

The Art of Garthness #14

June 2016



“Smile! You’re on Candid Camera!”

Colophon

Welcome to *The Art of Garthness* #14, dated June 2016, a personalzine from Garth Spencer at 4240 Perry Street, Vancouver, BC CANADA V5N 3X5. You can also contact me at garth.van.spencer@gmail.com. This fanzine is available for contributions in the form of articles, letters, illustrations, or other fanzines in trade.

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Taral’s correct address: 245 Dunn Ave., Apt. 2111, Toronto, Ontario, M6K 1S6 Canada (e-mail taral@bell.net). Taral writes in *Broken Toys* #49, “This is important! Lately, I have become aware that not only are some fans using an address that has been out of use for more than two years, but they are bulk-distributing that wrong address to others! **Please** replace the useless teksavvy address with the correct one above!”

News



Taral's correct address: Taral writes in *Broken Toys* #49, "This is important! Lately, I have become aware that not only are some fans using an address that has been out of use for more than two years, but they are bulk-distributing that wrong address to others! **Please** replace the useless teksavvy address with the correct one" (e-mail taral@bell.net; postal address 245 Dunn Ave., Apt. 2111, Toronto, Ontario, M6K 1S6 Canada.)

Garthness:

Talossan census: When the Kingdom of Talossa (a micronation online) decided to hold a census recently, I found myself updating my listing thusly:

"I was born on the flanks of Aetna where the sullen smokepuffs float, and promptly stolen from vacationing space gypsies by a tribe of wandering Anglos. After several unhappy decades conflicting with the social norms I couldn't perceive, and getting mocked for it, I finally worked out that my life's mission was to spell out what 'common sense' meant to Anglos - and show it up for the dysfunctional delusional nonsense that it is. Secretly I am a Mad Scientist working on a social calculus that will permit me to manipulate you all.

"I joined the Kingdom of Talossa on a lark, while websurfing, the same day [in 2004] I opted for a Universal Life Church ordination. Since then I have been mostly interested in the Talossan language and reconstructed history, including the abortive stories of the Brothers Asbad. Somewhere among my papers is an unfinished translation of *The Gospel of Thomas* into Talossan. My online activity on Wittenberg has been sporadic. In recent years I have voted, but have otherwise been preoccupied by mundane, fannish, and heathen/pagan activities.

"I won the first Fan Activity Aurora Award for my contributions to Canadian science fiction and fandom (editing an SF fan newszine for a few years in the 1980s). While editing *BCSFazine* in the late 1980s I awarded myself the nonexistent Sockeye Newshawk Award. I may have won an Elron Award one year for disservice to SF and

fandom, but I'm not sure. I retired the yard glass at the Merchants of Deva convention parties, having succeeded in downing the whole yard of vile alcoholic green stuff ... temporarily. And I was the Canadian Unity Fan Fund delegate in 1999, travelling from Vancouver, BC to attend inCONsequential II in Fredericton, NB.”

Heathening: Like a silly fool I have now decided to start a local Vancouver heathen group, as in offering-to-Norse-gods heathen. This being a grassroots, self-organizing practice, it can (one hopes) avoid the issues that plague organized mainstream religions. My motivations are simply a) I got tired of straining to make myself believe some rather fantastical elements in mainstream religion, b) I would like to have a group which I can regularly meet. For whatever reason the heathen community in southwestern BC is seriously dispersed, at least for my ability to travel around.

Would it help to start a western Canadian online heathen APA?

Man, the things I'll do to make my life interesting ...



early pranking

This Is Why I Drink

Actually getting up in the morning usually takes me another four hours after waking up ... the first time. Has my natural force been abated?

Sometimes I miss the bus by two or three minutes, and have to wait another fifteen. This can make me at least half an hour late to my part-time work. Then there's sometimes a new Canadian having issues with boarding, or leaving a bus – Vancouver buses take two steps to leave, not one. Not everyone gets the memo about this. Every so often someone in a wheelchair wants to use the bus but can't make their destination clear. Express buses are often packed to the gills.

Working with someone - like understanding bank tellers or making myself understood in groceries - can be unpredictably baffling. It is as if static erupts at irregular intervals in our ears, or speech; generally I have to go back and ask someone to explain their explanation, spell out what their instructions meant, find out what "it" or "this" or "there" meant to them.

