

BROKEN TOYS 4

Broken Toys is a personalzine by **Taral Wayne**, and in no way implies that my other zine, New Toy, is a dead letter. The letter column isn't looking so very good this time, boys and girls, so write a loc. As has been the case for more than 20 years now, I live at 245 Dunn Ave., Apt. 2111, Toronto Ontario M6K 1S6. Or loc me – Taral@Teksavvy.com The date is sometime in **June 2012**, and this is ExtraTaraltorality (or Kiddelidivee Books & Art) 253.

Of late, I've plied a rather heavy hand on the keyboard, lacing into subjects ranging from the state of California to the fate of the Euro, that are as depressing to think about as they are beyond hope of reform. I really need to lighten up.

Maybe it's time for another "Steven" story.

The Greening of Little Italy

My friend Steven has lived in Little Italy all his life. This is only natural, as his family is Italian-Canadian and many of them live in Little Italy as well. He lives in a large Edwardian house with three floors, and a finished basement that's bigger and better furnished than my entire modest apartment. It even has a wine-cellar and a heated tile floor in its own bathroom. I plan on moving in when I'm too old and decrepit to look after myself.

Living in a large, inner-city house does have its downside, though. Steven has had to dip deep into his pocket on an almost annual basis – if it isn't the central air conditioning that's on the blink, then the furnace needs replacement. If the roof doesn't leak, then the drainage under the house need to be excavated. The phone lines are intermittently shorted out, the gas stove has broken down and the remotely operated door for the garage has failed. Each and every time something has broken down, slipped a cog or thrown a fit, it has almost always been Steven who had to make it right again.

On one of my rare visits up to Little Italy, we got together at a favorite gelato place nearby. After we studied the menu a while, then ordered what we always ordered, Steven began one of his stories.

He had recently endured a Visit. Steven has hundreds of relatives, neighbors and friends-of-the-family who seemingly swarm all over his home on a regular basis, forcing him to assume the reluctant role of man-of-the-house and genial host. There had earlier been a spell of unusually warm and muggy weather, and a crowd of visitors on the way would only make it worse – so Steven decided he had better crank up the air conditioning in preparation.

Digressing a little from the story, Steven mentioned that his mother and sister often have him at wit's end over every tiny detail of running the house. His mother, for instance, loves the heat. Even on

the hottest day, she draws a shawl over her hunched shoulders and complains in the Old Country tongue that, “it’s freezing, can’t you turn up the heat?” Should he dare touch the thermostat, however, he risks bringing his sister downstairs from her room on a run. Unlike the mother, the sister is never satisfied unless cold air is rushing out of the vents fast enough to ice up houseflies in midflight. Obviously, it’s a ticklish business getting the settings just right.

Steven was used to striking a balance, though. He set the controls with the artistry of neurosurgeon, so that when the house was full of people it wouldn’t be too hot for Sister nor too cold for Mama. It would be *just* right. Or so he thought.

Once the visitors began arriving, though, it became apparent that something was amiss. The visiting aunts, uncles, cousins and godparents made mentions about the temperature that seemed oddly contradictory. One said it was too hot in the kitchen. Another said it was too cold in the parlor. Yet another said it was too warm on one side of the rec room downstairs, while someone else remarked on how chilly it was on the *other* side.

Steven’s brother-in-law, Andrew, was handy in such matters, and suggested they check out the exhaust from the A/C unit outside. The central air conditioning dumped its warm air from a drum-like vent in the back yard. At first glance, there didn’t seem to be anything wrong ... but then Andrew noticed a bit of ice between the exhaust vanes that was just *not* right.

The air exhausting from the vent should have been warmer than the ambient temperature outside, but it was *cold*.

They rushed in to check on the inside controls, where all the conduits converge like the pipes in a circus calliope. Steven threw open the unit’s door – and confronted a solid chunk of ice filling the metal cabinet. Oh-oh. *Definitely* not right. Despite the hot day and the crush of visitors, the central unit had turned into an icebox.

