

By the WAY #22

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And we're back for another issue after a short hiatus. It's a new year and a new decade with new opportunities and new possibilities ahead for each one of us. Hopefully, the roller coaster ride of the past decade is behind us and we, as a nation and as a world community, can move forward into a brighter future.

Below is the (for the most part), the original column submitted last May. I've added some comments and updates to bring up to date. The later comments have "[2010]" as a lead-in. As always, your comments, thoughts and ideas are always welcome.

A note on a slight correction to the rules for the Hangman game - I initially said each round would consist of six turns, that being the traditional hangman result. Later, I realized that I wasn't clear on what I meant by that and it could easily be misconstrued. So, I've rewritten it just a little bit to specify six turns with unmatched letters, as in a traditional hangman game. And, no, if "E" and "S" are unmatched, it doesn't count against the limit. [2010] Based on experience running this game in another column, the next game will never reveal any "E" or "S". It definitely makes it more of a challenge!

Commentary

I've recently had my love of baseball reignited. Many, many, years back I followed it quite closely, the strong interest driven by my management of a team in an APBA league (specifically, the Long-Distance Baseball Association) for seven or eight years. To effectively manage the team, especially for trades and drafts, you needed to keep a fairly close eye on all the teams and players. And, as a side note, to give you an idea of how long ago that was, the traditional opening day pitcher for the Lansing Generals was always Nolan Ryan (my last year in the LDBA was the year after Ryan retired).

My renewed interest began in a conversation with a coworker earlier this year about the local Round Rock Express (AAA club for Houston). He mentioned that he had a Fireworks Plus ticket plan which allowed him to see a prepackaged number of games in the same seats - basically a partial season ticket. I checked, and for this year (Round Rock's 10th), it included a preseason game and nineteen other games for a discounted rate. The name of the plan draws from the fireworks which follow all home Friday night games, all of which are part of it.

In contacting the Express and making the purchase, I found an added bonus. Needing only a single ticket, the person I was speaking with mentioned that there were a number of "orphan" seats amongst the blocks purchased by others. So, I ended up with a seat in the midst of long-time season ticket holders, fourth row back, just to the left of home plate. The package includes some of the perks of full-season ticket holders, including discounts, the option to join the Intel Club (indoor, 2nd level viewing area) and some additional services - no parking pass though.

As I'd previously only been to one game (last year with a group from work), I've had a bit of a learning curve about the park, minor league ball and catching up on the changes to baseball rules. Part of this involves working through all the different food offerings to find what I like (double dogs good, regular sausages not so much). I still have to try the Hooter's Wings and the Pok-E-Joe's BBQ, as well as the ribeye steak out at the Grill.

Also, I've found that minor league ball has all sorts of diversions and traditions. There's the between innings contests such as Joe's Crab Shake Crab Grab (two kids, in crab get-up, race to put three balls into a bag). Then, there are the Dave and Busters coupons if the Express score in the bottom of the first. A lively group joins in the Chicken Dance, though I don't.... The team's mascot is Spike (a bulldog in railroad engineer uniform).

One holdover from when the Express was a AA club, if someone from the team hits a homer, the crowd take up a collection in each section (mostly \$1 bills collected in a ballcap) which are then passed on to the player and a team fund. It was a way to support to those in AA, who don't make that much in salary and it has continued.

So, it is a lot of fun and, through the folks around me, I'm getting to know more about the Express, the field and the players. Being AAA, we've had some major league players rotate through for rehab and, of course, players called up into the "big time". One of the biggest successes so far this season is second baseman, Edwin Maysonet. He's now starting regularly for Houston and, last I checked, was batting over .400.

Thus, I'm starting to get back into baseball. Of course, I check the Round Rock game reports every day and, now that players I know are at Houston, I'm checking their game reports. I've ordered a copy of the current baseball rules to get up-to-date - a decade ago, who ever heard of the Venditte rule?

