THE AGING OLD FHART NOSTALGIC TIME WASTER GAZETTE)



FEET BE A'SHRINKING

It's my perzine, and I'll write about what I feel like writing. But come on now... feet? Am I serious?

Actually I was thinking about shoes. I never was any good with shoes. For decades I wore black hushpuppies because they were relatively cheap, relatively comfortable, and the closest I could find to running shoes. I don't even know if they make hushpuppies anymore. All I know is I used to wear out the heels within a month and I'd walk around with my heels at an angle for several months till I broke down and bought another pair.

But once I landed a job in the warehouse I had to wear heavy steel-toed boots. I took to wearing running shoes the rest of the time. Darn comfortable. Makes me wonder why I ever bothered with hushpuppies. The pleasure of slipping out of steel-toed boots at the end of the working day into running shoes was a great and instant relief, sometimes the only time at work when I smiled.

Now that I'm retired I wear nothing but running shoes, with one exception. I have a pair of black dress shoes in case I'm going some place where I need to look semi-respectable, but I seldom put them on.

Thing is, I don't have quite the guts to imitate my Dad and wear sneakers all the time, even on 'dress' occasions. He got away with it because he covered his sneakers in black shoe polish & managed to buff it to a fine, glittering shine. Anyone glancing casually at his shoes would think them a pair of peculiar formal loafers, which – come to think of it – is an apt description of my Dad in those days.

Anyway, what puts me in mind of this topic are the two pairs of runners I purchased today. I need wide shoes because my toes are more or less laid side by side (as opposed to those people whose feet look like their toes were pressed in a vice) and I like plenty of wiggle room. The result is almost as if I've been running around barefoot, namely wide toes. My last pair of running shoes were size thirteen triple E wide.

Sigh, this reminds me of a drunk's reaction upon seeing me wearing them on the Skytrain, "*Oh my god, you got clown feet! Those are big feet you got there!*"

"Well, perhaps a bit..."

"No, I mean it! Your feet are gigantic! I never seen such huge feet! Clown feet for sure! Biggest clown feet I ever seen..." and so on and so on.

Wouldn't you know, he was going all the way downtown just like me. I endured forty minutes of this. Ah well, seemed to amuse the other passengers.

The store I went to didn't have size thirteen triple E wide, just size twelve wide. I thought, what the heck, and tried them on. They fit. Hmm.

Be my feet a'shrinking? Should I be worried?

READING MISCOMPREHENSION

I like to read. I've always liked to read. When everyone in my class in Grade school was still stuck with the 'See Spot Jump Jane' books I was reading 'Tom Corbett Space Cadet' juveniles (still have them by the way).

Now that I'm retired, and a brand new multi-million dollar library finished construction half a block away, I'm reading quite a bit. Since August I've read 36 books (from the library that is, not counting the books I bought or the ones already in my collection that I decided to re-read).

Question is, what good do they do me? What am I learning?

Damn near nothing. It all gets poured into my subconscious where it sits gestating, brooding, and otherwise percolating, probably more to the benefit of my mind asleep (influencing my dreams) than serving any useful purpose to my awake self.

In fact, if you interrupt me while I'm reading and ask me what I've just read I have to glance back at the last few paragraphs to come up with an answer, thus confirming the suspicion of myriad teachers and quite a few bosses that I possess virtually no conscious mind at all, other than a drifting, day dreaming haziness which floats randomly about in la-la land.

True enough. I like using my imagination. I like using other people's imagination. For me to

read a book is to share someone else's viewpoint, to see events through their eyes, to experience what I myself can never experience. In a sense I abandon myself completely and become that other person. Books take me out of my own humdrum reality and stir my sense of wonder. This is the secret behind my addiction to reading, the constant search for fresh new wonders.

I don't read for a practical purpose. To accomplish something. To prepare myself.

I read for the very experience of reading. The process of reading. The act of reading. The sport of reading. The sheer joy of reading. I read **BECAUSE I ENJOY READING.**

I guess, in modern parlance, I immerse myself in a virtual reality triggered by mere words on printed paper or glowing screen.

I'd even go so far as to say reading is – for me – a form of conscious dreaming, a means of entering another person's dream state. (Hmmm, have the makings of a potentially lucrative cult religion here... hmmm...)

Or more simply put, lest the men in white coats come for me, I read for fun.

Even so, for the sake of reassuring worried relatives and friends, I've always claimed I retain at least one useful impression or fact from every book I've read.

Is this true? Or am I fooling myself?

I thought it would be an interesting exercise to list the titles of the 36 books (as much as I can recover them from the library receipts – no authors noted) and record the principle impression, lesson or fact I derived from each.

Note that most are histories. I like history.

BERLIN AT WAR: By the end of the war 25% of the population consisted of badly treated slaves. People knew what was going on.

THE HITLER I KNEW: And you thought your boss was a manipulative bastard...

LORD HAW HAW: THE ENGLISH VOICE OF TREASON: A lifetime of seeking the main chance and always making the wrong choices.

A HISTORY OF SPACE EXPLORATION: Presented so drily it utterly fails to capture the excitement of the day.

HITLER'S ARCTIC WAR: What was he thinking? Poor Finland! Only Hitler for a friend. With friends like these...

THE MONUMENTS MEN: A handful of men during WWII rescuing war-damaged architectural wonders about which neither side gave a damn.

TWILIGHT AT THE WORLD OF TOMORROW: 1939 world's fair: nasty political football, cost overruns, exploitation of 'primitives', carny atmosphere with bare breasts galore, yet somehow a celebration of a wonderful future that never came.

THE LOST HISTORIES: A book about lost books and lost libraries. At least, I think that's what it was about, I forget. Hmm, could there be a connection?

THE AIRFIX BOOK OF SCALE MODELLING: Now I know why I'm so poor at making plastic models.

THE MEDIEVAL WORLD AT WAR: Constant evolution and change in tactics and technology, quite a surprise to me.

WAR MADE NEW: The impact of new technologies on war at key periods in history. The learning curve for generals always very hard on the troops.

THE CRIMEAN WAR: Misnamed, part of a much larger English/French VS Russia war involving the highest standards of incompetence and criminal leadership.

AMBASSADORS FROM EARTH: Early space probes and the highly individualistic near-lunatic scientists who created them.

