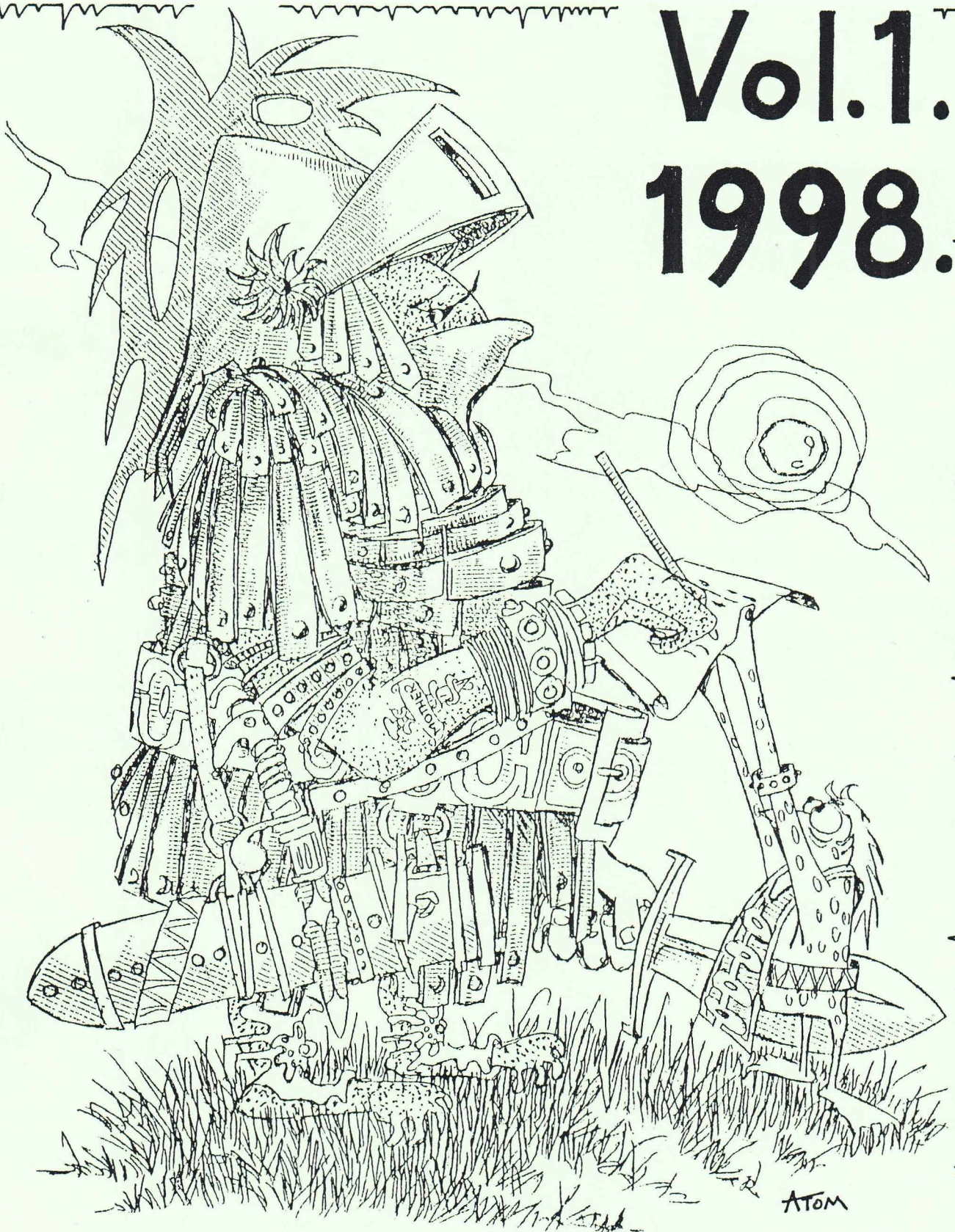


Vol.1.
1998.



FABLES OF
IRISH FANDOM.

A Time Regained ...

By John Berry • 1998.



BEING FABLES OF IRISH
♣ SCIENCE FICTION FANDOM.

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Shoestring

As of the end of September 1998 volume 2 is coming along fine,
and we hope to mail out:-

possibly before Christmas 1998

99% certain in January 1999.

John Berry, and Ken Cheslin, wish you an enjoyable read
of volume.1.



this is a

Shoestring

publication

from Ken Cheslin, 29 Kestrel Road, Halesowen, West Midlands,
B63 2PH. U.K.

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Should this fall into the hands of anyone who knows not the
JOHN BERRY I should point out that John Berry wrote the text, the late
Atom, Arthur Thompson, drew the majority of the illustrations, Ken Cheslin
merely printed the opus.

* * * * *

THIS VOLUME is being mailed out to: people who have sent me fanzines, or
letters, or letters of comment on previous publications, etc.,
also to some of the folk mentioned in FABLES OF IRISH FANDOM and, where no
other explanation fits the bill, on 'editorial whim'.

THIS VOLUME then is essentially FREE OF CHARGE to all those mentioned above.

However, should you wish to help us finance this, and the further three volumes
that we plan, you might like to send me MONEY.

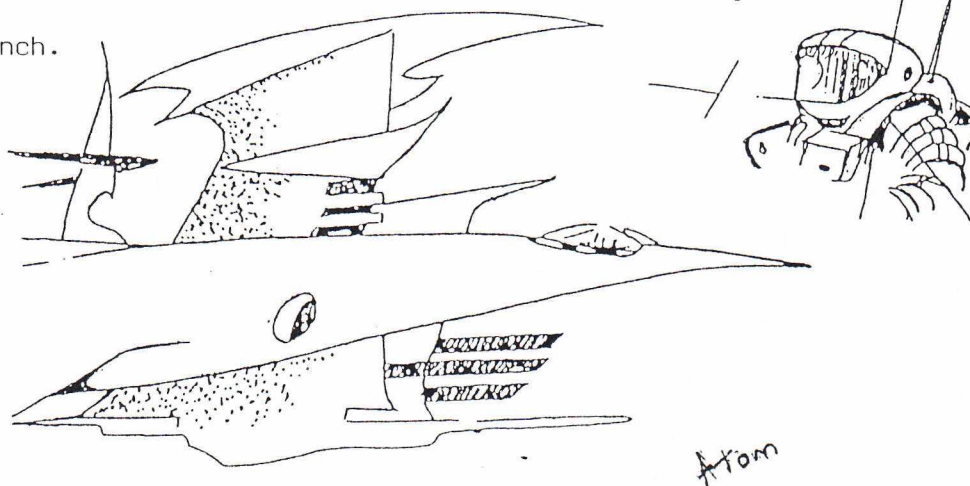
£1.50 to £2 in UK money. (or in stamps of 50p denomination or less)

\$4 to \$5 in US money. (US money is eaten up by bank charges if one changes
it so if you can get hold of UK money....otherwise

I can send it back to the US to pay for publications...like the Tucker Collect
ion from Bill Bowers.)

Where 'the usual' has been operating for some time now I,
naturally, will continue the arrangement for the coming
volumes.

Kench.



DOWN MEMORY LAIN.

The final meeting of Irish Fandom at Oblique House, 170, Upper Newtownards Road, Belfast, took place on 26th April 1965, thirty years ago. From 1954 to that date I had written a large number of stories regarding the fabulous characters of Irish Fandom, and their unbelievable activities, and these were published in numerous fanzines in the United Kingdom and the United States of America (also several were translated in fanzines in Sweden, Belgium, West Germany etc.)

In a nostalgic bout of retrospection I have gathered some sixty of these stories, plus one potted biography in the BELFASTERS series, written by Bob Shaw, concerning myself, under the collective title of FABLES OF IRISH FANDOM.

This volume is sub-titled A TIME REGAINED, and this prompts my observations concerning the oft-repeated doubts as to the truth-factor in the so-called 'Berry Factual Articles'. In my defence I wish to quote the comments of various well-known fannish writers on the subject.

Arthur Thomson (ATOM) - RIP - a magnificent cartoonist and artist, visited my house in Belfast, with his wife Olive, in 1956, and I subsequently wrote and published an account of our adventures in a one-shot THE THOMSON SAGA.

Arthur later wrote that because of the controversy surrounding the authenticity of my humorous writings, he commenced to read THE THOMSON SAGA with a certain degree of trepidation, but he reported that everything I had written had actually happened.

Walt Willis, being the kind person that he is, pre-empted a review of my exaggerated literary style by revealing incidents he had written about in fanzines which were much more unbelievable than my own features.

Boyd Raeburn witnessed a ghoddminton match at Oblique House, and observed that, whilst he could not comment on the veracity of Berry Factual Articles, every word I wrote about ghoddminton was entirely truthful.

Probably the most perceptive statement was made by Archie Mercer. He wrote that when he started to read my Irish Fandom stories, everything seemed to be perfectly orderly and rational, yet when he'd finished reading the articles, he felt he had been transported into a fantasy world, but he had been unable to finger the transition.

I do freely admit that during those heady years of Irish Fandom meetings with Walt and Madeleine Willis, Bob and Sadie Shaw, James and Peggy White, and George Charters, with incursions mainly from ATOM and Olive, and Chuch Harris, I felt impelled to record the conversations, the puns, the incidents, the numerous adventures we had together for posterity. But as time went by, and more and more fanzines featured my Irish Fandom stories, many of them superbly illustrated by ATOM, it is true to state that the lead players became rather irritated by my frequent revelations about their personal idiosyncracies, overstressed for effect. Bob Shaw wrote that my style of exaggerated

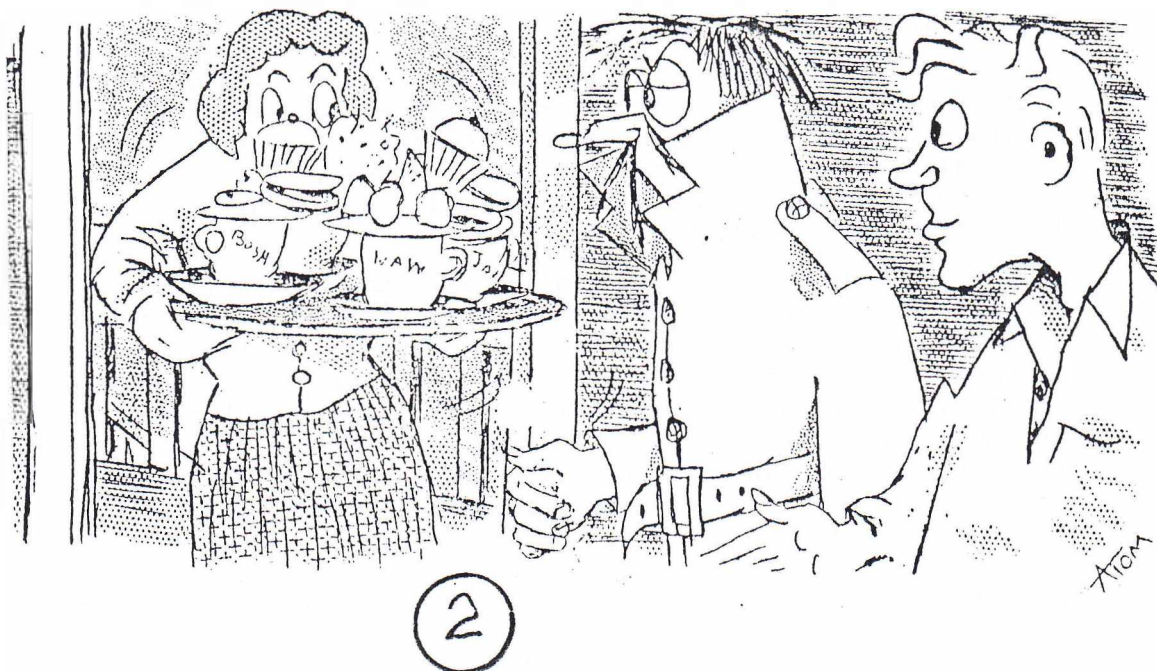
observations forced home the incidents I wrote about, trivial though they may be, with sledge-hammer blows to render them unforgettable. James White referred to me as the 'Chronic-Leer' of Irish Fandom.

Exaggeration and fantasy are integral parts of humour...Les Dawson, one of England's best loved comedians, who died recently, reserved his barbed humour usually for his mother-in-law, revealing these quintessential aspects. Here are a couple of his asides...he stated that he knew his mother-in-law was going to visit his house, because the mice were throwing themselves on the traps...he informed his audience that his mother-in-law was out of the country at the moment, she was attending a Luftwaffe reunion.

Frank Carson, a Belfast-born comedian, also applies these techniques to his delivery...he didn't report the theft of his credit card to the police, because the thief was spending less than his wife...on hearing that the I.R.A. had planted a bomb in a pet shop in Belfast, and given a two-minute warning, he observed that this didn't give the tortoises much chance to escape... a woman attending chapel slipped from the upper gallery and was suspended up-side-down by one leg, revealing her intimate underwear. The priest cautioned all the men not to look, on the pain of being immediately struck blind by the Almighty. Murphy observed..."I think I'll risk one eye."

So the truth is that, well, yes, if you do read these stories, you will be invited to enter a fannish fantasy world. Nevertheless, many of the quoted incidents did happen; the conversations did take place as I've written them; the puns were indecently exposed, and it is my considerable pleasure to invite you to re-live those wonderful times, those precious afternoons and evenings when the problems of everyday life, from which we all suffer, were temporarily relegated and replaced by an abundance of wit, charm, kindness, creativity and excitement.

John Berry
1998.



COMING UP FOR THE THIRD TIME.

It was dark. It was raining heavily. I pulled up my coat collar and trudged along. I looked at the numbers on the gates.... 120...122...124...getting nearer. I felt tense...excited...thin rivulets of perspiration ran down between my shoulder blades. Only a few moments now...144...146...148. What will I say ? What will I do ? 166...168...170...170 ? I gulped, hesitated for a second, took a deep breath, and with a snort of decision, felt for the gate latch. Anticlimax. There wasn't one. I pushed the gate aside, strode up the path, tripping unexpectedly on a flagstone, gad, I was in a state.

I glanced upwards, and against the night sky I could see the silhouette of a large three-storey house. Light gleamed from a top window. Reaching the doorway, I pressed a bell. A pause, and the door opened...a charming young lady appeared. I was in the wrong house. I must be. I stammered an apology, and turned reluctantly away.

She spoke. "Mr. Berry ?"

I wheeled round. "Y - yes."

She smiled. "My husband is expecting you," and led the way upstairs. I followed closely. Sweat was now beading my forehead. I'll never forget that one sweet apprehensive moment as I passed through the open doorway.

A young, intelligent-looking fellow was busily punishing a typewriter with finger and thumb. He turned, got up, we shook hands.

I HAD MET WALT WILLIS.

Let me describe the room. My eyes flashed back and forth, noting the important details. I saw a large bookcase, crammed with science fiction magazines...a calendar depicting Marulyn Monroe in the altogetther; an enchanted duplicator; a calendar depicting Marilyn Monroe in the altogetther; a large futuristic drawing of a space ship; a calendar...wait, I suppose I must explain. I am a Marilyn Monroe fan. Always have been. I saw NIAGARA four times...GENTLEMEN PREFER BLONDES thrice. A beautiful pair of pictures. I also saw her in... what ? You want to hear about Willis ? Man, where's your sense of proportion ? I could rhapsodise for hours. I also saw...oh well, if you insist.

So we sat down, and discussed the pros and cons of fandom for some time. The result was that I was invited to visit Oblique House again the following Sunday afternoon, to meet a couple of stalwart fans.

Oblique House looks imposing in the sunlight. You've probably seen it. But I bet you've never seen a bicycle (a generous term in this instance) like the one I saw leaning self-consciously against the side of the house on this, my second visit.

I wish I could describe it. It seemed sort of - well, it's difficult. However, I could make out the mystic word BOSH scratched on the thick coat of rusted rust on the cross bar. Even as I watched, fascinated, a battered spoke, with a 'ping' reminiscent of a ruptured G string, teetered slowly over, and hung in a silent gesture of

abject apology. It was pathetic, my heart warmed to this unfortunate lubrication-starved velocipede.