And, yes, I'm starting to follow the Rangers. What connection do they have to Round Rock, you might ask? Well, the owner of the Express is Reid Ryan and his dad is an owner of the Rangers. There is a mini-museum in the park for Nolan Ryan and there are some cross-promotions between the clubs. This makes the Express a bit unique, with direct connections to both major league teams in the state - one in the National League and the other in the American.

[2010] Well, I must say I thoroughly enjoyed the entire season last year, I even went to a number of other games beyond those in the original package deal. The folks around my regular seat are a good group and, over time, we got to know one another a bit. The park is extremely family friendly and strives to make each person's visit enjoyable and fun with an upbeat staff and a community atmosphere.

So, for the coming 2010 season, I sprang for a full season pass - in the end, it'll be a better deal for the number of games I hope to see. Parking is included and you get some free swag (cap, jersey, pin, etc). Plus, with the liberal ticket trade-in policy, I should be able to take a friend along anytime I want by exchanging games scheduled in the middle of the work week or when I'm traveling. And, I used some birthday money to get an Intel club pass - so, when it rains, it's approaching 110 degrees in the shade or I want to use a wi-fi connection, I'll be able to get inside (plus, they have upscale food if I don't want the basic baseball fare).

As some side information, Reid's brother runs the Corpus Christi baseball team which is Houston's AA farm team (Hook's tickets are part of the Express's season ticket package). There are some who are speculating, since this is the last year of the two team's contracts with Houston, that Round Rock and Corpus Christi will become the Ranger's farm teams - making that truly a family affair!

Texas Spotlight

The Civil War battlefield of Sabine Pass has recently received a bit of national attention. The Civil War Preservation Trust lists it as one of the ten most endangered Civil War battlefields in their 2009 report. Being the site of two of the five Civil War battles within Texas, it has been heavily damaged by Hurricanes Rita and, then, Ike (Palmito Ranch (see *BtW* #9), Fort Brown/Brownsville and Galveston being the others; and for the record, Corpus Christi and Aransas Pass were seized without substantive resistance).

The 57-acre site was first opened to the public in 1974 and is run by the Texas Historical Commission (transferred from the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department in 2008). The battlefield was closed in 2005 due to the hurricane damage, with those repair efforts suffering a set-back and additional damage during last year's storm. It is hoped it will be reopened in the near future, possibly in September.

To protect the pass and the crucial port facilities in Port Arthur, the Confederates built two earthwork forts - first Fort Sabine, later replaced by Fort Griffin. The first Battle of Sabine Pass occurred September 24-25, 1862 in support of the invasion of Galveston (stepping stone to Houston). The Union briefly took control of the pass, but control soon reverted to the Confederates. During the battle, Fort Sabine was effectively destroyed, resulting in the construction of Fort Griffin, with timber and iron used to reinforce the earthworks.

The Union returned on September 8, 1863 with a force of four gunboats, eighteen-twenty transports and thousands of troops (sources have between 1500 and 5000). Defending the pass, in the unfinished Fort Griffin, was Lt. Richard "Dick" Dowling and between 42 and 47 men, mostly Irish Houstonians, from Company F Texas Heavy Artillery manning six cannons. After a relatively brief battle, two gunboats were sunk and subsequently captured along with 150-350 men. The end result was the Union forces retiring from the field and returning to New Orleans (roughly 60-100 additional sailors killed, injured or missing). The Confederate suffered no losses. Interestingly, the Union commander General William B. Franklin, has the distinction of "the only American general who managed to lose a fleet in a contest with land batteries." (McComb, page 74).

Fort Griffin was finally abandoned and the remaining guns destroyed on May 24, 1865.

[2010] The Winter 2009 issue of Hallowed Ground (the magazine of the Civil War Preservation Trust) included an article by William A. McWhorter of the Texas Historical Commission on two Texas Civil War battlefields. It reports that Sabine Pass was reopened in September 2009 to the public.