THE BATTLE OF THE ATLANTIC: No way in hell will I ever go down in a submarine.

TERRIBLE EXILE: THE LAST DAYS OF NAPOLEON. A fake imperial court, crammed in a country cottage, rife with pettiness and decaying, megalomaniacal protocol. Sad. Pathetic.

SPARTACUS ROAD: A JOURNEY: A delightful retracing of a desperate army's meanderings, delightful because of the historical trivia associated with each stop. Sucked to be a slave, but then I already knew that.

CITY OF THE RAM-MAN: No, not a tribute to the porno industry in Los Angeles, but a sketchy reconstruction of an ancient Egyptian city (where the ram god was worshipped). Fact: ancient Egyptians constantly recycled their buildings.

ROME AND JERUSALEM: Judaism accepted till the great revolt. Then viewed with suspicion. The second revolt in the time of Hadrian, with violence by Jews against Greek neighbours from Alexandria to Antioch, triggered a massive revulsion against Judaism, the true beginnings of modern anti-Semitism.

FINEST YEARS: CHURCHILL AS WARLORD: Damned useful 19th century-minded sort of chap, but contrary to modern myth, seldom popular during the war, and increasingly insignificant to the war's direction once America got involved.

GASTROANOMALIES: Illustrations taken from 1950s cook books and described on the basis of appearance alone. Laughed so hard my diaphragm hurt for days.

THE GERMAN CENTURY: Many amazing photographs, but I begin to see why the Tarzan books portrayed the Germans as supreme villains. Racism and aggression engrained in upper-class culture from Kaiser on.

VANCOUVER'S EXPO 86: Dull book makes a (relatively) dull world's fair even duller. I thought it a very superior PNE, but I liked Expo 67 in Montreal better.

OUT OF THIN AIR: Our atmosphere's varying oxygen level is responsible for numerous mass extinctions. Next guaranteed mass extinction due in 250 million years. Darn, I wanted a long retirement...

THE SHARK AND THE JELLY FISH: Complexity of nature told from the point of view of the creatures involved. For some reason I found this dull and uninteresting.

THE PROFESSIONAL APPROACH TO MODEL RAILROADING: Good thing I never tried to build a model railroad. Hopeless task for someone like me. Nice photos of layouts though.

THE CARS OF PULLMAN: Yep, photographic history of Pullman railroad carriages. Some very opulent. Not interested in the technical details.

WINGS ON MY SLEEVE: Autobiography of 'Winky' Brown, world record holder for different types of aircraft test flown (more than 1,000). Amazing how many bad designs there were.

VESUVIUS: A BIOGRAPHY: Record of multiple eruptions by what is still one of the most dangerous volcanoes on Earth. Now I know why they say "See Naples and die."

RIVER MONSTERS: Each chapter provides further details about particular episodes in the TV series. Stunning postscript, most of the fish filmed are now extinct or extremely endangered.

THE SHAH: Bought into national belief everything internal caused by British or American manipulation, yet insisted on micromanagement to detriment of democracy or even free will. Victim of his own delusions. Basically a twit.

TERRY JONE'S MEDIEVAL LIVES: Medieval women quite forward, even modern, till myth of frailty & lack of desire began to take hold. Joan of Arc burned, not for political 'witchcraft' (no evidence), but for cross-dressing (jailers offered her choice of nudity or men's clothing).

WORLD WAR I IN CARTOONS: Not very funny, but surprisingly apt commentary at times, mixed with embarrassingly obvious propaganda.

SHAKESPEARE: Now I know who wrote Shakespeare's plays. He did. Elizabethan England a police state. Spies & informers everywhere. He had to be cautious all his life.

THE WORLD'S WORST WARSHIPS: A circular, dinner-plate-like hull is a stupid idea. Putting most of the armour above the water-line not good either. Putting it too low, as in the Bismark, even worse, very bad for the crew. Steam-powered submarines, forget it.

TALK SHOW: New York Times columns by Dick Cavett, former talk show host. Did you know John Wayne was a huge fan of the plays of Noël Coward? I sure as hell didn't.

THE HORSES OF ST. MARKS: Stolen from Constantinople by the Venetians at the instigation of a vengeful commander by name of Dolondo. He hated the Byzantines. They hated him. But he had a good eye for horse sculpture.

To conclude: an eclectic mix, basically whatever caught my eye as I wandered amid the shelves. I find that if the subject seems interesting, the contents of the book will probably be worth reading unless the author is clueless at presenting interesting material in an interesting manner. Sometimes fascinating information is buried deep, never to be retrieved, beneath a thick shell of tedium and mind-dulling elaboration. Academic writers especially are often guilty of this. I prefer writers who write to communicate as opposed to impressing their peers and justifying their tenure. Any time I hear a historian scornfully described as a 'populist' I know he's the writer for me.

Anyway, my conscious mind, being so forgetful and shallow, may not benefit much from my reading, but I like to think my subconscious self is a marvel of erudition. Pity it only shows up in my dreams.

LOIN RIPPING TIME

One year and seven months after developing a hernia, I've finally been informed I'm tentatively scheduled for an operation at St. Paul's hospital on Thursday, December 8th.

Meanwhile, indulging in my second childhood, I've ordered ten early issues of FAMOUS MONSTERS OF FILMLAND via Ebay. This will, including FMs currently in my possession, give me 42 out of the first 50 issues. I plan to put the

new arrivals aside and not open them till Christmas, reading one per day in order to prolong the childish pleasure of rediscovering part of my youthful joys.

Well may you ask: what has FAMOUS MONSTERS OF FILMLAND got to do with a hernia operation?

Simple. Through ordering the magazines I also rediscovered the simple excitement of looking forward to Christmas, of wishing time would hurry up so the magic day would arrive as soon as possible.

However, contemplating my first ever operation puts a brake on things. Suddenly I hope time slows down, at least till I've wrapped my brain around the concept of being cut open and my internals handled by someone who thinks he knows what he's doing. Not to mention the netting "*firmly anchored by scar tissue*" to be left inside. And the modern business of being stapled shut rather than sewn up. The more I think about it the more I sound like someone's craft project.

I'll be happy when it's over and done with, and then I'll plead for time to speed up to Christmas, but at the moment I'm in more of a plodding mood.

I'll tell you one thing, if I say anything at all prior to going under, it'll be "*Right side! It's on the right side! Not the left! The right!*" And I'll point too...

