





Stay Tooned!

by Gary K. Wolf
illustrated by Mike Cressy

Tadbitty Stifles cursed aloud—in French, naturally, the only proper and censor-approved language for on-air profanity.

His employer, Big Bull Topman, required Tadbitty's services. The urgent phone call came in just as Tadbitty was clearing off his burled walnut desk at the end of another long, exhausting day of adroit and dextrous gentleman's gentlemanning.

"Big Bull Junior got trouble," grimly intoned Max Uppercut, the Topman family's chauffeur. "He had a major dustup with this hoppity Roger Rabbit fellah. B.B. Junior's in bad shape. Big Bull wants you should take care of it pronto."

Tadbitty was baffled. Things like this never happened on Tadbitty's series. *Tinseltown Tells Tales*, the much-watched, round-the-clock, Hollywood-based television reality program, adhered to an inviolable Network rule. Humans only. No Toons Allowed!

"Impossible. Roger Rabbit is a" (Could he even utter the word *Toon* on air? As with everything in his tightly structured life, Tadbitty erred on the side of caution) "... a joviality."

Tadbitty collapsed into his rubbed-leather club chair. Bid au revoir to his off-camera, quiet evening at home alone. De-ice that century-old bottle of *Châteaux Lafayette V'R'here*. Forget about penning another chapter of *Vaunting Valets*, his ingeniously crafted history book detailing the vital role of domestic stewardship in the rise of Western civilization.

Holding the phone awkwardly between his shoulder and his ear, Tadbitty fumbled a bottle out of his desk. Since he was officially still on duty and consequently on-air, he was being shadowed by his personal, omnipresent, and single-digitally IQed camera and sound crew, the two fooligans he referred to disparagingly as Ike and Mike. *Tinseltown Tells Tales* wasn't scripted, but the program's general tone was outlined in a multichaptered document reverentially referred to as the Show Bible. Tadbitty's character was too morally conceptualized to imbibe anything stronger than the mildest liqueurs. He emptied three fingers of crème de menthe into a cut-crystal Waterford glass. Tadbitty's elegance and style differentiated his single, genteel, but slightly hurried sip from what, in a common man's throat, would have clearly been a despondent *gulp*.

In return for a substantial weekly salary, Tadbitty had contractually agreed to live a perpetually on-camera life of social isolation and monkish celibacy. The Network paid Tadbitty to be boorish, vain, egotistical, snobby, and as inhuman as a petrified tree stump. No problem. Tadbitty was not playacting. He was trading on his true persona. It was possibly the easiest money any man had ever made.

Tadbitty's loosely structured character functioned as the anatomic adhesive that bound together the series' often raggedy-edged real-world story lines.

Megamogul Big Bull Topman employed Tadbitty to serve (*babysit* might be a better term) Big Bull Topman Junior, playboy scion, only heir to Big Bull's immense fortune. In his official capacity as most private and personal secretary and general companion to the young mister, Tadbitty had helped restore B.B. Junior to a reasonable facsimile of his former self after countless altar jiltings, identity crises, paternity suits, and adulterous love affairs.

In the series' current flight of factual fancy, B.B. Junior was rebounding from a stunningly unsuccessful hostile takeover bid for Prestige Pictures, his smarmy father's Hollywood film studio.

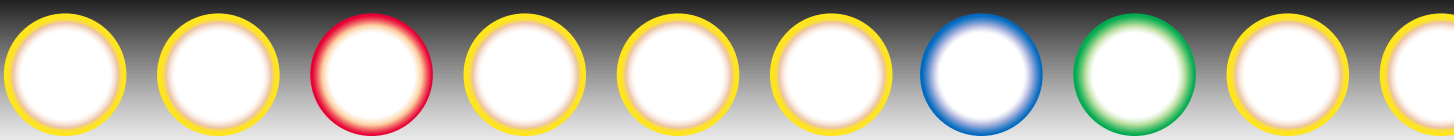
In last week's tasseled string of live episodes, Tadbitty convinced B.B. Junior that gainfully menial employment would release him from the throes of his funk. Hence, B.B. Junior took a job as a gofer in one of Hollywood's major prop-supply facilities.

"Max, tell me what happened."

