

BROKEN TOYS 27

Broken Toys 27 is a personalzine, or perhaps a celebration of the life and times of the inimitable Taral Wayne, who continues to reside at 245 Dunn Ave., Apt. 2111, Toronto Ontario, M6K 1S6. Write or e-mail me at Taral@bell.net Date is around **mid-April, 2014**, nearly two weeks earlier than I wanted to publish. But I've already too much material on hand for a "regular" issue. If I wait until May, I might end up publishing another 30-page monster! This is *Kiddelidivee Books & Art* (or *ExtraTaraltorality*, or *Tarable Mistake*) 279

Center of Controversy

In a recent zine I read the typical Canadian complaint about "Torontocentrism in the media." Funny it should mention that, since all my life it's seemed the other way around. How many TV shows has the CBC produced that take place in Toronto? The only one of note that I can remember was "King of Kensington." There was also "Tugboat Annie," a TV series based on a Marjorie Main movie and a series of now-forgotten *Saturday Evening Post* stories from the 1930s. In 1957 the series was adapted for TV as a series called "The Adventures of Tugboat Annie," and shot in Toronto Harbor. I don't think it was meant as Toronto Harbor, however, but as New York Harbor ... so perhaps it didn't count.

Curiously, I went to school with a boy whose father played a deckhand on Annie's tugboat.

Other CBC shows that were possibly related to Toronto included "Cannonball," the story of two truckers who drove Highway 401. But one might as well say it was a show about Windsor, London, Kitchener-Waterloo and Hamilton, Ontario. I've driven the 401 many times myself, and it stretches from the Gateway to the Thousand Islands on the St. Lawrence, to the Ambassador Bridge over the Detroit River.

Then there was "The Littlest Hobo." The transient canine traveled the entire country, following roads and hopping freights, rescuing hapless humans from fires, bandits, car wrecks, cave-ins, quicksand, zombies and innumerable other hazards. At one time or another, "Hobo" *must* have passed through Toronto – or at least close enough to hear Foster Hewitt shout, "He shoots, he *scoooooorrrres!*"

In the 1960s, I lived in a flat over an animal hospital, where my father worked as an assistant to the vet. One of the patients was “Hobo.” Actually, there were five German Shepherds, each trained to do different stunts. You didn’t think any one dog was smart enough to do *all* that, did you?

But other than that, I draw a blank on the subject of Toronto in the CBC’s program schedule.

Instead of “Torontocentrism,” it seems to me that the CBC has usually produced shows about tiny hamlets of a few hundred people ... most recently, “Little Mosque on the Prairie” and “The Trailer Park Boys.” The epitome of all such programs, has to be the extremely long-run series about Gibson's Reach, a speck on the map of the BC coast. For nearly two decades, “The Beachcombers” was one part sitcom, one part soap opera and one part family for millions of Canadian viewers.

I’m sure there were a host of other shows that the CBC made that were set in Medicine Hat, Chibougamau, Red Deer, Peace River, St. Johns, Fort Gary, Fredericton and Thunder Bay that most of us have never heard of, much less seen. “Torontocentric?” Not bloody likely. If anything, the CBC has disproportionately represented the inhabitants of Canada’s small towns and rural routes 25-times-over, compared to the populations of our nation’s big cities, *including* Toronto.

“Torontocentric” makes more sense when speaking of the news, however. But the fact is that an awful lot more news *does* happen in an urban sprawl of 5 million, compared to towns of a half-million-or-less. Even when added together, the population of the rest of the country only outnumbered Torontonians by about 6 to 1. There is the urban effect or “critical mass” to consider, as well. Lethbridge may have a population of under 100,000 (I just checked that), but it does not stand to reason to expect it to have 1/50 the number of universities, museums, symphony orchestras, auto shows, off-Broadway productions, Ethiopian restaurants or science-fiction bookstores, much less a Caribbean festival, international author’s symposium, a gigantic gay pride parade, a world-class pot symposium and so on. In fact, it will have *none* of those. It may have a neighborhood bake-off or junior hockey league finals, but the concentration of people and money, make big cities more cosmopolitan than mere numbers would suggest.

I’d go as far as to say practically *all* the news in Canada occurs between Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver and Edmonton/Calgary. The tiny remnant is about ski accidents in Banff, fishing boats that have capsized off the coast of Newfoundland, tainted water in Indian reserves and ketchup-factories closing in Leamington, Ontario.

There is the question, too, of regional editions of the CBC news. Surely, the newscast in Victoria or Halifax tends to downplay events in Toronto in favour of local happenings?

Then there is Quebec. Gawd knows what the CBC shows in Quebec, but I bet it has little to do with Toronto. And have you noticed how there has never seemed to be a show about Montreal shown in English Canada? Perhaps there was one exception. There was an animated cartoon called “Jacob Two-Two,” based on a series of children’s book by Mordicai Richler. That scarcely counts, since it’s more about being a Jewish-Canadian kid than being French-Canadian. But what about television shows set in Quebec City? Trois Rivières? Gatineau? Never seen ‘em, have you? Do you ever wonder ... what’s going on in La Belle Province that *they* don’t want us to know about?

If you must ponder conspiracies, *there’s* one for you!

Working Against the Gain

I hate to say it, but once again it comes down to questioning the point of working.

That is, for the umpty-umpth time, I've had a customer default on his commission. You'd think I'd learn, and demand payment up front? In fact, I thought I knew better, and *almost always* insist to see the colour of someone's money before I'll muss up a fresh sheet of paper. This time I made an exception, for what seemed like a sensible reason. The customer had commissioned me three or four times in the past, and had always paid up. I thought I could trust him.

I don't suppose I'll go so far as to name the person, but those of you in the macrophile community can probably make an educated guess if I merely hint that he's in the RAF. Past commissions have included simple cartoons, a lengthy prose piece, and a complicated picture of one of my signature characters – Saara Mar – as she unknowingly tramples a miniature alien city into the dust. This is not something Saara is ever likely to be absent-minded enough to do, but I found a tongue-in-cheek way to work it.

The art: <http://www.furaffinity.net/view/4676202/>

The new job was supposed to be a continuation of the incident where Saara trashes the miniature alien city. By that time, having never been into the macro concept myself, I was bored with the whole idea. Also, I had finally been granted a disability pension, and was no longer under any great pressure to earn extra money. So, while I had never been one to work cheaply, I set a price on the new job to make it worth my while. In the past I might have done the job for \$100, but the customer agreed to \$150 for the full-page piece (with multiple panels). I gave him a small break if he would settle for a high-resolution file that I didn't have to physically mail to him. As prices go in furry fandom, this is high, but nothing like the going rate in the real world. Also, if I was going to use my time this way, the money had to make a real difference to me.

As usual, I did a rough outline and e-mailed it to the customer. There were a few minor changes that he wanted, but also one somewhat more difficult change in Saara's pose that required me erasing most of her figure. Once I made the alterations, I e-mailed a new scan for his approval. I think that may have been the last time I ever got a willing message from the customer. That was back in August 2013.

Since then, I've left the drawing untouched. Until I had payment in hand, I had no intention of finishing it. Time passed, and every now and then I'd e-mail the customer about his job. Sometimes I got a reply, sometimes I didn't. There was *always* a problem. He was away from the base for two weeks, or undergoing helicopter training, or *something*. Then he would complain that it was a long trip to the post office, where he had to go for a money order or to exchange Pounds for Loonies. More often than not there were no excuses, just "radio silence" from the north of England.

Finally, the customer offered to pay me through PayPal. Now, I don't have PayPal, and I don't want it. But I found a trusted friend of mine who was willing to take payment on my behalf, and then pass the money deposited in his account along to me. I e-mailed my customer to give him the friend's address.

There was no reply from my customer. My friend anxiously e-mailed me to say no money had turned up in his PayPal account. I e-mailed the customer a reminder about three weeks ago. Still no word.

I have to assume at this point that he's had second thoughts about the job, or he feels he's seen enough of it in the rough outline to be satisfied, or maybe he's overwhelmed with debts ... considering how many macro commissions he's posted lately on FurAffinity, that wouldn't surprise me. But as for the job I was commissioned to do, it looks kaput. I've filed the half-done job away and plan to forget about it.

When I discreetly aired this sorry business on-line, I got a surprising response. Other artists recognized the deadbeat in question, and revealed that *they* hadn't been paid by him either. Perhaps I came close to the truth when I suggested that the customer had gone on a spending spree that he was subsequently unable to afford.

As for future commissions, I'm not very keen on them.