As I turned away, filled with pity, the door was opened. Upstairs I was introduced to James White, Bob Shaw and George Charters. You've met them? For the unfortunate ones amongst you who haven't, I feel I must say a few words about them.

Bob is the poor man's Lex Barker. Not, I hasten to add, from any apparent propensity to swing from tree to tree, but purely because of the remarkable physical resemblance. (Sorry, Lex !)

James's prosperous appearance leads me to assume that he has some professional business connection with one of Belfast's leading Gentlemen's Outfitters. This assumption is entirely guesswork on my part.

George is a punster. His whole existence is centred around puns. I have it on excellent authority that throughout the years he has accumulated a superb collection of original puns, which he has carefully tabulated in his mental recesses. He listens to conversations, leaning forward avidly, and suddenly, during a rare temporary lull, he utters a marvellous pun which is just suited to the subject under discussion. He is considering starting a School for Puns, as if we don't suffer enough punishment.

After tea, kindly provided by Madeleine at the appropriate moment, the room was energetically cleared to provide space for the unique tournament which seems to be (and happily so) a ritual at these meetings.

The easiest way I can explain the rules is to say that there are none. Literally nothing is barred. It seems essential that at least an elementary knowledge of Judo is required; indeed, the possessor of a Black Belt would not gain much respite, but perhaps more practice.

I joined in the game quite readily, because I am heavily insured; otherwise I would have given the invitation to play much more consideration.

The basic idea is that two fans join forces and face two others across a table, over which is stretched a net. Each player is armed with a 'bat' (loose floppy layers of cardboard, one of the charms of the game) and a battered shuttlecock is bashed too and fro.

The energy expended in one set is prodigious. The antics performed by the players are also worthy of note. Walt's chief gambit is to attempt a cannon off a large picture of a semi-nude dancing girl hanging on the wall. I think Walt chooses a special aiming point on the girl's anatomy, because the pin-point accuracy of his shots is amazing. On second thoughts, it could be that his intention is to divert his opponent's attention to the picture. You've already guessed my next statement. He should attempt a cannon off Marilyn. That would upset my game.

James White uses ESP. He launches his bat to the left, glances to the ceiling, leaps to the right, and at the same time he wills his opponents to drop their bats.

Now we come to George. He displays an advanced knowledge of psychology. His primary approach is calculated to appeal to one's finer feelings. Let me explain. His service, for example, is a gem. Note his apologetic smile to the two across the table. That smile says, in effect, "Look. I know my service is pathetic, but please, puh-leeze don't murder it." He then taps the shuttlecock slowly and

gently over the net.

That service is dealt with in two ways. By (a), the kindly, compassionate type (me). An opponent in this category purposely **LOSES THE POINT**, lest George should have a mental breakdown, which, to judge from his pitiful expression, is imminent. Secondly (b), we have the heartless, sadistic, vengeful type (James White.) With methodical and murderous precision, this type unleashes itself with elemental force, and crashes the shuttlecock with venomous hatred.

Now watch carefully. As George prises the shuttlecock from the wall behind him, he grins weakly. He appears to make the same service, but the discerning eye might notice a final crafty flick of the wrist. Type (b)...(James), licking his lips with anticipation, doesn't notice this. The result is that when Type (b) hurls itself forward, **THE SHUTTLECOCK TURNS AT RIGHT ANGLES**. Honest. It does. I've seen it. It is surely unnecessary for me to add that George has yet to appear on the losing side - he won't partner me.

Bob is in his element at this game because, as we all know, he is the recognised authority on **PLOYMANSHIP**. He reaches unprecedented heights. It is magnificent to watch. He backs against the wall, snarling, and waving his bat about as if it were a machete. Naturally, his opponent is overawed, makes a weak service. Bob leaps forward, a smooth smile flitting across his face, and with a vicious overhand flick hurls the shuttlecock back from whence it came. Like a recoiling spring, he then reverts to his original stance against the wall, and with an added leer makes sure his opponent lacks the audacity to return the missile, should it be physically possible to do so.

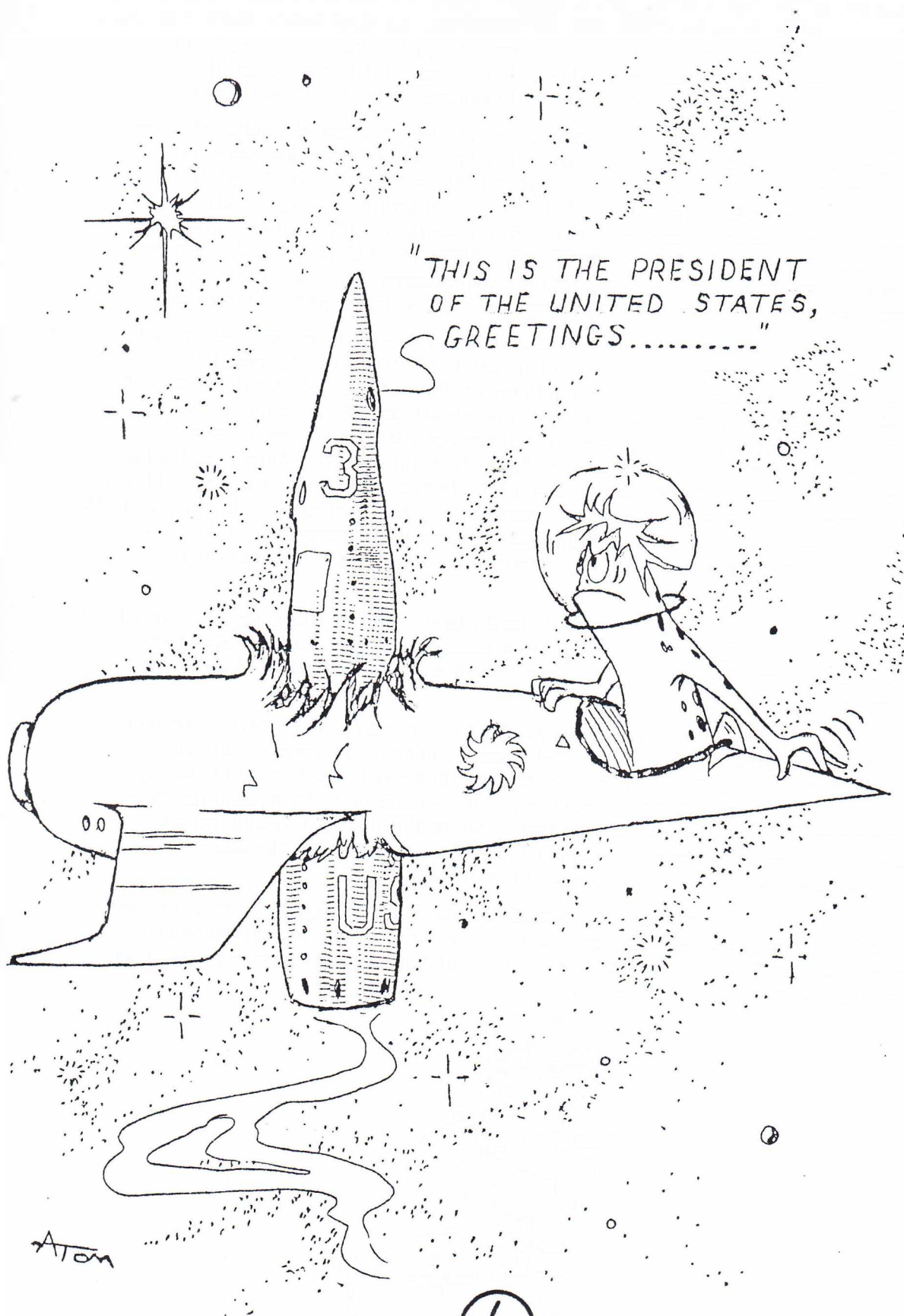
I've left Madeleine until last. It is most ungallant of me to do so, but I was forced into this unhappy position because her technique is so subtle that it has taken me considerably longer to diagnose.

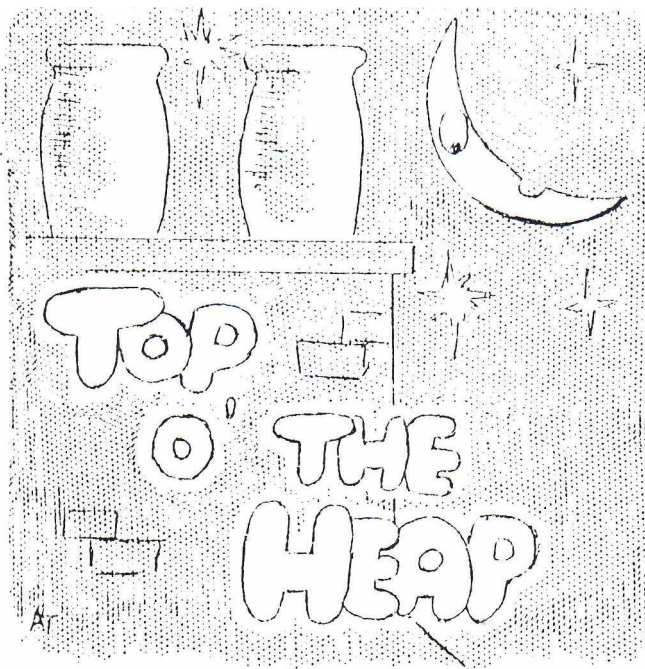
This is it, briefly. Smiling coyly, she holds her bat in her right hand with finger and thumb, little finger daintily raised. Still smiling, she holds the shuttlecock in her left hand, little finger also daintily raised. Her opponent (I'm speaking from experience) stands back to admire this delightfully feminine stance. Suddenly there is a barely audible flash, and the shuttlecock hums past at the speed of light...and that is fast !

Do I employ any gambit, you ask ? Frankly , no. As yet I am still an amateur at the game. I've tried one or two elementary diversions, but with little success. I did rip my trousers, but I'm sure that James will fix me up.

5







Sunday 19th December 1954.

IT WAS a few days before Christmas. We were all seated around the table in our room at the top floor of Oblique House. It was tea-time, and there was silence, save only for the rapid action of six pairs of jaws, and the occasional hurried scrape as Bob pulled a plate of cakes towards him, and we pulled it back again.

"Have another cake, Bob," said Madeleine sarcastically, "and make your total an even dozen."

"What?" rasped an indignant BoSh, "and have everyone think I was a glutton."

Finally, only the crumbs were left, and leaving Bob sniffing round the empty tray, we leaned back, satisfied.

Walt spoke.

"I am pleased to be able to

announce," he said, "that Chuck Harris will be with us for a few days this Christmas."

There was a general murmur of approval round the table. Well, to be quite truthful, there was one cry of dissention. That was from Bob when he discovered the tea pot was empty.

James in particular, seemed quite happy at the prospect of meeting Chuck again and idly started to sharpen a knife on a whetstone that was convenient to him. From the way he constantly tested the edge with his thumb, I presumed there was some sort of ritual between them, whereby Jas sharpened Chuck's pencils - or something like that.

Then Madeleine leaned forward. "How can we introduce John to Chuck?"

Bob nodded. "Right enough," he observed, "it wouldn't be fannish just to introduce them normally...we must think of something really original."

They all looked at me and nodded sagely to each other.

Frankly, I had been thinking of the same thing, and had worked out a complicated plan I thought would amaze everyone. I decided to put my plan to the vote. I put my hand up and waited until Walt raised a finger, giving me permission to speak.

"This is my idea," I said, "but it needs split-second timing. I will come up next Saturday night at a carefully prearranged time. Just before I arrive, Madeleine will think up some pretext to take Chuck away to the back of the house. Walt will let me in and I will come up here into the attic. I will open the window, with my coat still on, crawl through the window, and stand on the projection outside. Walt will close the window, rush downstairs, and suggest a game of Ghoddminton. After you have all been playing for a few moments, I will push the window up, move the curtains aside and clamber through. Then you all look at me and say "Hello" quite casually, as though I always come in that way. Imagine the expression on Chuck's face."

My suggestion had a mixed reception. Walt

BY

JOHN
BERRY

wincing expressively. "It's about ninety feet up," he said, "supposing you fell?" "It would be a marvellous way for a fan to die," gloated Bob. He was serious too. I began to feel unnerved.

James had a dreamy look in his eyes. "Imagine the obituary," he whispered, "I can see it now." He began to jot down phrases on his scratch-pad.

Madeleine had obviously given the proposition much thought. "How would you retain a grip?" she asked.

"I've thought of that," I said. I would pull the window up about an inch, gripping the ledge tightly with my fingers. When Walt draws the curtains my finger-tips will be hidden."

"Ghod," said Walt. "Suppose Chuck felt a draught, and suddenly rammed down the window without saying anything beforehand?"

"Not a bad idea," said Bob, ".....I mean John's idea, naturally, not Chuck slamming down the window."

"Mmmmmnn," mused Walter, "I suppose it would put Chuck thinking if John did make his entrance in that manner."

"It would be fun," Sadie said.

"I like it," added James. I looked across at his paper and distinctly saw the letters F.I.P. and a verse below them.

I began to feel cold all over. I clasped my fingertips lovingly, looked across at the window and shuddered.

"Of course," I said, without even putting my hand up -- you can tell what a state I was in -- "perhaps it would be too complicated, perhaps it would be snowing, or even freezing, or even raining. I..."

Walter held up his hand authoritatively. "I have thought of an alternative plan," he announced. "I have a copy of the Vargo Statten Magazine No.3., which, incidentally, has my photograph in it. However, it also has a story by Chuck. My suggestion is this: I will loan this magazine to John, and when he comes around on Sunday, I want him to rush in, with his eyes staring out of his head in awe. I want him to rush up to Chuck, trip over the doormat in excitement, and lay prostrate at Chuck's feet, with the book opened at page 56, muttering 'autograph, autograph.'"

There was a spontaneous burst of applause at this suggestion, with cries of "Bravo!" and "Brilliant!" and "Ghod!"

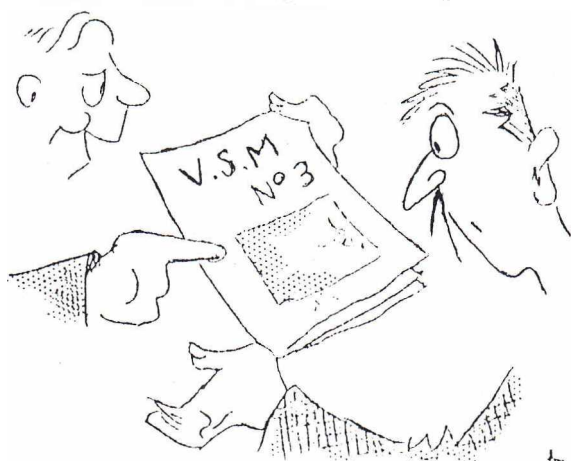
"Well," said Walt, "I will put the two suggestion to the vote. In the case of a tie, as there are six of us here, I will let George have the casting vote. He will be coming here next Tuesday. Now, hands up for John's suggestion."

James' arm shot up like a rocket, closely followed by the arms of Sadie and Bob. Three.

"My suggestion," said Walt. He raised his hand, and Madeleine raised hers. They were very slow about it, my arm was beginning to ache. Three.

"It's up to George then," said Walt, "and please understand that I shall not allow him to be approached by anyone to try and sway him one way or the other."

Well, that is how the matter stands at the moment. I am writing this before



Chuck comes, so that if George is in a frivolous mood on Tuesday, and votes the wrong way, my loss may be mourned, but my story will live on.

Why don't I keep my big mouth shut?

.....

Tuesday, 21st December 1954.

