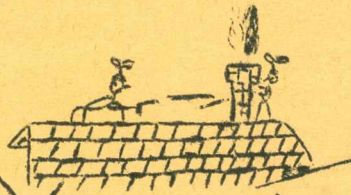


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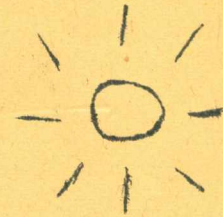
CONVENTION

by: MAL ASHWORTH

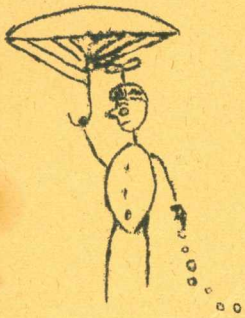


MY FIRST

REAL



CONVENTION



One day, on June 5th 1954, in the morning, I went down to the station in Bradford to meet Uncle Tom and Auntie Betty White. Uncle Tom was looking rather angry; I think it was because some man in a uniform was waving a flag in his face before we had got on the train - also I don't think he liked my green shirt and yellow tie and lovely blue socks. He looked so angry that I didn't dare to show him my holster and water pistol and I don't think he got any more pleased when a little boy sat next to him on the train and started kicking his new trousers. I don't think Auntie Betty liked my green shirt and yellow tie and lovely blue socks either because she kept covering her face up with her hands and saying something about "Not at this time in a morning". We went through a long, dark tunnel and when we came out at the other side the little boy who had been kicking Uncle Tom's new trousers wasn't sat next to Uncle Tom any more (he didn't seem to be anywhere in the carriage), and Uncle Tom looked very pleased. There was a very, very big case on the rack above Uncle Tom's head and I kept thinking it would fall on his head, and bursting out laughing. It didn't though and he didn't take it with him when we got off the train in Manchester so perhaps it wasn't his after all - it might have been though, knowing Uncle Tom, and if it was I suppose he'll remember by January 1956 that he left it there.

In Manchester we walked down a street and round six circles (all in the same place) and we hadn't got very much further, so we asked a man the way to the Grosvenor Hotel. He didn't know but he told us anyway and we went the way he said until we came to open fields and then turned round and went back the opposite way. We found the Grosvenor Hotel a few yards from where we had started off, and went in the front door just as though we had a right to be there. The lady behind the desk didn't look very pleased to see us and wouldn't let us have our rooms until dinner-time, so we just put our bags on the floor and stood there. We got talking to a man called Fred Smith and another man called Brian Varley, and after a bit we went upstairs to the Convention Hall, where a few people kept appearing every time they slowed down. I didn't know anybody as this was my very first real Convention but Uncle Tom knew several people and introduced me to a man called Dave Cohen and a man



called Harry Turner. I made a pun and this Mr Turner walked away and left us. Mr Cohen had left before that. Uncle Tom then spotted a man called Terry Jeeves and he went across and shook hands with him with his right hand and borrowed Mr Jeeves' roll of Sellotape with his left hand and we stuck some notices up on the wall about our fanzine, BEM. Some Femme Fans got Auntie Betty in a corner and I couldn't think why they chose Auntie Betty and not me, and Uncle Tom and I found a zap gun but a Mr Pete Taylor came and borrowed it back because it was his. Then we went and made nasty faces at a table full of 'Vargo Statten Magazines' and pocket-books by Mr Vargo Statten and Mr Volsted Gridban and a Mr Alistair Paterson came and helped us make horrible faces at them.

Soon a lot more people started to come and Mr Jeeves gave each of them several hundred leaflets about his fanzine, TRIODE, and Mr Peter Hamilton gave each of them several hundred leaflets about his prozine, NEBULA, and everybody looked very happy. Then somebody said the people from London had come and a Mr Burgess walked into the Hall and everybody looked very unhappy. Mr Burgess pulled out a green zap gun and shot everybody within range and shouted at everybody who wasn't within range. Those who got shouted at looked even more unhappy than those who got shot.

I met lots and lots of people I'd never met before like Mr Brian Lewis and Mr Tony Thorne and Mr Arthur Cock and Mr Norman Shorrocks and lots more that I just can't remember all at once. Uncle Tom went off one way (dragging Auntie Betty along with him) and I went off another way and we both saw who could find most people that we'd heard of, first. We could easily tell who was who by peering at little pieces of cardboard which everybody wore in their lapels, with their names on, but it was a tiny-weeny bit embarrassing identifying Femme Fans and it got a little bit complicated when people like this Mr Burgess put other people's names (like Bert Campbell) on their pieces of cardboard. I don't know whether the lynching party was looking for Mr Burgess because he was Mr Burgess or because he was pretending to be Mr Bert Campbell. Anyway Uncle Tom and I found a lot of people between us so we converged on them, and whenever we found anybody new we shouted right across the Hall to each other to come across. It was fun when we both found different people at the same time.