For more information on preserving the Sabine Pass site, or other Civil War battlefields, contact the Civil War Preservation Trust: www.civilwar.org; 11 Public Square, #200; Hagerstown MD 21740; 1-888-606-1400

Sources: "2009 History Under Siege" pamphlet (page 8) from the Civil War Preservation Trust, Civil War Sites, 2nd Edition (copyright 2008 by the Civil War Preservation Trust), "1863 battlefield on the mend after two hurricanes" by Michael Graczyk (AP) from Austin American Statesman (May 31, 2009, pages B1/B3), "Texas State Park Guide", 4th Edition (copyright 2007 by the Texas Parks & Wildlife Department), Texas: A Modern History by David G. McComb (copyright 1989), Texas Forts by Wayne Lease (copyright 2001), Lone Star by T. R. Fehrenbach (copyright 1968/2000)

Review

Breathers is an independent comic series that I came across in my local comic book store. Currently five issues (#0-4) have been published in the past two years. Each is written and drawn by the series creator - Justin Madsen (see www.justmadbooks.com which gives more information on this series and his other comics).

Set in a world several years after a virus was released into the atmosphere, everyone going outside of sealed environments (buildings entered through airlocks), must wear a breather of one type or another. Each issue includes a few vignettes involving a small number of characters as their paths cross and become intertwined. One is a lonely man looking for companionship and who has a suicidal sister, another is a door-to-door breather salesman, while a third is a single mother who does her best to provide for her daughter and, then, there is a police detective hooked on the latest street drug - K.

What is the story behind the virus? Where is each of the characters headed, and for what end? What does the government have to do with the current state of society? All are compelling questions swirling around the comics.

Well drawn and tightly scripted, this is an excellent effort that is thought provoking and which paints a desperate world that could be in our future, in one way or another. There is one further issue to conclude this series which I am waiting to read. I'd suggest that, if this interests you at all, check out the website. Then, contact your local comic store to order it for you or buy it directly from the creator. If you think the costs are a bit high, consider that it is a self-published endeavor and that, the longest issue, is 80 ad-free pages.

LOCs

Send them in!

Jim-Bob: I just noticed that you don't like Doubt??? Care to say why in your next issue? I thought it was one of the best constructed movies I saw last year. [WAY] I came out of the movie more or less liking it, but upon grading it sometime later, I had an ambivalent feeling towards it. Some of the acting by the secondary characters was excellent, but I felt Streep and Hoffman didn't give their best performances. Part of that could be the roles they played, each with a significant backstory that formed their personalities; but, that wasn't revealed within the movie. They both appeared to be too restrained, rather than being able to fully explore the limits of the characters. Adams, on the other hand, was free to embrace her character, which had little past baggage, and push those boundaries.

[WAY] Also, in the end, where did the movie take anyone? The mother and boy, begging for a chance to go beyond their current life are all but pushed back into it, Streep maintains her position and heavy handed dominance of the school and Hoffman moves on to yet another parish school in a quest for relevance. Again, Adams' character is the only one that really grows, but really to what end? This would have been a better film without the headline actors, aiming towards more of an "art" film and thought piece.

Doug Kent: Our dentist is still quite good about repairing or replacing filling, or simply putting them in, when he feels a crown is needed (or WILL be needed soon). If there is simply not enough tooth to do so, he can't, but many times for both myself and Heather he has done fillings while letting us know that down the road a crown will without questions be required to actually solve the problem. [WAY] I'm glad you have a dentist that is interested in treating you as a partner in your care, rather than a revenue source. In my case, I've decided to try another dentist. At my last visit for a cleaning, and after showing up early for my 8am appointment, they realized "oh, you have to see the dentist first. Please have a seat, he'll be in later." The fact that I was already an hour and a half late for work and had a 10am meeting meant nothing to them, and elicited hardly any apology. However, they were quick to push to reschedule the office visit. We'll see if the new dentist is any different. [2010] Well, I tried a new dentist and, after an early uneasiness, am now very pleased with them. The new place is very accommodating to my requests

(they listen!), exceedingly professional, embodies up-to-date technology and is centered on serving the patient. After disappointments with the last two dentists, I'm happy to have found this one!