I raced around to Oblique House at top speed in an endeavour to have a word with George before the bourgeois arrived. I was too late. I opened the door to the Ghoddminton Chamber, and seven pairs of eyes looked at me. Two pairs, Madeleine's and Walt's (pro-Berry), looked apologetic, sorrowful. Three more pairs (anti-Berry), Sadie, Bob and James, looked sadistic and happy. It wasn't so much the way they looked at me that had me worried, it was the things they were doing. James had hewn out the rough shape of a cross from a chunk of timber, and was busily sandpapering it. Bob was working on a thesis that I saw was entitled "Head in the Clouds" which began with a mathematical equation in which "...32' per second, per second.." figured prominently. Sadie had a large piece of lace in her lap which looked like a shroud.

There was no need for me to ask which way George had voted. "George," I cried "George, how could you do this thing?"

He laughed from the corner where he was sitting, -- a hollow, mocking laugh. "Bags I the story of his demise for my Fourth Column," he shrieked.

I ran across to Walt and knelt down respectfully in front of him. "Walter... Mr. Willis...sir," I gasped, "can't you intercede on my behalf?"

He gulped, obviously under great emotional stress. "Irish Fandom is run on strictly democratic lines," he announced grimly. "It was put to the vote, and we must abide by the majority decision. It was your original idea, anyway. And by the way, don't think I am being too suggestive, but I consider it would be a rather fitting gesture if you bequeathed your Science Fiction collection to O'Bleak House. I'll have a special bookcase built in mahogany, overlooking the Ghoddminton Court." His eyes began to light up with a strange enthusiasm. "What a precedent! sacrificing a neofan to Chuck Harris. God, that'll go down well in America."

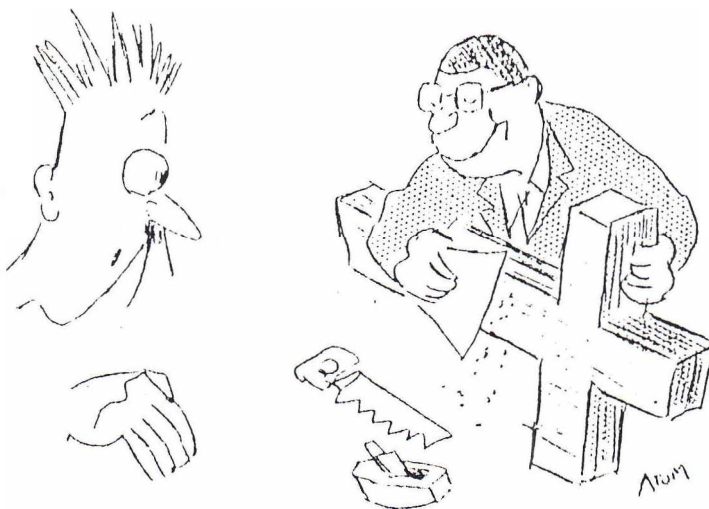
I turned desperately to Madeleine. "Madeleine," I begged, "please, can't you use your influence?"

But she had a far-away look in her eyes too. "John," she cooed softly, "I've always had my eye on that Ghoddminton bat of yours with the leather wrist-strap.. Promise me you won't leave it to anyone else."

.....
Sunday, 26th December 1954.

I survived. I survived, and what's more, I met Chuck Harris. It was a near thing, but fate was kind. But I am getting ahead of myself. I must tell you how right triumphed over the machinations of the trio.

Working to the split-second schedule, I arrived at Oblique House at 4.36. pm.



Exactly at that time, the door opened and Walt furtively ushered me inside. "It's O.K." he whispered, "Chuck is in the kitchen."

I thought at the time that Walt was rather excited about something, but I tiptoed upstairs after him, my heart thumping wildly. Only my pride kept me going as we entered the attic and Walt opened the window. I gulped and turned to Walt. His eyes were closed, and he was muttering a strange incantation to someone called Bosco.

I crawled through the window, and the icy blast almost tore me away. Even the moon seemed interested. I climbed onto the projection, gripped the window ledge with my fingers, closed my eyes and began to pray. The plan, you will remember, was for Walt to fetch the rest of the gang upstairs, play ghoddminton, and me make my entrance. At least half an hour had gone by and I was still outside the window. What the hell had gone wrong with the plan? Dammit, they hadn't even come into the room. I looked downwards.

'Sfunny you know, but Walt isn't much of a gardener, and I was quite surprised to see that he had dug a big hole in the middle of his lawn. It seemed a strange place to dig a hole, especially of this size -- I guessed it to be about 6' long, 3' wide, and 6' deep. All sorts of strange notions passed through my head. Perhaps Walt had taken up archaeology for a hobby, perhaps his refuse man was on strike. I suddenly decided I had done my bit for the cause. I had waited long enough, a small crowd had gathered outside 170 and I could hear murmurs of ".... dial 999..."

Somehow I raised the window and wriggled inside. I collapsed on the floor, exhausted. After a few moments I found enough strength to switch the light on. I gazed at the Marilyn Monroe calendar for about 20 minutes. Considerably rejuvenated, I made my way down the stairs. All was silent. I padded to the front room and peered through the doorway. Everyone was lined up at the bay-window, looking out. "He's a long time coming down," said a strange voice.

I was indignant. I rushed forward in annoyance. Unintentionally, I tripped on the doormat, flew through the air, and landed on my stomach in front of a large pair of carpet slippers. I looked upwards from the slippers and saw a distinguished, bespectacled face looking down at me. Someone, (BoSh I think), grabbed me by the scruff of the neck, and dragged me to my feet in front of this important personage. "Berry," everyone chorused.

With a gesture of annoyance, Chuck clicked his fingers impatiently. Then he unscrewed his fountain pen. "Well, where's your Vargo Statton?" he asked.

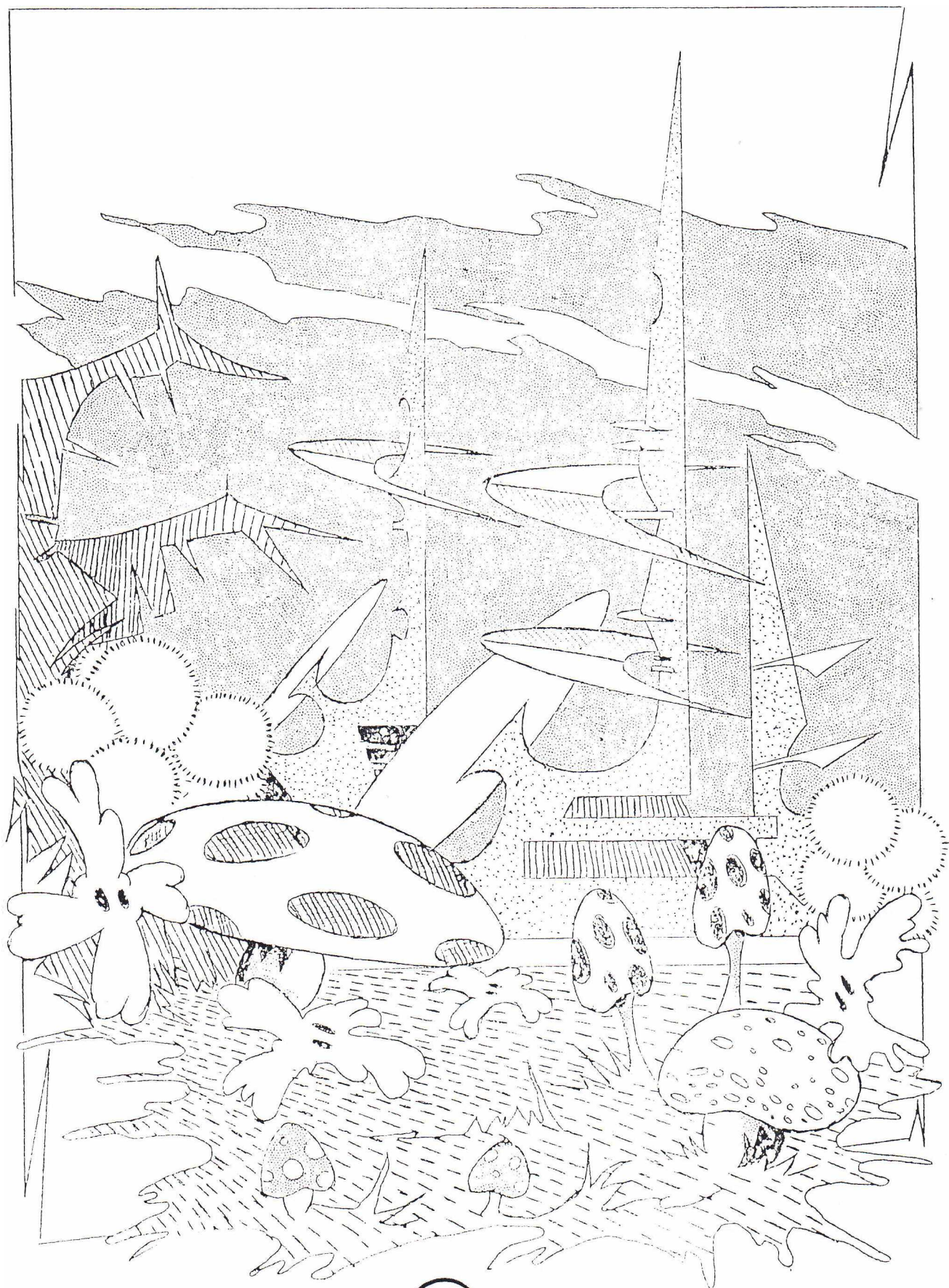
Later I asked Walt what had gone wrong with the scheme. "Oh, I knew you would come down one way or the other," he grinned. "But supposing I lost my grip and fell?" I asked. "That was a risk I had to take," he said modestly. Can you beat that. It was a risk he had to take. "How about the grave in the front garden?" I countered.

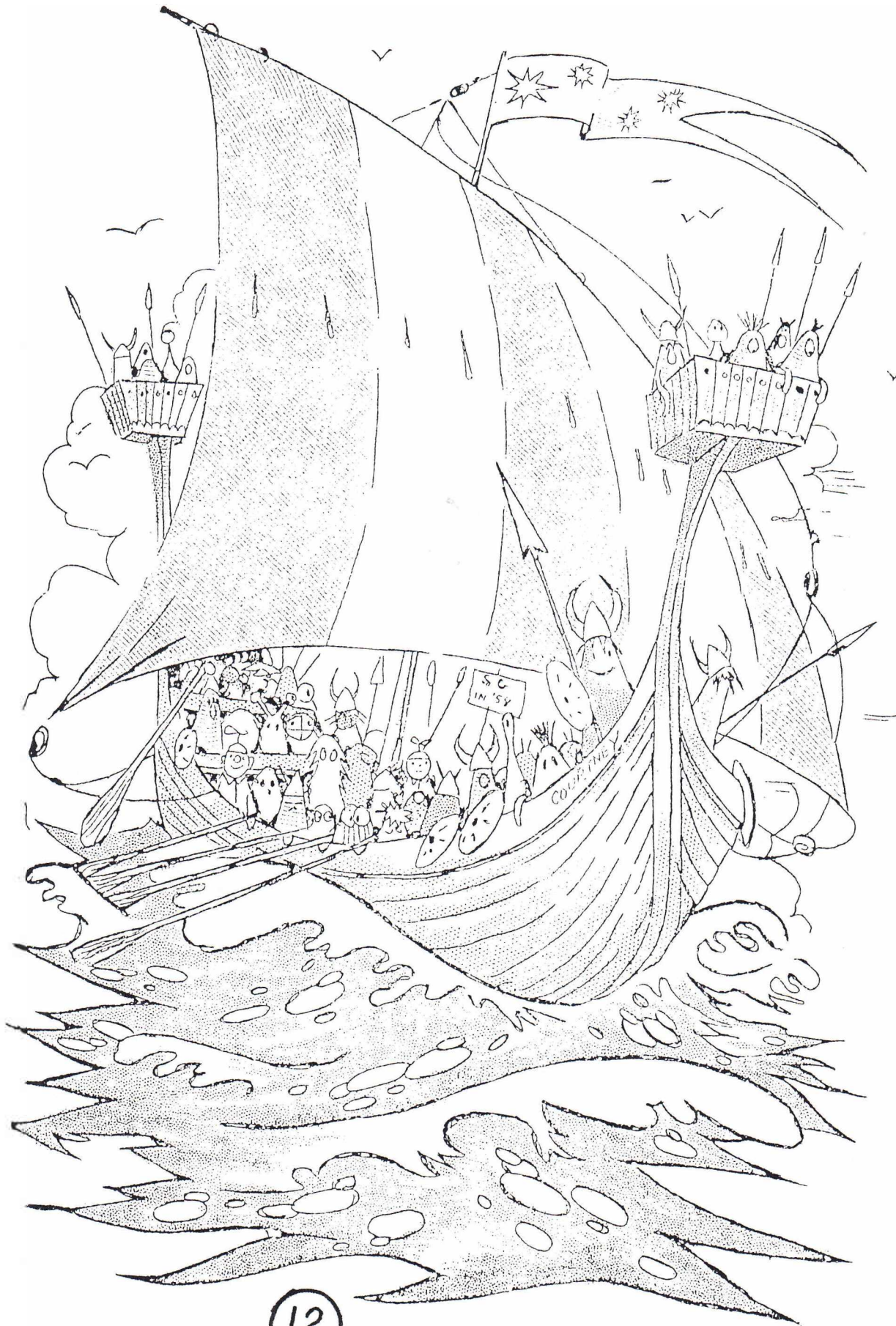
"Grave?" he asked with raised eyebrows. "Grave? Oh, that. If you go outside and look, you'll see that it's a small patch of lawn I cut the other day when I felt madly possessed with the gardening bug. The comparison with the surrounding long grass makes it stand out. You know, there's something kinda poetic in that illusion of yours. I suppose from the third floor, in the moonlight, it would look like a grave."

"Cemetery'ial to me," roared Chuck.

Confidentially, I began to think that the whole plot was arranged just as a build-up for that lousy pun.

As I say, I began to think so, ---until I saw the wistful expression on Madeline's face as she gazed with envy at my ghoddminton bat with the leather wrist strap.





BELFASTERS

ONE ~ WALT WILLIS.

In response to a demand for more information about the characters of Irish Fandom, I have decided at great personal risk, to devote my time compiling a fascinating series of factual articles about each member of the Irish Group.

In preparation for this great literary event, I have been keeping a surreptitious note of their mode of dress, their conversations, their intimate personal lives, and other startling data which, I say without fear of contradiction, will hold the fannish world enthralled, mystified, and indeed, enraptured.

Without further ado, then, permit me to present Walt Willis:-

Walter Alexander Willis, or just plain Willis, as he is affectionately known throughout fandom, originated SLANT. He is the brains behind HYPHEN. He has travelled vast distances in pursuit of fandom, a subject on which he is the recognised authority. He had a hand in THE ENCHANTED DUPLICATOR (it's healing well). Why, he is even referred to in fannish circles as Ghod...presumably the Ghod of HYPHEN and mirth.

The enormity of my self-appointed task has just struck me. How can I, a mere neo-fan, have the utter audacity to write about this fabulous character? How can I, with my limited literary capacity, describe in detail a personage whose word is respected in six continents? My sole qualification is that I am in personal contact with him and therefore am in a position to note those important little idiosyncracies.

THE MAN. Meeting Walt Willis for the first time, one gets the impression of a razor-sharp mind, in complete control of a situation. Physically, he is tall, sort of fair-haired (well, not dark, anyway) with photogenic features (my wife says.) I am pleased to report that he is an ideal family man, with a pretty daughter, Carol, who I am sure you have read about, and a charming wife named Madeleine, who reverts to Amazon mode when playing ghoddminton.

Walt is a generous host, eager to be friendly and sociable, and bursting to guide innocent neo-fans like myself through the initial trials and tribulations of fandom.

I feel that Walt's general appearance has been summed up remarkably well by that witty columnist, Bob Shaw. I consider it is impossible to improve on his description. Even should I attempt the task, the result would be the same. So, to prevent fans calling me a plagiarist, I will quote Bob's telling paragraph :-

'His favourite apparel consists of an old, well worn wind-cheater, and an old, well worn pair of trousers, and an old, well worn pair of carpet slippers. He also wears an old face, but hasn't a patch on it. The only other salient points about his appearance are that he stands very far from the razor when shaving, and his comb must have pyhorrea. As you may have noted, he is very careless about his dress, about his meals, about everything except books. He is even careless about money ...careless about how he gets it. '

Thanks, Bob, that I can endorse.