Is it really impossible to understand the lyrics to popular music? It isn't just a matter of age, I had the same problem when I was a teenager.

Asking questions on Facebook, or making queries on Google, can be a real crapshoot. You cannot tell who will respond, or when, or how much. Sometimes it's actually better to deal with an automated information system.

Maybe it's just having seen it all before, but there really seems to be nothing but crap on TV. The police procedurals might as well be soap operas, the comedies aren't funny, the horror shows aren't horror, the science fiction shows have barely any tokens of science, it's horrifying how many comic books have been turned into TV series *for adults*, the educational documentaries seem to be dumbed down for elementary students, and don't get me started on soap operas. Some of the best writing seems to be reserved for commercials.

It would be nice to go cycling and swimming again regularly. It would also be nice not to get mowed down by incompetent drivers, or infected by incompetent users of public pools.

There must be mind parasites, as Colin Wilson asserted in one of his metaphorical novels; it's time to exorcise mine before I turn into a grumpy old man for good.

First I'll have another drink.

Letters

Mike Meara, May 3, 2016

Many thanks for sending AoG#13. #13? Why, it seems like only yesterday that you sent me #9 and #10. #9 and #10? What happened to #11 and #12? Don't tell me, I can't cope.

(oops)

Anyway, I'm just pleased to get whatever you care to send me, as I'm coming to the view that AoG is my favourite personalzine in the whole wide (?) fannish world. I hope that enough others feel the same way that you get some recognition in this year's FAAn awards. Would that please you? Or don't you care about such things? My answers to those two questions would be "Yes" and "Not as much as I used to", which may just mean that I am Old and Tired, not to say Inconsistent.

(Well, gosh.

(I don't suppose my name gets around enough for my zines to show up on the FAAn Awards ballot. That hadn't even occurred to me; my concerns have narrowed down to work, bills, catsitting, documenting our undocumented culture, the stories and other projects I don't get down to writing, and daydreaming wistfully about the ladies I might have known intimately ... no, strike that last. Outside voice! Bad! No biscuit!)

Enough of that. Liked the cover, but will not comment further. Talking about religion is too much prophet and not enough profit. Best avoided. Nothing useful can be achieved by it, anyway.

A life well-lived – what is that? Don't hurt anyone, or if you do, try to fix it up as best you can. Don't hurt the planet, or if... ditto. Leave people and things a bit happier and better than you found them. Have as much fun as you legally can. The prescription is simple to write, but quite hard to achieve.

Just look at most people.

Your Planet Facebook stuff raises the possibility that intelligent life exists there. But I'm still not tempted to risk a landing.

You're familiar with the work of Jasper Fforde, I expect? Most of his character names seem to involve puns of varying dreadfulness.

(I have been contemplating the creation of a story universe, basically an absurd alternate-universe version of British Columbia and the Pacific Northwest, peopled with various absurd people with absurd names in absurd situations. The adventures of stalwart Wright Burke and Diego Garcia, agents of the Reality State Office of Rory Bory Land, setting forth from their secret headquarters in the pine- and fir-clad Páinenforör Fjords beyond the Islets of Langerhans, combating the evil sinister plot to achieve global domination for BELGIUM ... Maybe I'm overdoing it. Maybe I should stick to recycling tales of the Mullah Nasruddin into updated stories about the Mullah Kintyre, Canada's only Scots Muslim.)

I was impressed by your list of Things I Know How To Do, as there are quite a few of them that I can't do. Or at least, don't care to attempt. You don't know why we still use shoelaces? Me (n)either. Actually, I don't, apart from when I'm going to do some serious walking, and I hardly do that anymore. My favourite footwear is what I call a semi-sandal, with a proper heel but with slots in for ventilation, and a Velcro-type closure. Great except when it's raining - but I don't go out in the rain these days if I can avoid it. Rain is God's way of telling us to stay indoors and get the housework done.

This loc is a bit fragmented and stop-starty. Sorry about that. I rent my trains of thought from Amtrak. Odd phrases keep jumping out at me. Such as "People can be educated". Really? That's an optimistic viewpoint and you should stick with it, sir. Well done.

