

More Stylization, Less Conformation^{??}

Playing Devil's Advocate with an Expert

*When the flush of a new-born sun fell first on Eden's green and gold,
Our father Adam sat under the Tree and scratched with a stick in the mould;
And the first rude sketch that the world had seen was joy to his mighty heart,
Till the Devil whispered behind the leaves, "It's pretty, but is it Art?"*

*The tale is as old as the Eden Tree—and new as the new-cut tooth—
For each man knows ere his lip-thatch grows he is master of Art and Truth;
And each man hears as the twilight nears, to the beat of his dying heart,
The Devil drum on the darkened pane: "You did it, but was it Art?"*

*We have learned to whittle the Eden Tree to the shape of a surplice-peg,
We have learned to bottle our parents twain in the yolk of an addled egg,
We know that the tail must wag the dog, for the horse is drawn by the cart;
But the Devil whoops, as he whooped of old: "It's clever, but is it Art?"*

*Now, if we could win to the Eden Tree where the Four Great Rivers flow,
And the Wreath of Eve is red on the turf as she left it long ago,
And if we could come when the sentry slept and softly scurry through,
By the favour of God we might know as much—as our father Adam knew.*

—From "The Conundrum of the Workshops," by Rudyard Kipling

Too much sushi. That had to be it. No more "All-U-Can-Eat" sushi-shovelling fests for me... not after coming home to find a dapper gent, with faint fumes of brimstone, rummaging through the remake-laden china cabinet.

I never knew the Devil was a blond guy. "And I never knew a pacer could be pinto," he replied aloud, pointing a smouldering pen at a tobiano head on the bottom shelf. "Cost you less than \$300, too, didn't he? I must say"—he paused, frowning, to scan a list on the glowing clipboard he carried, then curtly jotted something beside a name—"I thought you were supposed to have a quality remake collection."

Over the shoulder of his tailored cape, I could see his roster that listed each horse's name, its creator, and the price I had paid. A point value was assigned to each remake's artist and cost, and many of my favorite models had not only low point totals, but also big red slash-marks through their names.

The visitor turned to me sympathetically. "I know how much you enjoy the model horse hobby," he said, "but you should realize that it's entering a new era, a new age of sophistication. You won't want to be left behind, so to help, I've made some suggestions." He handed me the list. "Sell the ones that I've crossed out, and invest the money in some truly fine-art pieces."

"B-but," I stammered, "you've crossed out every horse by Remaker A, and I really love her work!"

"Small-time stuff," he shrugged. "Perhaps five years from now she might become the new darling of the trendy crowd... but can you afford to wait that long to see whether you're sitting on trash or treasure?"

"But I don't care if someone else thinks a horse is trash or treasure," I protested. "I buy a horse because I like it, not as an investment."

"I hope Remaker A gets all kinds of recognition, because she seems like a nice person and does great work. But if she never becomes the Biggest Hottest Artist in the hobby, all she's missing out on is a ton of ego-boo and the chance to watch hobbyists beat each other senseless with their wallets for the honor of saying they bought a horse by her!"

"You," admonished my visitor, "are wielding an awfully broad brush."

"Well, granted," I back-pedaled, "soaring stacks of cash would be really nice for Remaker A. But would she feel any greater pride in her work than she does already? I just think satisfaction in a job well done would be far more spiritually satisfying than being shoved onto a pedestal by fashion-frenzied hobbyists who would love to suck you dry."

He eyed me, amused. "You've never been a popular remake artist," he asked, "have you?"

I had to admit, I haven't.

"It could be arranged..." he began, but I shook my head emphatically, and he settled into an easy chair with a good-natured chuckle. "You are going to be a difficult convert to the hobby's new age," he smiled, "but I'm here to help."

"For a remake collector, the way to achieve fulfillment in the hobby couldn't be easier—you simply keep what's hot, cull what's not, and continue from there. The goal is to have a remake collection that radiates brilliant auras of 'cost' and 'quality,' and outshines all others—we're talking a collection that will make fellow collectors absolutely melt with envy!

"Before you know it, you'll find yourself welcomed as part of the elite, with access to model horses more fabulous than you'd ever dreamed possible—and they can be yours simply by trading models that you've so astutely amassed for their popularity and value!"

I could have eaten at Arby's that night, but no-o-o, I had gobbled up yellowtail and wolfed down eel instead. Honestly, it had seemed like a good idea at the time. But now, not only was the Devil in my living room, but I also couldn't help visualizing his smooth concept of the hobby as an ad designed for the two most likely types of publications to reach potential hobbyists, real-horse magazines and comic books:

"HEY KIDS!

**Become an Entrepreneur and Win
Instant Popularity Through Plastic Ponies!"**

Whoo boy. I retreated to the list in my hands. "You've got a great handle on the artists in hot demand today," I conceded, "but really, I'd just as soon sell a few of the remakes you *didn't* cross off, rather than part with some of ones you feel don't belong."

"I see," he nodded, folding his hands. "Because they'd sell for more money to re-invest...?"

"Well, no—because a big-name artist is the *only* thing some of them have going for them!" I explained. "See, some people proclaim long and loud that they're great artists, and advertise a few really outstanding pieces so that hobbyists assume *all* their work is high-quality. But it's just too tempting to these people to coast on their past work and reputation, and they'll crank out low-effort sale horses way below their abilities, at premium prices. So 20 percent of their work are super-horses, and the other 80 percent are downright doggy."

"Some of their customers can't take the 'Kick Me' sign off and just keep coming back for more, hoping to finally get a horse from that wonderful 20 percent. But when it doesn't happen and doesn't happen, enough just gets to be enough."

"Me, I'd rather have a horse with real heart and effort put into it," I continued. "If the artist isn't well known, no problem—great work speaks for itself. Some of these models you crossed out are literally twice the horse for half the price!"

"That's not to say all big-name artists take advantage of buyers—some have worked a long time to establish themselves and their reputations, and they continue to create each model to the best of their ability. I treasure every horse that I'm lucky enough to own that's by an artist with integrity