Pamela Bulmer, showing unusual perception for a female, states that in her opinion... 'Walt is a handsome man, in a delinquent sort of way', and that he is an ... 'unassuming genius.'

THE PROVIDER. Oh, yes, Willis suffers from the dreaded mundane disease of having to go to work for a living. Notice that I specify go to work, I didn't actually commit myself to saying he works when he gets there. After all, he is employed by the Northern Ireland Government as a Servile Savant, which tells you that he follows the accepted Civil Service Charter, the only connection between Walt and work of the 23rd letter of the alphabet. His chief occupational hazard at the Ministry concerns the 20th letter of the alphabet.

THE WIT. As I said before, Willis has a razor sharp mind, which he attributes to black-strop molasses. Anyone can make puns - everyone does make puns - but not like Walt. His mind is so nimble, so quick, that it takes apart every sentence he hears, every word is carefully digested, every possible meaning and inflexion tried out, and invariably a clever pun is the result. But in a split second. I wish I could meet the critic who labelled them 'Lousy Willis-type puns.'

Presuming that you haven't been tortured too much by them already, here are a few ~~WIT~~ puns to cheer you on your way:-

To the statement "Those houses are like rabbit hutches," Walt replied, "Naturally, weren't they built by the Borough Council ?"

In a letter to the editor of BEM, complaining of bad typing, he wrote... 'unless you want 150 readers with ruptured eyeballs, and I truss you don't.' On another occasion, George Charters wouldn't play ghoominton. His excuse was that he had a toothache, but I thought it was because I had criticised his service in an article. Walt refuted this. 'George is conspicuous by his abcess' he said. (BoSh says that this was always a good pun.)

Finally it gives me great pleasure, as a final example of a Willis pun, to announce the following specimen which has never before appeared in print.

Willis states:- "My grandfather was a printer, and I reverted to type."

Beside puns, Walt is also an exponent of the Witty Retort. Only the other day, for example, I was an innocent foil for his deadly art. I was telling IF about a Holiday Camp I had visited, where physical training early in the morning was compulsory... "so at about 6.30 am," I said, "a big chap came in, grabbed me, dragged me out of bed, and flung me outside."

"Her husband, I presume," snapped Willis. The annoying thing was that I was totally innocent and blushed profusely, thus confirming everyone's suspicions that it was true.

THE WANDERER. WILLIS HAS BEEN TO AMERICA. This is the first thing he told me, five minutes after our initial meeting.

THE SPORTSMAN. Willis also likes to play tennis, which is recognised by myself as being symbolic of virtuous and unblemished manhood. I prefer poker.

But Walt also plays ghoddminton. In fact, even better than this, he INVENTED ghoddminton. This is my reason for applying the term "neo genius" ! I think this is one of the best things he has ever done for Irish Fandom, even including buying a tv set.

You all know about ghoddminton, of course. Let me explain Walt's attitude to it. White is quite capable of hacking your fingers off. Shaw will attempt assassination. Madeleine will frequently attempt to abstract your epiglottis. But Walt does none of this. He is a true sportsman, and disdains brutality of any sort. He simply flings his bat the length of the room, sinks his fist into the wall, turns red, and says with great feeling an eloquence:-

"BLOODY HELL."

Maybe a psychiatrist could make something out of this...the exclamation, not this article.

THE HUCKSTER. Walt has an extensive collection of S.F. Hundreds of ASTOUNDINGS are arranged in chronological order along the bookshelves, and piles of others, GALAXY, IF, etc are also stacked in prominent positions. When a meeting at Oblique House is about to break up, Willis announces loudly, "Prozines, anyone ?"

Everyone, rather naturally, takes no notice. Consequently, I was unsure of the dangerous position I had taken up near the doorway. As Walt croaked "Fanzines for sale," I was trampled underfoot by the concerted rush. The last thing I remember, after the stampede had passed over my defenceless body, was Walt rattling a tin of small denomination coins under my nose.

The secret, which I have discovered from careful observation is not to relax vigilance for a second, otherwise all is lost. How well I remember the George Charters episode. The poor soul, in an unguarded moment, actually picked up a prozine WITH WILLIS IN THE SAME ROOM. The rest of us gazed in silent pity as Walt tiptoed over to him, a savage gleam of triumph in his eyes. I'll never forget that look of utter despair in George's eyes as he dug his hands into his pockets.

Walt caught me once, too. But I don't really feel too badly about this. In fact, I'm quite proud of my collection of ASTOUNDINGS !

THE EDITOR. This is Willis supreme. This is his avowed vocation. As editor of HYPHEN, Walt brings to the fore his powerful organising ability. It really is marvellous the way he organises his staff.

When the HYPHEN issue date is imminent, Walt girds his loins. Under his masterful direction, everyone rushes about with stencils, reams of paper, etc, expertly dodging the showers of prining ink that emanates from the protesting duplicator that frequently becomes red hot through brutal usage.

Not until the very last staple has been affixed does Walt finally lay down his whip.

THE WRITER. Oh, Walt is diabolically clever. I would be the next-to-last to deny it. (Willis likes the last word in these matters.) His writings prove his skill. I think his style is brilliant. It is unique...an opinion, I might add, with which Walt concurs.

Seriously, though, whilst Walt's articles are somewhat longer than most, I find that interest is maintained right up to the bitter end. His descriptive flair for putting his reader in the picture, as it were, is most effective. I have read most of his works avidly, and I feel I must conclude with one or two paragraphs of what I consider to be choice examples of his art. Not the funniest, by any means, but these two items clearly demonstrate what I mean by 'descriptive flair.'

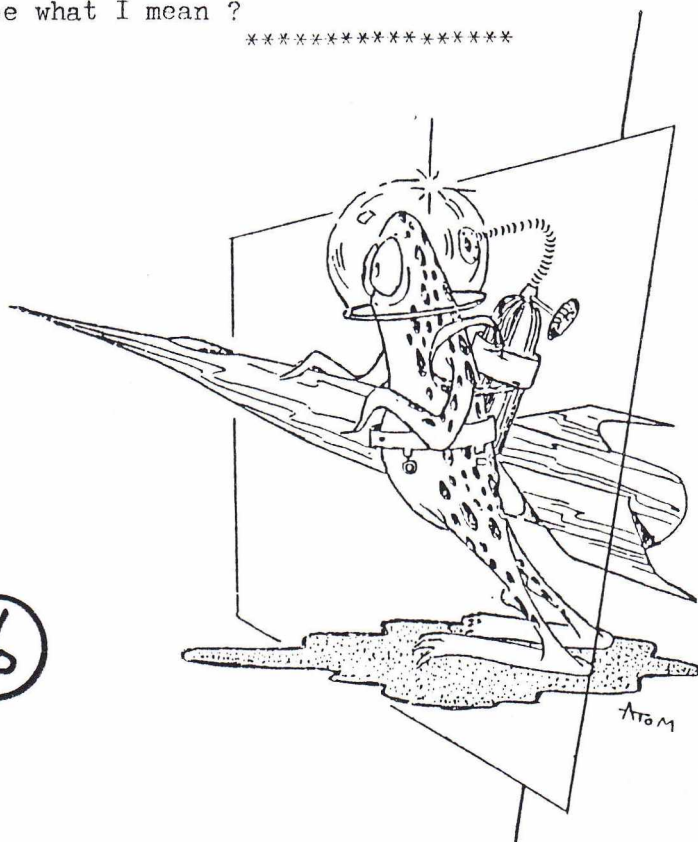
From QUANDRY 13 :-

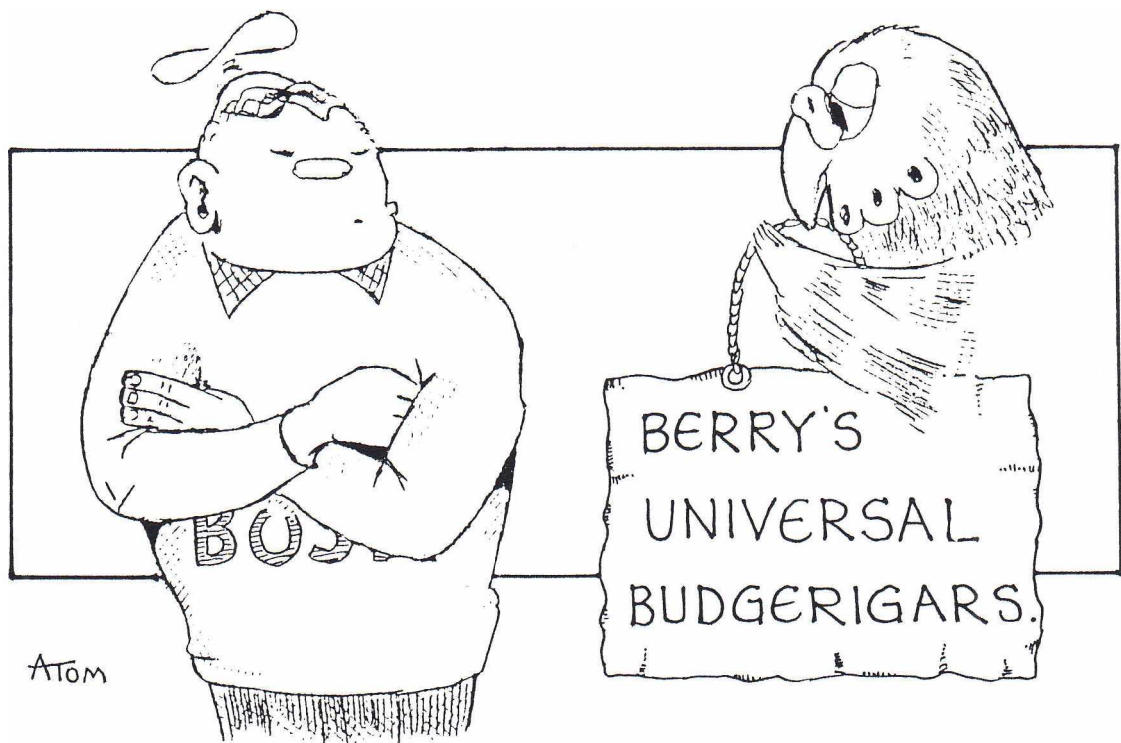
'Round about 6.30 that evening, I was sitting outside in my slippers - sometimes I wish I could afford a chair - when a telegram boy arrived, carrying, of all things, a telegram. I opened it. It seemed the thing to do. Steady now, I said to myself and clambered off the roof. I dashed through the front door to show the telegram to Madeleine. I think she suspected the moment she saw me that something was wrong. Female intuition, I suppose, or it might have been the fragments of wood and glass hanging round my neck. I really should have opened the door. If you have ever seen a woman who has been told to expect an important visitor ((in this case, Forry Ackerman)) in less than an hour you'll know what happened next. I stepped out of the blur of action, and through the back door. I lose more doors that way.'

This next example is my favourite so far. It comes from QUANDRY 27/28, and deals with Walt's experiences with the American Emigration Authorities:-

'...I had to call this a queue, because it was anything but a line. It was in the form of an enormous bulge, tapering to single file between the two tables. When the pressure got beyond so many tons per square inch, a mangled body would be projected with great force down between two tables in front of the Customs Inspector, in no fit condition to tell lies about any dutiable goods he happened to have. Every now and then, the mass of angry people at the back would surge forward, pushing the queue, the tables, the customs officials and everything else before them several yards further down the shed. I calculated that, assuming we survived this heat, we'd push the bastards into the Pacific by December.'

See what I mean ?





For many months now, there has been a battle of wits between Bob Shaw and myself. It concerns my pet budgerigar, Joey.

It all started when Bob visited my house, MON DEBRIS, and stated bluntly that budgerigars cannot talk. Now I knew this to be a fallacy because I had patiently taught my bird to say 'Marilyn Monroe' and do a wolf whistle. Budgies are clever, you know. They have a sort of inborn intelligence. Why, after a few sleepless nights I even trained it to say the magic words, then fly to the top of its cage, suspend itself from a wire rung by its beak, and wave its claws in the recognised shape indicative of an hour-glass figure.

Bob maintained this was impossible, and he stared at my bird with such concentrated venom that the innocent creature cringed pathetically on its perch. I tried to convince Bob, and even persuaded him to sit under the table for an hour or so, in case the bird recovered its confidence. However, that effort met with no success. My theory is that Bob is surrounded by an anti-budgie aura that mentally ruptures these birds whenever he is in their proximity.

So when, the other day, I invited Irish Fandom over to my house again, Bob sneered, "Perhaps I'll hear his bird talk this time."

This was a challenge to both Joey and myself, and, by Ghod, we accepted.

Unfortunately, the extra training was too much for the bird to take. It finally expired when I tried to get it to sway provocatively across the floor of its cage, like Marilyn Monroe does. Secretly, I was rather glad because I did feel rather embarrassed doing the same thing in front of its cage as an example. That type of thing is liable to effect one's personality.

With the visit getting nearer every day, I was in a dire position. Ordinarily I would have explained the bird's unfortunate demise to Bob Shaw; but, after the loathing and contempt in his voice, it was the last thing I could do. I spent many hours in meditation before I discovered the solution to my problem. Science fiction had come to my rescue.

I raced into Belfast and called to see a taxidermist. For a small

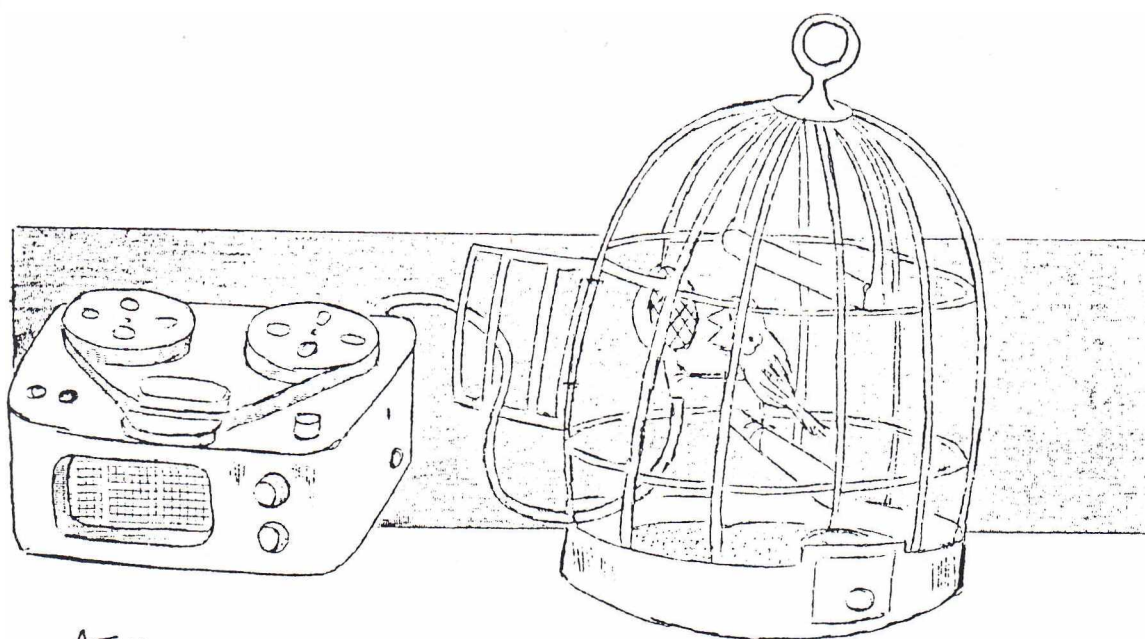
consideration I obtained from him the stuffed body of a blue budgerigar. Poor critter. I also made one or two other purchases...a small blob of putty and three old watches.