Shortly a Mr Ken Potter, a younger Mister than most of the other Misters, came into the Hall and looked at the posters on the wall about our fanzine, BEM, and gave a great shout. When he stopped frothing at the mouth I went up and shook his hand and tried to pretend I was somebody else. Soon after this some of the people we knew from Leeds came in, Mr Michael Rosenblum, Mr George Gibson, Mr Jack Smillie and Mr Jack Darlington, and we didn't manage to hide quick enough so we stood around and asked them why they were bothering to put up a stand for their fanzine, ORBIT, and did they expect anyone to buy any, and what on earth made them produce a thing like that anyway, and then Mr George Gibson gave us both some lovely little lapel-brooches which he'd made, with the words LEEDS and BRADFORD on, and we both felt heels. After this a Mr Ron Bennett, also from Leeds, appeared in the doorway and all the other fans from Leeds tried to hide with us this time but there wasn't enough room under their table for all of us. Mr Ron Bennett had written an article in the first BEM, saying what he thought of the stupid 'sheeplike fen' who went to Conventions, and then had been going

to come in disguise, wearing false beards and red hair and all sorts of things, instead of which he looked just like he usually does - which is why we all tried to hide. Just before Mr Dave Cohen managed to get everyone out of the annexe into the proper Convention Hall, we spotted someone who we thought must be Mr Norman G. Wansborough, though we'd never seen him before. We were right. I don't know how we guessed really.

When we all got into the genuine Convention Hall Mr Dave Cohen and several other people started to talk from the platform, and read various letters and notes and memoirs from various people and opened the Convention and pointed out the people everyone had heard of (tho' I think they missed Mr Burgess), and Mr Michael Rosenblum moved a motion that everybody should move up near the front so that they could hear better and, apart from a few foreigners who continued to sit at the back of the Hall, everybody moved. Mr Dave Cohen said that there was a bran tub which people could buy magazines and books and things from and he stopped talking and then everybody started getting dissipated again and I saw a very tall, sunburned, smiling man coming across the Hall towards me and I thought: 'The Time Has Come When I must Give Account of Myself Before Him', and it was Mr Walt Willis. We shook hands and got acquainted and I introduced him to Uncle Tom and Auntie Betty and then he took me and introduced me to Mr Bob Shaw and Mr James White (whom, I think, Ghu would have a !!£?@£&!! of a job to crush), and I thought that everybody who comes from Ireland must be very tall and very quiet and very nice people to meet. Mr Walt Willis also introduced me to (Mr) Chuck Harris but I didn't catch his name when Mr Willis said it and I smiled at him as though I thought he was a nice man! Mr Harris had a dip in the bran tub and pulled out a very gruesome AMAZING STORIES, with a story in called 'The Monster' and for some reason he didn't seem to want to keep it so he went and sold it to Mr Norman G. Wansborough and I still didn't know it was Mr Chuck Harris and I said: "You could even sell the VARGO STATTEN MAGAZINE", and he said: "I did". Meanwhile Uncle Tom had found Mr Archie Mercer, who had his little piece of card-board in his lapel with his name on, and another little piece on his stomach with "Archie Mercer's stomach" written on it. I liked him because he was obviously a very logical man.

It was dinnertime by then so we went to get our rooms and the lady behind the counter had to let us have them then and I'll bet she couldn't eat her dinner because of that. Even then she tried to tell Uncle Tom that he had booked a room along with Mr Bob Shaw, but Uncle Tom managed to convince her that that was another Mr White. The little man who took us up in the lift left Uncle Tom and Auntie Betty in the lift while he went with me to find my room as it was on a different floor to theirs. He said "This was, Sir" and went tearing off down a corridor peering at the numbers on all the doors, but I didn't feel like going for a walk just then so I just stood by the door with my room number on and waited till he got back and then told him that this was the one. I think perhaps he hadn't been at that hotel more than ten years though; I feel glad, for the sake of the poor man's wife and children that he doesn't work in an American hotel because I think he'd starve before he got back to the parts he knew.