WHAT'S A LIBRARY?

I have the impression a lot of people don't know. Sure, they've heard of public libraries, but a personal library? Why would anyone have books in their house? What for?

Personally, I can't conceive of a house without books, ideally with an entire room devoted to the collection. Books are useful. Books are entertaining. And books are friends. Good friends. Not all of them. Just the ones you fell in love with. 'Wind in the Willows' springs to mind. A good book to read on a bad day.

Not too long ago I rearranged my den. I'd bought extra shelving for my hard cover books, and now had space on the older shelving for my pocket book collection which had been languishing in boxes stored in closets for the past five years. At last my SF collection is once more on display and ready of access.

I have been collecting science fiction pocket books for 49 years. I possess more than 700 of them, and this despite periodically culling the collection and giving away books I know I'll never read again, like Frank Herbert's DUNE series, or Farmer's RIVERWORLD series. Not that they weren't good, but I had no further use for them. I did keep the works I particularly liked, Herbert's THE GREEN BRAIN for instance, and Farmer's JESUS ON MARS.

If you separate out the multiple author anthologies, I'm left with about 630 novels and single-author anthologies.

Looking them over, it occurred to me it might be fun to list them according to the number of books per author. This reveals which authors are my favourites (bearing in mind I tend to snap up as many works as I can find of the writers I enjoy most) and perhaps which ones I'm not so keen on. It also reveals my 'taste' in SF, and which way my taste trends: retro? Or contemporary?

In short, I present to you a snapshot of one fan's taste in written science fiction. It may astonish you. It may shock you. It may even ruin my reputation. Hoo boy! What fun!

The best way for you to approach this article is to speed read the names looking for the ones which confirm your own excellent preferences in SF literature but also for the ones which prove I'm a boorish, illiterate bovine turd of a reader incapable of recognizing 'quality' under any circumstances.

You get to chortle with glee as you utter "Hah! Goof choice!" or "What a moron!" You get to form an opinion of me! Of my taste in SF literature! To find multiple hooks for loccing!

And if the very idea of this article bores you silly, then skip it. You don't have to read it.

ONE BOOK EACH: *Christopher Anvil, Piers Anthony, Pierre Barbet, Edward Bellamy, Ben Bova, Pierre Boulle, Leigh Brackett, Marion Zimmer Bradley, Fredric Brown, Anthony Burgess, L. Sprague de Camp, Karl Capek, Terry Carr, Lin Carter, Fred Chappell, Louis Charbonneau, Curt Clark, Stanton A. Coblenz, Juanita Coulson, Samuel R. Delany, August Derleth, Peter Edgar, Christopher Evans, Alan Dean Foster, Pat Frank, Egon Friedell, Raymond Z. Gallun, Rory Harper, Christopher Hodder-Williams, Ernest Hogan, Aldous Huxley, Raymond F. Jones, Dean R. Koontz, Rex Dean Levie, Stanislaw Lem, Frank Belknap Long, Barry M. Malzberg, Laurence Manning, Jack McDevitt, James de Mille, Walter M. Miller, Thomas E. Montelone, John Maddox Roberts, Robert Silverberg, E.E. Doc Smith, Norman Spinrad, Bruce Sterling, Louis Trimble, E.C. Tubbs, Robert Moore Williams, A. Tolstoy, Roger Lee Vernon, Vernor Vinge, & Russ Winterbotham.*

Analysis: A motley collection indeed. Why only one book from these authors? In some cases they only wrote one book (Ed Bellamy), or they wrote but one I was interested in, the others not to my taste (Piers Anthony), or I just wanted a representative sample of their work (Vernor Vinge). Some of these books are outstanding classics of the genre, some early examples, some distinctly and oddly original. A fair number of these authors don't appeal to my taste so I probably won't buy more, some maybe depending on the basic premise, and a few definitely (Karl Capek, Fredric Brown, & August Derleth in particular).

TWO BOOKS EACH: *Greg Bear, Eando Binder, Robert Bloch, John W. Campbell, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Ursula K. LeGuin, Thomas M. Disch, Ralph Milne Farley, Otis Adelbert Kline, Nigel Kneale, Henry Kuttner, John Lymington, A. Merritt, Keith Roberts, Lisa Smedman, George O. Smith, Wilson Tucker, & Howard Waldrop.*

Analysis: Bloch's books are Lovecraft pastiches so of course I had to own them. Farley and Kline are contemporary with Edgar Rice Burroughs and imitate him pretty well. A. Merritt had a stunning imagination and an unreadable style. Kuttner and Smith are interesting early writers. Campbell

better known as an editor, but a good writer. Tucker was a fannish legend for decades. Lisa Smedman I've known for thirty years. Waldrop is a lot of fun. Likewise Conan Doyle. Greg Bear is another writer I enjoy but gave most of his tomes away. Disch is more literary than most but quite fascinating. LeGuin very literary, but not to my taste. All in all, a good bunch of authors.

THREE BOOKS EACH: *J.G. Ballard, A. Bertram Chandler, Avram Davidson, Lionel Fanthorpe, Joe Haldeman, Philip E. High, Keith Laumer, C.S. Lewis, Michael Moorcock, Emil Petaja, Christopher Priest, Michael Shea, & Manly Wade Wellman.*

Analysis: All good writers – with the spectacular exception of Fanthorpe – but I'm especially pleased with Fanthorpe, Shea, and Wellman for the exuberant good fun of their prose. Definitely want to read more by this trio. Ballard I would call an artistic writer, quite surreal.

FOUR BOOKS EACH: *Algis Budrys, Don H. DeBrandt, Robert L. Forward, Alan E. Nourse, John Wyndham.*

Analysis: Budrys and DeBrandt stand out for their innovative, off the wall ideas and style (plus I've known DeBrandt for years). Forward always struck me as a Hal Clement imitator, but in a good way, an accomplished way. Nourse a combination of Lester del Rey & James white, and Wyndham old fashioned but dignified.