Back home, I locked myself in my study and began the tedious job. I cut open the bird's body and removed the sawdust. With infinite patience I took the three watches apart and reassembled them into one item of machinery. With my heart throbbing with excitement I stitched up the bird again, and, inserting a small key into its mouth, I wound it up.

Creeping downstairs in the early hours of the morning I placed my masterpiece on the perch and affixed it firmly with fuse wire. It looked very life-like. With more minor manipulations I got it to ruffle its feather every seven minutes, flap its wings every sixteen minutes, and (most realistic of all) deposit a small pellet of putty on the floor of its cage every half hour.

I HAD MANUFACTURED THE FIRST ROBOT BUDGERIGAR !

However, there was still a lot to be done. I called at the house of one of my contacts and borrowed his tape recorder. Again, in the middle of the night and in the privacy of my room, I recorded a magnificent piece of dialogue. All in budgie jargon, of course. I played



Atom

the tape over to hear the result. It was brilliant. First of all there was a little preliminary banter, with suitable pauses for obvious surprised comments by Bob. Then came three choruses of Marilyn's song, 'After you've got it, you don't want it '. Finally, as a fitting climax, a short dissertation on the complexity of getting an original science plot. (A subject near to Bob's heart.) The whole performance lasted for half an hour.

I was able to conceal the tape under the floor of the bird cage, and, with the curtains partly drawn, the whole effect was one of extreme realism.

The great day came. Walt, Madeleine, Bob, Sadie, James and Peggy all crossed my portals and seated themselves 'round the room. Sadie, I

noted in particular, seemed rather bewildered. I might even say mystified. She knew all about my differences with Bob and I think she realised the climax was near. Bob seemed strangely quiet, completely ignoring a bowl of fruit near his elbow. Most un-Shaw-like. The atmosphere was tense. Surreptitiously I pressed the wall switch with my toe, and, with a slight whirr, the tape started.

"Hello, Bob."

Shaw's head clicked 'round, eyes oscillating. "No, no," he cried.

"Yes," said the bird with a ruffle of feathers.

Everyone craned forward. "I hear you have a new typer, Bob," said the bird. Bob backed away, his muscles stiffened with excitement.

"It's talking," whispered Bob incredulously.

"Don't sit there looking so insipid," shrilled the bird. "Of course I'm talking. What do you think I am? A dumb cluck?"

Then something strange happened. The bird started to swing 'round and 'round on its perch, gradually getting faster. I knew I should have fitted it with a gyroscope. Finally the bird came to a halt. Unfortunately, it was upside down. Even that wouldn't have been so bad, but at that moment, its half-hour cycle came into play, and with a sharp 'ping' a putty pellet hit the ceiling with a smack.

"Impossible," breathed Walt.

"Incredible," muttered Madeleine.

"Indigestion," announced George.

The performance continued. Really, there is nothing quite so ostentatious as seeing a budgie, upside down, sing 'After you've got it, you don't want it.' Finally, the bird's talk on science fiction plots, also delivered upside down, evoked great enthusiasm, Bob even taking notes.

The episode ended.

Bob jerked over and sat beside me, his face strangely contorted. Suddenly the door burst open and in walked Bob Shaw. BOB SHAW? TWO BOB SHAWS? There was a gasp of astonishment.

"What's happened?" shouted my wife from the kitchen where she was preparing refreshments.

"We've got two Bob Shaws here," I replied.

There was a scream and a crash of smashed crockery from the kitchen. She had only prepared 148 sandwiches.

Then, like a physical blow, realisation struck me.

My robot bird had been talking to a robot Bob Shaw.

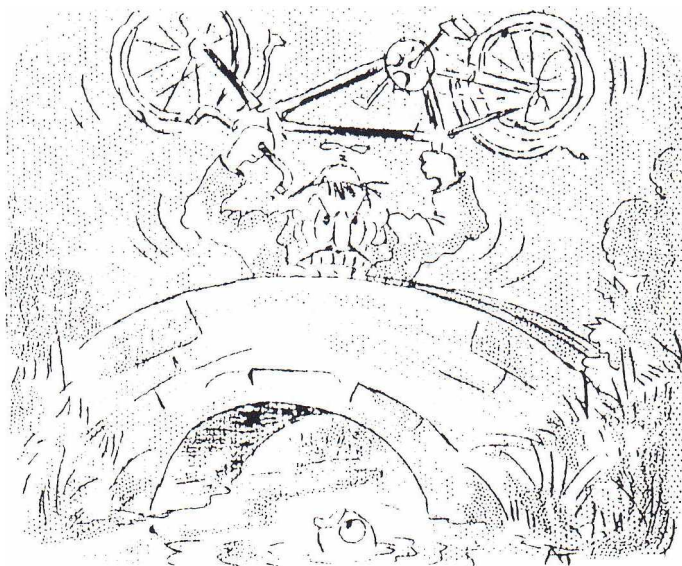
Oh-h-h-h-h-h, no-o-o-o-o-o.....



RUST IN PEACE

In an outcropping of the Mountains of Mourne a stream rises. As it flows downwards it is joined by other small streams, until eventually, as it reaches the green fields of County Down, it is a fair-sized river. The River Lagan. It flows serenely along in a northerly direction, and a few miles from Belfast it swings west and forms the boundaries of Counties Down

and Antrim. About six miles from the centre of Belfast the river passes along a lovely stretch of rural countryside. At this point is a bridge. It is known as Shaw's Bridge. It is famous. Chuck Harris has been there.



But it also holds a grim secret. Woe that I ever became a conspirator in the dreadful happenings I am about to relate. I will never forget that dirty night, when...wait, I want to tell you everything. I want you to get the following events in the proper perspective.

It all started one night in Oblique House. We were discussing Bob Shaw's bicycle...

"But what I want to know is, what holds it together?" asked James White for the third time in rather a mystified voice.

"String," I answered. "I know. Once I asked Bob for the loan of his cycle pump, and when he untied it, the front wheel fell off."

Bob half rose from his chair in anger.

"I deny my front wheel was fixed to the frame with string. This is an unfounded exaggeration. The back wheel, maybe. But not the front wheel."

He sat down again, his lower lip puffed out in indignation. He pushed a full teapot away. A danger signal. A hush fell over us.

He spoke softly enough, but his eyes glared accusingly.

"I'm just about getting fed up with people casting aspersions on my bike, just cos I paid three and sixpence for it thirteen years ago." He pointed an aggressive finger towards us. "It's as good as they day I got it. The dustman said it was a bargain."

"That alters things," said Walt. "If your bike is as old as that, isn't it time it was laid to rest? After all, the machine has suffered enough physical hardship all these years without considering the mental anguish it has endured."

"I agree," said James, "and I suggest we ceremoniously fling it on the nearest rubbish dump."

"No, oh no," sobbed Bob. "Not fling my bike on a rubbish dump. If it must go, it must - but let it go in the best fannish tradition."

Walt suddenly snapped his fingers.

"I have it," he shouted. "Let's all go to Shaw's Bridge, and dump the bike in the Lagan somewhere nearby. I will compose a short service to deliver as we line the towpath, and Bob can take the bike on its last triumphant journey to the bed of the river. What do you say, Bob?"

Bob's eyes began to light up. He looked at Walt with new respect.

"Yes, I like it," he sighed. "The bike is worthy of it. You know, I often think how clever it was of them to dedicate that bridge to me before I was born. Kinda symbolic."

We all nodded.

"How about next Tuesday night?" asked Bob.

"Yes, that will do," said Walt. "Dress...er...let me see, raincoat and gumboots. No flowers, but if you care to bring along a few small cans of lubrication to pour on the water, that's O.K."

It was a moonlight night. I don't live too far from Shaw's Bridge, so I cycled over. I arrived on time, and saw a car parked under a row of trees. I leaned by bike against the river bank and sidled over.

Everyone was there except Bob.

"Where is he?" I queried.

"He said he would ride over, as a last token of respect. He should be here soon," said Sadie.

Ten minutes later, a horrible squeaky noise issued from the Belfast direction. We exchanged knowing glances. Fifteen minutes later he arrived, and stopped by the simple expedient of kicking away the back wheel. Pausing only to re-adjust the back wheel, he jerked spasmodically towards us. (I forgot to tell you the bike had no saddle.)

"Well, this is it," he said simply, "let's get it over with."

"OK," said Walt, "fire the salvo, James."

James disappeared behind the trees and, seconds later thirteen rockets blasted upwards, one for each year of the bike's co-existence with Bob.

It was a great moment - symbolic, as Bob had said.

Then Bob came over to me. The rest of them turned away.

"This is for you, John," he sniffed. "It's not much, but I know you will treasure it."

He handed me the cycle pump. I put it in my pocket. I didn't say a word. He knew how I felt.

We lined the towpath. Walt, Sadie, George, Madeleine, myself, James, Peggy and Bob

"When I've concluded this short address," announced Walt, "I want you all to hum the first few bars of DRAGNET. That will be a signal for Bob to ride the bike into the Lagan, its final resting place."

After a potent silence, Walt read the address.

"...and so, Roscoe, " we ask that this long-suffering velocipede shall rest content in the shadow of Shaw's Bridge, until rust has finally merged it with its parent earth."

"That won't be long," someone muttered. Honestly, some people have no respect for a service of dedication.

"OK, folks," said Walt solemnly, "DRAGNET."

As we hummed the opening bars, Bob picked up the bike from the bank, and slowly rode into the middle of the river, gradually disappearing until only a trail of bubbles showed where the bike had finally finished its labours. For a moment we all began to think that Bob had taken it too seriously and gone down with his bike, but some seconds later he appeared on the surface and swam to the bank. We wrapped him in blankets and hurried him to the car. They all piled in and drove away hurriedly, shouting 'Goodnight' to me.

I was deeply touched with the real life drama of the whole episode. You know what I mean. It was truly fannish, somehow.

I pulled my bike from the bank, ran down the towpath for a few yards, and vaulted into the saddle. You've done it yourself.

I shrieked aloud in torment. I had landed on a perpendicular piece of metal tubing. The hair rose on the back of my head. I got off the bike and rushed to the bridge, and discovered I still had the handlebars in my hand.

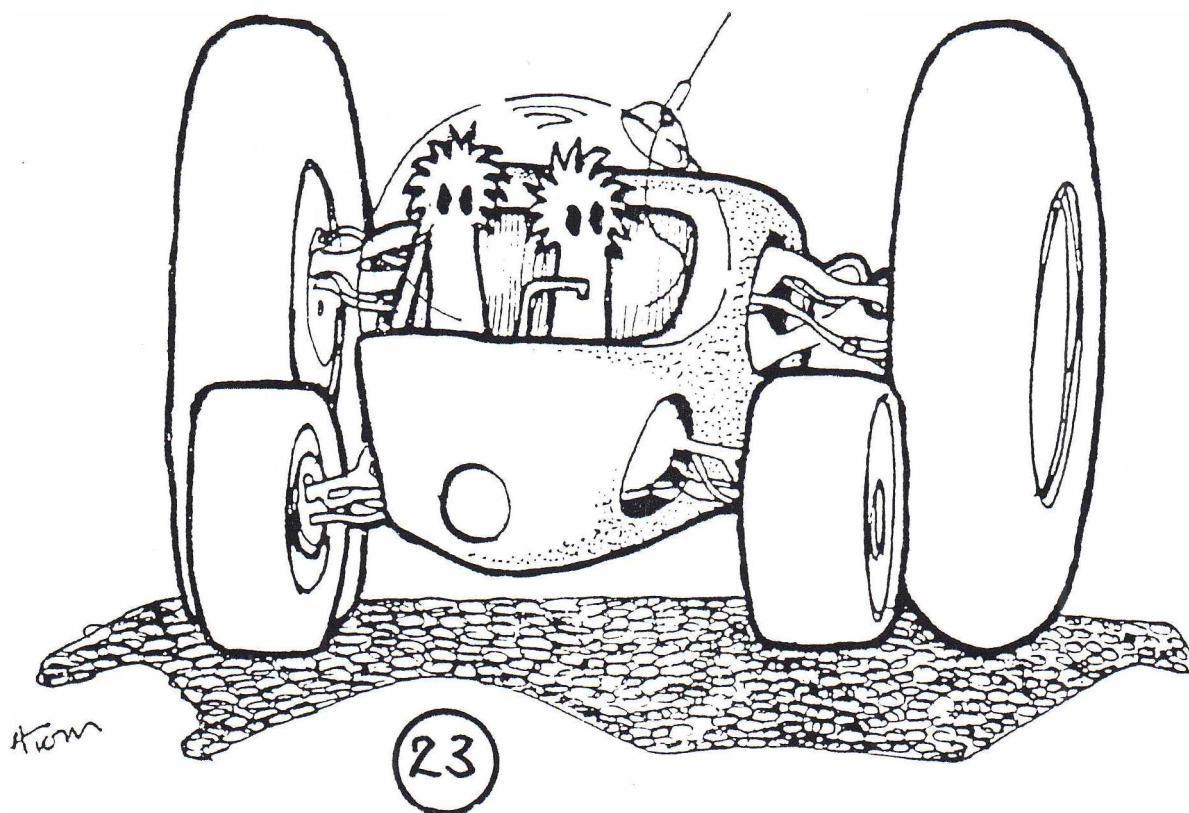
I thumped my fists against the parapet.

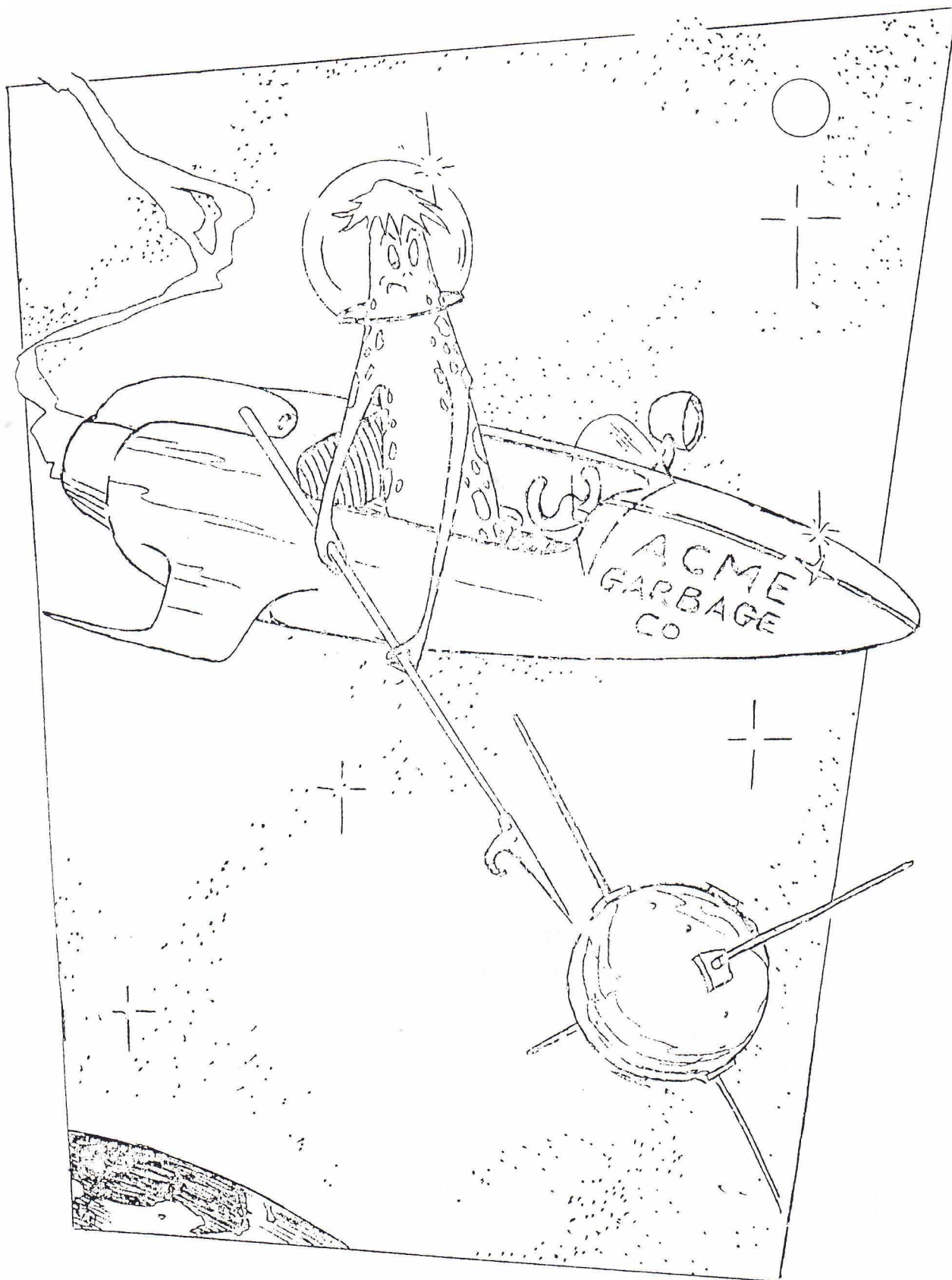
"You fool, Shaw," I shouted. You fool !"

