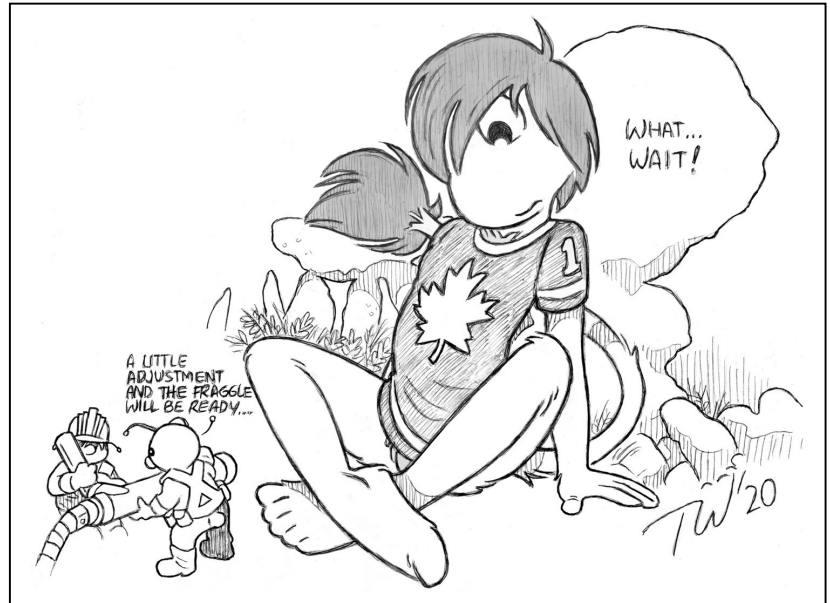


The 4 Balooobius

Why am I publishing yet *another* one-shot, the fourth of an apparently unfinished series. There is probably a good reason, but right now I can't think of it. All you that need to know is that I'm **Taral Wayne**, living at 245 Dunn Ave. Apt. 2111, Toronto Ontario, M6K 1S6, Canada. eMail at Taral@bell.net - Phone (416) 531-8974. Oct. 2020 KB&A 327

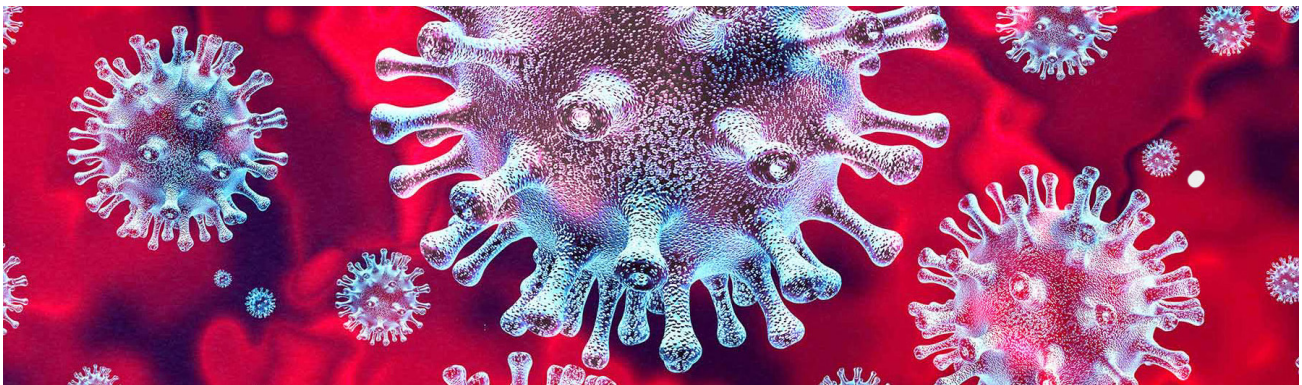
Contents: 1) "A Plague on Your House." (Covid)
2) "The Bishops Dime" (An early Christmas Story)
3) "Like a Bump on a Blog" (or Doctored Papers 3)
4) Concluding remarks not yet written



A Plague on Your House

Once again, the human race is showing it has a limited attention span, and has forgotten all about the pandemic. Either that, or it has decided that the risk of death or a lifelong disability is a small price to pay for a night out with the guys, loud music and cheap beer. Of course, I should focus my resentment on the younger members of the species, who feel invulnerable because they are young, and what does it matter if a lot of old people hack their lungs out in a hospital ... after all, they were going to die in twenty or thirty years anyway, and *right now* the pub crowd is in danger of dying of boredom.