(Haven't you spent any time reading and writing for APAs?)

(I only steal these lines from the best.)

Did you really only get three fanzines? And only four locs and a WAHF? Inexplicable. You must be sending tAoG to the wrong people, or not sending it to anything like enough people. Or maybe you publish too often, though a personalzine should be more frequent than a genzine, I think. Whatever, a zine this good deserves a better loccol. My witterings won't help much, but at least they've stopped now.

(No, I just cut my reviews short in order to get the issue out. Only a few people, such as Guy Lillian, make a point of reviewing practically every discoverable fanzine.)

Kent Pollard, May 3, 2016

(In response to last issue's cover, which vaguely recalled the absurd wedding-cake controversy) The difficulty, of course, comes when we aren't able to draw neat lines between doing something and someone else doing it. The refrain of the persecutor is that they are not stopping us from doing it, but that forcing them to enable us to do it is forcing them to do it. After all, if they bake you a cake for you to celebrate doing what God hates you doing, then obviously God will damn them for all eternity. I sometimes wonder, though, if they ever ask the happy couple if she is his first wife or his 41st. Or if her wedding dress will be made of mixed fibres.

((Obvious there is a subculture of alleged Christians, of various denominations, who are far more interested in honouring selected customs and values in the Old Testament according to their prejudices now – and enforcing them, even on people who don't even claim to be Christian – than they are interested in doing good deeds, as former President Carter is known to do. But this is a twice-told tale.))

Lyn McConchie, May 4th, 2016

Interesting start; problem is that to me, while broadly speaking, the first item is mostly correct, it's when you get down to a definition of 'religion' and exactly what any particular one says, that life becomes hectic. "I can't do that it's against my religion." Yes, but if you say your religion says no girl child should be allowed education, I am NOT going to defend your 'right' to follow it. And if your religion (or your interpretation of it,) insists that girls should be circumcised, I'm going to suggest that the law have a word with you. All anyone can do is the best that they can do, which to my mind starts with - "first do no harm."

Re desire for the respect of family. A lot of that is pure luck, when what you want to do coincides with what they think you should do/admire you for doing. I was very fortunate there. My birth mother was semi-illiterate, we found each other in 1979, and when, four years later I started writing (AND SELLING) books, she told everyone in her suburb and club about it. It hasn't done any harm that over the past 3 years I'm selling Holmes/Watson pastiches (to Wildside,) and my sister and her boyfriend adore Holmes and love those books. A good friend on the other hand has two degrees, and worked (being highly valued there) in a top Korean University for 25 years. She published a textbook there on ESOL too, and collaborated on a published (award-

winning) fantasy with me. But her parents and sister never valued her because she hadn't stayed home, got married and had kids. No kids made her a failure in their eyes. So family approval can be a lottery, with, on top of that, the brutal fact that *some* parents will never approve of *anything* you do, not matter *what* it is. Me, I was pleased my family approves, but if they hadn't, well, truthfully, I wouldn't have cared. *I'm* happy with what I do, that to me is what counts. End LOC..

see Lyn at her site and blog -

read updates on her writing and farm.

all at www.lynmconchie.com



Lloyd Penney, May 20, 2016

You're putting out *The Art of Garthness* fairly frequently; I can barely keep up. That's part of the challenge. Here come some comments on this most recent issue. (It's FRIDAY again!)

((I am now working to a monthly schedule.))

Setting priorities is fairly vague. Priorities for what? Your life, your future, your career?

((All of the above. It took me over forty years just to work out that what my folks probably expected – and why they were disappointed in me – was to know what I wanted to do with my life even before I graduated from high school, pick a career, obtain a degree, get married even before I had a home, build a personal estate – all while raising children to do the same. They disregarded the fact that after they approximated this life cycle, the economy changed significantly: opportunities shrank; living costs rose to the point where it took both spouses working full-time to remain at the same level of debt; housing costs rose preposterously; and it became common for grown adults to have to move back into their parents' basements.

((Clearly, setting goals and priorities in this shifting environment was an unexpected challenge, even for an adequate person. I guess something was wrong, here, eh what?))