I am writing this in bed, recovering from pneumonia. The only pleasant recollection I have of the event is that Bob's bike now lies strewn over the fields between Shaw's Bridge and my home.

I am keeping the pump until I meet Shaw again.

It is filled with lead shot.





arrested development



A few months ago, we of Oblique House were somewhat shattered when Bob Shaw announced his intention of becoming a policeman, thus following in his father's big footsteps. I had already split several floorboards with my constabulary six twelves, and the prospect of two pairs of size twelves leaping about the Ghoddminton Chamber was too horrible to contemplate.

But however much we tried to dissuade Bob, the more determined he became. Suddenly the germ of an idea flashed through my head.

"Oh, er, Mr. Shaw," I faltered (I was very much a junior neo-fan in those days...I hadn't yet worked out the significance of HYPHEN !) "I think I may be able to assist you. As you know, potential recruits are given an educational examination, and I may be able to give you an idea of the sort of thing you are likely to be asked. I need hardly point out that in any case, the questions will be exceedingly simple to a man of your education and intellect."

"I would think so, Berry," he sniffed, indicating to me that his tea ~~cup~~ ~~was~~ bucket was empty. "However, your suggestion may be of some slight assistance."

As you probably all know, Bob and Sadie are now domiciled at 170, Upper Newtownards Road, but when this incident occurred, they lived in the same general direction as myself, only about four and a half miles further than Oblique House. So it was simple for me to slip round and see Walt the following night, and have an earnest discussion.

The upshot of this conflagration was that Walt agreed to my ploy with enthusiasm, so we prepared our own set of examination papers.

"We'll do the General Knowledge paper first, Berry," said Walt.

"O.K, sir," I replied.

Walt made a brilliant suggestion. I quote here from the carbon copy:-

'What effect did the de-valuation of the old Gold Standard in 1929 have on the resulting fluctuating Wall Street Stock Exchange Rates, bearing in mind that the conversion value of the franc, 2.75 equal to $9\frac{1}{2}$ d, was .379% over the 1924 rate ?'

"That'll fix 'im," grinned Walt.

"Oh yes, Mr. Willis," I said. "And how about these ?"

I handed him a few notes I had made.

'Write a few pertinent notes on any three of the following :-

1. The Siamese Brethern.
2. The Wong Su Bing Hatchet Men.
3. The stone images of the Wallaby Peninsular.
4. The myths of the Barra Islet. '

"Mmm, yes," mused Walt. "Though perhaps you had better amend the second one to read ? Wong Su Bang Hatchet Men. Good. Now how about this for a geographical teaser :-

'Give the effect the North Easterly underwater tides of the Upper Adriatic have on coastal shrimping, mentioning briefly the gill rate ?'

And so on...after an hour's session we had concocted a set of questions which would have given apoplexy to Einstein.

A week later, we all met at 170. I thought it would give the show away if I produced the papers immediately, but Walt skilfully guided the conversation round in such a way that Bob suddenly snapped his fingers, and queried..."Did you get those questions, Berry?"

"Oh yes, Mr. Shaw," I answered, feigning surprise. I produced an envelope from an inner pocket and handed it to him.

"I feel rather impertinent giving you these," I confessed, "the Force is so short of recruits that they have deliberately lowered the educational standard. The questions are so ridiculously simple, that I feel I am insulting your intelligence by submitting them to you. Pray forgive me, Mr. Shaw."

With a superior smirk, he slit the envelope open, pulled out the papers and perused them. He suddenly sat down.

"A new article, Berry ?" asked Walt.

"No," I replied. Just a few specimen questions for Bob. Carol could do them. Well, to be honest, one of the questions troubled me a little. It concerns the stone images of the Wallaby Peninsular."

"Great Ghu," cried Walt. "Infants stuff. Surely everyone knows about the original carvings found on the peninsular. They were completed in 297 BC, and consist of 97 full figures, 183 heads, and..."

There was a thud behind us.

We picked Bob up, and James slapped him in the face with No.3. Vol.1. of the Vargo Statten Magazine. He soon recovered.

"Very hot in here," he spluttered. At that moment Madeleine entered with the tea, and remarked about Bob's pale complexion. He shifted uneasily.

"Er, tell me, Madeleine," he enquired, "what do you know about this Gold Standard and franc business."

"Oh, Bob," she said, and the way she said it satisfied me that Walt had briefed her. "It's years since I was at school, but, offhand, and I may be wrong, I would say that it all started because of the dubious deals by the great financier Baron von Schülztengerschön. This brought the value of the franc down to 2.75 per 9½d, and,

consequently, the dollar influx..."

The bhoy hit the ground with a tremendous thud.

We picked him up just as George came in.

"Come here, George," groaned Bob, "and tell us about the underwater currents of the Adriatic."

"Be specific," said Carol, "Upper or Lower Adriatic?"

Bob's eyes started to revolve like Catherine Wheels.

"Upper Adriatic," he sobbed.

"Ah" quoth George, handing round his bag of humbugs, "I am not known as Old Man Charters for nothing. All this new-fangled edification will do the present generation a lot of harm. In my day, and you'll pardon the expression, Madeleine, my incentive was the birch across the seat of my breeches. But let me think, yes,mmmm, ...er, I have it. I would say that due to the North Easterly under-water current, flowing at 5 knots at 599 fathoms, the shrimps..."

This time we caught BoSh.

When he recovered, he staggered across the room, completely ignoring a steaming apple tart. This above all was highly significant. In fact, it was incredible. Bob lurched through the doorway, a broken man.

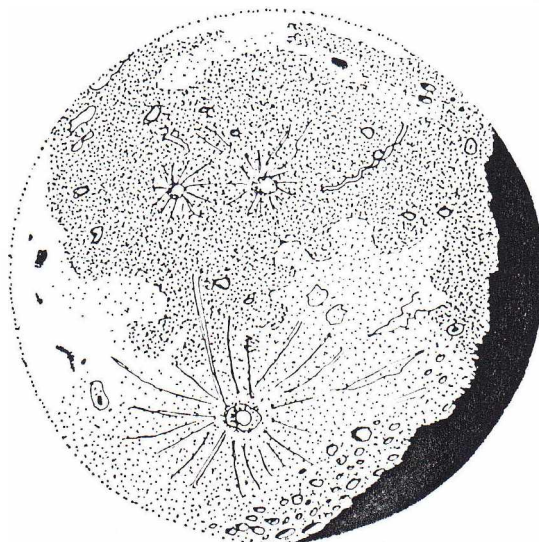
"I don't like the look in his eyes," muttered George. "Suicidal, I reckon."

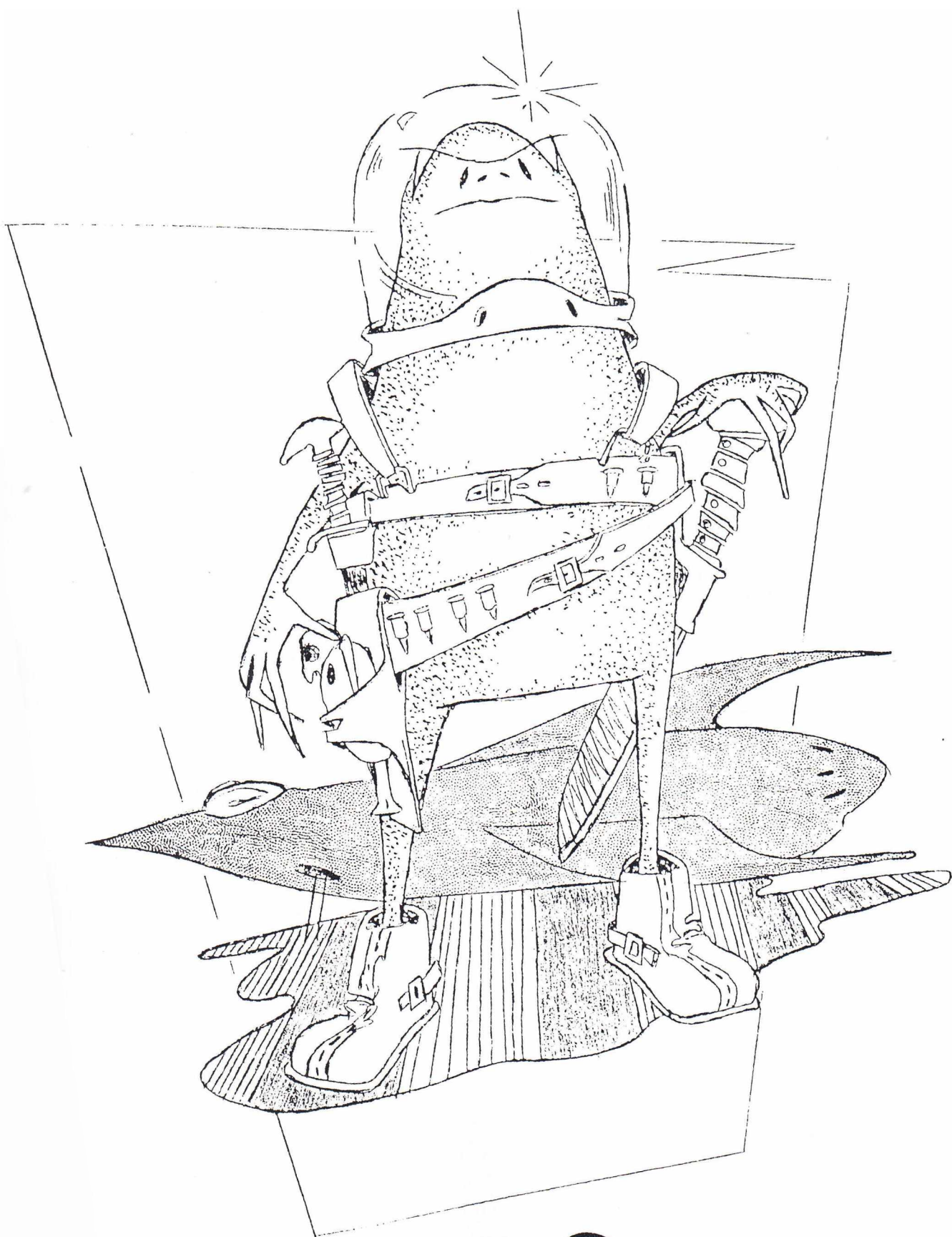
"You should have told him it was a hoax," said Madeleine, maternally sympathetic, "you all know Bob is very sensitive."

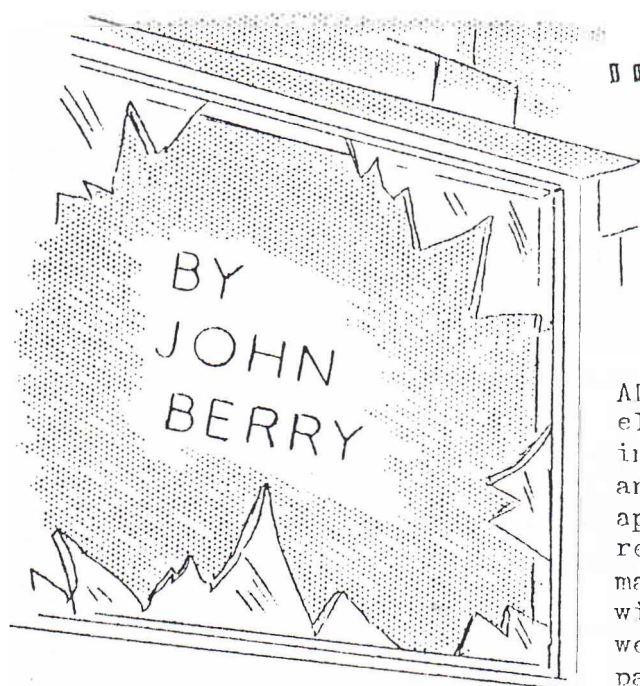
"I think he has taken it very badly," observed James. "He has forgotten his Vargo Statten."

"Heh heh. I've taken care of the situation," smiled Willis. "A friend of mine who lives near Bob dropped a letter through his door earlier this evening, so as soon as Bob gets home he will discover the truth."

If any of you want an early reply to your letters to BoSh these days, it is advisable to send them care of:- The Reference Library, Royal Avenue, Belfast.







"HIGH WIDE AND TRANSOM"

ALTHOUGH I WAS aware that Walt and Madeleine were away at Kettering representing us at the Convention, it would in any case have been obvious to even an apprentice neofan that they were not in residence. The flag was at half-mast, massive blinds were pulled down over the windows, the usual crowds of sightseers were absent, and the prozine kiosk was padlocked.

Of course, Bob and Sadie were in charge of 170. Walking up the path, I noticed a large three feet square pane of glass missing over the front door, and when James opened the door to my urgent knocking, I sensed that the afternoon was going to be different.

Bob rushed up and shook my hands, tears in his eyes. "Accept my apologies, John," he panted. "You once wrote an article about Oblique House, and you said the front door and hallway resembled an air-lock. Although I scoffed at the time you have been proved correct. I closed the front door last night and thus created a vacuum. The resultant pressure of air from outside caused the weakest part of the structure to give, which was, as you have seen, the large, expensive pane of glass bearing the inscription....

WALTER A WILLIS, IRELAND'S GREATEST EXPONENT OF THE
FANNISH ART, ORIGINATOR OF SLANT, CO-AUTHOR OF THE
ENCHANTED DUPLICATOR, PUBLISHER OF THAT REMARKABLE
FANZINE,

"I want to catch the 5.30 pm trolley bus tonight," observed James.

"Sorry," said Bob. "Anyway, you know what was inscribed on the pane. Unfortunately, as I have just explained, the glass disintegrated due to the tremendous pressure from outside. Upon making enquiries, I discovered that a new piece of glass of the required dimensions will cost £3. 8. 7d. Besides that, there is the inscription to be painted on, although if I take three days holiday, I may just be able to conclude the job before Walt returns. The point I am trying to make is this.....Ahem.....John, don't think this is flattery, but I think your articles are terrific. I take no offence at the Shavian Mysteries. Your style of playing Ghoddminton is sensational. Your budgerigar can talk. You can make puns.....er.... I've put you down for a twenty-five shilling subscription towards the cost of the glass.....O. K.?"

He got up from his knees, wiped the polish from his lips, and smiled hopefully.