FIVE BOOKS EACH: *John Christopher, Gordon R. Dickson, Edmond Hamilton, William Hope Hodgson, Robert E. Howard, Bob Shaw, Robert Sheckley, Eric Frank Russell, Jules Verne, Ian Watson, & H.G. Wells.*

Analysis: Hodgson is mind-bogglingly imaginative in a pre-Lovecraftian manner, but hard to slog through in his longer works. Sheckley wonderfully witty. Shaw and Russell good fun. Ian Watson innovative. Jules Verne and H.G. Wells the progenitors of SF, their works the first true classics, especially Wells. Howard is unique, though spawning myriad copyists.

SIX BOOKS EACH: *Brian Aldiss, Fritz Leiber, & Fred Saberhagen.*

Analysis: Aldiss is original but I think of him as a lesser Ballard, Leiber is very amusing, and Saberhagen's 'Berserkers' endlessly fascinating.

SEVEN BOOKS EACH: *Ray Bradbury, Harry Harrison, & H. Beam Piper.*

Analysis: Bradbury a poetic, dreamy writer I have to be in the proper mood to appreciate, Harrison is somewhere between the early and the late Silverberg, and H. Beam Piper old-fashioned fun.

EIGHT BOOKS EACH: *Robert J. Sawyer, & Jack Vance.*

Analysis: Sawyer is a spritely, fast-moving, idea extrapolator, and Vance a supreme stylist with a wonderfully dry sense of humour and superb power of description.

NINE BOOKS EACH: *Stephen Baxter, Larry Niven, Spider & Jeanne Robinson.*

Analysis: I love the scope of Baxter's vision, the believability of Niven's aliens, and Spider & Jeanne's sense of fun combined with old-fashioned optimism.

TEN BOOKS EACH: *Poul Anderson.*

Analysis: It's odd I have so many, in that he strikes me as a workman-like SF author, a bit pedestrian, but still a good read.

ELEVEN BOOKS EACH: *John Brunner, Hal Clement, Philip Jose Farmer, & Donald A. Wollheim.*

Analysis: Brunner often ordinary but sometimes innovative and brilliant. Clement almost always an excellent treatment of wonderful ideas. Farmer frequently totally off the wall and immensely interesting. Wollheim a good writer of juveniles.

TWELVE BOOKS EACH: *Brian Lumley, Lester del Rey, & A.E. van Vogt.*

Analysis: Lumley does great Lovecraft pastiches, del Rey really good juveniles, and van Vogt, whom I don't particularly like as a writer, is always interesting if not downright puzzling as a unique stylist.

THIRTEEN BOOKS EACH: *Andrew Norton, & James White.*

Analysis: Slightly odd I have so many Norton, since I'm rarely keen on fantasy, but then most of these are her early SF. As for White, I love his Sector General medical novels.

FOURTEEN BOOKS EACH: *H.P. Lovecraft, & Clifford D. Simak.*

Analysis: Two exceptional stylists here. Lovecraft is my all-time favourite weird-mood-evoking author, and Simak a poetic-mood writer similar to Bradbury but with more interesting ideas.

SEVENTEEN BOOKS: *Isaac Asimov.*

Analysis: Asimov I find a bit dry and deplore his lack of aliens. But his early juveniles are great fun, and most of his works are full of great ideas and good humour. A playful writer, both with his ideas and with the readers.

TWENTY BOOKS: *Frederik Pohl.*

Analysis: One of the greatest SF writers, clever and intriguing ideas matched to a smooth, fast-paced style and a wonderful satiric sense. He and C.M. Kornbluth working together brought out the best in each other.

TWENTY-ONE BOOKS EACH: *James Blish, Arthur C. Clarke, & Murray Leinster.*

Analysis: Blish could be mediocre but at times amazingly good. Clarke another fun idea man, always readable, yet with a voice curiously distant from the reader. Leinster, better at stories than novels, always engrossing, pioneering fun; one of the early giants.

THIRTY-THREE BOOKS: *Robert Heinlein.*

Analysis: Say what you will, a superb story teller with an incredible eye for telling detail and innovative, imaginative plots. At least, at first. Can't stand his bloated later novels.

THIRTY-FOUR BOOKS: *Philip K. Dick.*

Analysis: Dick is the SF author I love the most. The paranoia present in his early fiction led to all sorts of mindboggling twists of the 'reality is not what it seems' vein. Unfortunately, like Heinlein, his later books were self-indulgent and barely readable.

SIXTY-ONE BOOKS: *Edgar Rice Burroughs.*

Analysis: 61? I bet you didn't know he wrote that many. And my collection isn't even complete. Granted, he was an example of a professional pulp hack writer with limited skills, but a superb example. What he had in abundance was sheer imagination typical of the 'day-dreaming' mode. Addictive. Like popcorn. Poorly written but absolutely great fun, albeit tainted with the prejudices of the day.

Overall Analysis: I think it's bloody obvious I'm not very «au courant» or «au fait» with contemporary science fiction literature. Worse, my collection is nearly devoid of Canadian SF authors, including certain authors I know personally! Above all, my collection reflects my complete ignorance of what is currently popular, who the bright new writers are, and where SF literature is going.

On the other hand, I know what I like: early genre classics, golden age classics, particular pre-and-post-New Wave authors who concentrate on aliens, alien cultures and alien worlds while scrupulously avoiding angst, introspection, soap opera love affairs and other time wasters. I love anything to do with ancient alien ruins or mysterious alien artifacts. To put it another way, I love old-fashioned/style science fiction because it's proper science fiction: i.e. story telling that entertains and stirs my sense of wonder.

What especially pleases me is the huge number of absolute classics in my collection. To read what I've got is to read the history of SF literature, to learn what SF was all about for its first hundred years or so. Damn good collection.

Alas, most of these authors, let alone their books, are no longer to be found on bookstore shelves. Many out of print. Not to be found except perhaps in used bookstores or on E-Bay. Probably

impossible to build a collection such as mine nowadays.

I mean, where can a newcomer experience what I experienced as a kid? Where can you browse? Examine cover after cover till you see something exciting, then read the blurb to see if the contents of the book purport to match the cover? Then take a chance and buy the pocket book, read it, and find out if you want more by the same author?

Sure, of course you can still do this with contemporary authors. But what about the hoary giants of the genre? To search them out wherever they can be found is impossible if you don't know who they are or what they wrote. Where's exposure to the classics to be discovered? What provides the initial impetus to begin collecting the no longer available?