To be fair, what no one talks about is the inconvenient fact that Covid doesn't *seem* terribly contagious. Elementary precautions seem to make it much safer than scare talk would have it. You have to do something really stupid to catch it ... such as attend a Trump rally, or boogie all night with strangers on a dance floor. Keeping your distance, using hand sanitizer and staying at home as much as practical seems to be enough to keep you safe. Wearing a mask actually won't make YOU safer at all. It just makes that boob who *isn't* wearing a mask safer ... which makes me so mad that I want to cough all over him.



The fact is, however, that if Covid was Cholera, Smallpox or the Black Death, unthinkable numbers would be dead before now. The death toll could easily end up in the hundreds of millions, including people with the money to pay for the very best medical care.

We mustn't be complacent about Covid, however. Although it will not infect you if you look too closely at it, it will spread exponentially, given enough time. We've been seeing how America has been behaving as though it was a giant Petri dish, and watching the numbers of the dead rising steadily. It is easy to make predictions. I'm no expert at number crunching or microbiology, but multiplying two numbers was all I needed to do to predict there will be 300,000 dead in America by Year's End. So far, it seems as though my predictions will be spot on ... unfortunately.

This is probably true even if Joe Biden does win in November. It will be too late to slow the infection rate before Spring. And if the slug in the White House wins a second presidency, there will be no stopping Covid until there is a vaccine.

Two things should be noted about the possibility of a vaccine. First, Trump has made clear that he can merely *order* a vaccine to be made, and it will be made in time for his re-election. This is dangerous, because Trump has every motivation to release a vaccine that may be ineffective or even dangerous. As long as it offers hope to his voters, it won't matter if they all die later... It will be too late. He will be president for four more years, regardless.

The other thing to remember is that Americans can be extremely pigheaded, trusting in their own limited knowledge, half-baked conspiracy theories and misplaced faith in supernatural agencies. Even if an effective vaccine is approved as safe, and is distributed freely to anyone who wants it, a sizable number of Americans are apt to refuse it. Anti-vaxxers are a growing and irrational movement in the US, and they constitute a threat to other people in the community if anti-vaxxers grow in numbers to the point that they defeat efforts to create herd immunity.

Keep in mind that few vaccines are for life, and some only produce a high degree of protection, but not perfect protection. If 10% to 15% of the population refuses a vaccine, because they believe that their Echinacea drops or tin-foil hats will protect them, the public won't be adequately protected. The unvaccinated are a threat.

One final thing to which you might give some thought. How *many* Americans will have to die for the Trump Nation to finally take SARS-Covid 2 seriously, and not dismiss it as just a sort of bad flu, that is only likely to kill your worthless old granddad? I'm just guessing that 300,000 isn't enough. At a rough guess, I'd say in the neighborhood of half a million. Let's put that in perspective. At present, just over a million people worldwide have died due to the pandemic. Slightly fewer than a quarter of EVERYONE who has died of Covid were *Americans*. This is not a statistic that President Trump should boast about.

To put 500,000 American deaths into perspective, it took only 2,996 casualties from the combined attacks on the World Trade Center to send Americans to war against the hated terrorists. 360,222 brave Union soldiers laid down their lives to defeat Southern secession,

and end slavery. By comparison, an estimated 416,800 Americans died to overcome the Nazis in WWII. Apparently this is the order of provocation it will take to shake Americans in 2020 from their politically induced lethargy over the SARS Cov 2 pandemic.

If the death toll rises to half a million - and without a workable vaccine before summer, I see no reason why it won't - I think Americans will finally begin to realize the seriousness of the situation. In other words, I think they will start to panic.

And what will the panicky Trump Nation do when it becomes unhinged? If you think the last few months have been bad, don't kid yourself. Demonstrations? Riots? Mobs of gun crazies? Nazis and White Supremacists? We may not have seen *anything* yet.

The plot to take over the legislature in Michigan, and murder the governor, may just be for starters. Not only is it possible that there may be other attempts at coups in the weeks and months ahead, I think we need to brace ourselves for armed mobs looking for someone to blame for the pandemic. Who will that be? Not Donald Trump, I bet. Not John Bubba Deere either. They will be looking to wash away their sins in the blood of blacks, Latinos, Indians, Arabs, Asians, Muslims, Jews, gays, Lesbians, transsexuals, socialists, the disabled, the intellectuals and the educated ... in fact, everyone other than their own sweet, innocent selves who will never blame themselves for their own short-sighted stupidity.