Setting down what you want to do is something we should have done while we were much younger. I don't especially want a house to live in, but I also know that I will never own one. That's a financial reality check. Priorities and goals also have to be edited down with a good dose of reality. Only a 6/49 win is going to secure for me and Yvonne the future I want, so I suspect that when I hit 65, retirement will not be an

option for me. We will have to see what luck I have with income, and how my health continues.

((Yeah, me too, and I'm single.))

Yes, I spend too much time on Facebook, too. Civilized countries ... do they look after all their citizens? No exceptions? They help their citizens with health, upbringing, education and aspirations? I suspect I could count those countries on the fingers of one hand.

((I wouldn't expect civilized countries to "look after" citizens; I imagine almost everyone wants to take care of themselves, as independently as possible, and only depend on the authorities for problems that individuals can't take care of independently. So; you could define the functional role of governments as providing a stable platform, a peaceable environment, in which people can make an independent living, either as employees or as employers.

((But it appears that most countries – regardless of political form or declared ideology – reach a climax state, as forests do, where more and more executive freeloaders and grifters devise dodges to plunder the public purse. In fact some subcultures, like the class of investors and chief executives we call "one-percenters", seem to display the attitude that this is how things should be. When forests reach a climax state, they are ripe for forest fires. When countries reach a climax state, something like the English or French or Russian revolution may happen. I suspect we are going to experience that kind of bloodletting. But this also is a twice-told tale.))

Mother Nature, or whatever you want to call it, seems determined to keep our numbers as low as it can by throwing up against us new diseases, many with increased resistance to our current range of antibiotics, plus things like AIDS ... however, we're relatively smart, which means we can figure out ways past these barriers to higher numbers. I figure the only thing that will eventually kill us as a society is mass starvation because there's simply too many of us.

((Oh bliss oh joy, another incipient disaster to look forward to. Do you have an emergency kit? Do you know where your towel is?

((Probably the prospect of antibiotic-resistant epidemics was inevitable, and I wonder if there is a maximum viable world population or level of international traffic, for this reason alone.))

I still don't know how to get a good night's sleep, either. I am like my mother in that I have trouble falling asleep. Unfortunately, melatonin is my friend, and I probably take too much of it.

((Oh, right, that's what I keep forgetting to put on my shopping list ...))

I have had my share of Daugherty projects, but sometimes, life is such a project.

((Seems that ordinary life is a combination of projects – which need documentation, they're getting that complex.))

Bringing You News of Fresh Disasters

It's a curious thing, what you can find on the Internet. Recently there was a post reporting that *The Economist*, of all periodicals, published an article claiming that neoliberalism has had its day and has not worked at all well. (Neoliberalism is apparently the current term for what I knew as neoconservatism, or Reaganomics, or trickle-down economics – the economic and management fad for deregulation and outsourcing and under-resourcing that swept the political and economic world, starting about the beginning of President Reagan's administration.)

Within a few days I read another post from a friend, predicting a run on the U.S. dollar and an economic crash, parallel to the crash that has hit several other economies.

Within the next 24 months, the dollar is likely to start losing value rapidly and noticeably. Foreigners, who own over 7.3 trillion of them (including T-bills and other IOUs), will start panicking to dump them. So will Americans. The dollar bond market, today worth \$40 trillion, will be devastated by much higher interest rates, a rapidly depreciating dollar, and an epidemic of defaults.

And that will be just the start of the trouble. Since the U.S. property market floats on a sea of debt (and is easy to tax), it's also going to be hit very hard, again, this time by stifling mortgage rates. The next step is up for interest rates. Forget about property owners paying their existing mortgages; many won't be able to pay their taxes and utilities, and maintenance will be out of the question.

The pain will spread. Insurance companies are invested mostly in bonds and real estate; many will go bankrupt. The same is true of most pension funds. If the stock market doesn't collapse, it will only be because money is looking for a place to hide from inflation. The payout for Social Security will drop significantly in real terms, if not in dollars. The standard of living of most Americans will fall.

This rough sequence of events has happened in many countries in recent decades, and they've survived the tough times. But it has the potential, at least in relative terms, to be more serious in the U.S. than it was in Argentina, Brazil, Serbia, Russia, Mozambique, or Zimbabwe for two main reasons.