“I had taken into account the number of people and the temperature, but not that the humidity that day was only a little lower than a steam bath,” Steven said. Once a little ice had formed, it blocked the outflow of cold air and more ice formed, until a runaway feedback cycle froze the works solid. The obvious solution was to turn off the air conditioning, which they promptly did. Unfortunately, that didn’t solve the problem. The iceberg stared back at them from the cabinet, obviously in no hurry to melt by itself. Steven went and brought back his sister’s hand-held hair dryer to speed up the defrosting.

Steven wound up his story as I spooned up the last of the chocolate topping from my gelato. The hair dryer was taking too long. That much ice wouldn’t melt in less than a week with nothing but a tiny breath of warm air blowing on it ... so, he had another idea. The control box was mounted right above the furnace. He suggested to his brother-in-law, “why not turn the furnace on full blast?”

And that was how it came to pass that for one afternoon, in the middle of a humid summer day, a big house crammed full of Italian relatives had the furnace running full tilt – so that the air conditioning would work! David Suzuki would have been horrified. Acts of environmental violence like this were sure to have been specifically banned by the Kyoto Accord.

For once, though, you might think that both Steven’s mother and his sister would finally be happy with the temperature – but, things never have a way of working out that neatly. His sister was

already on her way downstairs to complain about the lack of semi-arctic air blasting from the register in her room.

Meanwhile, Steven's mother was tugging on his sleeve for attention. "Stefano," she said, "the heat is just the way I like it, for once! Can we keep it this way?"

Mad as the situation was, he could only say, "Sure, why not?" and beat a hasty retreat. Maybe he'd come out of his room when the snow fell.



My eyesight is weak. I never seem to notice discussions on FaceBook or people's blogs that have a big, fat "Deadly Earnest: Proceed With Caution" sign posted. As a result I have a bad tendency to walk into "situations."

Recently, there's been a minor controversy in fandom over gender parity. It was begun by a British fan at Eastercon, who out-of-the-blue jumped up from his seat on a convention panel, and offered his place to a woman in the audience. He claimed it wasn't right for a panel to have more men on it than women.

In the aftermath, Eastercon has decided to include gender parity as an issue in the make-up of future programming.

On the face of it, this sounds sensible... but objections can be made that have nothing to do with male chauvinism. The main one is that fandom itself hasn't achieved gender parity, nor has the Science Fiction profession. So, is demanding gender parity in convention programming "correcting an injustice," or is it actually just distorting reality?

I've been arguing the later. So far, the debate has been fairly civilized, but you can never tell when a harmless-looking fuse may suddenly decide to sputter to life and begin a race for the gunpowder.

For instance, a thread I was following on FaceBook today began to turn downright grim in its earnestness before I noticed the danger. I might have wallowed in and just said "I don't like the direction this discussion is going, and here's what I think ..." but instead I decided to be indirect about it.

I wrote:

"This reminds me of a story I just made up... There was once a Men's Club. It was the usual thing – a lot of leather on the walls and leather seats, the smell of old cigar smoke hanging in the air, a well-used dart board and not much else. Men came to read the paper and shoot the breeze and not much else. Ultimately, it was just a way to just get away from the pressure of work and demands of home. One day, one of the members – who for one reason or another took a suggestion of his wife's to heart – proposed to the other members that keeping women out of the club was as pointless as it was unfair. Women could sit around, read the paper, smoke cigars and bullshit as convivially as anyone. Nobody disagreed, so after a little hemming and hawing, It Was Done. All the same, it didn't seem as though women liked hanging around the men's club all that much – all that cigar smoke and

leather... *ugh*. So a fan was installed and the decor was made a little brighter. No one minded very much, and, sure enough, more women started to hang out at the club. In fact, the club was generally full to capacity most nights. But there were still more men than women in the club, and someone said the state of affairs remained unfair. After another vote, it was decided that Something Had to be Done. They couldn't afford a larger club house, so they did the only logical thing – they suspended about 30% of the male members to open up more space for women to join the club. The moral of the story? Some days you just can't do the right thing by doing the right thing.”