The Colour Out of Lovecraft

Lately, I've been reading a collection of Lovecraft, thus sharply reminding myself of why I loathe and despise everything the man ever wrote. His partisans often excuse HPL's horribly overwritten prose as "imaginative" and "dream-like." I beg to differ. Lovecraft's imagination ran in a very deep and very narrow furrow – tentacles, obscene beasts with bat wings, rat's or dog's heads, squamous horrors, decayed cities, ruined temples, vaults, sepulchers and grottoes where sub-humans danced around fires to the bestial beat of the drum and the eerie wail of flutes. For some reason, flutes put HPL on edge. Benny Goodman would have been insulted. As for "dream-like," I have plenty of dreams that are surreal, but none as linear and episodic as the plot of a story by H.P. Lovecraft.

Despite a lengthy bibliography, there were only two stories ever written by H.P. Lovecraft. In the first, a sensitive, bookish, aristocratic white man – either English or from New England – leaves the familiar confines of his dwelling place, family seat or hometown. He shortly discovers some repulsive subhumans worshiping ancient monstrosities, panics, runs home to Mama, and is never entirely right in his mind after that. In the other story, a sensitive, bookish, aristocratic white man – either English or from New England – pines away for something he once saw in a dream. He falls into a deep slumber in which he searches for his lost vision over several subjective years, but in the end discovers that the vision he had was of his own nursery when he was six.

All other HPL stories are minor variations on, and combinations of, those two similar sketches. Both are transparent re-tellings of the brief time he left home and lived in New York City, only to flee back to Providence and his aunties in a cringing funk.

So much for imaginative and dream-like.

HPL was, in fact, a little boy who played at being one thing or another, but never grew up. Into his thirties, he played at being an 18th century country squire, a robust Aryan outdoorsman, an antiquarian scholar, chemist, political scientist and literary figure, but he was, in fact, none of those things. He was an impoverished, over-sheltered, woolly-headed *fanboy*, who had modest talents of his own, but remained in thrall to antiquated models and possessed not a shred of self-discipline. Too late in life,

HPL discerned the deceptions in which he had wrapped himself, and ultimately regarded himself a failure.

What's worse is that his life all too closely resembles *mine*.

I don't think I ever took my pretenses as seriously as Lovecraft. I never believed, or even seriously pretended, that I was an extraterrestrial visitor in disguise. I never deceived myself into believing that the world owed me a living simply because I was an intellectual who preferred to spend my time buried in books, rather than working in an office. But I could probably be faulted for not being realistic enough, for not applying myself to more practical uses of my talents ... such as they were. I never took the plunge by leaving home at the age most people do. I have been arrogant and supercilious at times. I never followed nature's course by marrying and establishing my own family. To this very day, I don't even own a suit.

On the other hand, I breezed through my 47th birthday a long time ago. Lovecraft died of cancer at that age. I guess I can say I've surpassed HPL in *that* respect, but I'd like to have more to boast of than mere, pointless longevity. Lovecraft, for all that he was a writer dyed in purple, whose prose was antiquated even by the standards of L. Frank Baum, seems to have left an indelible mark on the field of dark fantasy. Indeed, some may go so far as to say he *created* dark fantasy, as we know it today. What have I got to show? I was an influence on the formation of furry fandom ...

Oh, the ignominy of it!

There's the common wisdom that it's never too late to change. I'm not convinced that's true – clearly, if you wait until you're under the surgeon's knife before you give up smoking, you have little reason to expect a favorable outcome. Still, you never know whether it's too late unless you try.

I just wish I knew what it was I was supposed to do to become whatever it is I wanted to be when I grew up.

Did I mention that I never decided what I wanted to be when I grew up? A cartoonist? A novelist? An animator? A scientist? An illustrator of books? Maybe I haven't outgrown Lovecraft at all, and like the Hermit of Providence, I'm still just lost in make-believe and should have gotten a job delivering pizza.

But I don't think I could ever have fallen so as low as to wear a suit.

There Can Only be One Ending

Not long ago, I read a passionate on-line argument that J.K. Rowling had finished the Harry Potter series of novels on a weak note. True, there was a twist ending, where – to fulfill the prophecy that either he or Voldemort must die – Harry sacrifices himself. But in killing Harry, Voldemort also kills the last remaining horcux that contains all that is left of his own soul, and so destroys himself as well.

Oh, is it a little late for a Spoiler Alert? Probably not. Everybody knows about the horcuxes by now,

or never intends to read the books anyway.

From that point, the plot gently winds down, and the good students of Hogwarts settle into the lifestyles of modern, married, middle-class British wizards. Harry Potter's later life rather reminds the reader that the tumultuous break-up of The Beatles ended in nothing more sensational than the mundane, late-life crises of Sir Paul McCartney, MBE.

The revised ending that was preposed on-line hinged on a literal interpretation of the prophecy, that either Voldemort would kill Harry, or Harry would kill Voldemort. In the revision, the prophecy was that only one of them *could* die – *only one!* When Voldemort was vanquished – as, one way or another, was pretty much required – Harry would live on, unable to ever die. He would grow older while his friends Hermione, Ron, Luna and the others died, one by one, leaving the unhappy Harry alone forever, with an immortality he never wanted.

It smacks a little too much of *The Highlander*, to my mind. It is precisely the sort of melodramatic ending an amateur writer would choose; imagining himself in Harry's place, fist clenched to forehead, bemoaning his fate while secretly gloating over being immortal.

But the idea of an immortal Harry bothered me on a deeper level, which I was unable to formulate. Next day, however, I had it.

Yes, an immortal Harry Potter is more exciting, more in keeping with the traditional Ideal Hollywood Ending. But let's look at Harry more closely.

As we first met him, the eleven-year-old Harry Potter seemed like the customary Special Kid. Although he lives with very boring, very mundane step-parents who see nothing Special in him, unknown to everyone he is a Wizard, and he was left a fortune by his true parents. Harry is all but independent from the banal suburban couple who aren't even his real mother and father (who were also wizards). He is enrolled from birth in a snobby school full of wonder and exciting new experiences, and he is at the center of a Prophecy that will determine the fate of the entire Wizarding World! In fact, Harry's Specialness is, by far, the least satisfactory thing about Harry. You can't help but hate him, because you so much wish you had been born him, but weren't. I suspect that this detestable Specialness is mainly because this was Rowling's first novel, and she was still working out the character. As the series progresses, though, it becomes plain that Harry is *not* very Special, after all. He's a bit better wizard than Ron, but clearly not in Hermione's class. He struggles with his studies, does poorly in some subjects, has limitations on his powers and prefers commonplace amusements such as playing for the school rigger team to burying his nose in a book. That it's called Quidditch and played on flying brooms at skyscraper height doesn't change the fact that Harry is more comfortable with school sports than academia. Some of the other students, and one of the masters in particular, don't even *like* Harry.

At bottom, Harry Porter is merely a good-hearted, but rather ordinary, kid in a situation that is far deeper and portentous than *he* is.

Ironically, it is Voldemort who gives Harry Potter his Special status, no one else. Voldemort, also known as Tom Riddle, sets the prophecy in motion when he attacks Harry's parents, and Harry himself in the cradle. The attack backfires and lodges a part of the evil wizard's own soul in the infant, linking them intimately. What befalls Voldemort from then on will involve Harry, *regardless* of Harry's own

intrinsic qualities ... or lack of them. Otherwise, Harry would surely have grown up to be a very ordinary wizard, with no Parsel Tongue, no impressive prophecy nor the sinister mark of Voldemort on his forehead.

I strongly suspect this was intentional on the author's part. If it hadn't been so in the first book, then by the second or third she must have seen how the rest of the story must go. As such, when Voldemort destroyed Harry, he destroyed that last part of himself that was in Harry, and the young wizard simply went back to what had been all along – a very ordinary, if good, person.

The series might still have been written to end like *The Highlander*, with ordinary Harry elevated to a sort of godhood, as an immortal, but this would have undermined the entire treatment of the character up to that point, for no better reason than to provide some readers with a bigger thrill. I have no doubt in my mind that by allowing the series to fade to a mild, mundane conclusion, J.K. Rowling did the right thing. There can only be *one* ending.

LEFT-OVER PARTS FOR BROKEN TOYS 21

WAHF - Mark Manning, tandmark@outlook.com, Steve Davidson (Amazing Stories), steve.davidson33@comcast.net, Tim Marion, timothy.marion@rocketmail.com, Kent Pollard, kentpollard@gmail.com, who says "Auto-correct on Android is handy, except when it isn't."

Rodney Leighton, who says he will write to anyone whos ends him a zine but doesn't want to be a loccer. "Jenner" Craig Hilton, jenner@docrat.com.au, who says he is more comfortable working on a Wacom tablet now than paper, which makes me worry that soon an artist may not need any manual skills at all, just some elusive thing called "judgment."