Max's voice trembled. A bad sign.

Max had spent his early decades as a professional boxer. He fought under the *nom de pug* Mad Man Max. He was not a man easily flustered. When Max spoke, his voice growled, it rasped, it spit fire and coughed bullets. It *never* trembled.

"Master B.B. Junior was propping the shoot of this new cartoon. One of those slammer bammer and yammer things the animation bozos turn out by the bushel basket. You know the kind. Where this little Baby Herman tyker, who's really a grownup only acting like he's still in nappies, where he gets into a whole load of Toon trouble and this oddball



Roger Rabbit bails him out. One of those.”

Tadbitty had little experience with cartoons of that kind or any other. Rinky-tinky animations failed to amuse him. He found them pointless, stupid, witless, and mundane. His preferred filmic subject matters involved noirish foreign films depicting death, doom, and abject despair.

“Well,” Max continued, spacing out his words as though the dead spaces between them would soften their overall impact, “Master B.B. Junior and the rabbit, they didn’t see exactly eye to eye. One thing kind of led to another and pretty soon ... I guess you could say there was a sort of a fight.”

“How bad is he?” Despite years of Big Bull–sponsored boxing, kung fu, and dirty street-fighting lessons, B.B. Junior had persisted in remaining, to his father’s eternal regret and chagrin, steadfastly delicate.

Max took so long answering that Tadbitty wondered if the man remembered the question. “Hard to tell,” said Max eventually, his voice so low Tadbitty strained to hear it. “He didn’t get hit or nothing. He kind of got ... I can’t explain how he got. Especially over the phone.”

“Try.”

Max spit it out in one long gush. “He’s all squished together and twisted around double with his head sticking out the big end where the music comes from and his feet poking out the little end where you blow.”

“You’re not making sense. Slow down, compose yourself.”

Max took a breath. “Master B.B. Junior and Roger Rabbit, they exchanged a few hot not-so-pleasant words after Master B.B. Junior commented in kind of curvaceous terms about the most prominent attributes of the rabbit’s hootchy-kootchy, hotsy-totsy red-headed wife Jessica. Whose poster, I might add, I have myself, hanging in the garage. Right over the Bugatti, ‘cause the car and her they both got the same style of headlights if you catch my drift. Next thing I know, it’s over. Quick as a wink. Never seen nothing like it.”

“For God’s sake, forget the dramatic exposition. What happened?”

“Roger Rabbit—he grabbed Master B.B. Junior, wadded him up, and stuffed him inside a trombone.”



Props, heavy on the oversized, colorful, asinine, and plain ridiculous, cluttered the Buffoon Cartoon Studio soundstage. Smack in the center Tadbitty saw poor Master B.B. Junior sticking out of either end of a brass horn. This wasn’t right. Not in the slightest bit. This was antithetical to the central guiding premise of *Tinseltown Tells Tales*.

Once, when the series was in its infancy, only a few episodes removed from its pilot, still feeling its way through its particular view of reality, Tadbitty had attended a dinner party at Big Bull’s country place. Big Bull had invited in a few celebrity Toons to hype the ratings during sweeps week. Tadbitty found himself seated between a gruff spider wearing an outfit borrowed from the Little Miss on the front of a carton of Muffet’s Whey and a squirrely duck in zoot suit and spats.

Midway through dinner, the duck lobbed a forkload of lyonnaise potatoes at the spider. The spider retaliated by pointing left, up, and sideways with three of its arms. When the duck bit and looked in those directions, the spider jammed its eight string-connected snow mittens sideways up the duck’s nostrils. The duck sneezed. Suffice it to say, things went rapidly downhill from there.

Big Bull roared with laughter. He loved it.

With potatoes and duck snot smearing the front of his best gray heringbone suit, Tadbitty did not. Not in the least.

Big Bull invited the Toons back for another guest appearance. Mercifully they never came. The Network executives wisely stepped in and

vetoed the idea. A grittier philosophy prevailed. The series took on its enduring and serious demeanor. No anvils down gulleets. No long drops off high cliffs. That was left to other, goofier characters in other, more raucous time slots. At least it had been until now.