Had this been in a rented hall, you might have heard a pin drop.

It wasn't ten seconds before I was reminded that I was a “privileged male.” This translates as: “men are beasts and their opinions should not be spoken out loud.” It took very few seconds more before I was accused of “trolling,” and naturally my suggestion that people lighten up a little only provoked a stony “oh, now he's playing the – *quote* – sense of humour card.” Obviously, *this* was a discussion in which only small children and drooling idiots could see the humour in. From there the accusation that I mistreat women was a natural step. And finally, the show-stopper, “I don't care to belong to any group where *this* behavior is permitted!”

Dear, dear me. I have become a male chauvinist pig because I questioned the propriety of correcting the imbalance of men and women in a certain way. And I brutally stood my ground and refused to apologize when called on it. How do some people become so utterly, inflexibly, morally superior to everyone else?

On this matter, I have to let The Joker speak for me... “why so serious?” Then suppress the urge to stick a pencil in someone's eye.



THE EUR PES

The Greeks – known for thousands of years as canny traders and bankers, and among the first people in history to use money – are broke. They owe so much money that the country is on the verge of bankruptcy. Any number of explanations have been offered – the Greeks shirk their taxes, they don't work hard enough, their government spends money like water on universal social benefits that just encourage laziness – but such explanations sound suspiciously like the sort of sour-grapes propaganda that American conservatives have been spewing out ever since Wall Street capitalism shot itself in the foot in 2008. Maybe there is some truth to some of these explanations, but I suspect that the collective failings of the Greeks only hastened a built-in problem to its inevitable conclusion.

That problem was elegantly described in a brilliant book, “Cities and the Wealth of Nations,” by Jane Jacobs. This 1984 book explains the role of currencies in regulating trade between different economies. Unfortunately, while the Powers That Be have been happy to present the author with awards and honours – and even to name one or two after her – they have been far more reluctant to adopt her ideas.

By sharing the Euro, the citizens of Greece were in effect earning in Drachmas but spending in Deutsche Marks. The value of their labour was increased artificially by denominating it in a higher-valued currency.

So, now that Greece has spent all those Deutsche Marks it earned with Greek hourly wages, it is in a black hole of debt.

I'm sure I don't know what the solution is to this problem, but I'll bet it would involve having to cut back on imports. Greece has been buying things that it can't afford from other European Union nations for a rather long time, and the payments due are now larger than the country's net annual income. It wasn't that Greeks had unreasonable expectations. Do you consider air conditioning, cable internet access and a wide-screen TV unreasonable? Had Greeks bought from each other, however, they would have done just fine. Unfortunately, they bought the Good Things in Life from other European nations who didn't buy anything from the Greeks in return.

What exactly would anyone buy from Greece? Olive oil is top of the list. Have you heard of any luxury Greek automobiles or Greek-made commercial airliners?

Obviously, this situation couldn't go on indefinitely. Even if Greece is bailed out, the problem isn't solved because the Greeks will still be spending Deutsche Marks they don't earn. There are only two possible outcomes of this situation: either Greece will be reduced to a third-world standard of living by the “austerity” programs forced upon it by the EU and IMF – this seems to be the solution preferred by Germany and the bankers – or Greece must abandon the Euro. That is, Greece must go back to earning in Drachmas and spending in Drachmas.

There are two difficulties, however. First, nobody else wants Greece to abandon the Euro. Those astronomical debts would be wiped out, or least reduced in value by being paid back in a low-value currency.

But, in the long run, returning to the Drachma would actually help Greece pay its debts. It would give the country a fighting chance to balance its trade deficits, by lowering the cost of its exports. By selling more than it buys, in time Greece would pay off its debts.