Jerry Kaufman JAkaufman@aol.com — I'm sorry to hear your physical ailments continue to plague you, and I hope that you have been able to get relief in this last month of the year. I've been having some knee pain since this summer, and intend to do something about it (like seeing my doctor) in the New Year. At times the pain has been enough to make it hard to get to sleep. I discovered that lying on my back with my knees stretched out didn't work too well, but when I elevated my knee so it was just a little bent, the pain was alleviated just enough. I have a small pillow that does the trick, but perhaps a rolled-up thin towel would work.

Although you've reached a small audience with your fan art, it does make a (small) legacy, as does my writing and publishing, and that of many other fans. But your work has always been good enough that it should have given you a career of some kind - cartoonist, commercial artist, etc. It's entirely mystifying to me that you, D. West, Dan Steffan, and so forth never got the traction to do what you all do so well, and make some sort of living and a wider reputation.

I liked your use of an odd font for the names and addresses of the letter writers. I idly wonder what the name of the font is, although I don't think it's one that I'd use myself. Our local fannish discussion list has frequent eruptions of font-talk, thanks to John Berry being on it.

Bride of Frankenstein is really more of a parody of horror than horrific itself. The cinematography, set design, character design, and so forth, are wonderful to watch, and the acting is probably a good example of camp.

Kent Pollard, kentpollard@gmail.com — Happy 26th, Taral. I hope Spring is more of [one] there than it is here. Yes, we've managed to reach the melting point a couple of times this week, but we're a long way from me sitting in the sun watching my goldfish.

Like you, I find myself humbled, if not dumbfounded, by Graeme's capacity to produce. I, too, signed on to do some work for *Amazing Stories*, but quickly went "what was I thinking" and begged off. I haven't even produced an issue of "Coronal Mass Ejection" in years. It seems more than I can manage to read a few zines a month, let alone generate a comment now and then.

"Snow Job" reminds me of a visit, a long time ago, to our favourite (at the time) Vietnamese restaurant, where a friend with an entirely unadventurous palate ordered a burger and fries. It took a group of eight of us an embarrassingly long time to translate the new server's "you want key trap with that" into an offer of catsup.

Brad Foster, bwfoster@juno.com — Even when you try to cut back on the output, still it flows, and here is BT #26 to prove it. Face it, you can't help it, you were born to do this, and you will do it, no matter what!

Random thoughts from reading this issue: Awards: I've never felt educated or informed enough in just about any field to feel comfortable nominating for most awards. How do I know that I really *know* who all the eligible people are, and have I seen enough of their work to make a good decision? Rather than send in poorly thought-out or knee-jerk nominations, I just don't do it. On the final ballot of awards, it is also often the same thing: I don't feel I have enough info to make a good decision. Maybe I read one story by one writer, or saw one drawing by one artist on the list-- so how could I say they were better or worse than any of the other nominees? Sometimes I will know a little about everyone in some group, and can give what I feel is an educated vote on what I think was the best of that. But, usually, I leave it up to others who have a wider exposure of a field to do the awarding of votes.

Sorry to hear you've kind of hit the wall on doing illos for Graeme's *Amazing* column. Didn't know that the idea was that you were going to do one for each new column, thought it was just that one-time illo you finished. Hope you can get fired up on it again, would be a great expansion of the audience for your work, not to mention having a specific illo for his column would make it stand out as well. Maybe if you can't do it for all of them, you can still drop in on those that do inspire you with ideas? Has he been able to show you the text for any of his upcoming columns? Might be things more inspiring in there that will get your creative juices going again?

At first, I had the impression that Graeme would write a column, send me the text and wait for me to illustrate it, but he couldn't wait. He send me two ideas, and then started writing as fast as he possibly could, the next five columns appearing in the *Amazing* site before I was even started. I have to question whether he would be better

pacing himself. But, then, the way websites work, there really is no sense of time or space. For all I know, hardly any of the readers every find Graeme's columns on the site, so he may not be doing himself any favours.

Regarding your new access to multi-channels of television. I laughed a bit when I read: "Why a sports fan in Memphis has to have his own channel and a sports fan in Seattle has to have another, I just don't know. It's the same sports." If you change "sports" to "science fiction" and "channel" to "fanzine," is probably the same thought many sports fans would have toward what we do!

I like the multiple channels of specialty music we get, mainly because I seem to look at it from the opposite side of how you wrote. Broadcast radio these days really seems to be full of stations with very specific play lists already, so hard to hear much that is different. Having so -many- of these type channels on the TV means I can skip around among them, and actually do get to hear widely different things. Sure, someone can pick one channel and stay there (I know while I'm working I like to have the "smooth jazz" station going), but it also gives you easy, instant access to all kinds of variety, whenever you want it.

I saw an article the other day that they had recently fired the programming genius that had taken over the Cartoon Network the past few years, and had worked hard to have less cartoons and more live-action programming. Hoping this is a good sign, and will see a new flood of inventive cartoons coming in the next couple of years.

Some moron was doing that on YTV too. I know someone who worked there for a summer, and I think he told me the station director was a woman who didn't much like cartoons and wanted to get rid of them. Disney also went that route, making me wonder if it was a demographic decision or just that hiring some pimple-less teen actors is cheaper than animation?

Getting older and starting to break down is a bummer for sure, as your problems with the relatively universal act of "going to sleep" shows. Hoping I haven't had a hint of that happening yet myself. Got some kind of odd muscle pain a few weeks ago around my abdomen, such that lying down in any position just aggravated the pain. It also coincided with one of the ice storms that came through the area, making the house much colder than usual. Ended up being fully clothed in several layers of socks, pants, shirts, jackets, cap, etc, then wrapping myself up in blankets, and sitting/slightly reclining on the sofa, propped in one corner so I would not topple over. Did fall off to sleep that way, thankfully. After a couple of days the pain became less (kind of moved around my body as it lessened, very odd). And after three days was able to find a position lying down that worked. Bodies are weird things, aren't they?

Diabolical, when you come right down to it.

Bill Patterson, bpral22169@aol.com — Well, I don't think is really serves to leave it at: "literature is written with a serious purpose in mind." There is a lot of nonliterary writing that is nevertheless serious of purpose. I could illustrate from 19th century and early twencen, but I think the earliest Spider Man comics and in general the whole Marvel bullpen when it was trying to break ground in the 1960s – stuff that fifty years later is the kind of "just formula" that *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.* puts on the small screen every week.

I do think attitude to formula is part of it -- but after the long formalist discussions last century, I also think we have to include elements like: how does the work try to relate to Eliot's "Order of Literature" and how much of Harold Bloom's "anxiety of influence" is there and how does the writer cope with it. And then there are formal elements about how these serious ideas are developed.

And then there are imponderables, like, when are parallel subplots good writing and when are they just tacky -- that call for judgments of taste.

And speaking of judgments of taste, Eric Mayer raising the Stephen King quote about literary magazines being read only by people who want to be published in them reminds me to remark that those self-consciously literary types seem absolutely unaware that they are simply recycling worn-out clichés of a ghettoized genre, and that is what makes their literary production unreadable. The prestige of that kind of art fiction is absolutely indefensible. It's an art movement that is 100 years old and was worn out sixty years ago.

I feel much the same when someone raises the chestnut about Hemmingway's style. People! That was almost a century ago. The Hemmingway style is a straitjacket, not something to be imitated.

I'm not sure what you're getting at to say "I doubt the gap between Sturgeon and Tolstoi is much more than a single letter." Doesn't seem to be a development or conclusion of anything that has gone before, so there's no context to help me parse or construe it.

Steve Jeffrey: Yes, yes; likening the closing down of science fiction in favor of space opera to the punk return is a familiar critical attitude, but, really, having been through that era (and it may be tailing off only now), it struck me more as *nostalgie de la boue*.

The literary qualities of the production have more relationship to the literary qualities of the craftsmanship, it seems to me. Iain Banks is/was an honest-to-god real-life literary writer certified by the "mainstream" establishment. I read much of his stuff (Yes, even stuff like *The Canal*, which is even more bizarre than *The Wasp Factory*). I'm also not sure how fair it is to label his Culture novels part of the "space opera" tendenz. I think Walter Jon Williams gives you a better picture of that evolutionary phase of the genre, since he started off doing really intriguing stuff like *Aristoi* and the *Metropolitan* novels, and then made a deliberate and conspicuous veer into space opera with the *Dread Empires Fall* trilogy.

Milt Stevens: My idea of a sensible "sport" is bowling. In bowling, you find a large heavy object, and you throw it *away* from yourself.

Andrew Hooper, fanmailaph@aol.com — As usual, you criticize my unpaid work, and offer no alternative. You do not suggest any parties that you would like to see win instead of those who do. You do not suggest anyone I might send the ballot to in order to get a fresh perspective. All you do is whine and pussyfoot around whether you can bring yourself to vote or not.