First, many people in those countries knew they couldn't trust their government and acted accordingly, even in contravention of the law, by accumulating assets elsewhere. So, there was a significant pool of capital available for rebuilding. Americans, on the other hand, tend to be much more insular, law-abiding, and trusting in their government. When they lose their U.S. assets, they'll have lost everything.

Second, those societies were significantly more rural than the U.S. is today. As in the America of 100 years ago, much of the population lived quite close to the land and had practical skills and habits that helped them get through the tough times. For 21st-century Americans, it's a different story. Shortages and disorder are going to hit commuters who live in suburbs, and urban dwellers who think milk appears in cartons magically, like a ton of bricks.

One thing you can absolutely count on is that everyone will look to the government to "do something." Americans really do think governments control the way the world works. Another certainty is that the U.S. government will "step in" massively, because everyone will want them to, and the politicians themselves believe they should. This will greatly aggravate the crisis and make it last much longer than necessary.

Doug Casey

Quoted on Facebook by D. Malinski, June 5, 2016

Now, of course we're all likely to take this with a grain of salt. And most of you can make more sense of the financial pages than I can, so you can evaluate this forecast, as I cannot. Still I post this here, as I am copying it to friends and family, because if we actually find ourselves in a crisis, there are probably steps to take *now* in order to ride out the storm. Buying gold might have been one of those steps, but perhaps much of the advantage of buying low has now passed. Having real assets, skills to barter with, and starting a home garden might be other steps.

How many of us are in a position to take those steps?

Mediocritters (Taral Wayne)



A little while ago, I had finished a long night of revising a piece I had written. It was time to shut down the computer, get a bite to eat and go to bed. Yet I was still rather wound up, and couldn't bring myself to just shut down without unwinding for a little while first. As I sometimes do, I went to the Cracked Website to read a few humorous pieces until they stopped seeming humorous. To my surprise, featured on the front page that day was "We Draw Furry Porn: 6 Things We've Learned On The Job."

“What the hell?” I thought.

Has furry porn really grown to be important enough to be noticed and ridiculed on Cracked? I had thought not, but apparently this is now the case. The article was posted on the same day I saw it, March 26.

If you must read it for yourself, here it is: <http://www.cracked.com/personal-experiences-2060-were-professional-furry-porn-artists-6-on-the-job-lessons.html>

I was unfamiliar with the six artists who were interviewed for this piece, and who draw furry porn for the money. I felt a brief burst of proprietary jealousy, but that faded quickly. The day when a handful of insiders “owned” furry fandom or had the sole “right” to talk about it is long, long past. Today there are hundreds of similar artists who are grinding out furry porn to meet the growing demand, and who know just as much about the ins and outs of catering to the strange tastes of their customers as anyone can. It’s not rocket science, after all.

In fact, I found nothing in the article at which to take umbrage. The artists accurately described the business of drawing a blowjob or forked penis just the way the customer wants it, and did so in a good-humored way. I will only complain that while it was “good-humored,” the article didn’t actually seem very funny. But let’s face it, being a comedian takes entirely different skills than drawing an hermaphrodite with eagle wings, unicorn horn and porpoise tail.

But it really drove home how alien furry fandom has become to me. Do the artists who featured in this Cracked piece even like furry art, I wondered, or do they draw portraits of horses, Celtic spirals and colicky babies on alternate weekends ... that is, whatever helps stretch the household budget? Are they furry fans themselves, or merely hard-working freelancers? Does it matter? I suspect way too many artists working furry fandom these days will take anyone’s money, so why even speculate?

I remember when everyone understood the “Erma Felna-crowbar” joke. One day a fan approached Steve Gallacci and wanted him to draw Steve’s signature character from Albedo Comics for him ... but she had to be “doing it” with a crowbar. The idea of approaching any artist with such a peculiar request, and expecting him to prostitute his brainchild in that way, was so goofy that you could only laugh.

Today, I suspect nobody would see the joke.