The other difficulty is that nobody wants Greece to leave the European Union. Belonging to the EU requires a member state to open its borders to free trade. It's worth repeating that, with high-value French and German goods freely crossing the border at relatively low prices, there is no way for Greece to balance its trade deficit. But does free trade require a common currency? I don't know why it should. Canada, Mexico and the United States haven't taken the fatal step of sharing a single currency, and – for better or worse – we are partners in the North American Free Trade Agreement.

What a common currency does is rob a government of one of the most powerful tools for adjusting its economy. When it no longer prints its own money, it can no longer revalue or vary the supply of it to optimize the national economy. Instead, the currency is pegged to indicators that best meet the needs of other countries.

In other words, the EU wants Greece to do none of the limited number of things that are probably all a nation can do to address out-of-control debt. The bureaucrats in Brussels and the bankers in Bonn don't want the Greeks to adjust their currency in Greece's favour, and they don't want Greece to block the flow of imports into their country. The entire purpose of the Euro is to prevent individual nations from having control of their own money and their own economy.

What's the alternative? Apparently the decision of the EU is that Greece must adopt a program of impoverishing the Greek people instead. That is, a policy of diverting what little purchasing power most Greeks have to servicing debt, while denying them the means to improve their purchasing power through exports. To pay for the pensions and secondary schooling and socialized medicine that the Greeks so foolishly and profligately enjoyed in the past, they must learn to do without all these luxuries until the bill is paid. As is always the case in loan-sharking, the bill is never paid because the sucker is forced to increase his borrowing to pay the interest.

That should ensure that the more fortunate nations in the European Union keep their Ferraris and BMWs on the road for a generation or two.

Hell ... maybe the bureaucrats in Brussels do need to be overthrown by revolution. For the sake of sentiment, I suggest it be done on Bastille Day.



Dance Cats Bomb at Altar

Feline Falling-Out Nixes Nuptial

Our Variety Reporter, Taral Wayne

Danny and Sawyer Cat were divorced soon after their honeymoon, have you heard? They seemed made for each other, but in the end it was a case of “A Star is Born,” only this time Norman Maine wouldn’t take his bath.

Most mornings, breakfast at the Cat household apparently went something along these lines:

"Good morning, Danny."

...

"I said, *good morning*, Danny."

"Oh, *say*, did you just come in the room? Did you see this headline? I'm starring in the Fall Star Special on the Dumont network!"

"Yes, I know dear, so am I ... *remember?*"

"Oh, right. I wonder if I should wear my ascot and Borsalino fedora, or does that make me look too much like William Powell? Or does he look too much like me? Did you know I'm up for the Golden Corncob this year? That's an award back in Kokomo for hometown boys like me, who make good. As a boy, everyone said I'd win one someday. That's why they urged me so often to go to Hollywood, I guess. Say! Let's go to Grauman's Chinese Theatre – I hear there may be reporters there to interview Gable, and it would be good if I was seen along with other VIPs! I'm also scheduled for a photo session – for that billboard promoting my new film – "

"I know dear, I was in it too... "

"That's good, dear. We should work together more often... "

"We already appear in *every* picture together."

“ – but that’s not until 7, so there’s plenty of time to do Gable first, catch dinner at the Derby where I hear Zanuck might be bringing a director I’m dying to film my next pic, and then – “

“... in fact, I think I got top billing.”

"...because it's good for my career to have an attractive leading lady. Say, do you think I'd look good next to Dietrich? No? How about Jane Russell?"

And so on, ad infinitum. Eventually, Sawyer consummated a less flamboyant marriage with a cartoonist, while Danny went on to a record 11 more marriages (once to a transvestite aardvark) and a lengthy career on “Hollywood Squares.”

Left- Over Pieces

Eric Mayer – groggy.tales@gmail.com

Obviously I am way behind on our correspondence, but I will move *Broken Toys 3* to the front of the queue.