Tadbitty peered inside the trombone’s bell. One of B.B. Junior’s bloodshot and extremely wide eyes peered back at him. “Don’t worry, Master B.B. Junior,” said Tadbitty with more confidence than he felt. “I’ll have you out of this in no time.”

B.B. Junior’s eye rolled plaintively. He tried to talk. The lower part of his jaw was immobilized inside the trombone’s bowels. Nothing except grunting came out. Albeit very resonant grunting, amplified and directed as it was by the trombone’s bell. He looked so abject, Tadbitty felt moved to offer him a small consolation. He reached inside the trombone and rested his hand on B.B. Junior’s forehead. “Think of yourself,” he said soothingly, “as a metaphor. Modern man trapped in the product of his own technology.” Tadbitty was quite the deep thinker, an unusual trait in a series-TV actor. Pronounced profundities were more characteristic of the fey British thespians who starred in PBS adaptations of Jane Austen novels. Another example of how Tadbitty’s true intellectual superiority sensibly embellished his on-air character portrayal.

Now. The problem. How to get B.B. Junior out of his brass prison. A plumber? The fire department? A consultation with the conductor of the L.A. Philharmonic? Visualizing the attendant headlines and the violently adverse reaction of Big Bull, a man who hated people knowing that he’d fathered a nebbish, Tadbitty rejected them all. The only way to get B.B. out of his horny dilemma was to appeal to the one who’d put him in it.

Roger Rabbit lounged nonchalantly against a wall. In addition to being a major movie star, Roger was also a fully self-contained cocktail lounge. One of his ears held a pinto-painted pony keg of the potent moonshine called Toon Up. The other ear held a glass only slightly smaller than plucky Bucky Rogers’s space helmet. The rabbit’s bright yellow right hand was curled up into a bowl shape. It contained a pile of bright orange Carrot Crisps. His left hand was stacked with odd-colored napkins printed with off-colored jokes. In the short intervals between pouring, drinking, munching, wiping, reading, and giggling, he plucked his tongue against his teeth. The action produced a reasonable facsimile of a tinny piano playing “Stardust.”


The buffoonish bunny evinced only one modest touch of class. His eyes were the same stunning blue as Tadbitty’s Wedgwood dinnerware.

Talking to Toons always disconcerted Tadbitty. He invariably got the impression they were subtly putting him on. Take that time after Big Bull released his big-budget, award-winning World War II epic *Hunky Heroes, Blazing Bazookas*. In keeping with the military theme, Big Bull had invited every old soldier in Toontown to the celebration party. Comic-strip hero Sir Lanced Alot, the valiant medieval knight of the Round Table, with his chain-mail tuxedo and inverted-cereal-bowl haircut. That swaggering, mucho-machoe World War II Army Air Corps fighter ace Stoney Canyon. Sergeant Sad Sam, the beetle-browed, dingy dogface. Tadbitty remembered the three of them, arms draped around each other’s shoulders, cozying up to Big Bull’s grand piano for a chorus of “Onward Christian Soldiers.” With the final stanza rendered in pig Latin.

“Eh, what’s up, doc?” asked the rabbit, shamelessly swiping his prime competitor’s repartee. The rabbit gnawed a Carrot Crisp. Flaky bits of it landed on his severely sloping shoulders. These mite-sized particles of organic dandruff rolled downward toward his elbows, gathering volume as they went, eventually congealing into orange balls the size of ... of oranges. Roger grabbed the succulent spheroids as they reached his mitts, popped them back into his mouth, and began the process anew.

“Allow me to introduce myself.” Tadbitty graciously put forth his hand. “Tadbitty Stifles.”

“P-p-p-leased to meet ‘cha, Bitty.” The rabbit slapped a lighted fire-cracker into Tadbitty’s outstretched fingers.



The firecracker exploded with a dull thud, shredding Tadbitty's sleeve. Tadbitty stared dumbfounded at the smoking arm of his Italian silk jacket.

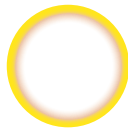
The rabbit's wristwatch, a device the size of a windup alarm clock, produced a rattly ring that vibrated the animated fur ball's entire body. "Four-sixteen o'clock on the dot. Quitting time. My workday's over."