Hopefully I'm too far ahead of the curve, and will end up off the track. In the meantime, remember to wear your mask correctly, and learn how to hide it if the mob comes your way.



The Bishop's Dime

I have watched many Christmas-themed movies in my life, and enjoyed them all. Alastair Sim's *Scrooge* has to lead the procession, and is the prototype of all modern movies about the Christmas Season. Coming close behind in my affections is *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*, followed by Jean Shepherd's *A Christmas Story*, then *Jingle All the Way*, *The Polar Express*, *Arthur Christmas*, *Scrooged*, *The Muppet Christmas Carol*, *Emmet Otter's Jug Band*, *Mr. Magoo's Christmas Carol* ... even *Merry Christmas Mr. Bean* makes it onto my list. But I admit that I never expected to encounter another seasonal favourite this late in life. And yet, Santa left me a present last year that was as unexpected as it was a pleasure. I had never seen, much less heard of Cary Grant in *The Bishop's Wife*.

For those who have not seen *The Bishop's Wife* – with Cary Grant, Loretta Young and David Niven – the story begins with an Episcopal bishop whose ambition is to begin construction of a new cathedral in the city. He is a good man, but increasingly absorbed in material affairs, particularly those that revolve around raising money for the cathedral. Particularly important is the donation of an elderly widow, whose endowment is as essential to the Bishop's plans as is *her* desire to twist those plans into an inappropriate tribute to her late husband. Caught up in this stressful situation are the Bishop's wife, who was been watching her marriage grow increasingly unhappy; an elderly scholar of Roman history, who fears he will never find the inspiration to write his book; a cabbie who has long since given up the joy in his work; and a young man who has been sternly advised to give up a pastime he loves, playing Santa Claus for the children.

And then a heavenly helper enters everyone's life...

The interesting thing about *The Bishop's Wife* is that the angel never explicitly grants the Bishop his wish to build the cathedral. Instead, he grants the Bishop the guidance he prays for and really needs. He also brings peace to the life of elderly widow, who in fact had married for money, and who now recognizes at last that she had denied the one true love in her life.

Call me a sucker for a certain kind of schmaltzy movie, of which *The Bishop's Wife* is a glowing example. Unlike a modern film by Disney or Spielberg, which would almost certainly feature a wizard's workshop full of special effects, there was very little gimmickry in a similar picture in Cary Grant's day. I'm mindful of a movie a few years ago about angels becoming involved in a major league World Series. There were so many angels in their flying, full-feathered glory that it looked more like a turkey shoot than a baseball game. The original version of *Angels in the Outfield* had no angels in it at all – merely the voice of William Bendix, warning him to mend his ways – and despite the character being clearly of the same ilk as Yogi Berra, his authentic, colourful language was carefully muted over whenever he chose to let any rip with any profanity.

Similarly, the angel in *The Bishop's Wife* performs only the subtlest of miracles. He appears when bidden by the Bishop's prayer for guidance, but he appears without being visible to other characters, and, equally mysteriously, he leaves though a door the Bishop had locked behind him, without unlocking it. Minor accidents are avoided, and at least one auto accident that would have resulted in a sizable smash-up, had the car not miraculously swerved.

The elderly scholar of ancient history confesses his fears over a half-empty bottle of wine that is somehow never empty...

In keeping with his miracles, Cary Grant is dubbed "Dudley" by the Bishop. He wears a conservative suit and tie, is soft-spoken and moves entirely behind the scenes, "his miracles to perform." There are no wings. Instead, he "flies" on ice skates, inspiring others with an easy grace, and giving them a confidence they didn't know they had. Strangest of all, however, is that it is Dudley who envies *humans*. For all his perfection and benevolence, he cannot live among mortals, though he would give anything to do so. It

isn't explicitly explained why, but I would imagine it would likely have something to do with free will – one imagines that Dudley cannot help but love all those around him, and do only what is best for them ... but never do anything for himself, or share his life with them. It would be an interesting tradeoff if it were offered, don't you think? But unless you had tried it, perhaps there would be no way to choose wisely.

During an early scene, played by Monty Woolley, we learn that the professor of history has been working on a study of Roman history all of his life, and greatly fears that he won't live to finish it. In fact, he has not even properly begun it, never having decided how he should start the work. Realizing he probably never will write the book at all, he gives the bishop's wife a very old coin that he owns, telling her that she might as well have it to raise money for the church fund, as he would, after all, never make any use of it.