I left all my things in my case because there was a lock on that, and when I'd finished a GALAXY short novel I went downstairs and there were Uncle Tom and Auntie Betty waiting for me on the steps of the hotel, looking as though I'd kept them waiting two hours. We

wandered around the streets then (without our coats because the sun was shining - the people who lived in Manchester looked as though they thought the end of the world was coming), and down roads with lots of picturesque blocks of offices and warehouses and mills and all kinds of shops except cafes. That would have been nice except the bookshops weren't serving any dinners. Some of the inhabitants were quite picturesque too but Uncle Tom and Auntie Betty kept coming back and dragging me away to go look for a cafe again. Eventually we found one where we only had to queue half an hour before we got served and we were left with a full minus ten minutes before the Con programme was due to start again. When we got outside Auntie Betty wanted to do some shopping so Uncle Tom and I set off to go back to the hotel on our own. We got to where the hotel should have been and it wasn't, so we asked a man where it had got to and he said it was over the other end of the town, so we looked over 'that' way and we could see two big radar mirrors or something like that which were on top of a building near the hotel, so we set off towards them. They kept disappearing and when we found them again they had moved over to another side of the town; we cheated them in the end however by sneaking along under cover of some buildings and then dashing out across a square and into the hotel before they could move it again. We smiled at having beaten them and went upstairs to the Convention; it wasn't there. They had won after all; we had found the hotel but the Convention wasn't there any longer. Both Uncle Tom and I were a bit sad about it, because the hotel wasn't any good to us without the Convention - in fact it was really the Convention and not the hotel we had come for. We wandered off downstairs and accidentally found the Convention in the Billiards Room on the ground floor. They could have hidden it better than that but it was the last chance we gave them; ever after that we kept our eyes on the Convention very closely. (It appears that they had used as an excuse for moving the Convention, the fact that the Manager of the hotel didn't like the new paint being scratched off the walls in the upstairs room, by notices, like ours for BEM. What an absurd excuse; I'm sure he didn't really mind.)

We needn't have worried about the programme though because there was hardly anybody there and the only programme there was was piled up on a table just inside the door. We went inside and chatted to several people and Uncle Tom spotted Mr Eric Bentcliffe and went across to talk to him and he introduced me to him and just then Mr Burgess floated past and pulled a zap gun on Mr Bentcliffe. After Mr Bentcliffe had ducked Mr Burgess sorrowfully explained that his zap gun was empty so Mr Bentcliffe got out his own zap gun, pulled the pin out the end and shot Mr Burgess in the eye; Mr Burgess had almost been down on his knees begging for that! Auntie Betty arrived back soon and she and Uncle Tom decided to go up to their room before the Convention got started again, or maybe it was in case the Convention got started again, so they went to collect their key from the keyman in the little box by the hotel door (I hadn't bothered to give him mine when I went out because I didn't know he wanted it and anyway I would have figured that it was more use to me than to him - I think). The man said that Uncle Tom hadn't given him his key when he went out. Uncle Tom said he had. The little man said no definitely not. Uncle Tom said yes definitely damn so. The little man said he was certain..... Uncle Tom's really a peaceful man but he has red hair, only just as he was about to hang the little man up among the keys (so that he could look for Uncle Tom's

key better) another man came along and found Uncle Tom's key so the hotel manager didn't need to ring up the Employment Exchange after all.

All this time I was making secret plans in the Convention Hall with Mr Brian Lewis, who had a wonderful massive zap gun, and Mr Eric Bentcliffe, and we decided that sooner or later somebody would have to 'get' Mr Burgess. 'Why wait for the Undertaker?' we thought, so we also decided that it might as well be sooner and that the somebody might as well be us. It was. Mr Burgess was sat quietly reading for once (well he was looking at a magazine anyway) so we arranged ourselves on all sides of him; Mr Lewis on one side, Mr Bentcliffe behind, and me on the other side. Then we signalled to each other and all doused Mr Burgess together. When he started to realise, after about three minutes, that Something Was Happening we gave up; it wouldn't have done for him to find out.

After this I went to the toilet to refill my zap gun, along with Mr George Gibson, my friend from Leeds. We had finished testing the range of our guns out of the window overlooking the River Irwell and were refilling them at the washbasins when a Distinguished Looking Old Gentleman asked us what we were doing. Mr Gibson said we were filling our water pistols. The Distinguished Looking Old Gentleman said "Bloody Idiots", and Mr Gibson, who had got his gun full by then, whirled round on him and said "Smile when you say that". The Distinguished Looking Old Gentleman patted Mr Gibson on the shoulder, explained that he was a pro-ed, and offered to splash Mr Gibson all over Fandom (he was only joking really). Mr Gibson just stood there with his mouth wide open and when the Distinguished Looking Old Gentleman had gone out he managed to gasp "My God that was Alistair Paterson". I could have told him that if he'd asked me.

I helped Mr Gibson push his bottom jaw back into place and led him out to the Convention Hall again, though I wasn't able to stop him muttering to himself for the rest of the two days "Great Ghu I threatened to squirt Alistair Paterson".