I'm amazed I'm even asking this. Of course everybody knows Andre Norton or Avram Davidson. Of course everyone knows Eando Binder was actually a pair of brothers. Of course everyone is absolutely familiar with all of the writers mentioned in the above paragraphs. Aren't they?

Unfortunately not. I have the perspective of someone who imprinted on science fiction books more than half a century ago. Today the world is very different.

I suspect there are literate SF fans out there reading many books a year who have never heard of any of the authors whose books I have in my collection.

And that makes me sad.

A POCKET FULL OF HISTORIES: COIN NOTES

By Taral Wayne

(Editor's note: though I've decided to make SPACE CADET much more of a perzine, I continue to include Taral's articles on ancient coins cause I likes ancient coins.)

The coins illustrated in these short written pieces are all from my collection. I've scanned each one, and drawn on my own knowledge to describe the coin, the Kings, the Queens, the Emperors, and the times. Certain statements are my opinions only, even guesswork, but that's alright. After more than 2,000 years in some cases, there's nobody around to sue!

Anastasius, 491-518 AD AE Follis, Post 498 AD Reform



Obv. DN
ANASTASIVS
PF AVG

M/CON
(Constantinopolis
Mint, Δ officina)

The year 498 AD is an important one for Roman coins. It was the year the Emperor Anastasius in Constantinople swept away the old coinage of small bronzes that characterized the old order of Rome.

The follis shown is one of the new coins circulated in Anastasius' reign. It is at once cruder and heavier than the coins of the previous century, and it is dominated by Christian imagery. Instead of gods and personified virtues (such as Faith, Hope, Liberty, Plenty, or Peace) there was a large initial M, which was the Greek numeral for 40. (A half follis had a K, the Greek numeral for 20, and so on.)

"Follis" is not itself the correct name for the coin. It was a Latin word for "bag" and we use it because documents talk of so many bags of bronze coins, but never name the coin itself! Folli after the reform of 496 are sometimes referred to as "nummi", but this is their worth rather than their name. The one shown is 40 nummi, a half follis is 20 nummi, etc. But since "nummi" is only a Greek word for "money", this can't be strictly correct either, even as a name for the worth of the coin rather than for the coin itself. There are times you wish you had a handy 1500 year old ghost to ask...

LETTERS OF COMMENT:

OOK, OOK, SLOBBER DROOL!

**From: TARAL WAYNE, November 23rd, 2011
Rotsler & Faned Awards-winning Fan Artist.**

At last! The zine I always knew you had in you! Well... okay... I didn't know it was in you, but I hoped it was. Space Cadet was relaxed, entertaining, made no demands on my loyalty to any causes and provided one or two hooks for comments. I hope you keep up the good work. To be sure you do, I *won't* send you my complete list of all occasions that Robert J. Sawyer mentioned a street name or well-known Toronto landmark in his fiction... I'm afraid you'd actually *publish it*.

Well, you know how desperate faneds get for material... An epiphany! I started to type "I've been trying to catch up with 'Bob's Church of Slack' ever since I retired..." when it struck Me: 'Bob' (founder of the Church of Slack) and 'BOB' (Boring Old Bastard). I've been advocating we fanzine fanactivists stop being BOBs. Obviously the solution is to convert into Bobs!

Hmm, I'm convinced I still possess a copy of the Church of Slack Holy Writ somewhere in my collection. I hope to find and review it in a future issue of SC. Only by slacking off and seeking extreme comfort can we transform from BOBs into Bobs. I seem to recall one of the most important rules was to always wear a comfy sweater....

OSFiC never had a policy of admitting members only by invitation. I don't know where Lloyd would have gotten that idea. It is true that membership in the club didn't automatically mean acceptance in every clique or an invitation to every party. No one was welcome in every private shindig -- that included me and Mike Glicksohn as much as anyone. I wasn't invited to his poker games and he didn't come along on our all-night walks around the city and down in dark ravines. Each to his own. The fanzine group I belonged in was more than a little elitist, I admit. Patrick and Phil would likely have made sure that newcomers -- who weren't politically correct on any number of touchy

subjects -- felt *most* unwelcome. Victoria and I were not especially receptive to unfamiliar faces who showed little interest in fanzine publishing, and wanted to talk about Hammer films or Battlestar Galactica. It wasn't that any of us didn't enjoy a wide variety of media or genre, but our main interests were clearly focused. But, I suppose weird distortions of the true situation must have gotten around. God knows, we had a few odd ideas about some of the other groups in town...

My Dad was born in 1930, which would have made him a little young to be fighting Nazis. He could have joined up and fought Commies instead, but the Korean War was comparatively small and not an occasion for the draft in Canada. One of the interesting but little known pieces of trivia is that despite two global struggles and a sometimes enthusiastic participation in England's "splendid little wars," there has only been about 18 months of conscription in Canada... *total!*. If there was a reason to fight, there were usually enough volunteers.

Not only that, but those who were conscripted did not serve overseas but were used to man defensive positions in Canada, such as the gun batteries in Stanley Park and Point Grey area here in Vancouver. The conscripted were popularly known as 'Zombies' for some reason or another.

An entire troop train of 'Zombies' heading North in B.C. mutinied and stopped the train in the middle of nowhere when rumour spread they were going to be forced to join the Pacific War. Using RCAF fighter planes to strafe the train was briefly entertained as an option to force the mutineers back into line, but instead an officer travelled up the track with written assurances nobody was going to be sent overseas (or punished for the mutiny) so the train resumed its travel and that was that.

Wish I had more coins to write about. Unfortunately, the cost of collecting has soared. Silver denarii of common type that could once be had for around \$40 are \$100, or even \$125, now. I haven't bought anything in a long, long time.

Also, over time I bought coins of increasingly better quality. I used to browse through numbers of unidentified bronzes, looking for something unusual, or that gave a hint of what it might be. Most coins I passed over – no amount of cleaning, scraping, soaking or sand-blasting was ever going to reveal enough information that would disclose its true nature. Then, when I least expected, I would come across a coin with a distinctive beard or schnozz that could only belong to a certain emperor. With that foothold, I could reconstruct everything -- the date, the mint, the inscriptions on both sides and the history of the type. With more expensive coins, though, there is less mystery. The inscriptions and mint marks are all clear, and the dealer has already written all the facts on the cardboard holder. I was at the point where I bought the coin, took it home, and had no research left to do. Cut and dried as that sort of collecting may be, there are only so many bronzes with bearded emperors I wanted. I have no need of 47 nearly identical Constantine the Great AE3s with votive wreaths on the back. For the collection to grow, it was necessary to be on the look-out for more unusual coins that were scarcer and more costly. As prices rose, the pieces I most wanted grew farther and farther from reach. I think one of the last coins I bought was early this year -- a silver Cistophorus of Hadrian's. I recall a badly minted English silver penny by Henry III as well. They were the last.