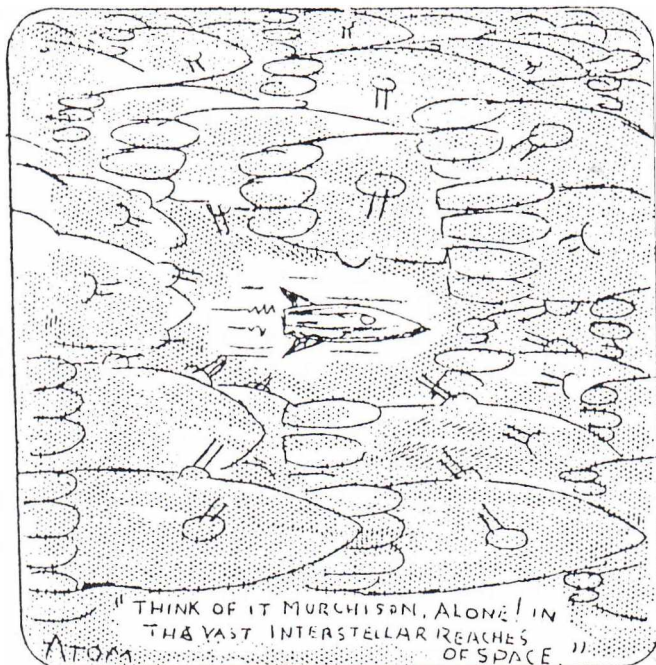
"As a matter of fact, Shaw," I said. "I smashed a Willis window a short time ago, and I paid the full amount unaided. But wait, I have an idea....listen....

Get all the pieces of glass, put them in a box, and suspend the box above the hall door by a length of cotton. George hasn't arrived yet; when he opens the door, the cotton will break, the glass will fall, and he'll think he is responsible. We can all blame him, and then offer him a few shillings each to help ease the strain."

Bob sighed in admiration. "Brilliant," he breathed, "brilliant.....I'll, -- I'll give you a science-fiction plot for this."

"I have discovered a flaw," announced James, who, typically, had gone over the whole plan with his analytical mind, "supposing George looks up and sees that the glass is smashed whilst he is walking up the path?"

The gleam in Bob's eyes dimmed. "I know what to do," I cried. I wanted to help Bob, you see. I wanted to repay him for having sold me his typer. "Bob must go outside and scatter a few coins. Drop a penny by the front gate. On the steps, put a couple of threepenny bits. Drop some shillings on the grass to make it look plausible, scatter a few half-crowns on the doorstep, and allow the corner of a ten shilling note to protrude slightly under the door. The cost will be much less than having to pay for the window. I'll help you.....here is the penny for the front gate."



Bob's eyes shone. He snatched my penny. "John," he announced, "consider yourself the owner of not one, but two of my plots."

"Better hurry," said James, "he will be here any minute now."

Five minutes later, all was ready. We took up a position near the stairs, a few yards away from the hall door.

We heard the front gate click, a pause, then the sound of shuffling footsteps. The front door was pushed open, the cotton was broken, and the glass cascaded downwards.

"Get the right facial expressions," said James. "Think of Berry's last science fiction story."

We all assumed expressions of horror and indignation.

Then an amazing thing happened. The hall door opened, and George crawled in on his hands and knees, his nose inches from the ground, his fingers groping in front of him. He crawled past us. "Where's the pound note?" he mumbled.

"Hey, George," we shouted. "See what you have done...smashed the fanlight." He turned.

"I did not," he said.

"You did just," answered Bob. "and pull that crescent-shaped piece of glass out of your scalp. You look like a Creole."

James snapped his fingers. He pulled out an indexed pocket-book, thumbed through it.

He held up a hand. "George, stop creoling about the hallway," he shouted triumphantly.

We ignored this.

Suddenly, realization hit George. "What have I done?" he sobbed. "I've smashed Walt's autobiography."

Bob stepped forward. "George," he said, "I am sorry to see a fan in such a dire position as this. That window will cost you at least £3. 8. 7d to repair and that doesn't include labour. All I ask is that you get the job finished before Walt comes back."

We all handed him a few coins to show that fans stick together, no matter what happens.

"Yes, I must get it fixed before Walt gets home again," said George. "First of all I'll....."

Sadie burst in. "Just finished your best suit, Bob," she said rather sharply. "It has taken me all this time to mend the tears and brush out all the little splinters of glass. The next time you come home late and forget the key, don't dive head first through the fanlight."

There was a stunned silence.

"Cheerio," grinned George, and flashed through the door.

"Bye," muttered James, with a sickly smile as he followed George.

Bob looked at me sort of frustrated.

"My plot, Bob," I pleaded, "my plot."

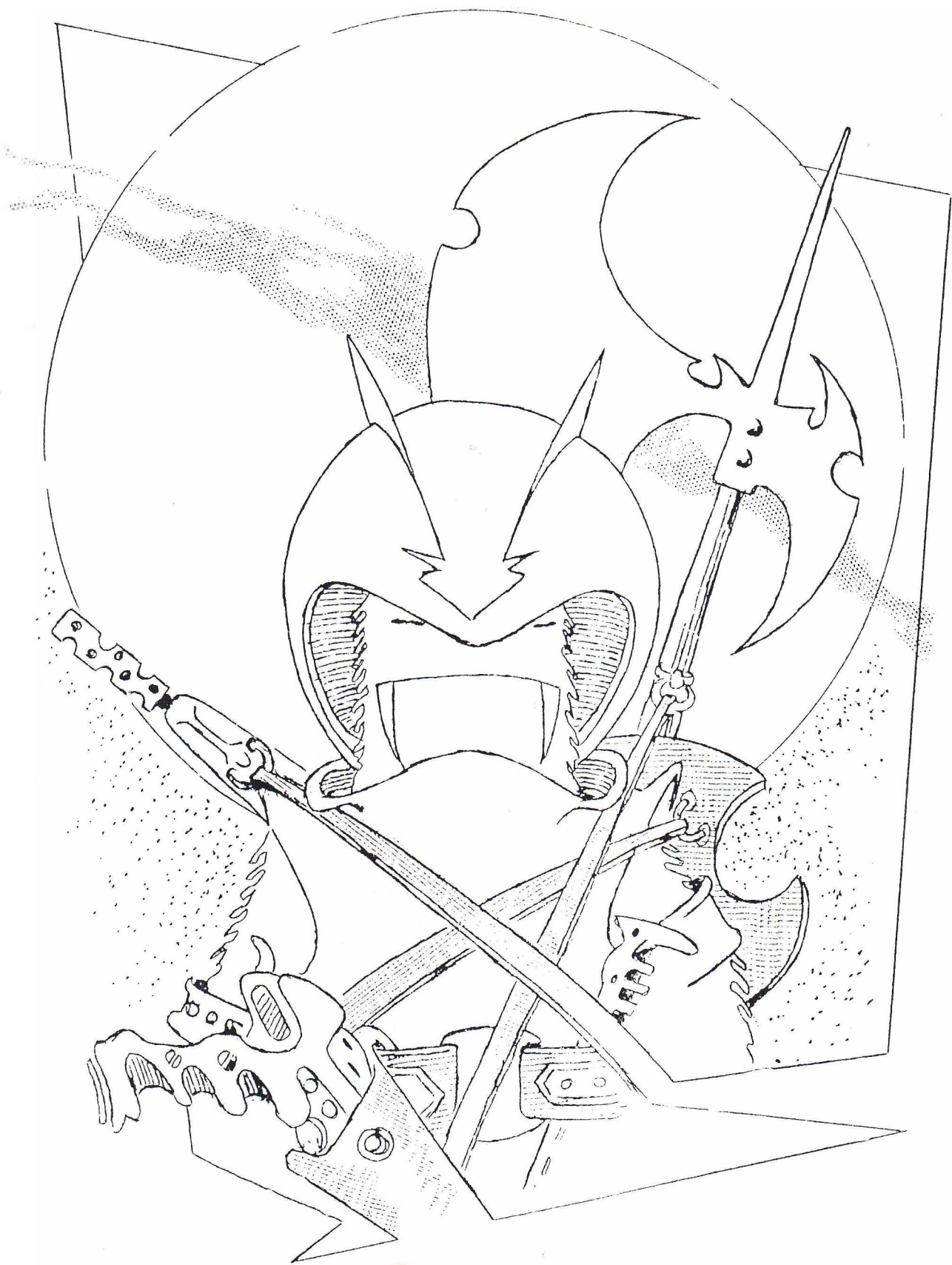
"I'll give you a plot," he screamed. "Sadie, bring my spade."

I fled like a swallow through the fanlight.

People just don't appreciate me.

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Tea Thing Troubles.

I think it is about time that Fandom heard about tea time at Oblique House. Unfortunately, I have had no other experience of fannish groups and therefore am not really in a position to state whether the facts I am about to reveal are unique. I like to think so - in fact, I will go so far as to say I shall be disappointed if I discover otherwise.

Before launching into the fray, as it were, I must ask you to bear in mind three things:-

1. Bob has a ravenous appetite, and a titanic thirst.
2. Our fanac room at Oblique House is on the third floor.
3. We are a very congenial group.

Well, read on !

The usual procedure is to have a couple of games of goodmington before tea, but it was some time before I was able to deduce from Bob's temporary loss of form that tea was imminent. You know, he can tell instinctively when Madeleine, with laden tray, has her foot on the first of the 45 steps, three flights below. His play slacks off considerably, his nostrils twitch, and he suddenly leaps to the door, opening it wildly to reveal Madeleine staggering along several paces from the threshold.

Madeleine lays the tray on the table, as far away as possible from where she presumes Bob will sit. Everyone else grabs chairs, scrapes them along the floor, and surrounds the table laid with good things. Meanwhile, Madeleine brings into play her clever gambit for forestalling Bob's appetite, thereby making sure sufficient foodstuffs are left for the rest of us. This is what she does. She lifts THE TEAPOT (more about this later) and pours everyone's tea except Bob's. Then she says to Bob:-

"Would you please get some hot water from the kitchen ?"

Now this is the cunning part. Bob realises he must get the hot water if he wants tea, which he does. He also knows that during his absence eager hands will grab half the cakes; in other words, his share.

This is his solution...follow it carefully.

The first thing he does is to half-rise from the table, eyes flashing angrily. He gives everyone in turn a grimace, then stands up. He carefully counts all the cakes, sandwiches, scones, etc, also noting the positions of the respective plates. Satisfied, he flexes his not inconsiderable muscles, strains, and manages to lift THE TEAPOT. He staggers backwards towards the door, takes a deep breath, and disappears. As far as we know, he leaps down from landing to landing, and his dexterity in the kitchen must approach supersonic proportions, because people who have actually been in the kitchen at the time say that all they witness are two flashes, one coming in, and one going out.

We upstairs, smiling smugly, have just reached forward to select our choice when Bob materialises in front of us. He levers THE TEAPOT onto the table, collapses in a chair, mops his brow and grins.

"Sorry I was delayed," he says.

Now this is a slight exaggeration, because I have been

keeping a careful watch on the clock (sorry) and his total absence amounts to 15.6 seconds. Not bad. Not bad at all.

One day, for a joke, Madeleine locked all the doors before asking him to fetch hot water. His time was 15.7 seconds. Walt dismisses the episode with a shrug.

"I've always had a hankering for carpentry," he says philosophically.

Now for THE TEAPOT, or, to be perfectly accurate, TEAPOTS, because I must mention Mks I, II and III.

The first (Mk.I) was an orthodox sort of teapot, which was its main failing. It was thus rapidly replaced with Mk.II. This was a smashing affair. As far as I know, it was originally an electric boiler (which explains the thermostat.) The trouble was, although it provided an adequate quantity of tea, it was too ungainly to manage properly, and its capacity did not allow for disposing of Bob for those few vital seconds. Mk.II was accordingly relegated to the more unpretentious duty of being a rain butt at the Willis back door.

The current Mk.III then made its appearance. Madeleine saw it in a shop window one day (there wasn't room for anything else), purchased it, and hired a lorry to deliver it to Oblique House. I wouldn't go as far as to say that Mk.III is big, but even Walt says it would need a tent to make a cosy for it. It is roughly the shape (and size) of a magnetic mine, and its colour is dun brown. But don't let its size put you off; the material of which it is made (some sort of non-porous clay), is about six inches thick, which means that Mk.III's capacity isn't as much as you would think. I don't want to give the impression it is heavy, but you need both hands to take the lid off.

But to get back to the informal meal. After every last crumb has been removed, the conversation starts. I only wish I could write shorthand. I would be able to copy down enough quotes, interlineations, etc, to keep fandom going for years. But I am not going to give you examples of the backchat. It wouldn't be right. After all, I want to write other articles, and the few notes I have managed to take will come in useful to me later on. Sorry.

After conversation has been exhausted, we wait anxiously until Bob finishes off the tea. That boy surely can absorb liquid. As yet I don't know his alcoholic capacity, but judging from his tea-drinking abilities I am not too keen to find out by bitter experience. (Explain that pun to the others, you drinking men !)

Finally, Mk.III is empty.

This is where the battle of wits commences (which, James White considers, puts me at a disadvantage). You can see why... someone has to take all the crockery and Mk.III, downstairs. Down three flights. Forty five steps. Bob has done his bit...in any case, he is afraid to move in case the tea pours out of his ears. Then James is...hey, what are you all looking at me for ? I carried it all down last week. I can't manage THE TEAPOT, too... dammit, play the game. Hey, don't pinch my bat, Madeleine, I'll be up soon. Crikey.

A G E BEFORE DISHONOUR

I am not given to philosophizing.
I don't think about things much.
I have so much to do that little
happenings which SHOULD combine
and mean something just do not
add up.

BY JOHN
BERRY

Take that little incident
in Royal Avenue, Belfast, the
other day, for instance. It
should have alerted me. It was like this...

As I was passing the Grand Central Hotel I glanced in awe, as I
always do, at the swinging doors. They fascinate me. As I gazed, an old-
looking gent was ejected by the doors. He stopped, looked at me in
alarm, and nipped back inside again, narrowly avoiding being minced. Now
in itself, this was not unique. People often do strange things when they
see me; but there was something about this gentleman which impinged on
a delicate cell in my mind. I had seen him or his photograph before...
and he undoubtedly knew me.

That eveing I casually mentioned the incident to Walt Willis.

"Describe him," he ordered.

".....small chap, distinguished, obviously wealthy, sun-burned face,
with weeds growing out of his trouser turn-ups..." I explained.

Walt turned white.

"Ghod," he screamed, "that sounds like Paul Enever."

I dropped the table leg. (We had just finished playing.)

Suffering Catfish. Maybe my ORION sub had expired.

Needless to say, I forgot all about it.

It COULDN'T be Paul.

The summons from George Charters, The Sage of Bangor, was rather
strange. Strange, because Goerge - a lovable old soul is usually timid
in his pronouncements. The authority behind the telegram -

REPORT TO BALLYFLIPHERBERT BARN EIGHT OCLOCK TONIGHT.

STOP. GATWC.

was, as I said, most un-Charters-like.

It was impossible to guess what was afoot. His venerable brain, nurtured on hard covers, was capable of anything. For instance, it was quite within the bounds of possibility that he had hired the Ballyflip-herbert barn to produce his new punzine and he wanted someone he could trust to work the duper handle and assist him to collate in deference to his rheumatic digits.

There was only one way to find out.

The Ballyflipherbert barn, situated in that elite locale, Bangor, Co.Down, was bequeathed by the local Urban Disrict Council as a place for the elderly people in the area to use for recreation. I arrived outside the barn exactly on time, and was surprised to see Bob Shaw leaning against the corrugated-iron door, idly peeling a banana. As I approached he flung the skin over his shoulder where it landed with a 'plop'. Judging by the mound of skins I calculated that he'd been waiting for at least five minutes.



"What gives, Bob ?" I asked. "Did you get a telegram, too ?"

He nodded, his pulsating jaws working inexorably onwards.

"Something queer," he munched. "Can't understand it. I had planned to take Sadie to the ballet tonight, but I cancelled it to come here instead."

Just then the sliding door scraped open about twelve inches and George's wizened face peered out.

"Come in, bhoys," he wheezed, then burst into a fit of uncontrollable laughter - " heh heh heh heh,"

We followed George into the barn. It was well illuminated, and several of George's friends from 'Eventide' were sitting round the walls, looking quite happy. Across the far end of the large room was hung a full-length curtain whilst dividing the room into two equal parts was a familar-looking net.

George addressed his friends who appeared to be impressed.

"Heh..heh..heh," he said, "Allow me to present two young friends of mine from Belfast..Robert Shaw and John Berry. Two ghoodminton exponents, both individualistic in style. Mr.Shaw favours the - heh heh heh- genteel approach, somewhat similar to myself. Berry is known as a room clearer."