When we got back into the Convention Hall most everybody was sitting down and they were just about to start having a programme; I wanted to see this. I sat in between Mr Ken Potter on one side and Uncle Tom and Auntie Betty on the other; beyond Auntie Betty was Mr Archie Mercer (I guessed Mr Archie himself was there anyway because I could see Mr Archie Mercer's stomach) and Mr Chuck Harris and Mr Walt and Mrs Madeleine Willis and all the other Irish fans. On the platform a Mr Frank Simpson started to talk about 'Radioactivity' but I don't know anything that he said about it because everyone all about on the back line started passing little notes to each other. One of Mr Willis's said (about Mr Frank Simpson) "Is he going to ask questions afterwards?" and when Uncle Tom sent Mr Willis an aspirin he sent back a note which said "For an aspirin' young author?". Mr Willis is like that.

The next talk was by a Mr Geoff Lewis on "Bloody Provincials" but I don't know whether he was in favour of them or not as I couldn't hear, so I don't know whether or not there'll be any. Notes were still flashing past furiously and I noticed that Mr Vinø Clarke and Mr Ken Bulmer (both of whom I recognised from photographs) had arrived at the back of the Hall. Things were still going on on the platform without any regard for the real Convention on the back line and I kept looking up just to see what was disturbing us. The Medway Group (Mr Tony Thorne and Mr Brian Lewis) acted a very funny piece about Commercial Radio

advertising in the future trying to sell a product called 'Soggy', a breakfast food. "No more crunching and crackling; no more popping and bursting - 'Soggy' just lies there and oozes".

When the Liverpool group went on the stage to provide their share of the entertainment we abandoned our Convention to take notice of them. There were two reasons for this so I don't want you to think we gave in easily. One was that they were presenting a recorded playlet called "The Alien Arrives", which had been written by....Mr Walt Willis; the other was that Miss Pat Doonan was up there with them. The play was a scream - I heard a lot of people scream when Mr Norman G. Wansborough was made the Prime Minister of Britain in it. When bits like 'BNF Malenkov' and 'Experts identified them as unidentified objects' cropped up in it, I gave up trying to sit on a chair because it was safer on the floor anyway. Sometime during the afternoon too, Mr Alistair Paterson was on the platform trying to get people from the audience who were invited on the stage, to tell him what they would like to see on magazine covers. I think some of them didn't dare say too exactly because of the femme fans in the Hall, but Mr Ken Potter yelled out and asked for 'Something Mind Shattering in its Cosmic Significance'. I was sat next to him and would have told him where the bar was if he'd asked me.

When the afternoon's programme finished I managed to avoid being clutched by Mr Ron Buckmaster who was ardently selling 1/6d copies of the new London fanzine EYE to everyone he could grab, and went over and introduced myself to Mr Vinç Clarke the well-known Fabulous Fannish Genius. Mr Clarke said "Hello" and "How did I do?" and "Pleased to meet me" and looked at my LEEDS badge and my BRADFORD badge and then a couple of minutes later he looked at my name tag and said "Oh, Mal. Hello. I've been looking forward to meeting you". Then he fished in his pocket and pulled out a lot of little quote cards which had things like "If you don't want crottled greeps what did you order them for" and "Defy the Deroces with Dianetics" written on them, and handed me them and said "My card". He is. Mr Clarke had set off from London on a motor-bike driven by Mr Bert Campbell, the widely-loved editor of 'Authentic' but it appeared that Mr Campbell's bike had the same love of the inhabitants of the North as Mr Campbell himself and it had consequently refused to come further than Birmingham. Mr Clarke had had to come on without Mr Campbell.

Uncle Tom and Auntie Betty and I weren't very hungry so we went into the hotel snack bar to have our tea; we had some sort of salad - I think it was a salad anyway but it might have been sandwiches. Anyway if it was sandwiches it was the most salad-like-tasting sandwiches I've ever had. In between swallowing aspirins and salad (or sandwiches) we talked to Mr Eric Bentcliffe who told us all about the All Night Party planned to take place in the Liverpool suite and invited us along. Uncle Tom seemed to think that the Old People might be out of place there but I talked him and Auntie Betty into promising to go.

After tea we went up to our rooms and Mr Bentcliffe came and sat in my room to have a chat and Mr Alistair Paterson dropped in too and then in the middle of a really Serious and Constructive talk some femme fan bobbed her head round the door and squirted us with a zap gun. The lady disappeared before I could invite her in as well, and that was a pity - I think femme fans can talk some of the seriousest and certainly constructivest talk ever talked. As Mr Bentcliffe and I were on our way downstairs we met some of the gentlemen from Leeds on the stairway. Mr

Jack Darlington was having to leave for home and Mr Jack Smillie and Mr George Gibson were seeing him off. They were all up above us on the staircase and they started firing down at us with their zap guns, so we hid in corners and fired back at them. As we got onto one floor we met about three dozen more fans so we enlisted them and we all hid in Mr Bentcliffe's room while the Leeds fans came downstairs; when they did we all poured out and made them a water slide down the stairs. Mr Jack Darlington got his send-off.