There are no "nominations" in the FAAn awards. There winners, and those who place behind them.

My win for Best Fan Writer last year was the first in a decade. I'm sorry that's too often for you.

There is still plenty of time for you to express your contrary preferences in the only way that matters. Voting deadline is April 5th.

I am bereft of alternatives. I don't know how the FAAn might produce a better outcome, or even what a better outcome *is*. Nevertheless, feel unsatisfied with them, and it has come to where I have more peace of mind when I don't think about it. Your FAAn award last year for Best Fanwriter was actually a happy departure, in its way, and I'm pleased to see that you won a some small "formal" recognition for a span of fanwriting which has been second to none. Not even I – in my sometimes disparaging, disenchanting view of fandom – want to detract from that. However, there remains a pattern, which is made no less apparent in light of the three FAAn awards won over the years *Chunga*, the two won by *Apparatchik*, and the three consecutive FAAn awards for best Fanwriter that you yourself also won in 1995, 1996 and 1997. But as you say, I have no constructive alternative. I can vote – and may, even though my reading of fanzines has narrowed too much to do much other than reinforce the status quo. I also suspect this issue of *Broken Toys* will be much too late to contribute further to the discussion of this year's award.

But, let's explore a small range of alternatives. For Best Fanartist, almost anyone but Dan and Steve. Dan I admire tremendously, and Steve I love you like a brother. But their one-two hold over the slot for the last 11 years is a tad ridiculous. Has Marc Schirmeister's highly original style and sense of humor even been nominated in those 11 years? Or at all? I don't have the statistics at hand, but Schirm says no.

Incidentally, the information on the screen belies my statement that Brad Foster was also a shoo-in. Given that he has won an unholy number of Hugos, in fact it turns out that he has *never* won a FAAn. The one anomaly strikes me as silly as the other.

Best Fanzine possibilities abound, but tastes differ. I was never of a mind to vote for *Journey Planet*, *SF Commentary* or *Interstellar Ramjet Scoop* because I only browse fanzines with such high content of book reviews and SF-related material. In past I have voted for *Challenger* and *Askance*, though, which for me have a more pleasing balance of light and heavy reading. I like both well enough that I have regularly contributed them as well. This year, I might well be tempted to vote for *Beam*.

Best Fanwriter is a much harder choice, due to the large number of possibilities. My problem is that I am a very impatient reader, and not satisfied with merely a grasp of correct English and logical construction. There is the almost indescribable quality of style, that the best fanwriters bring to their material, that is rare. It is not even found consistently with the same fanwriter. Even so, style is not immediately obvious, and takes a bit of patience to recognize., and this patience is what I notably lack of late.

I have written the name "Andrew Hooper" on a few ballots where the space says Best Fanwriter, but I am nagged with the suspicion that I am simply overlooking other worthy writers.

HotRod 302, Ogre302@aol.com — I have only seen my name in print a couple times, but that was only to be given credit for concepts I came up with.

I know how it feels to once be on top of the game, at least when it came to something in the fandom at least, and to feel dethroned by another. I don't think the person who knocked me off my #1 spot

maliciously targeted me specifically. It was just they did flat-out porn and would do *anything* anyone asked, no matter how ... *creepy* ... it was. Though lately, it seems that both her, and my stars, have faded.

Maybe TV is just something that kind of fell out of your daily routine? Or maybe you just have had an adjustment of personal tastes. I watch a lot of educational channels and fight sports. Cartoons. Walking Dead. Okay, so I watch too much TV.

I wonder how long it will be before someone has a "FURRY TV" channel. I almost shudder...

Actually, I was only kidding Graeme, and think that his reach may have finally exceeded his grasp. Now that he is writing at top speed for *Amazing*, its beginning to look as though some of Graeme's other activities are being neglected. There is only so much even a zealous, hyperactive fan with retirement-time on his hands can do! In my case, I just hope that I've recognized *my* limit, finally.

TV is definitely a habit I've lost. My complaint about it is that it's changed so much that I'm not sure I can get back on the habit.

If there was a "Furry TV" cable channel, I would probably not watch it, anymore than I read books just because they are "furry." (Such as *Redwall*, which struck me as thoroughly second-or-third rate fantasy.)

Ron Kasman, ron.kasman@gmail.com — I guess fans who read fanzines today are a pretty small group. I guess problems will arise whenever a group gets so small that a few people can dominate goings on. We have talked about the Canadian SF Awards and the inherent problems. I guess the Faan awards have inherent problems too.

I told someone recently, and who it was may come to me soon, that I have been out of this for a while, not having attended a convention (excluding the Fantasy World Con of a year and a half ago, which I had contributed to) since Toronto in 2003. I don't miss it. I see Hope Leibowitz maybe twice a year and I always enjoy seeing her and Charles and whoever else may be with them but beyond that, you are my only contact. I don't miss it much. I think I missed going to the monthly parties at your friend Rob's place when they ended. That may have been because it was a way to get out and see old friends, as good a reason as any. I don't miss the old friends so much now. I still see Larry Hancock a couple times a year too. I like Larry very much. I see Peter Halasz every once in a while. These are good people, but I don't want to do fan stuff with them beyond the occasional discussion. Who else, now that I think of it? Probably no one. That is OK. People change.

People change. Time passes. It gets harder to remain continent...

Eric Mayer groggy.tales@gmail.com — I don't think the FAAns are worth voting for anymore. Most of the voters have had their minds made up for decades and they aren't going to change their opinions. You mention the lack of surprises, which is a good point. It's impossible for me to believe that the exact same people produce the best work year after year. Occasionally someone other

than the usual suspects would produce something of enough quality to sneak in, if voters were paying attention or were willing to vote for someone outside the inner circle. But actual work during a given year, or lack thereof, barely makes any impact aside from a slight reshuffling in the order of finish amongst the usual group of winners.

Let's face it, people typically vote for friends. It isn't necessarily pure cronyism, either. It's human nature. Don't we tend to see a friend's work in a more positive light than a stranger's, if only because it means more to us? I did fairly well in the voting when I published *E-Ditto* a few years ago but that was because some friends who don't usually vote for the FAAns did so to give me a boost, and with such a tiny number of votes, that's all it takes.

What I find troubling about the idea that the same people produce the best fanac year after year is that it implies that some fans are very much better at fanac than the rest of us. But is that true, or are some fans just on a broader wavelength, appealing to a the currently popular interest? Ultimately, I find the whole business of comparing fuzzy peaches to smooth nectarines pointless.

I have to start reading Graeme's column. Especially now that you are illustrating it. (Get to it now!) It's really great that a fan like him, with an enthusiastic and welcoming attitude, is writing for *Amazing*. It will give readers a much better impression of fandom than if one of the insular, kvetching, old guard were writing it. Not that Graeme is younger than them, except in spirit. Doesn't John Purcell write for them too? And he's another good representative of fandom.

Heaven forbid! I hope I didn't give anyone the idea that I was regularly illustrating Graeme's column! I'll be lucky to illustrate a second column before one or the other of us dies of old age. Especially now that Graeme appears to have set his sights on writing about science fiction itself, a topic of little personal interest.

Good luck finding something to watch on your new television set. Mary and I never replaced the set that stopped working a decade or so back. Now, rather than wasting time on TV, we waste it on the Internet. Actually, I think the Internet is more interactive.

I have a similar problem sleeping as you describe, though not nearly as severe. With me it isn't full-blown insomnia, but just difficulty going to sleep nights. Which is strange, because during the day, sitting in front of my monitor, I'll feel suddenly sleepy, put my head down on the desk and basically pass out for fifteen minutes. Weird. Maybe I ought to replace my bed with a padded desk to sleep at. Mind you, often I am doing legal editing work when I begin to feel sleepy. You don't suppose that could have anything to do with it?

Another funny "Bob" story. Although I am less appreciative than normal of stories involving snow in any way. We set a record for snow during February and we're near the record for most sub-zero days during a winter (7F). Tomorrow morning, March 17, it is supposed to go down to 11F. Since the weather got bad unusually early, the second half of November, we've had four whole months of unmitigated winter.

Theodosius II was the longest reigning Roman emperor? Well, I guess if you wanted to survive as emperor the best way was to do nothing.

Not necessarily. What made it possible for Theodosius (as well as his father Arcadius, and his uncle Honorius) to retain the throne although they were entirely passive emperors, was that it was possible for more ambitious figures

to rule from behind the throne, using the legitimate ruler as a figurehead. Had circumstances made that unworkable, they would have been removed. In Theodosius's case, it was his mother, then his sister who held the real power.