But that was furry fandom when the creators were enthroned in their own little worlds, celebrated for their outstanding achievements. Now artists seem to be just a pair of hands to aid in realizing increasingly absurd, chimerical characters for fans who seem to have no imagination of their own, but just mix and match various animal or fantasy bits to create a persona that is adequate to gain them entry to game spaces and role-playing circles. In its own way, this is a very democratic evolution. Why should a few snobbish artists like me expect to be the stars around which all of you negligible little dust motes revolve? Yet, undeniably, the change toward mass self-expression has also created a great deal of mediocrity. It’s the mediocrity that I have misgivings about. Why should anyone be expected to look at it, or waste his or her attention on it? It benefits the game players but not the spectators who expect professional-level play.

It is not as though many artists working in furry fandom are not excellent craftsman. My fear is that they have evolved from creators to mere realizers of other people's ideas. If they are not drawing to order, they are drawing generic pin-ups and stroke art. However well done, it doesn't really serve any creative purpose. The fandom today is all about fursonas.

I get the same sense of alienation when I hear of furry conventions, too. At one time, there was only one. Then three or four. Then close to a dozen. Even so, they were recognizably the same sort of conventions that SF cons are. They attracted people with a wide variety of interests, and featured programs, dealers' rooms with all sorts of things for sale, art shows, game rooms, costume events and parties at night. You saw a few costumed fans role-playing during the day, but, frankly, they were regarded as peculiar, maybe even a small nuisance. I hated it when some guy in a blue doggy suit or triple D-cup Bambi costume came up and mimed something unintelligible ... or, worse, wanted a hug. What the hell was a normal person supposed to do, under the circumstances? This wasn't accepted behavior in furry fandom in the 1980s, any more than it would have been in the street.

Now it is. In fact, you have furies parading in the streets, seeking hugs from the straights, and the photos of furry cons that I've seen have no one in them but fans in furry costumes, preening around and demanding to be accepted as "Flashbright Twinkletoes" or "Silvermane Nightmare." The under-thirty generation seems to have no problem with creating fictional persona they use on-line, and never questioning the other fictional personas that they encounter on-line ... but I grew up thinking this sort of thing silly and childish. I like to talk with real people – not some idealized or fantasized image they want to project at me.

"Look at me, love me for who I'd like to be, not who I am."

Is this a fandom, or just a very large group hug?

Oh, it's not to say that I don't have broadly similar fantasies. But my interior fantasyscape is one I am careful about exposing to the world. I have no intention of pulling on some baggy drawers and sticking a blue wig on my head and doing a half-assed job of being one of my fictional creations. I won't do it. You know why? Because it can't be done well. Once again, I have no love of mediocrity. The day I can walk down a street and people turn to look and say to themselves, "My god, that's a real Kjola or an actual Teh Langgi or a genuine Fraggie" is the first day I would even consider doing it. In fact, you might have trouble getting me out of a costume like that. I'd even take my baths in it.

But it ain't going to happen, on so many levels!

What I do, instead of putting on a foam head and velour pajamas, is work out my fantasies on paper. I sometimes use pencil or a pen. Sometimes I resort to a word processor. I create drawings, comics or stories that capture my innermost dreams and longings exactly as I want them. No droopy-assed costume could give me remotely that much satisfaction.

And I am judged by how good I am at it ... not simply because everyone deserves a hug.

And that brings us back to what furry fandom once was.

And to regret what it has become. Role-playing and costuming have leveled the fandom to mediocritters.

Reviews

Broken Toys #49, May 2016, the penultimate issue. “Should you wish to contact me, I park my butt at 245 Dunn Ave., Apt. 2111, Toronto, Ontario, M6K 1S6 Canada. Or e-mail me at taral@bell.net. It doesn’t cost postage.” Taral comments wryly on discovering that his zine is nominated for the upcoming Aurora Awards; observes the difficulty of maintaining a monthly fanzine (really?); discourses on the relative rewards of mundania and fandom today; talks about breadmaking; and examines the real challenges to a Mars mission, both en route and on the planet. And an incredibly large letter column. Good reading!

Billiard Balls Moved by Invisible Fairies, April 2016, with George Wells, Richard Dengrove and Gary Tesser. From George Wells at gwellssss@yahoo.com. A fannish conversation on paper, starting with “the suggestion that causation is to be defined in terms of a counterfactual relation is made by the 18th Century Scottish philosopher David Hume” and winding its way through recent popular movies eventually to the conclusion “You don't permanently OWN the presence of your friends”, occasioned by a recent demise in SFPA.