Using his ears, seven of his eight fingers, one toenail, and his bow tie, the rabbit made a sexually suggestive gesture. "I got a date with my angel baby cuppy cakes. We're taking yodeling lessons at Perfesser Tin Tonsil's Academy of Musical Mania. We always go out after class for a round of glottal tomfoolery." The rabbit hopped merrily out the door.

"Wait." Tadbitty held up a blackened index finger. "You can't be calous enough to leave him stuck here like this."

Obviously he could because he did.

Avoiding B.B. Junior's pleading eye, Tadbitty activated his cell phone. Downstairs on the street, Max answered. "Bring the car around," Tadbitty told him. "We're taking B.B. Junior to see his father."



Topman Tower, the highest-rised office building in L.A., headquartered Big Bull Topman and his various gregarious and nefarious enterprises. Big Bull designed this building in his own image. Half again too big for the size of its footprint, the mottled color of a wastrel's nose, with a façade the texture of unpopped blister wrap. Two opposing, horizontal, cantilevered, upper-story outjuttings make the edifice as plug-ugly against the night sky as the Dog Star's fire hydrant.

Tadbitty always felt uncomfortable in Big Bull's office, decorated as it was with stuffed hunting trophies, assorted lethal weapons, and books selected for the color of their dust jackets rather than their content.

Big Bull found his son's predicament hilarious. His laughter echoed through the open terrace window leading out to the manicured formal roof garden where the poisoned-ivy bushes had all been trimmed into itchy images of Big Bull. "That Roger Rabbit," he guffawed. "Ain't he a corker?" Big Bull's contrabanded Cuban cigar produced more smoke than Hades on a hot day.

"I found him overbearing and malicious," countered Tadbitty. He saw nothing the least bit humorous in this. But then he wouldn't. Humor wasn't part of Tadbitty's character. As specified quite clearly in the Show Bible, Tadbitty was a man with a flinty shaft of sensibility where his funny bone ought to be.

Big Bull hoisted the trombone to eye level and glared at it. Idly, he ran the slide back and forth a few times.

B.B. Junior howled.

With a good-natured grin, Big Bull put B.B. Junior's feet to his lips and pantomimed a high-strutting player in a marching band. He swung the trombone up and down, side to side, in and out. Each new motion changed the pitch of B.B. Junior's screeching. It didn't take Big Bull long to recognize the comic possibilities. In short order he had going a spirited, B.B. Junior—screaming vocal rendition of "Stars and Stripes Forever." Big Bull marched, parade fashion, around the room. Ike, dutifully recording the event on camera, fell in step behind him. Mike put his hand over his sound equipment to muffle his own giggles.

Tadbitty could not contain himself. "Mister Topman, stop it this instant. I must protest. We are not buffoons. A stuffed trombone has no place in social pathos. This is *Tinseltown Tells Tales* we're doing here, not some lampoony burlesque. We have our Network mandate to consider. Not to mention our Show Bible. For the propriety of the *series*, we have to extricate B.B. Junior. This instant."

A reluctant Big Bull lowered his trombone. "Too bad you feel that way. He's got a real mellow tone." He flipped on an intercom switch.

"Miss Ritz. Send in the clowns."

Wonky the Wondrous Wizard appeared out of thin air, waved his ebony wand, and the trombone disappeared.

After chugging a can of spinach and doing a spirited hornpipe, ape-armed Poopdeck the Pirate grabbed B.B. Junior by the neck and bent him back into shape.

Doctor Ignatz Cats, self-appointed Head Shrinker to the Mucky Mucks, prescribed sedation, which he gleefully administered with an iron mallet.

What, thought Tadbitty, were all these Toons doing here? Their presence was so terribly, horribly *inappropriate*.

Tadbitty possessed an IQ fashioned out of solid-Grade A+ Mensanite. He was bright enough to know there was a reason for this upward blip of lunacy. The Network never did anything without a reason. He was more bothered by the fact that nobody from the Network had informed him, one of the show's pivotal characters, that this was going to happen. "What, pray tell, is going on here, Mister Topman?" he asked. "Why are we infested with Toons?"

Big Bull chuckled heartily as his son staggered around the room like a B.B. Bobblehead on a hard trip down ninety miles of rocky road. "Seemed like a funny thing to do."