I have five or six Roman coins somewhere. Each bearing an emperor, each acting as a physical talisman or token of my love for ancient history. I have a few other Roman artifacts as well. May write a brief article about them in a future issue. I envy your collection.

I'll take Canada's health care system over the US any day. Sure, it's frustrating to wait and deal with paperwork, but I've never heard that there was any shortage of paperwork in dealing with private insurance. And delays in the US are often directly proportional to how much you've paid in insurance premiums over the last year. I'm morally certain I'd be dead or have been mauled by the welfare version of health care if Canada had the same system as the lower 48 provinces...

Recently a panel of Canadian Bank Presidents, amid gleefully suggesting how Canada could take advantage of the current

world economic crisis, warned the Federal Government it should revise its current entitlement social programs. What a superb choice of word! Superb propaganda that is. Implies such programs (read 'Federal financial support for Provincial Medicare,' 'Canada Pension', 'Old Age Security,' etc.) are superfluous and wasteful, consisting of tax payer's money needlessly spent on selfish people who expect something for nothing. All with just one word!

Universal health care is part of what makes us Canadian, what makes us all equally Canadian. It's just about the only thing worth paying taxes for. That and Canada Pension and the OAS. The majority of Canadians agree. Especially us old folks. Harper better remember that if he wants to stay in power.

Why Ed Beaugard's dad endured such shabby treatment after the war I can only speculate. For one thing, it was the 1940s, *before* Canada legislated its present government controlled system of health care. Secondly, and sadly, there seems to be a tradition among governments of always treating veterans badly. Even today, while billions are spent seeing that American pilots and marines are nigh invulnerable to enemy fire, the money all goes to Lockheed or General Motors for the hardware... the veterans of the Gulf War who came home crippled despite the hi-tech protection often found themselves laid up in pig-sties with inadequate care. Veterans don't have shareholders, boards of directors and lobbyists you see...

There've been some scandals re the treatment of Canadian veterans too. Once you're demobed, out of sight, out of mind it seems.

Basho is mentioned in Ian Fleming's "You Only Live Twice." Otherwise I would never have heard of him or read a line of his poetry. Who says pop lit isn't educational?

Who was it who first said "All knowledge is to be found in fanzines"?

Hmm, or maybe it was "All things are found in fanzines." Can't quite remember the exact words. Point is, us Faneds tend to stick in the most esoteric trivia imaginable...

From: JEAN-PIERRE NORMAND
Multiple Aurora Award-winning Artist
November 25th, 2011

Thank you Graeme for Space Cadet! I enjoy reading it. Doing 7 fanzines is not crazy, I will worry when these zines start to fight each other... JP

Ah, but think of the editorials I could write in each attacking the sloppy editor policy in the other six! An auto-flame war! And I probably wouldn't have to worry about punching myself in the nose (unless I got carried away...)

From: ED BEAUREGARD, Nov 26th, 2011
One of the founders of the B.C. SF Association.

Hi Graeme,

It is good to see another issue. Eliminating the index and other trapping of a regular magazine is not a problem - I read through the whole issue anyway so it just makes the contents more of a surprise.

Perhaps it is just age, or perhaps people now understand that there are many different hobbies, but I remember back in BCAPA days I felt the need to create a submission titled, "You Play With Toy Soldiers?" to explain my miniatures wargaming hobby to the uninitiated. Certainly when I was in U.B.C., the student society newspaper thought we were all monsters in the wargaming club.

To those who insist wargaming (be it miniatures, board, console or computer gaming) promotes war, I counter with the fact these games show how ludicrously easy it is to get killed in battle and, if anything, make the gamer think twice before advocating war, never mind actually participating in one.

Should you wish to do your miniatures gaming in a non-solo manner, you could always come out to the Trumpeter gaming nights. They are at Bonsor Recreation Centre, an easy skytrain ride from where you are. This Friday (Dec 2nd) at 7 p.m. is the next gaming night. Lisa Smedman is often there, and has brought students from her game design courses. Their work was very impressive - some highly creative boardgames.

Sounds like it could be very interesting and maybe a lot of fun. If I have the energy I may check them out and perhaps write up a brief article for next ish.

I must admit I have been rather unsuccessful at staying retired. The first six months was rather as you describe (except for the absence of animals and more emphasis on reading, watching anime and painting naval miniatures). But in January I got a call from an IT manager I worked with a few years back, and she asked me to do some part-time consulting for BC Hydro. That was okay - about a day and a half a week throughout the spring. I got the summer months off, then started again part time in September. It was a little strange sitting across the table from some of the people I had worked with for many years in TELUS, negotiating with them as a customer now, not as another minion in the TELUS army.

Certainly nothing wrong with going back to work, if it appeals to you. I can't imagine interrupting my second childhood to revert to a daily grind unless it was something I found intellectually stimulating and exciting without involving any stress, pressure, or deadlines. Unfortunately I have no idea what such a job would be. God knows I spent decades searching for it.

However, a couple weeks back the manager who brought me in put her hand on my shoulder during a big meeting with TELUS and announced that she wanted me to manage the BC Hydro side of a major transition project. We hadn't discussed this at all, but how could I refuse in such a setting? So for the next two to three months it is going to be almost full-time, although at least I will be able to do a lot of the work from home. It is 17 years since I regularly commuted downtown for work, and for the past 15 years I was either not commuting in Vancouver (I was in Seoul where they have an outstanding subway system) or driving to work locations in New West or Surrey. Now that I have been driving downtown semi-regularly, I don't know how people can stand it. I tried getting home (to south Surrey) from downtown during rush hour, and it was over 1.5 hours.

I hated commuting, albeit by bus & skytrain.