I don't think the manager of the hotel really liked zap guns but I don't know why not; somebody has to wash hotels haven't they? I heard that Mr Burgess was squirting someone (probably a Defenceless Old Lady) on one of the stairways when the manager came up quietly behind him and said in a very shocked voice: "Really". He doesn't know how lucky he was if Mr Burgess didn't squirt him too; I don't think Mr Burgess is the type of gentleman to be biased and discriminate between hotel managers and Defenceless Old Ladies. In fact all the hotel staff looked just a little bit queerly at zap guns and when Mr Bentcliffe and I met one of the porters going into the bar carrying one we were amazed and thrilled; I stayed to keep my eye on him and follow him while Mr Bentcliffe went off and found Mr Fred Robinson who was taking photographs. They came back and I pointed out the porter and we stood looking at him and Mr Bentcliffe tried to hide Mr Robinson and his camera behind himself so that the porter wouldn't get suspicious but he saw us looking at him and put the zap gun down on a table and stood and looked back at us as though he thought we were going to shoot him without a trial for picking it up. Mr Bentcliffe smiled at him ever so sweetly and said, in a voice as though he was trying to persuade a rabbit to come and be stroked: "Please pick it up again; go on. Would you mind?". The porter just stood and looked scared and tried to grin and shake his head. We didn't give up so easily but eventually he backed out still shaking his head.

The staff should have got used to the idea of zap guns just through seeing Mr Brian Lewis though; they should have got used to the idea of fans through the same cause but they didn't seem to. Mr Lewis didn't wear a jacket and he had his green, open-necked shirt outside his trousers and a peaked cap on his head with a Dan Dare badge on the front. He cradled his massive, thousand-shot zap gun (on the lines of a futuristic Tommy Gun) in both his arms and patrolled the hotel entrance lobby. We didn't have much interference at the Convention from non-fans; they didn't seem to get into our part of the hotel somehow.

When we got into the Hall in the evening the first thing that happened that was intended to happen was some sort of an auction. Other things happened before and around that, like Mr Ken Potter playing what he called 'jazz' on the gramophone on the platform, and after that, even if the auction did happen on purpose, it was welcome! Everybody was treated to one of the most hilarious items of the whole Convention because the auctioneer was Mr Ted Tubb, the Well-Known Professional Author ('The world's best writer') and he doesn't just run an auction, he jumps it up and down and leads it around the corner as well. I was very glad then that this was My First Real Convention, just like I was glad the very first time I took a girl out. After the auction there was a film show which happened very smoothly and even had sound with it that didn't come from the audience. In fact after the lights had been put out some of the audience were very quiet but I was sat up at the front near Uncle

Tom and Auntie Betty so I watched the film which was "The Shape of Things to Come". It was a good film; I think if I had been anywhere except at a Convention I would have enjoyed it very much, but sitting still for a long time watching a film doesn't seem quite the 'right' kind of thing to be doing at a Convention; one sort of feels guilty about allowing the manager and hotel staff so much respite.