Big Bull reached inside his breast pocket and removed a pair of gloves. They were bright yellow with only four fingers. He slipped them on, making them fit by putting his index and middle fingers into the same hole. "Call them oddballs, idiots, maniacs, nuts, loonies. Whatever. You gotta admit, Toons are entertaining." Big Bull threw Dr. Cats a high four.

"How can the Network permit such a travesty?" countered Tadbitty. "They don't countenance Toons on a humans-only show."

"Right," said Big Bull, not looking Tadbitty in the eyes. "They don't."

Uh-oh. Tadbitty surmised that his tribulations in this particular episode were far from over.

"Sit down, Taddie," ordered Big Bull. This was bad. This was very bad. Big Bull had never before called Tadbitty by anything but his complete God-given name. "Want a drink?"

Tadbitty shook his head. Big Bull had one himself but, *mercy*, not the expensive cognac dispensed from a Spanish-leather-wrapped decanter as his Show Bible—specified characterization required. Rather, he took a shot of Toon Up from a crock secreted behind his wooden file cabinet, guzzling it straight from the container, cradling the jug in the crook of his arm. Something was definitely wrong. "Tadbitty, you've been with Topman Enterprises how long? Six, seven years?"

"Nine, sir."

"Nine? Really? Ever since we been on the air. I don't need to tell you that during all that time you've been a big help to me. Seeing my boy through his ... troubles."

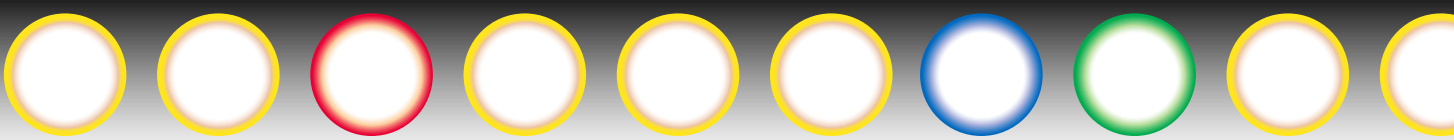
"Thank you."

"Sorry I gotta be the one to deliver the bad news. The Network says you gotta go."

"Sir?" Tadbitty noticed Big Bull wasn't as meticulously dressed as usual. Ink splatters dotted his shirt. One shoe was noticeably bigger than the other. Most ominously, his Armani glasses sported bloodshot plastic eyeballs dangling from twin springs.

"In the past few months, the show's ratings have fallen way off. The Network honchos hired a hotshot research firm to do correlative analyses. Their findings say the show's format's outmoded. Audiences don't empathize with grand operaesque, slice-of-life narratives anymore. They're tired of reality. Viewers want chuckles, laughs, giggles, grins. Light on the thinking. Adios to social conscience. Heavy on the ZAP, BLOOEY, POW. The Network's decided to give it to them. Smack in the old keester. Kerplow in the face with a custard-cream pie.

"The Network's upping the show's boffola quotient. They're switching over to a different structure, a combination of humans and Toons. As



the Network programmers envision our new roles, they see B.B. Junior as head dumbbell. That should be no great reformulating problem. Max's taking over the role of the Network's Major Mogul. They're trucking in a load of Toon stars for comic relief. I'll act as interlocutor and keep the fun moving. But Tadbitty, there's no place for you. The Network thinks you're too ... staid for the new format. You've been cancelled!"

Tadbitty gulped. He knew what that meant. His means of exiting the series was covered quite clearly in his contract. His exodus had been prescribed to generate the highest possible ratings. He never expected his departure clause would ever be invoked. He was, after all, the series' binding glue! He never envisioned that *Tinseltown Tells Tales* would one day switch to Silly Putty.

Yet here it was. Time for his big, and fatal, finale.

Big Bull drew a pistol from his desk, one of the bigger-bored models he used to administer the coup de grâce to wounded elephants. "I'm going to leave the room to take a whizzer. I'll expect you to do the decent contractual thing before I return."

Big Bull headed for the door. "Over the wastebasket if you wouldn't mind."

Swallowing every vestige of pride, Tadbitty dropped to his knees and clasped his hands. "Give me a chance. Try me out for a month or two. I'll change. I'll be zany. I'll be asinine. I'll be Toonish. I know I can do it."