From: ERIC MAYER, November 27th, 2011
Famed Faned of GROGGY & E-DITTO

Graeme,

Enjoyed Space Cadet # 15. I like the format. The few times I've published, I've mostly published perzines. E-Ditto has been produced exactly as you describe. I just keeping adding to it until I seem to have enough then send it off to Bill Burns at eFanzines. Oddly enough, it is also a perszine, but with articles by Taral.

I like to think it's a winning combination...

Also I prefer reading perzines. I don't really need fanzines for slick articles about this that or the other thing. What I like most about fanzines is how the personalities of the editors are allowed to shine through, making each fanzine different from all others in a much more pronounced way than commercial magazines are allowed to differ.

I agree. Call it a 4SJ influence (his personality certainly ran through every page of FAMOUS MONSTERS) but I think an editorial voice or flavor is vital to making a perzine personal, and indeed, any fanzine. Imitating prozines has its place (many of the earliest fanzines did that, certainly Nils Helmer Frome's SUPRAMUNDANE STORIES did that in Canada back in the late 1930s) but what helps make fanzine fandom 'different' is the emphasis on personal communication.

You mention William Burroughs. Once I did a zine using his methods. This was during the ancient, lamentable "TAFF Wars" I cut up a letter I had received, a utility bill, and a bit of the day's newspaper, tossed the pieces together in a bag, pulled them out and taped them onto the pages, photocopied the result and ...Voila! TEDSCAN. Sent the zine off to some of the folks some of the rest of us were fighting with. Several were suitably outraged but -- weirdly -- no one ever mentioned it was all just gobbledygook.

I suppose this method of composition is comparable to 'found art' but even more tiresome if done in quantity. You seem to have used it as a weapon. Not a bad idea. Hmm, I wonder if it would work online in social media...

Thoughts on Retirement was Delightful. I really should read Pliny. (One or both, I guess) He was kind of the Walt Willis of his day, wasn't he? Actually, reading what he said about chariot races I had to laugh because I feel exactly the same way about auto races. His mini-retirements at his Tuscany estate sound wonderful. Well, I would not be able to read Greek or Latin and I could do without being oiled. Coincidentally we had a tin of Progresso Tuscan Chicken Soup this afternoon. Wonder what Pliny would have made of it?

He never mentioned ordering his kitchen staff crucified so I imagine he was rather accommodating when it came to food. His book (published by Penguin) is well worth reading for such things as a detailed description room by room of his favourite Villa, his eyewitness description of the eruption that buried Pompeii, and his famous correspondence with the Emperor Trajan over what on earth to do with the Christians being brought to his attention by informers. Pliny the Younger that is.

Pliny the Elder's encyclopedia of virtually every 'factual' piece of trivia he ever read is endlessly fascinating. Penguin has an abridged version titled 'Natural History, a Selection' in modern English. It's full of remarkable concepts like "*The continuous revolution of the universe around the Earth forces her huge globe into the shape of a sphere...*" Almost but not quite, you might say. But where his commentary is accurate it's often breathtaking in its revelations about the ancient world. His description of Roman mining techniques for instance.

I highly recommend both books as an easy and entertaining way to slip back into the Roman world and see it from their point of view.

I do have one tie. It is, sorry to say, my funeral tie. Since I was laid off in 1994 and started working freelance I have worn a tie only to funerals. Guess I wouldn't have to, but the guest of honor -- if male -- always seems to be wearing a tie so....

A former member of BCSFA was very popular with the ladies, so much so that many female club members came to his funeral dressed like cast members of the Rocky Horror picture show in his honour, somewhat to the discomfort

of his distant relatives attending who belonged to a rather strict Christian sect and who were hitherto unaware of his tastes and habits. Or so I was told. I wasn't there. But sounds like a splendid funeral to me.

As for my own funeral, I should like a wake of some sort, with me propped up in a corner with a drink wedged in my hand. I think it would be appropriate for the guys who wore ties to my funeral to gather them up in a pile and burn them. And people should take turns telling all manner of outrageous lies about me. In short, I want people to celebrate my having lived. And any present who couldn't stand me, well, they can celebrate my death. As long as everybody has a good time.

Haven't decided on my funerary monument. Something like the pyramid of Cestius in Rome? Or carved deep into a cliff face? And which planet or moon to construct it on? Decisions. Decisions.

Your retirement sounds pretty darn good too. It is the not having to be anywhere, or do any particular thing, that sounds most appealing. Mary and I have talked a good deal about retirement lately since I will be eligible to collect reduced Social Security benefits early next year. As I mentioned in my last letter, we can't afford it but, freelancing, I do have a lot less stress than most working people. Besides, I might suddenly decide to publish 37 fanzines like you do and then I'd be working full time. Sheesh, you practically are Canadian Fandom!

I've often been accused of behaving as if I think that... Actually, the freedom of not having to do anything other than what I feel like doing is the greatest benefit of retirement bar none. There are frequent 'must do' things still, mind you, like doctor's appointments or food shopping, or walking the dog two or three times a day, but most of the time at any given moment I have complete freedom to do anything or nothing. Wonderful feeling.

I should be doing more perhaps, I have any number of projects underway, some of them at the request of and for the benefit of other people, but I'm determined not to be led into a deadline

trap. Fact is, I only have so much energy. I work at this or that, then break off and do something just to please myself. I may get back to the particular project in the same day. Or I may not.

And if one of our pets demands attention, well, why not spend a few minutes communing with a critter. Always enjoy that. It's like trying to communicate with an alien. Fascinating. Currently I tickle my cat just above the tail and she licks my arm. The faster I tickle, the faster she licks. I have no idea what it means. I'm just glad I don't have to do this with the Martian Ambassador.

I am amazed, by the way, at the animals you have. Wow. Did you leave any out? What, no ferrets or iguanas?

We used to have a ferret. And a Russian Wolfhound. And an Afghan hound. Three other Tarantulas. Three other cats. Three Guinea Pigs. And a duck. We've cut down the menagerie quite a bit. Or rather, nature has. Always sad when that happens.

When I was in eAPA I also had more to say about politics, in private, as it were. It all is really depressing these days isn't it?

It used to be depressing. Now it's infuriating. Bad for my blood pressure (which is normally quite good). I try to keep a historical perspective. Given the chumps who've reigned in the past, the current lot are mostly amateur incompetents and not quite as lethal as their predecessors... so far.