After the film finished the day's programme did the same and people started drifting off all over the place, to bed, to parties, to the woods.....I said I would see Uncle Tom and Auntie Betty upstairs at the Liverpool party and I stood around in the Hall for a bit talking to quite a few people, including Mr Mike Rosenblum, Mr Ken Potter and Mr Brian Varley. Mr Varley carries on his side of a conversation all in lovely quotes like, "....and this woman came to stay at the Balmoral for three weeks" and "I love scandals" (I was wearing some brown ones) and "Which floor are you walking round?". After a bit I went upstairs, made sure my zap gun was full, and went along to the Liverpool Party in Room 133. The room was quickly filling with people and the people were quickly filling with drink and it was wonderful and friendly and sociable and I might even have felt a bit 'Goshwowboychboyish' and people were all over the place doing all sorts of things and as Uncle Tom said afterwards 'a murder could have been committed at the other side of the room without me knowing anything about it'. I looked at Uncle Tom and he was looking a bit bewildered because he had to write an account of it all, up to midnight, for our fanzine BEM and somehow I don't think he knew where to start. Auntie Betty was sat with him, talking to Mr Mike Rosenblum and Mr Harry Turner and some fans from Liverpool. All sorts of people came in and went out and more often stayed and it was so friendly that it didn't matter who they were they were given drinks and stood around talking, and Mr Walt and Mrs Madeleine Willis came and Mr James White and Mr Chuck Harris and Mr Vince Clarke too when he got in, though I managed to keep him out in the corridor for quite a long time with my zap gun, even though he had a wonderful gun in the shape of an aeroplane on a base, which had six jets, but I was only paying him back for earlier in the day when he had beaten me to the draw downstairs. Mr Brian Lewis and his massive gun were there and he squirted Mr Ted Carnell and got patted over the head with a glass but it was all in the spirit of the party and he has since had some illustrations published in 'New Worlds' and I think I'll get a big zap gun. Also Mr Peter Hamilton was there and Mr Alistair Paterson and Mr Wally Gillings and Mr Frank Milnes and Mr Ken Potter and Mr Harry Hanlon and Mr George Gibson and Mr Jack Smillie and Miss Ethel Lindsay and Mr Terry Jeeves and Mr Ron Bennett and even Mr Brian Burgess and Mrs Ina Shorrocks and Miss Pat Doonan were there in some lovely costumes and Mr Norman Shorrocks and Mr Dave Gardner and Mr John Roles were there of course and occasionally a gentleman we didn't know at all kept paying us a visit and he had a hotel porters uniform on and I don't think he'd been invited to the party. After Midnight Uncle Tom looked very relieved because I had to report things then and I didn't know how it was possible and I asked Mr Walt Willis and he said "You just have to make it all up again afterwards". I know I've forgotten to include simply hundreds of people who were there (like Mr Eric Bentcliffe) and I've forgotten lots of things that happened too. People had drinks and zap guns and soda-siphons squirted at them and their zap guns broken in two and bottle tops pushed down their shirt necks and packs of cards and trouble with porters and

women and the lights out and photos taken and anything else you can imagine. Mr Norman Shorrocks and Mr Eric Bentcliffe and I went downstairs to room 123 where there was a London 'party' but nothing seemed to be happening really except that some of the fans and some of the femmes were laid on the beds and I couldn't think why anyone should want to go to bed when they could be doing exciting things like talking to BNFs or even playing 'Postman's Knock' if they'd wanted to, and Mr Stuart Mackenzie didn't seem to like our company merely because we were carrying zap guns for self-defence and he forcibly assisted Mr Norman Shorrocks into the corridor and there was a porter stood right by the door looking very quiet and slightly bewildered and just a little bit ominous so we went back upstairs to have some fun. At the party the Bheer ran out followed very closely by Uncle Tom and Auntie Betty (though Auntie Betty only went because Uncle Tom did - I think) and some other people left at various times and some more started playing strip-pontoon and others stood talking to the hotel porter at the back of the room and trying to make him feel as though he was one of the party; I don't think he appreciated the honour though - unless he was just holding the chair in front of him for some other reason. It was all very wonderful and very 'unwritable' but eventually the porter stayed there until the party broke up but even then he only really succeeded in sending all the people who had been in one room, all over the hotel and I got mixed up with a large party that roused Mr Dave Gardner out of bed in the middle of reading the 'Vargo Statten Magazine' and then went on to Mr Brian Varley's room and sampled his Canadian Whisky and managed to dodge porters all over the place and finally I ended up in my own room, though I don't know how, having it taken apart by Mr George Gibson and Mr Jack Smillie and Mr Ron Bennett, who were pretending to hide from porters, and after a while I pushed them all outside to fight off the porters as best they could, and I went to bed and accidentally pushed the service button instead of switching the light off and I listened to buzzing noises in the corridor and porters scurrying around but they didn't come to my room and the next thing I knew was that some horrible loud bells were clanging in my ear and it was morning and I didn't feel a little bit 'Goshwowboyohboyish' but quite a lot 'Damnhellmanooooohmanish' and I didn't enjoy the Spiritually Uplifting sound of the Cathedral Bells or the headtop uplifting sound of the bells in my head, but I crawled out of bed and got shaved and crawled downstairs and into the breakfast room and some fans there looked quite wide-awake and I had breakfast with Mr Brian Lewis as I didn't feel like fighting the Head Waiter (a man most suited to his job; I could just imagine him shrinking heads in the cellar) and he didn't want me to go across to Uncle Tom and Auntie Betty at a table over the other side of the room. The poor man had a bad time of it really though because some fans came in and watched him lead them to a table over at the other side of the room while they sat down at one just inside the door and one fan was short of a knife so he just walked across to another table and took one from there and I could see all the staff and the Head Waiter wince, and I'll bet they sent a delegation afterwards to report it to Queen Victoria. Mr Chuck Harris brought me an aspirin across during breakfast so I must have looked like I felt too.