What's left to say about you and “Hugo?” Let's face it, he's stringing you along. It is ridiculous that you are nominated for the fanartist Hugo in a year when you've done practically no art, but have written endless articles. Fans tend to apply labels to people and, once applied, the labels never change. You were a fanartist forty years ago.

Therefore you are a fanartist. You will always be a fanartist. Just as I will never know more about writing than I did when I was twenty-five, no matter how many books I have published. In the universe of fandom, people never change or grow, or so it often seems to me.

Maybe fandom is like the Army – request one duty and be assigned to something completely different? One good thing about stereotyping in fandom, though, is that it may take fans several more years to realize how little drawing I'm doing lately... (By the way, the books Eric mentions being published are a series of mysteries set in the Byzantine Empire, co-authored by his wife, Mary. They sound like exactly my kind of reading ... if ever I find one of them in a bookstore.)

The world is full of Lenny Gerbers, (Good name, makes me think of Gerber baby food...), who live to contradict and correct. I dropped out of Trufen because of an idiot like that. (No, not Ted White). No matter what I said, no matter how bland or (apparently) uncontroversial, this guy would leap in and start to argue. It got to the point where I couldn't make an innocuous statement without having to defend myself, so I said the hell with it. I don't have time, or inclination, to wrangle about trivialities with the Len Gerbers of the world.

“Lenny” seemed like a good fannish name, even though I didn't mean Len Bailes at all. And “Gerber” has nothing to do with the fan of that name who stuck up for his friends by incriminating them further. (i.e.: “He stopped stealing postage from work issues ago!”) They just sounded right to me.

The USA is far better at policing the spread of toy guns than real ones. We used to love playing with cap guns, but I guess today, ten-year-olds playing with toy guns are considered wimps. They ought to be carting real ones by that age, preferably concealed. I also had a realistic rifle with a nice wooden stock. What kind I don't recall. Oddly, I never grew to have any interest in real weapons. Never graduated to the hard stuff! Ah, but I still remember the joys of endlessly acting out the gunfight at the O.K. Corral. I must have rolled around dying on the ground hundreds of times. But, hey, you should've seen the other guy!

The American economy is a joke. Do you need to be an economist see that an economy based on a handful of people enriching themselves by playing useless, unproductive gambling games that they had invented for their own enrichment cannot function for long? Real investment in real things, let alone trying to make money by actually producing something is considered penny-ante stuff by the masters of the financial world. Why would they bother? And success or failure means nothing. Total screw-ups are only slightly less obscenely wealthy than the sharp gamblers. It would be interesting to see where this will all lead, but I am afraid I won't be around long enough.

Re Ned Brooks' loc and your comments. I find it very difficult to find the sort of art on the Internet that I would like to run, while trying to stick to Creative Commons material. Chris Garcia has found some terrific stuff from DeviantArt for his zines, but whenever I search there I'm overwhelmed and

never know where to start. I find that art from fanartists, no matter how varied, seems to work together in a zine, maybe just because I know it is all fan art. But different styles of art plucked from elsewhere look like a mishmash. Maybe it is purely my psychological reaction. It may be better to not have too much art, as in this issue of Broken Toys. Wonderful logo though.

Re my loc...I guess Catholic schoolgirls are always taught to dot their "i"s naturally. Those nuns are tough.

What? Someone has told Lloyd not to loc their zine? Amazing.

They didn't say exactly that... but why spoil a good joke with facts?

I like Steve Stile's thought that being ready to croak might result in a Hugo for either of you. But I hope you both don't leap on the idea. I can imagine you rolling around the Worldcon in a wheelchair and running into Steve trailing an I.V. rack behind him. Literally. Suddenly comes the news. Randall Munroe has just been run over by a bus!

Best, *Eric*

Dave Locke – davelocke@ymail.com

Really nice logo there. I'll bet it took more time to design than it did to write most of the zine. On the other hand, I might think that only because of how long it would have taken me to design it.