How wrong the professor is!

As Dudley reveals, in a scene designed to show how miraculous even the smallest detail in life can be, he explains to the astonished scholar that the coin is a Roman sestertius, minted by Julius Caesar to pay for Cleopatra's hotel bill. Dudley further explains that Caesar's wife, naturally jealous of Caesar's infatuation with the Egyptian temptress, ordered that every one of the coins be destroyed ... all except one, which survived for 2,000 years, until falling into the possession of the elderly scholar, who wanted to write a book about ancient Rome. Relating that story, says Dudley, would give the professor the inspiration he needs to finally begin his book.

It was a lovely fairy tale, I have to give it that. The coin in question was a genuine Roman sestertius.

Anyone familiar with one of these large, bronze coins would have no trouble identifying one – do you suppose that angels can lie in a good cause? The Latin inscription on the reverse is plainly legible in the DVD copy of the movie. Unfortunately, the likeness of the emperor Trajan is visible on the face of the coin – even though that emperor would not be born for nearly 200 years *after* Julius Caesar. There is worse to come. Julius Caesar never issued bronze sestertii at all, and never issued any coin with his own image on it. Likenesses of Caesar only appear on the coins of certain moneyers, and those were struck only after his assassination.

Furthermore, Caesar's wife could never have even imagined interfering in official business of any sort, much less recalling state coinage and destroying it. The mere thought that a wife of Caesar could be capable of *any* impropriety had led to the immediate divorce of his *previous* wife. The mere idea of a Roman nobleman of Caesar's breeding and generation sharing power with *any* woman was unthinkable.

Technically, Caesar was not, for that matter, ever actually an emperor. He was only a dictator – one of a long string of them that had appeared at intervals during crises in the Republic. The constitution even provided for them taking power – on a temporary basis. Caesar was not even the last of the dictators ... though it must be said that his nephew and political heir, Augustus, became the last of them when he founded the Empire. Perhaps it is a small point, but you would think angels wouldn't make mistakes like that!

Studying the sestertius in a screen capture gave me no reason to doubt that it was, in fact, a genuine Roman coin, worth about two hundred dollars or more in today's market. It was unmistakably minted under the emperor Trajan, between 98 to 117 AD. He had a very distinctive face that no collector could mistake for the bearded Sophists who succeeded him early in the next century. Actually, I have a couple like it from the succeeding two emperors, Hadrian and Antoninus, that I didn't pay nearly so much for. Crucially, I didn't see a telltale seam that would have revealed the coin from the *Bishop's Wife* as a counterfeit. Perhaps only a truly obsessive collector would pursue the matter any further ... but I was that sort of obsessive collector. I read enough of the inscription that I was able to identify the exact coin, using a guide to supply missing letters under the angel's thumb. The entire inscription reads IMP CAES NERVAE TRAIANO AVG GER DAC PM TR P COS V PP, exactly as it should.

The other side of the coin shows the goddess Pax (or Peace), who is standing with an olive branch in one hand, and has her foot on a captive from the war in Dacia. Now, isn't *that* the story of Empire in a nutshell? Below the goddess Pax is the inscription, SPQR OPTIMO PRINCIPI S C.

What the inscription on the "heads" side more or less means is, "The Emperor Caesar Nerva Trajan Augustus Germanicus Dacius, Chief Pontiff, Tribune for life, Consul for the Fifth Time, Father of His Country." And on the "tails" side it says, somewhat more loosely, "For the Senate and People, Best of Princes, by Decree of the Senate." You notice that the Senate gets better billing over the mere people? But we, of course, know who was *really* the boss, because his face was on the coin.

How's that for omniscience, when you can correct an angel?



1. *The Bishop's Wife*, 1947, MGM, Cary Grant, David Niven, Loretta Young.
 2. *Angels in the Outfield*, 1951, MGM, Paul Douglas, Janet Leigh and the *actual* Pittsburgh Pirates.
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Like a Bump on a Blog...

An Old Pain in the Neck

I've had it for almost as long as I can remember. I might have only been 15 or 16 when I first noticed the lump in my neck, just above the hairline. It wasn't very large then, and caused no discomfort. But it grew slowly over the years until it was eventually the size of a quarter, and felt like a wad of gum just under the skin. It was a pilar cyst.