After Mr Brian Lewis and I left there we went along to the Con Hall and all that was happening was that Mr Harry Turner and Mr Sandy Sanderson were tidying up, and Mr Eric Bentcliffe came along and started playing blues on the piano on the platform because that was what

everyone felt like and Mr Brian Lewis and I started to give him a rhythm accompaniment on an upturned tin and a chair bottom and the mood seemed very fitting and eventually a few other people drifted into the Hall and looked at the stands and stood around talking and some of them even started dancing so we must have had a steady, solid rhythm if nothing else - I think it was being transmitted direct from our skulls, and Miss Pat Doolan came along and sang one or two songs with us and that livened the mood up a little bit. Mr Ken Potter came along too and after we finished playing I met a friend of his, Miss Irene Gore, who had just arrived, only just as I was being introduced to her I nearly toppled backwards off the platform and it's hard to look like a Greek God when you're toppling backwards off a platform and feeling like a Patagonian potato-picker anyway. Dinnertime came along before any more Conventioneers and I went out with Mr George Gibson and Mr Jack Smillie and Mr Ron Bennett and when we got to the cafe Mr Arthur Cook and Mr Brian Aviss were already there and Mr Terry Jeeves and Mr Ken McIntyre came in later. Uncle Tom and Auntie Betty stayed at the hotel for dinner along with Mr Mike Rosenblum, and a waiter came up to Mr Rosenblum and said "Two gentlemen over there want to charge their lunch to the Convention Committee, sir. Will that be all right?"

In the Hall after lunch Uncle Tom and I met a lady called Frances Evans and she looked at Uncle Tom and said "Oh yes you're the one who wouldn't come in the W.C aren't you?". Uncle Tom said "I beg your pardon?" and she said "You're the one who wouldn't come in the W.C aren't you?" and Uncle Tom looked out of the window towards the faraway moors and said "I should hope so" and then this lady said "You know - the Willis Cult" and Uncle Tom sighed so hard that he should have been crushed having so much air outside him and none inside. Soon afterwards I got dragged out of the bar where I was with Mr Brian Lewis to go and be on a fan-editors' panel on the platform along with Uncle Tom and Mr Harry Turner and Mr Eric Bentcliffe and Miss Ethel Lindsay and Mr Pete Campbell and Mr Tony Thorne and Mr Fred Smith and Mr Paul Enever as chairman and I wasn't very happy about it as I wasn't sure that I could make a success of speaking from the platform - I didn't. The idea was for faneditors to criticise rival magazines but I had managed to get BEM to talk about, so after they'd finished talking about ZENITH and SPACE TIMES and HAEMOGoblin (at which point Mr Stuart MacKenzie arrived and made a speech about SPACE TIMES) and FEMIZINE, I stood up and said something into the microphone. Almost at the same time I heard another voice saying something, so I stopped to listen to that as I was certain that what it had to say would be more interesting to listen to than what I hadn't got to say but when I stopped the other voice stopped too and I wasn't pleased to find out that it was my echo. After I sat down the faneditors panel was immediately closed and the next item announced. That is how to kill Con programmes. There were all sorts of interesting items during the afternoon like the pro-editors panel with Mr Alistair Paterson and Mr Peter Hamilton and Mr Ted Carnell, all of whom were very entertaining to listen to, and there was a pro-authors panel with Mr E.R. James and Mr Sydney J. Bounds and Mr John Russell Fearn and Mr James White and Mr Dave Gardner and Mr John Brunner and Mr Ted Tubb, and Mr Ted Tubb showed that he could give serious and intelligent answers if he wanted but most of the questions weren't serious anyway and he seemed happy to keep everybody in fits of laughter, and there was a talk by Mr John Russell Fearn on his own about being Vargo Statten and about how his

stories weren't meant for the Slan-type genuine fans anyway really, and there should have been an item with three femme fans and one ordinary fan on the stage but the ordinary fan (who was Brian Varley) was just a bit too much of an ordinary fan and he had drunk all his bottle of Canadian whisky the night before and couldn't remember his lines for the play, along with a lot of other things, so the femme fans dragged him up on the platform to make an apology anyway, and there was a 'magic' item by Mr John Gunn in which he read people's minds and told them what cards they were thinking of, when they didn't tell him first (some of them were very keen to help him) and he had people standing all over the Hall holding long strips of paper and turning egg-beaters and all sorts of things suited to a Convention like that. When all the afternoon's programmes were finished and teatime came along there was a tea-interval and I went out with Uncle Tom and Auntie Betty and Mr Pete Campbell and Mr George Gibson and Mr Jack Smillie, to Lyons and soon hundreds and hundreds of fans came in there for their tea, including Mr Ron Bennett in the middle of a group of femme fans but we were all feeling quite kind really so we didn't make too many remarks about that. After tea I went along to the station to find out if the last train I could possibly catch really did leave at nine-thirty-two like Uncle Tom and Auntie Betty said, and Mr George Gibson came along with me for a walk and we met Mr Harry Turner and Mr Derek Pickles and Mr Stanley Thomas coming back from the station and they'd been to find out the same thing. At the station they said yes that was the last train until four-fifty in the morning and I couldn't really wait all that time, so we went back to the hotel and let Uncle Tom and Auntie Betty gloat about it.