Not really all that time-consuming, once I knew how I was doing it... In fact, I did it twice, because I wasn't satisfied with how it came out the first time. I used one of my own photos and the "Smoke & Mirrors" tool in Photoshop to layer everything together.

Ned Brooks says he does 18 apazines a year. Even in my periods of wildest creativity in apac, I've never come close to 18 zines in a year. At the moment I'm in one apa and can't even keep up with its four mailings a year. Having already missed one mailing, 2012 won't be the year that I keep up. And I'm not even the one who prints and staples them anymore. You could say that I notice myself slowing down more as I get older.

When Victoria and I were pubbing DNQ, as well as separate zines, we might have been getting close to Ned's 18, but that period only lasted about three years and we were both young. I'm older now than we both were put together then.

You note, "I could stuff the next issue with nekkid bunnies, but how would it look to the impictorate mass of fandom, who don't "get" nekkid bunnies." Well, hell, I *get* nekkid bunnies. Just this morning I was out on the back porch and there in the yard were two nekkid bunnies. They frequently graze around, munching up the lawn out there. I think this is allowed in a rural setting. Probably, in cities, they're required to be clothed. I should hasten to add that I've never seen a bunny in any city I've lived in, but that's how I envision it. Clothing required. If I'm wrong, someone can let me know. They always do.

In reality, that sketch you inserted at the end of BROKEN TOYS looks more like a skunk than a bunny. But then, maybe it's meant to. We have those out here in southwestern Vermont, too. I can still remember a few months ago wandering out onto the back porch and immediately noticing a skunk suddenly appear from under the porch and walk onto the driveway, and then stop and look at

me from over its shoulder. I immediately walked back indoors, without undue haste but also without too much wasted motion.

I added that illo to fill an awkward space -- it's Mlle. Hepzibah. Didn't know she was a pin-up model in Paris before moving to an obscure hamlet in a swamp in Georgia, did you? Why did she do it? One can almost smell blackmail in the air... oh wait, that's just Ma'm'zelle's "Eau de Naturele."

In earlier days someone I knew had a skunk for a pet. Descended, of course. One time he walked into one of the local bars, set the skunk butt-first onto the bar, lifted the skunk's tail and said "kill!" The bartender didn't think it was a great joke. He'd seen it dozens of times before. And the fact that someone was walking around with a skunk meant the customers didn't get overly excited about it being a skunk. They're actually quite friendly critters as pets.

All Best, **DAVE LOCKE**

If skunks are raised to be familiar with people from a young age, they can be quite friendly. Someone I used to know kept skunks. His first skunk I helped capture, but he smuggled them in from breeding farms in the States and had up to three at one time. None of them were very sociable. But then, my acquaintance wasn't very sociable either, and I suspect he was secretly pleased that his pets would tolerate nobody but himself. At that, they only barely tolerated him! Appropriately, he named his first skunk after "the least clubbable man in London," Sherlock Holmes' elder brother Mycroft.

Once, when the landlord set a date for inspection, my acquaintance asked if I would let Mycroft stay with me for a day or two. I agreed to let the little stinker use my bathroom. A board across the door kept him in and my cat out, and was easy to step over. But the rotten little beast hid in his cage whenever I went in for a whizz, and hissed at me if I got near. I've met more sociable skunks tipping over garbage cans in the street.

As a matter of fact, so I have. Even in the "wild" – if you dignify the streets of Toronto at night as the "wild" – skunks tend to regard humans in a very matter-of-fact way. If you aren't threatening, they don't seem to care that you're near. One wild skunk I had been watching root through a lawn, nonchalantly finished his meal break by walking right past me – six inches closer and he'd have had to climb over my shoes! On another occasion I met a baby skunk on the side of a highway offramp. To one side was a high fence and a sheer 50 foot drop. On the other side was rushing traffic. The way back was a half mile walk for me, so I needed to get by. He seemed to shrug, so I stepped over the wee beastie and we both passed by without incident.