Perhaps it is an interesting light on women in power that several times in history a woman has been the real power behind a weak emperor, but you never hear of a Roman empress who was wise, just or generous. Merely feared.

While I can see the fascination of collecting ancient coins – handling bits of coinage that people were actually using to buy some wine, or a candlestick, or a bolt of cloth over a thousand years ago – there is also something peculiar in trading money you can spend for money you can't. Although from what you say your coin collection must be escalating in value, so that's something. I suppose having knowledge of coinage and history you could speculate on who would be using a silver denarius in 31 BC and the sorts of things it could buy.

Curiously enough, the value of a denarius hasn't changed much in 2,000 years. From what I've read, my understanding is that a silver denarius was about what it cost to support a typical working class family for a day in Augustine Rome. \$100 to \$200 is about what you can expect to pay for the same coin in middling-good condition today. Due to escalating values in the last three or four years, though, the contemporary value has been pulling ahead. As a result, whoever sells my collection back to some dealer will probably break even with what I spent over the years.

Pretty fancy wheels. Your cat might just take a fancy to them as good perch.

It needs an add-on cat carrier.

A few comments on the loccol. Both Bob Jennings and Tim Marion seemed to wish your fly story had had a surprise ending. Am I the only reader left in the world that doesn't think every story has to have a twist at the end? (Judging from modern books and stories, probably I am) I really don't grasp this penchant for judging stories solely by how they end or the idea that the end must be something that either undermines the whole story up until then, or turns it on its head. Doesn't that diminish the value of the whole reading experience?

Bill Patterson's loc brings up the subject of literary fiction as opposed to genre fiction but, of course, those distinctions are purely an invention of publishers to help their marketing efforts and an invention of academics who need to give themselves something to do so they can keep getting paid. Authors and readers had nothing to do with the distinctions except insofar as they chose to buy into them.

Jerry Kaufman, JAKaufman@aol.com – You seem obsessed with John Lennon, repeating the line, "So this is Christmas and what have you done," three times, if my count is right. Well, what have you done? Quite a lot, so it seems to me, with artwork and articles and letters of comment all over the fanzine scene, as well as issue of *Broken Toys* every month. To you, it seems like not much. From out here it seems like a huge amount of productivity - although practically nothing you could make a living from.

You have to admit, Lindsay Lohan is less quotable. But I'll have to avoid quoting from Lennon in future, at least on the subject of Christmas.

I know that when I tell people what we've been up to, it seems to them like we have busy lives; but from inside here it seems like we do nothing much, punctuated by briefly busy moments.

I'm behind two issues now - to remind myself of your current email address, I checked #26, and found myself reading your first comments on the FAAn Awards. I've sent my ballot off to Mr. Hooper already, but have given a bit of thought to the way the egoboo has fallen out. So even though the subject doesn't derive from #24, I'm going to discuss it anyway.

Whether you count the results as showing the best or the favorite of the past year, they are relatively consistent. I see a number of factors to explain this, some more likely or more important than others.

I think one of the more significant is the voting setup itself. There are three slots of nominations in each category, but they don't carry equal weight. The first choice one selects is given three points, the second is given two and the third is given one. I think this will favor some writers, artists, zines etc. much more than others. If familiar names are more likely to be written in the first slot, and also get entered in the second or third slots, the first place points pile up rapidly. Of course, I'm entirely speculating – and I'm not even sure that having ballots in hand to review would prove anything. There might be some mathematical theorem to support my supposition, but I have no idea what it would be.

We could try to convince next year's Corflu hosts (in Britain) to change the point system to allow only one point per slot (the more usual method, I think) and see what shakes out.

As for the FAAn Awards going mainly to Corflu attendees, this seems to happen. Maybe they don't receive or read fanzines outside the ones that get the top number of votes; maybe they do include those zines, but always in that one-point slot. Maybe they don't like the fanzines that they don't vote for. (Maybe that's too obvious?)

I liked hearing about your good friends, and about Judith Merrill. I find I am a bit concerned about how you and Paul Kidd feel about hot buttered mice. Was Paul actually thinking of the anthropomorphic mice you depict, or was he dreaming of actual mice? It seems to me that the latter, buttered or not, would be better as a dish for a cat than sexual stimulation for a human. But I guess it's a matter of different strokes.

Paul's taste definitely runs toward the anthropomorphic type. They don't make duct tape the proper size for actual mice. It helps to think of anthropomorphic characters as cartoons or ethnic types, certainly not as animals. I know furries who disagree on that point, but there are *not* the pack I run with.

John Nielson Hall, johnsila32@gmail.com — Re: the FAAn's, I understand what you say, but what would you suggest? Fanzine fandom is a small pool being dried out by the heat of blogging and other forms of fanac. Nevertheless there are some big fish still flopping around in it. Should they just give up and die?

Is there such a dichotomy? Are our choices, “the FAAns as they are,” or “extinction?” I don't think that's at all the case. Fandom, such as it is, will survive merrily with the FAAns as they are, the FAAns if they were different, or the FAAns if they didn't exist at all. After all, fanzine fandom did just fine in that long interval between the first

awards and their revival about 15 years later, in 1995.

If you like fanzines – and after all you are still knocking them out and getting people to write back about them – then what's wrong with voting, even if you accept that the aforementioned big fish will probably win anyway? Indeed, what's wrong with coming to Corflu? What's the alternative? The way I see it, it's better to be on the inside having some larfs, than be pissing on it from the outside, which is only going to make you miserable. This may well be the not-so-great end of an era, but at the same time, when it's gone, it's gone.

The alternative isn't as draconian as you suggest – it really isn't a case of vote for the FAAns and go to Corflu or fanzine fandom is dead. Far from it. I don't go to Corflu but publish, while half the people who do go to Corflu don't publish. What should be inferred from *that*? *Nothing*.

That's irrelevant, however, as I'm not advocating the overthrow of the FAAns. I don't even have any particular changes in mind. I've only observed that the voters seem to have remarkably stable taste – they don't appear to think much changes from year to year, and what they like doesn't change at all either. This is not what I think you would expect from a dynamic social environment ... but I guess it is what you'd expect from an elderly one that is set in its ways and no longer very open to new influences or patterns of thought.

The only alternatives to the status quo are, first, to try to get more fans to vote. That may or may not change anything, since the rules governing the FAAns are quite specific about what sort of people may vote, but the more who vote, then the more interesting the results are likely to be. The other alternative is to relegate the FAAns to the status of the Past Presidents of FWA, or the Corflu Guest of Honour, as more or less an in-joke.

Laurraine Tutahasi, laurraine@mac.com – I believe I sent my previous LoC to a dead e-mail address. If you didn't receive my LoC to #24, let me know. I can resend it.

I know all about good intentions and never seeming to catch up. That seems to be the story of my life.

It's always nice to have inspirations for art projects. Getting around to acting on them is something else. The same with fiction, though in that area I don't have a problem; that is, I don't have any inspirations. Good luck on all your endeavours.

Back in my college days, codeine gave me a high; but I don't recall hydrocodone ever doing that. I think the first or second time I used it, it worked well as a pain killer. After that I reacted similarly to Tim Marion, in addition to giving me constipation. Some of us just react badly to some drugs or not at all.

A lot of comic strips are available on the web these days. I actually subscribe to one service, where, for a nominal annual fee, you can read as many strips as you want every day. They send e-mail, or you can read them on the web. A lot of the strips I read are reruns of old favourites. Some I read separately online.

I love Milt Stevens's comments about "Hot Buttered Mice." He has a way with words.

I read "The Devil's Riddle." It's a real poem, not the "free verse" that people pass off as poetry.

However, I don't understand it.

I don't much like poetry myself, but evidently have better luck understanding it.

Milt Stevens, miltstevens@earthlink.net — *Broken Toys #26* begins with the topic of awards. I thought about saying there was no bad form of egoboo. Then I realized that wasn't true. Mere notoriety may pump up your ego. However, that may be for the period of time before they hang you. Charles Manson is very well known. Some people may even admire him. That isn't the form of egoboo any of us would want. For a much milder example, G. M. Carr believed egoboo was whenever anyone mentioned your name. She is remembered for winning a *FAPA* egoboo poll by voting all of the points for herself. Before she did it, there wasn't any rule against doing that. We always seem to acquire written rules after someone breaks our unwritten rules.

Once upon a time, I came in sixth in the best fanzine category in the FAAn Awards. That might have been nice, except I had never heard of the fanzine that supposedly earned me such an honor. After that, I've never paid much attention to the FAAn Awards. What you say about the awards is basically accurate. They usually fall between insular and incestuous.