In the evening there was an auction with Mr Derek Pickles and Mr Frank Simpson doing the selling and then a talk by Mr Sydney J. Bounds on 'Writing Science Fiction', and I went into the bar with Mr Eric Bentcliffe and we talked about next year's Convention, and at one time I was talking to Mr John Brunner and Mr Ron Bennett just inside the Hall door and Mr Bennett was telling Mr John Brunner how he was a pro-author too, only he hadn't sold any stories yet, and at another time Mr Walt Willis came across to talk to Uncle Tom and I and to look at a prototype BEM 2 (he was probably horrified that we would allow a prototype BEM) and to talk about various things and Uncle Tom told Mr Willis how he had met me going along the canal bank with a millstone in a suitcase and Mr Willis said "Oh yes - another millstone in Fannish History". On the platform they had a trial of Mr Bert Campbell for calling Northern fans 'Bloody Provincials', only Mr Campbell wasn't there so Mr Ron Buckmaster put on a beard and took his place and Mr Terry Jeeves was prosecuting and Mr Ted Tubb defending and they just ran the whole thing between them, along with Mr Dave Newman who was the judge and it was an absolute farce and kept everybody in the Hall and laughing like crazy and every time Mr Ted Tubb on the platform turned his back to the audience Mr Norman G. Wansborough who was on the front line pulled out his waterproof bag, got out his zap gun and squirted the back of Mr Tubb's jacket. Then he grinned, put his zap gun back in his bag, and his bag back in his pocket and went on watching the Trial. Afterwards Mrs Ina Shorrocks came up to me and gave me a photo of herself undressed-up as 'Neptune's Daughter' as a sub to BEM and I went out into the lobby to see Miss Pat Doolan about a sub of the same kind and I sat on her knee while we negotiated it and I thought 'Geshwowboychboy aren't Conventions just SUPER' and Mr Vince Clarke came past and I quipped back

to him a line out of one of his letters which said "Sublimation is not enough" and then I had to leave Miss Pat Doonan and I was looking forward to the next Convention, and Uncle Tom and Auntie Betty and I started to get ready to leave and I was talking to Mr Walt Willis and Mr Vince Clarke in the lobby and Mr Clarke showed me a phial of genuine Okefenokee Swamp (you know - where Pogo lives) water which Mr Willis had brought him back from America two years before, and he even let me smell at it and he helped me to stand on my feet afterwards, and then in the conversation he mentioned the 'Orgicon' to be held in Surrey and Mr Willis said something about 'Surrey with the lunatic fringe on top' and then I had to leave them too and Uncle Tom and Auntie Betty and I were dashing around saying Good-Bye to everybody we could find and saying we'd see them next year and not even having time to wish that next year wasn't twelve months away, and then we dashed off for the station and we met Mr Ken Potter and Mr Harry Hanlon coming back from seeing Miss Irene Gore off and just to round things off in a friendly, fannish way Uncle Tom told Mr Ken Potter that a column he had sent us for BEM stank and then we got on the train and we were coming home and it didn't seem like more than a couple of hours since we'd arrived and we didn't feel as though we'd really left all those people behind but rather like you do after a really 'hot' jazz session, still 'jazzing' inside; we were still Conventioneering inside and we kept talking very fast and interrupting each other, and when we got to one station a lady leaned out of the carriage and said to a porter "Have I to change here for Leeds?" and he said "Yes" and she said "Have I to get out here then?" and he said very sweetly "Certainly" and we all burst out laughing, and somehow the Convention wasn't quite over then; it was just sort of keeping going but in a lot of different places. After we got off the train we walked about two miles home and at night I dreamt about some femme fans and it had been my First Real Convention and Geshwowboyohboy I can't wait until we all have our Conventions at the same time and place again next year. I think I like Conventions because there are fans there.

THE END

Forty-five copies of 'My First Real Convention' have been published, in August 1954, thirty for OMPA Mailing No 1 and fifteen as complimentary copies for individuals considered either hyper-appreciative or nearly Ghods, by Mal Ashworth, 40, Makin Street, Tong Street, Bradford. 4., Yorks., England, and duplicated on Derek Pickles Rotary Gestetner Duplicator, by the Grace of Ghod and Derek Pickles, to whom my eyes are bequeathed - both.