[Doug] "Let the Right One In" just didn't thrill either of us, but I believe you're the second person who enjoyed it more than we did. It was decent, but simply not much above average (to us). **[WAY]** It was a good, but not great, movie. I thought the dichotomy throughout the movie between the boy and the child-like vampire very compelling, <<mild spoiler>> with the ultimate role-reversal at the end (the boy taking the parental role while the much older vampire, the child) a satisfying conclusion. Personally, I'm not a fan of this genre; but I felt it was well presented without going overboard (in gore, gratuitous violence, etc.) for the sake of shocking the viewer.

Books Finished (Partial): Robert Warren Penn: New and Selected Poems 1923-1985 (B); The Graveyard Book (A); Prayer: A Holy Occupation (B); Resurrection (B); Transporter, Vol I (General Readers F; Historian A-); The Plot to Seize the White House (B); Tigers in Combat, Vol I (General Readers F; Historian C-); World War I (C-); U-Boat Bases and Bunkers 1941-45 (General Readers F; Historian B+); Zoe's Tale (B+); The Longest Night: The Bombing of London on May 10, 1941 (B+); Tigers in Combat, Vol II (General Readers F; Historian D+); World's that Weren't (B-); Frank Lloyd Wright's Falling Water (B); Agent to the Stars (B+); Pedestrian Theology (B+); German Airborne Divisions: Mediterranean Theatre 1942-45 (B-); 1635: The Cannon Law (B); ShatnerQuake (C); 1945 (B+); Champion Hill (General Readers C; Historian B+); Grantville Gazette III (B-); In High Places (C); Third Reich Victorious (B-); National Museum of the United States Air Force: Aircraft Brochure (C); The Disunited States of America (B); The Gladiator (C); The Devil in the White City (B+); Early Poems (of William Butler Yeats – B-); Scourge of God (B+); Bloom County The Complete Library, Volume 1: 1980-1982 (A); Alternate Generals II (C+); The Maginot Line: Myth and Reality (C+); Messerschmitt Me 163 "Komet" Vol II (B-); Besa: Muslims Who Saved Jews in World War II (A); Song of the Sparrow (A); Johnny Hiro (B); Intellectual Devotional: Modern Culture (B); Seek Find: The Bible for All People (B); Daily Guideposts (B); Bodenplatte: The Luftwaffe's Last Hope (General Reader F; Historian B+); But in Purple...I'm Stunning (B-); Hitler's Empire How The Nazi's Ruled Europe (C);

Movie Watch (Partial): The Reader (A); Monsters vs. Aliens 3D (B); Escape to Witch Mountain (C+); Knowing (B+); 17 Again (D); Star Trek (A-); Star Trek (IMAX – A); Terminator Salvation (B-); Transformers II (B+); Up (A); Public Enemies (B+); Year One (D); Moon (A); Food, Inc. (B); Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince (B-); G. I. Joe (B); Julie and Julia (B+); District 9 (B); Aliens in the Attic (D+); Inglorious Basterds (B); Whip It (B); Where the Wild Things Are (B+); (Untitled) (D-); The Men Who Stared at Goats (B); Me & Orson Wells (B+); Shorts (C); Avatar 3D (B+); Invictus (A-); Book of Eli (B); Legion (D+)

Observation

What is the state of our education and the younger generation's reliance on technology? There was a letter to the editor, and follow-ups, in recent Austin American Statesman issues about a group of five graduating high school seniors. They had purchased a number of supplies for their party and were trying to divvy up the \$70 bill. Apparently they were trying to use cell phone calculators without success. The letter writer informed them that it was \$14 each.....

Another situation, recently passed on by a co-worker - he had a friend who had some neighborhood teenagers helping put address labels on a mailout. After a bit, his friend looked at the finished envelopes and found the labels in the wrong place. The teens had no idea where to put the "to" address on an envelope - and didn't even bother to ask.

Playlist for this issue: MTV Movie Awards, Sugarland "Enjoy the Ride", Elton John "The Captain and the Kid"; CBS Local and National News <Original Column>; SAG Awards, Local Fox News <Revised Column>