The Hugos are a much larger kettle of fishiness. In recent years, we have been getting voters from other universes in the fan categories. We always knew that other universes existed. There were comics fanzines and people who wrote for them. There were little magazines which existed on the borderlands of fandom. They just didn't bother with the Hugos. There were also people who did amateur fiction/porn zines. They didn't want publicity, and we were happy not to give it to them.

Times have changed. We have websites, blogs, and things that go bump in the internet. People write words and other people read them. Much of this resembles the primordial slime from which life originally arose, but some of it has become self-aware.

So why is the Hugo ballot the only point of contact between their universe and our universe? That's a good question. They could go to eFanzines.com and poke around traditional fanzines, but they don't. We could poke around blogs and such, but we don't for the most part. I think the problem may involve that amount of time in both universes. There is only so much of it. We use of all the time we have in our own universe, and there isn't any time left to do more than wonder about other universes.

Steve Jeffrey, srjeffery@aol.com — While this is hardly any consolation or likely to make you feel better, my problem with sleeping is that I find I nod off more and more at odd and sometimes inconvenient moments in the day. I suppose I really should adjust my sleeping habits to guarantee more than six hours per night, but I've got into the habit of going to bed and reading and listening to the radio around 11pm with the alarm set for 6 am to get up and ready for the bus to work, and that habit is so ingrained it persists even through weekends and holidays. So more and more often I nod off on the bus home after work. Luckily my stop is the end of the line (It's a longish 45-50 minute journey each way), so I don't need to worry about missing my stop. And then I'll quite easily nod off again on the sofa watching television in the evening.

And now I find even reading, where on the page or the screen, has a tendency to drift me slowly into the Land of Nod, which can be more embarrassing at work when trying to proofread a long and complicated document on screen and jerking back awake a few minutes later hoping that (a) I didn't snore and (b) nobody noticed.

It is, I think, hardly surprising that the same names come up time and again in the FAAn Awards, since it is largely centered around paper fanzines, a field which has an almost incestuously small catchment of editors, artists and contributors, with few if any new or younger fans coming in. (And I still think of Claire Brialey as a younger fan, despite the 55th issue of *Banana Wings* arriving in the post a week or so back.)

Since *Broken Toys* is one of the few e-zines I get or respond to with any regularity, I don't know how much crossover there is between paper and e-zines, but even your own letter column has many of the same names I recognise from *Flag*, *Chunga* and *Banana Wings*, and I suspect I'd have to venture quite outfield before new and unfamiliar names outnumbered the more familiar ones. (*Journey Planet* was one such zine which seemed to actively look for and encourage new contributors little known in 'traditional' fandom, and I really ought to try and catch up with what Messrs Bacon and Garcia have been up to in recent issues.)

And yes, once - back in the early '90s, when I still had the sylph-like figure of a young girl (whom I kept in the closet) rather than the stoutness of Pooh Bear - I tried to do everything all at once, as if fandom would suddenly disappear over the weekend: fanzines, three or four apas, locs, art and cartoons, book reviews, conventions and panel discussions, and being co-opted as publication manager and then reviews editor of the BSFA. God knows where I found the time or the energy. (I do remember that the concept of free weekends were something only dreamed about as a vague and distant prospect.) Something had to give, and it turned out to be me, with a concerted scaling back, if not total gaffiation, around the mid-noughties. I think at the moment I've reached a level of engagement I'm reasonably comfortable I can maintain, while recognising that if I was a bit more strict about bringing work home at weekends I could probably branch out and explore a bit more.

I re-tuned my TV the other week when we unaccountably lost several of the BBC channels. We rarely venture outside the handful of BBC channels and a couple of FreeView movie or classic repeats channels, but there seem to be dozens more pages, most of which seem to be trying to sell us rubbish jewelry, household bargains, Christianity or adult entertainment (pornography). Out of some 300 TV channels listed, I doubt if we've ventured beyond number 15 (Film 4) ninety percent of the time. Bruce Springsteen seriously underestimated the lack of choice.

What I do regret is that there are far more interesting radio channels and programs around than I possibly listen to all at once, and that's even without venturing into the realm of internet radio.

R. Laurraine Tutihasi laurraine@mac.com — I recently decided that I'd print out e-zines that were sent directly to me (or their links). So this is the first issue of your zine I've read. I was suitably impressed. This is the sort of fanzine I like.

Well, you have 25 more issues to print out and read. It's discouraging, though, to still find there are people who won't read an e-zine. It isn't as though I prefer to publish digitally — I have no choice, if I'm to publish at all. When people won't read my zines because they give me the message that they really don't care whether I publish a good fanzine or not ... if it's not on paper, then I'm wasting my time.

Are the people who believe Mars can be terraformed the same ones that don't believe in human-caused climate change? I kind of doubt they are the same group.

Well, one of them on Facebook was the same person ... and no one questioned his view.

Whatever is causing your Conservative Party to go green, I would be grateful if the same thing happened in the Republican Party. It seems to me like the Republicans would cut off their noses to spite their faces. I don't think they've heard of pragmatism.

Our Conservatives aren't really going green, just trying to seem a little green to woo voters. In fact, the recent bill to reform the medical marijuana laws are a step backward, that will prevent users from growing their own. Instead, they'll have to buy it from a company that will charge whatever it wants and can deliver second-rate pot without anyway to complain about it. Generally, our Conservatives are not as stupid as some of the supreme examples of idiocy the GOP has revealed lately ... we have them, but the party is better at keeping them shut up. Steven Harper, the PM, is an ideologue to be sure, but more than anything else he wants power, and will compromise his principles to stay in office. He'll certainly compromise anyone else's principles.

My sympathies to you and Steve Stiles for your cholesterol problems. If you haven't tried it, you might try taking Red Yeast Rice and Niacin. They helped a friend of mine, and I put my husband on them when the doctor voiced concern. They seem to help. The harmfulness of high cholesterol probably depends on the exact level.

My cholesterol problems are minor ... more LDL than is good, and not enough HDL, but over all no excess. I take a simple, which is no big deal since I have to take pills for other things anyway. Better than having to find some exotic rice product somewhere, creating another shopping headache. (I love basil, for instance, but in a neighborhood dominated by Asians, Middle-Easterners and Caribbeans, you can't find this basic of European cooking anywhere!)

I don't know about social media in general, but I do know something about Facebook, where I spend some of my time. I and most of the people I know on it use it to stay in touch with people we already know, including family. I don't use it as a platform for meeting new people, although I have met a few. I usually depend on the recommendation of people who are already friends before I add anyone whose name I don't recognize.

It is very annoying that we must subscribe to so many channels we never watch in order to get the few that we do. We are always told that subscribing to each channel by itself would be more expensive, but we're never given the chance to really know. We don't get the CBC, of course. Our PBS is what comes closest, I believe. Quite a large chunk of my viewing is on PBS. I also pay extra to get Showtime and HBO; I watch a number of shows on each of those. I watch a smattering of shows on the major networks: CBS, NBC, ABC, and Fox. Otherwise, there's one show on SyFy; but that's ending. There's one show on History, which is on sporadically. And there's BBCAmerica. I occasionally watch a show on Animal Planet. I have a movie channel package, and I find movies to watch on them from time to time.

Your Travelling Wilbury looks very nice, as does your cat.

The Old Oaken Fuckit

Fandom without sour grapes would be a pretty poor vintage, I think. We might be reduced to talking about science fiction, and be no better than those people whose lives are dedicated to Elvis, Marvel comics, Esperanto or Marxist literary criticism. So no matter how chipper and chirpy Graeme Cameron is when he writes about science fiction or fandom, I intend to preserve the integrity of my cynicism.

This makes it all the easier to agree with certain remarks written by Graeme about the execrable programs passing for documentaries on cable television. In the last issue, I was thorough in the bashing I gave my new cable service, and thought I had nothing to add. But, by the sort of coincidence that pushes buttons, Graeme recently lambasted a pseudo-documentary on the Oak Island Mystery. Now, it happens that I've been interested in that subject for a long time. I have read a very good, skeptical book on the subject, and by the aforesaid coincidence watched most of the same documentary criticized by Graeme!

First, you might want to know what the Oak Island Mystery is. To begin with, Oak Island is a tiny little isle off the eastern coast of Nova Scotia, barely the size of Tom Cruz's ego. For a couple of hundred years, many people have believed there was a vast treasure, or something at least mysterious and grand, buried under this sandy lump of limestone. Among favorite candidates have been Captain Kidd's pirate loot, the treasury of the Order of the Templars, Shakespeare's original manuscripts (written by Roger Bacon, of course), and the Ark of the Covenant. In fact, there is nothing whatsoever there.