Big Bull shook his head sadly. "If only I could believe that."

The door burst open.

"Beep beep." A fairly good-sized Toon bird, two-thirds legs and one third neck, roared into the room. It stopped in front of the open, street-view window. The bird peered out. It motioned Tadbitty and Big Bull over and instructed them to look too.

On the sidewalk, many floors below, a cluster of people pressed autograph books at a famous Toon coyote. The bird put a bony shoulder to Big Bull's oversized mahogany desk and shoved it toward the window.

"Would you look at that little tyker," roared Big Bull approvingly. "That's what the Network Hoodaddies call a winning contemporaneous contextual formulation."

The bird got as far as the windowsill and stopped. With only its scrawny wings for leverage, it was unable to heft the desk up and over. It turned imploringly toward the two men and tilted its head.

Big Bull curled his lip, cocked an eyebrow, and stared at Tadbitty.

Tadbitty took Big Bull's meaning. Decisively he grabbed the desk by the legs. He hoisted it up, rested one end on the windowsill, walked to the other end, and pushed.

The desk hit the ground with a resounding CRACK! Tadbitty looked down at it, imbedded in the sidewalk. A shaggy coyote tail and several human hands, some clutching autograph books, poked out from beneath.

The rat-a-tat sound of an index finger tapping a microphone emerged out of Big Bull's stereo loudspeakers. "Attaboy, Tadster, sweetie baby," said Max. His gruff, whiskey-warbled voice still sounded pug ugly, albeit now imbued with a forceful, dynamic, take-no-prisoners, top-executive quality. "You are keeper material. We up here at Network are mightily impressed by what you just showed us. We're looking down and seeing a survivor, an actor who's adaptable, a main man who knows how to go along to get along. Congrats, Tadstool. If you're willing to play Wiffle ball instead of cricket, have your people call our people about restructuring your contract. Otherwise ..." Max flipped off his microphone. The action produced a large-caliber BANG.



The crowd inside Silly Symphony Hall hushed.

The ridiculously renamed and radically reconceptualized Tee-Hee

Tadbitty—Tee-Hee Tad for short—took his seat with the other musicians comprising the Toontown Trio Plus Thirty-Three Orchestra.

It was Tadbitty's first day back on his newly improved television show, now called *Toontown's Tall Tales*.

As part of Tadbitty's restructured deal, the Network had required him to take a hiatus from the program to attend an intensive four-and-five-eighths-week-long course at Toon You.

There he received daily injections of Toon Tonic, a controversial concoction extracted from the humorous glands of laughing hyenas. Circumstantial evidence suggested a regular regimen of Toon Tonic could liquefy the inhibitions of a man of steel.

He also studied the classic stoogisms. The eye poke, the foot squash, the toupee snatch, the nose singe, the ear twist, the body crumple.

He got a crash lesson in Toon Tunes and how to play them using Goofy Gizmos. It turned out Tadbitty had a genuine knack for the musical saw, a fortuitous and unforeseen result of the countless miserable childhood hours he spent in his parlor vigorously practicing the *viola da braccio* under the stern Teutonic drilling of his finger-slapping musical tutor, the nomenclaturally androgynous Fräulein Herr.

Tadbitty's unexpected instrumental prowess landed him a much-coveted position as the TTTPTTO's second rip-saw. He was dressed in the band's traditional performance attire: multicolored fright wig, clown suit, and bulbous red nose. Tadbitty's nose did double duty, also functioning as one of the orchestra's primary instruments. During their Spike Jones-ish rendition of "The Blue Danube Waltz," after the opening *ta-da-da-da-aaa*, Tadbitty squeezed his nose, interjecting a dual *honk-honk, honk-honk*. His resonant nasal trumpeting was quite the crowd pleaser and earned him a standing O.

Tadbitty took his bow. He felt a quaint tingling of pleasure. Finally, after years of playing a supporting role to Big Bull's shrewd stunts and Master B.B. Junior, the stunted shrew, Tadbitty was finally the center of attention, receiving direct audience appreciation for his own work, preposterous though that work might be.