I enjoyed Taral's piece about the coins. I have a hard time keeping the various ever-changing denominations straight. As he points out, the downfall of Byzantium started during the time of Heraclius with the Arab invasions. The empire did rebound a couple hundred years later and had a sort of second Golden Age, although it was never again as large or powerful as at its inception.

It really was quite a remarkable civilization in its own right, even though the Byzantines never called themselves anything but 'Roman,' even after they switched to Greek as the official language. One remarkable classical Roman

survival, the use of Garum or fermented fish sauce. It died out in the west, but remained the Eastern Roman equivalent of ketchup right to the end. Visiting westerners often complained about it, and also about the Byzantine tendency to argue theological questions given the slightest opportunity. Even weirder in western eyes, the Byzantines enjoyed eating salads.

Taral's cover was really nice too. Haven't seen as much art by him recently but I guess he can't do everything.

Currently he's concentrating on writing articles, tailoring each for their targeted fanzines.

Re the loccol...Gee, I dunno...I am "famous" to five people maybe.

Oh, to more than that. Six or seven at the very least!

Your refer to the old expression about "the dignity of labor". I remember from my own experience that these days employers generally do everything in their power to humiliate their employees and purposefully deprive them of every shred of dignity.

Absolutely correct! From my own experience I'd say modern management is striving for a docile, fearful workforce absolutely devoid of initiative and utterly subservient to the whim of management. Kids today are in for a horrible future. Human rights are too good for us apparently. We are being taught to assume we deserve less. I thank Ghu I'm retired. I'll be all right until they take my pensions away.

Glad I am not the only one who has a hellish time getting page numbers how I want them. I once had a Word Perfect for a particular job I was doing and with that I found it simple to number any way I wanted -- suppress the number on the front page, etc. But every other word processor has given me a hard time and it seems inexplicable. Why should such a common task be made so difficult? If you manage to ever get it right, keep using that as a template. That's what I've done.

I finally figured out I'd clicked on 'continuous' use of numbering instead of

'normal' use of numbering. Not what I'd call intuitive. Wrote the correct settings on an index card and will follow it blindly from now on. Taral has argued I should be more experimental in my fanzine pubbing but I'll stick with what works in order not to screw things up.

Haven't got into much computer gaming. As a youngster I was addicted to board games and I was even, briefly, into war simulation games. I loved the maps and the history. And, of course, the fact that every time you played you were venturing into alternative history, seeing if the outcomes of wars and battles couldn't have turned out differently. I haven't sought out anything similar for the computer. I don't feel like trying to learn all the rules and I fear I would waste far too much time.

Well, Battlefield Heroes has virtually no rules at all but I guarantee you'll waste hours daily if you try it. I ration myself to approximately two hours a day. I never seem to get bored, I guess because all the other characters are played by actual people and vary considerably in skill, technique, enthusiasm and predictability. I know it's a waste of time, but in the words of the comedy channel, it's "Time well wasted".

Hope Space Cadet does appear more often. With that new publishing schedule you'll never miss a deadline.

Spot on! You have a knack for expressing in a few words what takes me several hundred to convey.

Best, Eric

**From: LLOYD PENNEY, November 29th, 2011
Aurora & Faned Awards-winning Loc Hack
1706-24 Eva Road, Etobicoke, ON M9C 2B2**

Dear Graeme:

Space Cadet 15 looks great, even without the usual format you put into your other zines. I wouldn't worry about that. Gather your material together, put it on the pages, and publish it via .pdf. I know of people who produce their own zines, but are thinking of dropping the magazine format, and going to a blog or Tumblr page.

I've heard of blogs (Taral maintains one, but his blog entity/server/program/thingie won't let me sign up so I can't read his blogs, damn it) but Tumblr? Something new? I don't even know how to twitter yet. Tumblr? I'm hopelessly behind the times. A thoroughly twentieth century kind of guy is what I am.

Alas, my last years are not my own, for they will be spent job hunting. I have an excellent lead on a year-long position in an advertising agency downtown, replacing someone going on maternity leave, but while I thought I had it sewn up, my odds are now 50-50. Fingers crossed, wish me luck. Unless a lottery decides to burden me with untold wealth, I cannot see myself retiring at any point.

I wish you great success. You definitely have my permission to win the lottery big time (just in case that is what the gods of fate were waiting for...)

Indeed, the array of goals we are urged to move forward on are the creation of marketers, and are suggestions, and pure lies. I even feel that way about popular culture, which is where our interest in science fiction lies. Gotta watch that show, see that movie! No! Why? say I. I refuse to believe everything I am told via television, radio, newspapers, magazines and even online, especially Facebook. I intend to be the marketers' worst nightmare...an educated consumer.

I discovered long ago that pop cult lied. I saw the ad for THE WASP WOMAN in an Ottawa newspaper. Scared the hell out of me. A twelve foot wasp with the face of a beautiful woman gripping a helpless, terrified man in a less than a motherly fashion? Dare I see it? My parents thought not. I was too young. Years later learned the movie in fact featured the body of a five foot woman in a business dress with the cruddy mask of a sorta-buggish face. Big let-down.

I know what I like. If I watch, see, read, experience something for the first time and don't like it, I abandon it no matter what the hype says. And if I do like it, I stick with it despite any reputation to the contrary. I like what I like.

Coins...a short time ago at one of our local antique shows, I purchased some coins from an

antique dealer who doesn't usually deal with coins, so I took them off her hands for \$5. Five large Canadian cents, dated 1902, 1904, 1910, 1912 and 1916. Looks like someone cleaned the 1910 cent, but the patina will return. Finally, I also purchased an American Indian head cent, dated 1888. I looked potential value...looks like I made my investment back several times.

My brother (also retired) collects Canadian dimes, just for the fun of it. Tremendous sense of completion whenever he finds one for a year not yet acquired.

What I relayed to you about OSFiC was what I was told, but that may have come from some of those early hostile fans who didn't want to see anyone new in the club. What OSFiC's actual policy was, I don't know. I never did want to join after all the nonsense I had to endure, and I still do not belong to any local clubs in Toronto.

Many thanks, and take care. See you with the next zine you produce.

Yours, Lloyd Penney.

NOTE: Both Lloyd and Taral commented on my mention of the Faned Awards in the last issue. I've placed their remarks in the next ish of THE FANACTICAL FANACTIVIST which is a more appropriate venue.

COLOPHON

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