However, two centuries of looking for something that wasn't there have transformed the place enormously. At present, Oak Island resembles a cross between the beach at Gilligan's Island and the craters of the Moon. The original location of the supposed "money pit" has been excavated so many times that it physically isn't there any more, and the exact spot where it once existed is in some dispute. But I'm getting ahead of myself.

I'm relying on memory, but, as I recall, the story of Oak Island supposedly begins with the discovery of a shallow sump, over which a rope dangled from an overhanging tree limb. It appeared very much as something had been lowered by that rope into a pit, and buried. Curious to see what was buried there, and very much hoping for gold Doubloons or silver Reales, a pair of brothers dug into the sand and soon came to an unexpected obstacle. They found a layer of rocks. Removing the rocks, they dug deeper still and came to a layer of logs, seemingly laid side by side. They dug farther still and came to more rocks. Then more logs. To the brothers, it seemed as though the series of obstacles couldn't be natural, they must have been laid by someone who had something of extreme importance to hide.

But dig as deep as they could, the brothers never came to the bottom. Before they had dug more than 30 or 50 feet, water suddenly burst into the pit and flooded them out.

Let's skip ahead about a hundred years. The pit had been re-dug many times, and the alternating obstacles of logs and stones had been confirmed. But each time the pit was excavated, it flooded. Other pits were dug to one side, hoping to dig into the original pit at a lower level, but they flooded at precisely the same depth as the original. I don't know why anyone thought they wouldn't. Oak Island can't be much more than ten feet above sea level anywhere, and the island is made of porous limestone. The diggers were well into the water table. Desperate for some other explanation, the

diggers found thin layers of what proved to be palm leaf fiber under the sand. In their imaginations, these layers became a deliberate trap, laid down by clever pirates, pious Templars or frustrated Shakespearean actors to extend all the way from the pit to the nearby beach, so that water would be efficiently siphoned into the treasure pit if anyone was foolish enough to try to dig it up.

Just how the owners of the pit were to ever recover their hidden goods was not, at that time, understood.

Twentieth-Century diggers were very ambitious, bringing modern engineering equipment to the task. By then, the original location of the treasure pit was very problematical, and one excavation had collapsed and nearly killed a man. Two other lives had been actually been lost to unventilated carbon dioxide. Yet, tantalizing clues had been brought up by the drills. Bits of metal link, such as would be part of a watch chain, for example. A pair of antique scissors. Scraps of gold that were unidentifiable. And then there were the camera probes that broke into small cavities in the limestone. Although excited observers claimed to have seen, at the 200-foot level, a skull and the outline of a hand, as though preserved in the briny, oxygen-poor water, the objects also looked a good deal like fallen lumps of limestone. Not only that, but the cavities were about the size of a chesterfield, barely large enough for Harry Houdini to preform an escape from. If modern tunneling techniques couldn't dependably keep a shaft open for Twentieth-Century treasure hunters, how could pirates or Templars have gotten there without bringing the whole island down on themselves? Not to mention that the cavities were already flooded with murky water.

By then, some ever-hopeful treasure seekers had dreamed up an elaborate plan describing the original pit. In their minds, the Oak Island pit was the Grand Central Depository of the Pirate Nation. The treasure seekers believed the pit had been a wide, vertical shaft, with horizontal tunnels sloping upward from different depths, and at the end of each was a separate treasure vault. The entrance had been filled in later, and the water trap set to prevent anyone from digging into the original shaft. Earlier, I wondered how the owners of the buried treasure ever expected to retrieve their ill-gotten gain. Apparently, the compass bearings and depths of the horizontal tunnels would have been recorded. When the pirate who owned the treasure in tunnel number six wanted his loot, he knew where to dig and how far, but not the whereabouts of anyone else's loot. Nor had he ever to go near the booby-trapped original shaft.

It's a very clever idea, you have to admit. The trouble was that there was no proof.

Oh, to be sure, the island had regular and very secretive visitors. All sorts of late 18th and 19th century trash can be found all over Oak Island, and some curious enigmas as well. There are large polished stones, for instance, with holes neatly drilled through the upper part. Treasure seekers claim they mean something, that perhaps sighting through the bore holes help locate the right places to dig. Unfortunately, nobody can read the puzzle. It is even possible they are just crude, stone anchors, abandoned or washed up.

Similarly, there's no reason not to think that visiting smugglers might not have dropped a pair of scissors or other oddments to be found a century later. Oak Island is conveniently very close to the mainland, connected in modern times by a short causeway. And yet it is quite isolated. There's been a suggestion that Freemasons might have used the island for rituals, which is not as unlikely as it may sound. Freemasonry was under strong disapproval in Colonial days, if not outright illegal. You might expect to find any amount of trash dropped by reveling masons in the dark night. Indeed, treasure

seekers themselves may have left some of it.

Then there is the questionable evidence of gold scraps found in one of the drill holes. They have since conveniently disappeared, and who's to say they weren't "salted" in the shaft to convince skeptical investors to put up money to drill deeper? Other supposed "evidence" has also disappeared ... if indeed it ever existed.

The only compelling evidence that there was something unnatural about the original money pit was the odd layering of logs and rocks in a vertical stack, plus the fiber-lined "channels" that created the water trap. Keep in mind, Oak Island is limestone. One of the things you find in a limestone landscape is natural sinkholes. The original depression found by the 18th century brothers was probably nothing more than that. And what is more natural on a small, low-lying island than logs and even rocks being moved up the beach by storm waves, and deposited in a sinkhole? I myself have seen sinkholes in Tennessee whose bottoms are full of such natural rubbish, washed in by rain water. Gravity might tend to lend an orderly aspect to whatever was washed in. Add a little imagination, and it's not hard to understand why the brothers might have interpreted a natural phenomenon as man-made. As for palm leaves, they wash up from the Caribbean during storms too. Once they were littering the beach, there is nothing odd about sand gradually covering them over. Therefore, the most likely explanation for what lies in the money pit is nothing – just random, tiny cavities full of sea water and calciferous ooze. There never was a treasure because there never was a pit, just misinterpreted natural phenomenon. Now that the evidence has been long since excavated, ground up and bulldozed out of the way, proving that there *never was* a treasure is next to impossible. For all I know, there is someone digging a bigger and deeper shaft as I write. Significantly, even if there had been some sort of treasure, the evidence for that has been destroyed also.

The documentary Graeme watched was almost certainly a cynical attempt to make an effortless documentary that the producers could sell to the History Channel or to PBS. They would have known everything about the history of the Oak Island money pit, and nothing they filmed couldn't have been found in the index of the 1978 book I read. Nothing. Most of it is in Wikipedia, if you care to look. They knew nothing they "found" on Oak Island was a new discovery, and probably never expected to find anything new. It was just a job of filming something ... anything. They would have filmed dung steaming, if they thought History Channel would buy it.

Unfortunately, the majority of TV documentaries today seem little better. There's treasure, all right. But it's not in the ground. The money is in the film can or video memory, and that's why cable TV is flooded with "documentaries" about Noah's Ark, escaped alligators in the New York sewer system, the lost ten tribes of Israel and spontaneous human combustion. For the script writers, cameramen and actors, it's not science or history; it's just a job.

From Sound Stage to Holo Deck

Recently, I read mention of a nearly-forgotten milestone of entertainment history – *My Favourite Husband*. I've listened to at least a dozen episodes of this radio program that were recorded on the DVD collections of *I Love Lucy*. In tone, the radio program was much like the TV show, but the Lucy character played by Lucille Ball is rather more on the ball. She isn't as wacky. In some ways, the radio

program was funnier than *I Love Lucy*. For one thing, there are no embarrassing scenes in which Lucy is slobbering all over Sonny Tufts or Alan Ladd. There is no music, either. The show never came to a stop as Ricky belted out “Babbaloo” in barely understandable English, or while the Mertzes did a Vaudeville song and dance routine. Another advantage that *My Favourite Husband* enjoyed was that you couldn’t see it. Because you didn’t watch radio, you weren’t horrified by Lucille Ball’s mugging and rug-chewing.

I have two seasons’ worth of Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz’s history-making sitcom. Despite sometimes going well over the top, or sometimes stooping to new lows, *I Love Lucy* was often hilariously funny. Sometimes, it was unexpectedly moving, as well. If you have ever seen the episode where Lucy tells Ricky, in the middle of his act at the club, that she is pregnant, you may remember how oddly intense it was. What the TV audience didn’t know, though, was that Lucy *was* pregnant. The actors knew it, of course, but real-life husband and wife became so caught up in the moment that, in effect, they forget they were acting. That was an instant of genuine emotion you saw, unplanned and very nearly lost. Ricky stumbled over his next line, and had to be cued by one of the musicians in the band.