For the orchestra's big finale, the conductor, a tuxedoed bovine named Leonard Holstein, motioned Tadbitty and B.B. Junior to stage front. In a stunning bit of irony, B.B. Junior played first trombone, although occasionally the trombone turned the tables and played him.

On the final drawn-out note of their rollicking *duetto* rendition of "I Sawed You Last Night," Tadbitty used his musical rip-saw to accidentally-on-purpose cut B.B. Junior in half.

Perversely, Tadbitty relished the deed. He viewed it as repaying Master B.B. Junior for all the aggravation the young dimwit had caused him over the years. Still, the tackiness and stupidity of his methodology bothered him.

"I'm mortified," thought Tadbitty. His words oozed slushily out of his head in an amateurish word balloon, a torturously tongue-tying, Toon-talking technique taught to him by S.E. Fex, the show's new Silly Effects man. "This is no role for a classically trained actor."

"Mortified, shmortified," said Roger Rabbit, nabbing Tadbitty's balloon in a butterfly net. The orchestra company's Stiffer would spray it with starch. Their eBoy would sell it autographed on the Internet. "Look on the bright side. You're not just an ordinary, run-of-the-mill, pretty-faced human television star anymore." Roger shook Tadbitty's raggedy word balloon out of his net, held it up by its edges, and framed it inside a rectangle constructed of his cotton-candy-colored ears. "You're hanging with Toons. You're a genuine, one-hundred-and-alebenty-percent piece of contemporary art!"

"Lucky me," thought Tadbitty in a traditional thought balloon composed of a large circle connected to his cranium by a series of smaller circles. He hadn't yet learned the slight forward head snap necessary to detach his utterances, so his balloon trailed after him like a prehensile ponytail, whacking him in the back as he returned to his seat.

Tadbitty accidentally plunked himself down on Chippie Charlene, the randy chipmunk playing first kazoo. Chippie protested this buttockal bludgeoning by blowing a sibilant blast into the nether regions of Tadbitty's floppy polka-dot pants.

Tadbitty found the sensation oddly pleasurable. Chippie's fricative colonic raspberried its way upward through Tadbitty's tightly overwound body, activating his residual Toon Tonic to produce a bubbly elixir of lively life.

Cruising past his privates, the elevating effervescence jerked loose Tadbitty's first-ever dose of wild whoopee.

The fountaining froth left his gut feeling gleefully deprived—he had just creamed B.B. Junior big time and been rewarded for it!

The ascending palpitation pumped through Tadbitty's heart, warming his cockles with the wonderful knowledge that he was through cleaning up B.B. Junior's mighty messes. Never again would Tadbitty cement Humpty Dumpty's busted body or shattered soul back together!

Finally, the elevating quiver stood his rainbow-hued hairs on end, turning them into a multicolored sunrise of dawning realization. In his rejiggered role, Tadbitty had become the show's big enchilada, its numero uno, its major mojo.

Limbering a livelier libido, bopping B.B. Junior, and becoming a shining star in the entertainment galaxy's sparkliest constellation. One potato, two potato, three. Childish though it might be, Tadbitty liked this new game! He liked it a whole lot!

"Ohhhhh," he thought in what Toons call a woo-hoo balloon, one the shape of utter mirth and reeking of gaiety. "Playing with Toons, it's ... it's ... it's ... drat. I've got the television industry's certifiably largest vocabulary, and I can't summon up the right word."

"Tad, my sad, mad, lad," observed Roger Rabbit, "the watchword you've been missing is now and always has been *FUN!*" Roger's final word on the subject came out of his head in bright yellow neon that blinked on and off in salsa rhythm. Roger grabbed his blinker and handed it to Tadbitty.

Tadbitty looked at it, the single glowing word *FUN*, and looked at Roger. Tadbitty smiled—the first time he had ever done so on camera—grabbed Roger by the wrist, and stuck his index finger into the bottom of Roger's phosphorescent *F*.

"Oh, I wouldn't do that," cautioned Roger, but it was too late.

Powered by *FUN*, Roger and Tadbitty both lit up like Roman candles. Their skeletal structure became visible through their clothing. Tadbitty's revealed a rapidly loosening spine. Roger's showed evidence of a recent meal consisting of fishbones, a bathroom plunger, and a flock of pickled canaries.