Pilar cysts are almost invariably harmless. They grow around hair follicles in the skin, and can grow to alarming size, far larger than even the one that had developed on my scalp. In fact, mine was invisible for all practical purposes. I never bothered with it, and I supposed I would take it to the grave with me. But to my surprise, that was not to be.

The reader who has been following the many setbacks I've suffered in my well-being during the last three years or so – a lung that had filled with fluid, congestive heart failure, a stroke, a botched colonoscopy, a diagnosis of sleep apnea, an edema that would not heal and then, improbably, priapism that left me with a hard-on that would not go away without a very painful, though minor, surgical procedure. I had every right to think that everything that could happen, had happened, and it was finally over with. *Who wouldn't?*

Unfortunately, I had congratulated myself on my survival *prematurely*.

Flip the calendar back to early Spring. I had washed my hair just as anyone might, shampooing with good, hot water, and thought nothing of it. A couple of days later, I noticed that the lump had become sensitive. In fact, it was just plain sore. I must have scalded myself, I thought, and settled down to wait for it to heal. But it didn't. Instead, the cyst under the lump was now leaking small amounts of fluid, and occasionally shedding dead skin.

To make a long story short, the cyst finally ruptured, and I felt justified in yet another sudden trip to St. Joe's ... at just the worst possible time, in the midst of the first wave of the pandemic! Not only was there a rather large and unpleasant hole in my neck that would not dry, a mass of what looked like a piece of soap had popped out of the wound! It was, in fact, the cyst itself. For the next several weeks, I was dependent on a nurse who came to my home every other day to clean the wound and scrape out grunge until it finally closed on its own. After 50 years, I could no longer complain about an old pain in the neck.

I wonder if I shouldn't have published another one-shot, as *Doctored Papers 3*?

Off the Road Again

They say that you can't complain as long as you have your health. For now, I seem to have my health ... but, yes, I still have reason to complain. Traveling Matt, my trusty wheeled companion, has been acting up, and is in danger of letting me down.

As far back as Spring, Matt began making intermittent noises like old brass shell cases rattling inside an iron boiler. The racket comes from the right rear caster, as far as I can tell. What's more, this has happened before. Last time, I was forced to consult Home Medical Equipment, who supplies and repairs electric mobility vehicles for the handicapped, and it cost me around \$2,000 for new batteries, new rubber wheels, a repair to the control joystick and – significantly – a replacement for the entire right rear suspension. A year or eighteen months later, and the rear suspension was acting up *again!*

This time I went directly to the City of Toronto, and began the paperwork to replace Traveling Matt entirely ... on the taxpayers' dime, as their coffers were infinitely more ample than my own. It had also been longer than five years since I had celebrated the Christening of the original Traveling Matt, and according to government policy, I was now entitled to a new chair. Heaven knows, Matt had been through a lot during the first year or so, while I learned how to use "him" and recognized "his" limitations, and another expense like the last repair was not an attractive thought.

At first, it appeared as though a mere repair was all that was likely. But as I went through the paperwork with my case worker and the representative from the city, it gradually developed that it made little sense to repair a six-year-old chair. It would mean a brand new set of wheels. The thought had occurred that I might dub the new chair "Rolling Thunder." But that had been the name of the walker I used to have, and so I decided to stick with Traveling Matt II ... a friendlier name, that also placates my Fraggie Rock obsession.

The paperwork was intensive. If I was in a hurry, I had the option of paying 25% of the cost myself, but the cost of the original Traveling Matt had been over \$10,000!!! Even though I would only be responsible for a quarter of the total, that would still set me back \$2,500! I decided to be patient. Matters moved incrementally, week by week. June became August, and the final paperwork was approved. August passed into September, and I was informed that I would be contacted when the new chair was ready. Now it is mid-October, and there has been no word, so far. My concern now is that winter might arrive ... *still* without wheels.

I've been lucky, so far, that Traveling Matt has not failed me outright. Despite the racket that it continues to make when I go out, the alignment of the springs and caster looks as it should, and runs straight and true. For the last several months I've used the chair sparingly, so that I have been able to shop for groceries and visit my doctors as needed. How long this state of affairs might last, I cannot know.

It's not as though the pandemic is going to let up anytime soon, anyway.

Falling... With Styles

It was just a thought. Since Steve Styles died I have wanted to write a few words, but the words didn't seem to come. I haven't given up yet, but if I make an attempt, it will have to be later.

A final word: Locs. I didn't get any. Not even after *three* issues. You think there won't be a fifth? A sixth... well, I hope not.

Biloobius the Forth - End