The show was enormously influential. For more than a decade after *I Love Lucy* first aired, a surprising number of sitcoms involved show business in one way or another. *The Dick van Dyke Show*, for example, and the *Danny Thomas Show*, were stories about entertainers. *I Love Lucy* was influential in another way, as well. Previously, sets for television comedies were rather minimal. *The Honeymooners* had Ralph’s apartment, and you rarely saw anything else, not even the bedroom connecting to the sitting room (where all the action occurred). This is hardly surprising, as the sitcom grew out of five-minute blackouts on Jackie Gleason’s comedy-variety hour and only later spun off as a sitcom. Another early classic, variously known as *You’re In the Army Now* and *The Phil Silvers Show*, had few basic sets. The barracks, Bilko’s private room in the barracks, and occasionally Ritzik’s kitchen or the Colonel’s office. They were simply backdrops, that were never seen from any other camera angle.

To my surprise, as I watched the nearly 80 episodes again for the first time in decades, I was impressed by the seeming reality of the sets used for *I Love Lucy*. I began to make sketches, and soon discovered that the Ricardo apartment was virtually a complete suite. There is even one episode where you see Lucy and Ethyl from outside, leaning in a window in the “fourth” wall. Not only was the kitchen connected logically to the sitting room, but so was the hallway to their bedroom. The hallway outside the apartment door led to a real corridor, which contained a flight of stairs up to a logically laid-out rooftop. The downstairs flight led to the Mertzes’ apartment, on the floor below. Even the balcony made sense, leading down to an alley that was seen in one episode. In the second season, when the Ricardos moved to a larger apartment in the same building, they were on the same floor as the Mertzes, and shared the balcony. There is even a basement set where Lucy once accidentally burned \$500 worth of frozen beef in the furnace.

The producers, Desi and Lucy themselves, apparently thought it important enough to establish a believable environment for the series that they created all these logically constructed sets! This too made its mark on TV history, for most television programs thereafter followed *Lucy’s* lead.

Next time you beg to disagree with a friend about whether there is a turbolift on the right side of the transporter room on the *Enterprise D*, or on both sides, remember who started it all. There might have been no *Enterprise D* without the Ricardo apartment.

No Good Deed ...

Not long ago, I read on Facebook a charming tale about a man who found a lost wallet. A reward had been posted around the neighborhood, making it possible to return the billfold to its rightful owner, a wealthy man. The wealthy man quickly counted the hundred-dollar bills inside the wallet, and promptly accused the finder of having “rewarded himself” with \$100 from the \$1,500 originally in it. There were only 14 hundred-dollar bills now. Apparently, the owner of the wallet was not only thick enough to have lost it in the first place, but unable to see how illogical it was to take *some* of the money, but return the rest.

While this was going on, a rabbi steeped in wisdom wandered by. For some reason rabbis (also Irish priests and friendly dwarves) always seem to do that whenever they might be needed for an uplifting moral at the end. The rabbi listened to both men tell their sides of the story, then took the wallet from the owner and returned it to the man who found it.

“Why did you do that?” exclaimed the astonished owner of the wallet.

The rabbi answered, “Since *your* wallet held \$1,500 and *this one* only holds \$1,400, clearly *this* wallet is not *yours*. Until its rightful owner appears, this one, and the money in it, belongs to the man who found it.”[\[1\]](#)

Charming. But, like all such fables, you know it isn't true. In real life, the rich guy would have called the police with his cell phone, or – in some states – even shot both the finder *and* the rabbi on the spot. You don't meddle with rich men, not even when they're cheating you. Maybe *especially* not when they're cheating you, because – along with their money – they have their good standing at stake. Strange as it seems, there is no one as sensitive about his reputation for probity as a thief and liar. Your belief is his due.

You think my cynical commentary on the story is also an exaggeration? From my personal experience, I can say it isn't much of one. Years ago, when I lived in the north end of the city and used to walk miles and miles all around the neighborhood, out of sheer restlessness, I found a wallet. It wasn't the first time nor, I think, the last. But that time, the address I found in one of the pockets was only a couple of miles away. I strolled down to Willowdale, south-of-Finch and east-of-Yonge, found the right house, then knocked. A rather gruff man answered the door. If he was grateful to have to have his wallet back, he was very discreet about it. Then his expression changed to one of cunning suspicion, and he accused me of stealing all the money that was in it. Of course, I already knew there was no cash in the wallet, merely a driver's license, photos, cards and so on.

To the best of my knowledge, there had never been any money. I guess someone else had found it before me ... or picked the guy's pocket and disposed of the worthless leather. I pointed out that had I been a thief, the last place I would show my face was at the victim's door. But he countered that perhaps I was hoping for a reward on top of what I'd stolen. What if he phoned for the police, *hey?* I said I hadn't asked for any reward, and certainly his baseless accusations were the last thing I expected ... and then I made a hasty exit. Well, try to do a man a good turn, even at some inconvenience to myself, and *that's* the thanks I got! I had to count myself lucky not to have to explain myself to the

cops.

That's real life for you. I felt like a turd that had been stepped in. There was no rabbi, of course – wise, foolish or plain buttinski. Poetic justice is usually only found in stories by stand-up comedians with names like Shecky or Manny.

Not all endings reinforce my often-cynical view of life. One day, while I still lived in Willowdale, I saw a man leave my bus, but I noticed he left behind his briefcase. There was no hope of getting off at the next stop and finding him again, so I took it home to look inside for an address.

What a treasure trove of unexpected surprises that man's briefcase turned out to contain! There were the usual personal papers, of course, whose details I've completely forgotten. There was a book, however, that was quite an eye-opener – a university press edition titled something like “Uranium Metal: Mechanical, Chemical and Nuclear Properties.” Digging deeper I found sheafs of paper ... engineering diagrams and blueprints of a nuclear reactor. Specifically, I had in my hands the specs and plans for the Pickering nuclear generating plant, west of Toronto.

It was as though I had fallen into a James Bond novel. Was there a desperate gang of SPECTRE agents combing Parkdale for their missing briefcase, even as I pawed through its secret contents? Suppose I published an anonymous demand for \$1,000,000 in unmarked bills for the safe return of the briefcase and all its papers? Would anyone respond?

The truth was a little more prosaic, unfortunately. I found a business card and called a man who turned out to be only an engineering student who was studying for a career in nuclear power. He was, in fact, grateful that I had his briefcase, but assured me there was nothing secret about anything I had found in it. (But then, he *would*, wouldn't he?) I think he came by for it the next day. (No black limousine at the curb, nor did men in dark glasses accompany him to my door.) A twenty-dollar bill may have changed hands, but even if it didn't, I basked in the glow of having done something useful.

That was my bit of adventure for *that* month. But, you have to admit; a taste of Bondian adventure, in addition to some genuine gratitude from a cool guy, sure beat being accused of theft by a mean-spirited deadbeat!

[\[1\]](#) *Ro Nagey posted a version of this story on FaceBook in late March.*

New Tucker Hotel

I sketched the drawing below a little while ago, with Graeme Cameron's *Amazing Stories* column in mind. But it's a fairly detailed proposal, and I wasn't sure I wanted to spend the necessary time on it. Before I could do much more, new distractions came along that pushed the sketch of the New Tucker Hotel to the bottom of the slush pile.



As you can see, the old two-story Tucker Hotel still stands, at the back of the lot. Given the graying of fandom, wheelchair ramps and stair lifts have been installed. It is mainly used now for parties. Between the new building and the old is the First Fandom Fountain, an eternal gush of correction fluid, alternating between blue, green and pink. It is not recommended that guests linger near the fountain, as the fumes are both intoxicating and injurious to health. To the left of the fountain is Corflu Hall, where the formal presentations of the FAAn awards are held annually, as well as other ceremonies, lectures, readings and minor riots. At the far right is the replica of the Tower of True Fannishness. Like Cinderella's Castle at Disneyland, it is merely a plaster facade, and there is nothing in the structure but public washrooms. However, the view from the scenic platform at the top is splendid. In the foreground you see the modern, main building, which contains accommodations for fans who wish the privacy of their own rooms, and also ample floor space in shared rooms for fans who are content to merely "crash" – pillows and foam pads are provided, and sheets are washed daily. There are six hot tubs and a gym in the solarium. A pneumatic tube connects the hotel directly to the airport, the nearest Chinese restaurants, a diverse fast food court, and a Denny's for purists.

The main building is also equipped with the latest in digital telecommunications – cell, Wi-fi, hi-speed optical, satellite dish, ansible, you-name-it! There is even a post-office and print shop on premises, offering a choice between old-school paper publishing, digital formats and social networking. Unfortunately, the only people who can afford to check in at the Tucker Hotel are the same-old, same-olds that you see at the Worldcon every year, who have never read a fanzine.