Tadbitty extricated his finger from Roger's brilliant utterance and released his grip. Rabbit and man immediately returned to normal.

The audience went wild.

On their sixth curtain call, Tadbitty whispered to Roger. "You're a very funny bunny."

Roger winked a large blue eye. "And you're one boffo butler."

Tadbitty took the Rabbit's paw and together they skipped off stage.

"I think we might have the foundations for a lasting partnership," said Tadbitty. "You as Sancho Panza to my Don Quixote."

"Naw, that's not the way we do things here in fairy-tale land," said Roger in a lavender-edged balloon the flaming-hot color of a pink lady. He planted a big, wet smoocharoo flush on Tadbitty's lips. "I'm thinking more you're Cindy Rella fellah and I'm your Prince Spaghetti."

Roger's va-va-va-roommate, Jessica, in a red evening gown that stuck to her the way a double dollop of ketchup clings to a hot dog's buns, sashayed into the scene. She took one look at the action, grabbed a fire ax off the wall and pried her hubby off Tadbitty. "Loosen that lapin lip lock, my randy little Honey Bunny," said Jessica in a voice that could coax any man's cobra out of its wicker package. "That kind of cross-species,

transsexual, reverse-gendered, preternatural shenanigan is not the buffoonish direction the Network wants to take this show's story line."

Roger backed away from Tadbitty, lowered his head, and clasped his hands sheepishly behind his back. "Just kidding, Jessica darling, dearest, sweetie-ums. You're still the only one for me."

"I want you to come home right this instant," said the rabbit's ever-loving. "I'm going to bake you a big, yummy, superscrumptious, wet and juicy carrot cake." She lowered her voice, her eyes, and her neckline. "You do want a big slice of carrot cake, don't you?"

As a sop to the censors, Roger's salivation bubbles soaked the double meaning off his word balloon and replaced it with his usual vegetabular euphemism. "Boy oh boy oh boy. I do loooove your carrot cake!"

B.B. Junior emerged from his dressing room, a huge purple Band-Aid wound around his bisected middle. He spotted Jessica. You would have thought he had learned a lesson from his last pronouncement of lexical lewdities, but no. "Betty boops the doo-dah day away," he exclaimed. His tongue dangled far enough out of his mouth to get him arrested for indecent cuddling in a cartoon cow county. "Call out my Sherpas and have them haul me up that mated match of mountainous melons. Gimme a gaping gander at those grandiose gourdos. Dole me out a popping pound of Ponderosa pineapples." Thin streams of steam emerged from his ears. "Wowie! What whale-whomping whortleberries!"

Quicker than you could say "Been there, done that," B.B. Junior was folded, bended, mutilated, and stuffed back inside his old reliable trombone.

"Getting to be almost a second home to the boy," said Tadbitty with a broad grin at Ike's camera.

Relieved of his pseudoparental responsibilities, now accountable only to the higher calling of slapstick humor, Tadbitty left B.B. Junior comically encased in his brass brig.

Tadbitty hooked an arm through one of Roger's and another through Jessica's. "You know," he confessed to Jessica, "in all my many years I've never tasted carrot cake. Maybe you could whack off a piece for me."

Jessica looked him up and down. "Underneath that wig and clown suit, you're a very handsome and distinguished older man."

Tadbitty's cheeks turned as red as his bulbous rubber nose.

The *ménage à Toon* strolled off the set and out the door.

Tadbitty launched a final trial balloon. It bounced back inside Silly Symphony Hall and rolled to a stop. Ike zoomed in for a close-up. "This is just a wildly harey idea I'm floating here," it said in twelve-point Salacious Bold. "You wouldn't by any chance have a twin sister?" **AS**



Gary K. Wolf wrote the novel *Who Censored Roger Rabbit?*, which became the Academy Award-winning Steven Spielberg film *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?* Wolf divides his time between his historic brownstone home in Boston and his nutty-putty, side-split-level, out-of-his-tree house in Toontown.



Mike Cressy was at Group West in Los Angeles for seven years before moving to Seattle. He has done illustrations for national advertising agencies, magazines, eight children's picture books, and Microsoft, and has spent the last five years working for Sierra Entertainment.