The spectators edged forward. From the excited and expectant expressions on their faces they obviously knew something that Bob and I didn't.

"So my friends," continued George, leaning heavily on his walking frame, "I want you to witness a Ghoodminton Tourney, an exhibition of ancient and modern styles."

Starting on his third bag of oranges, Bob stifled a yawn. His prowess at ghoodminton is such that we regard him, without malice or jealousy, as our cleverest and most proficient player - the perfect combination of gentle flowing movement and feline agility.

George turned to Bob, his creased eyelids fluttering like a broken Venetian Blind.

"For many moons," he sighed, " I have been playing ghoominton at Oblique House under severe strain, a terrible physical handicap. My age makes it impossible for me to match your speed, But I have never complained. I have borne my humiliation with a stoic grimace of fortitude. I want you both to show your sportsmanship by playing ghoominton my way - under my conditions."

"Sure, dad,sure," yawned bob, his tongue caressing a bunch of grapes.

I nodded. I felt a mite sadistic. Tonight I was going to spill blood. I knew it. I felt it. I hoped it wasn't going to be my own.

George clapped his hands, the curtains at the end of the room parted and Paul Enever shunted across the floor on a sports bathchair. The applause was deafening.

George crept away, returning after a moment in his bathchair, head thrust grimly forward as he swerved across the court, finally screeching to a halt in front of us. His crash helmet looked somewhat ostentatious.

"You'll find your bathchairs behind the curtain, too," he bleated. "Heh heh heh - hurry up and get mounted whilst Paul and myself limber up."

So saying, he turned a handle and his bathchair shot forward. Paul followed suit, although it was noticeable he didn't have George's dexterity - not being quite so old.

Our two mounts were indeed behind the curtain.

I watched Bob lower himself into the seat and place his packet of sandwiches on the gearbox. With a jerking movement he blundered forward. I followed closely behind.

A sigh went up from the audience as Bob appeared, which slowly turned into a chant of derision as he proceeded to turn round in ever-decreasing circles. He seemed to be unaware of the elementary principles of locomotion, and as soon as I extricated myself from under the stage I went to his assistance. However, Paul had taken Bob under his wing and was demonstrating a few primitive movements.

A vigorous whistle-blast reverberated through the barn. I looked up and saw Walt Willis sitting atop a stepladder at the left side of the net. Ah, I thought, with Willis in attendance we will see fair play. Safe in this knowledge we steered erratically forward under the net and took our places opposite The Elders. Gripping our squares of cardboard we watched at Walt produced a brand new shuttlecock.

A BRAND NEW SHUTTLECOCK !!!

This was Big Time...

"Allow me to present the first ever game of Bathchair Ghoominton," announced George as he signalled to Walt who threw him the shuttlecock.

There was something uncanny in George's mode of service. One second he was curled up in his bathchair like a hibernating squirrel - an old hibernating squirrel - the next second the shuttlecock was

lying on our side of the court.

"Our service, I teenk," grinned Paul.

Okay, okay, we lost.

Experience is the key-note in every form of sport. George and Paul, being so used to bathchairs on account of their ages, had no difficulty in attaining a 'three sets to love' lead.

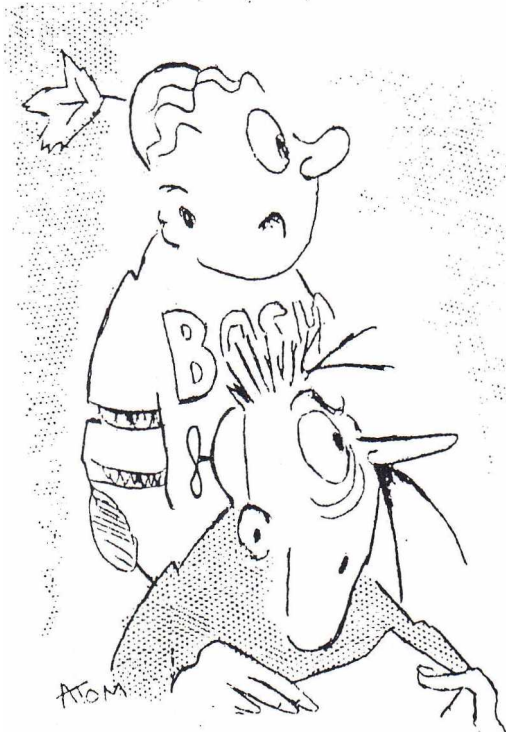
It was good to see those venerable fen glory-in in the chase...George, his sparse silver locks streaming behind him, showing glimpses of what, many years ago, was obviously a brilliant athletic career thrown to the winds. Paul Enever, forgetting all about his dandelion-seed content, demonstrating only too clearly that if he had ever decided on an alternative trade as a STOP ME AND BUY ONE merchant his future would have been doubly assured.

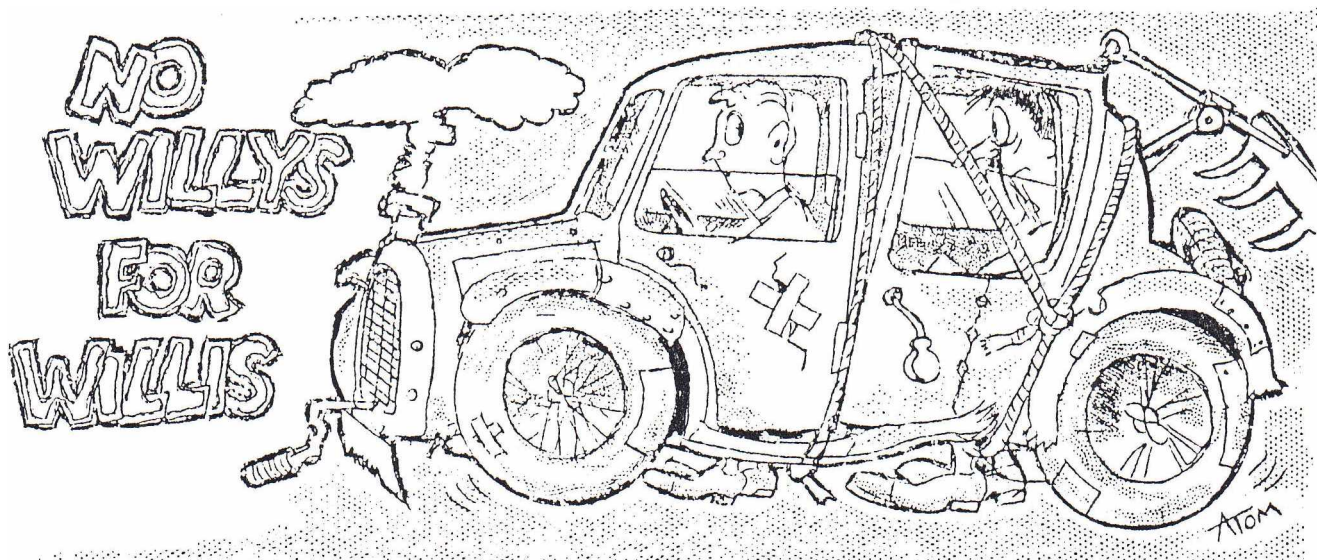
Bob admitted to me afterwards, as we consoled ourselves with copious amounts of bheer, that as young people, we were missing something. As he pointed out, a bathchair had certain advantages.

"...you can move at a reasonable rate," he explained, "and you are actually resting at the same time. Plenty of food space...vast scope for ghoddmin-ton...room for your typer...hey..." a dreamy look crossed his face..."hey, the more I think about it..."

On consideration, Bob underestimated the potential. Mundane people are very kind if you bump into them. Also, you don't have to pay for petrol, or insurance, or road tax, etc.

But, as I have learned, if you carry passengers, ensure they wear crash helmets.





I have been asked to say a few words about the Willis motor car. At first, I was very annoyed with this request, because it brought the bitter pangs of remorse shooting ruthlessly through me. But why should I suffer in silence ?

I recall that we were arranging a visit to The White House, and as the party promised to be a rather late affair, I was worried about the transport problem, as James's new house is situated in the country side, rural County Antrim, and the nearest trolley 'bus service finished at 11 pm.

"Not to worry," said Walt, "I will run you and Diane home in my car."

I agreed, at that time having profound faith in all that Willis stood for.

3.30 am at The White House.

It was raining heavily.

We huddled in the imposing portals of The White House, wrapped like mummies in oilskin waterproofs.

"OK," said Walt in his authoritative manner, "let's make a run for my car...be careful how you open the rear door, John."

Shouting 'Goodnight' to the Whites, we picked our way over the empty bean tins and empty milk bottles, past the scrap heap and onto the drive.

"Hey, come back," shouted Walt.

Supporting my wife (who seemed to be in an exciteable condition ...but which I later discovered to be a flash of intuition) we retraced our steps, but no Willis.

"Hurry up," gritted Walt from the scrap heap.

Even though the rain was lashing down, I surveyed the Willis motor car. I recognised the bonnet of the car as being from a 1923 Austin. The roof of the car, I was happy to note, seemed secure enough, the rope supports being conspicuous but workmanlike. Presumably to eliminate air resistance to the minimum, Walt had dispensed with proper

mudguards. The wheels seemed firm enough, and, as I was to discover later, actually were solid, the front and off-side rear wheels being from an 1898 Columbia Electric, the near side wheel from a 1904 Vauxhall, as was the spare wheel, being souvenirs of Irish Fandom's 1955 visit to Belfast Museum.

"Pull the door off and get inside," shouted Walt, and doing that very thing, I ushered Diane inside.

"Watch the nails on the back seat," advised Walt, by the sound of it winding something up, "else they'll tear Diane's dress."

Thankful for the timely warning, Diane stood up in a horribly bent posture, hanging on to the lantern for support.

The winding noise continued for some time, with Walt swearing up and down the scale, fluctuating from a whispered 'damn' to a ribald 'bloody hell.'

Several times he whipped in and out of the car...sometimes with a spanner, sometimes with a screwdriver, finally with a 16 lb sledge hammer.

After a resultant horrible smashing noise, all was silent. Walt was away for some time...I couldn't help thinking that maybe he had gone back to The White House to spend the night waiting for the first trolley 'bus. I began to feel reckless...I didn't care if the door did fall off, and I let go, and it did.

Walt came back, however, with his face screwed up like a brazil nut.

"Fortunately," he remarked, changing into a pair of hobnail boots, "even though the engine is...ahem...temporarily out of order, I have arranged an alternative power plant.

And, amazingly, the car moved forward, although Walt began to grunt and perspire.

"There is nothing for it," gasped Walt at length, "I'll have to change into second gear."

He pulled a lever on the dashboard, and the floor vanished under my feet, and my patent leather shoes sank ankle-deep in a puddle. We were still on the White drive.

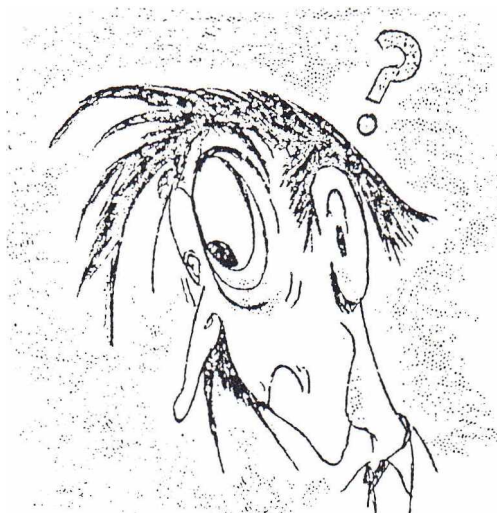
I soon caught the rhythm, however, and we moved forward at quite a reasonable rate.

We stopped again...I didn't discover exactly how Walt managed to stop the car with such a smoothly pneumatic action. Maybe the retractable spring-toothed harrow suspended across the rear bumper had something to do with it...I must confess I am not mechanically minded.

"If we want to get home," observed Walt, "we shall have to change into...um...third gear."

"I've got my high-heeled shoes on," sobbed Diane.

Walt began to get annoyed.



"Look," you can't expect me to do everything," he maintained, "after all, I'm driving."

Sometimes we went fast, sometimes we went slow...at heart, I sensed that Walt was free-wheeling. At 7.30 am, we trotted up to my front door.

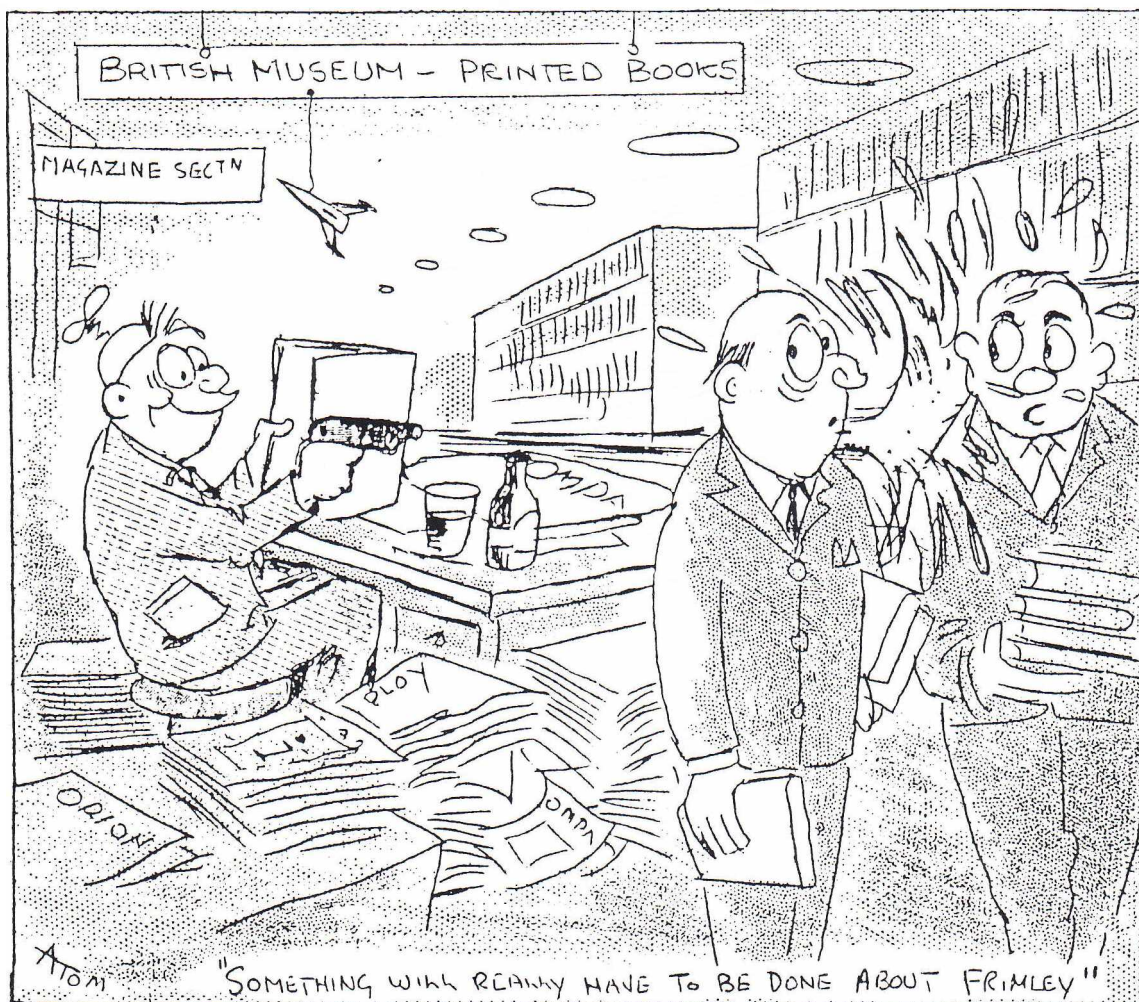
"We'd invite you in for breakfast, Walt," said Diane, taking off her flat-heeled shoes, " 'cept it gets light soon."

"You haven't got a spare pair of boots?" asked Walt pensively.

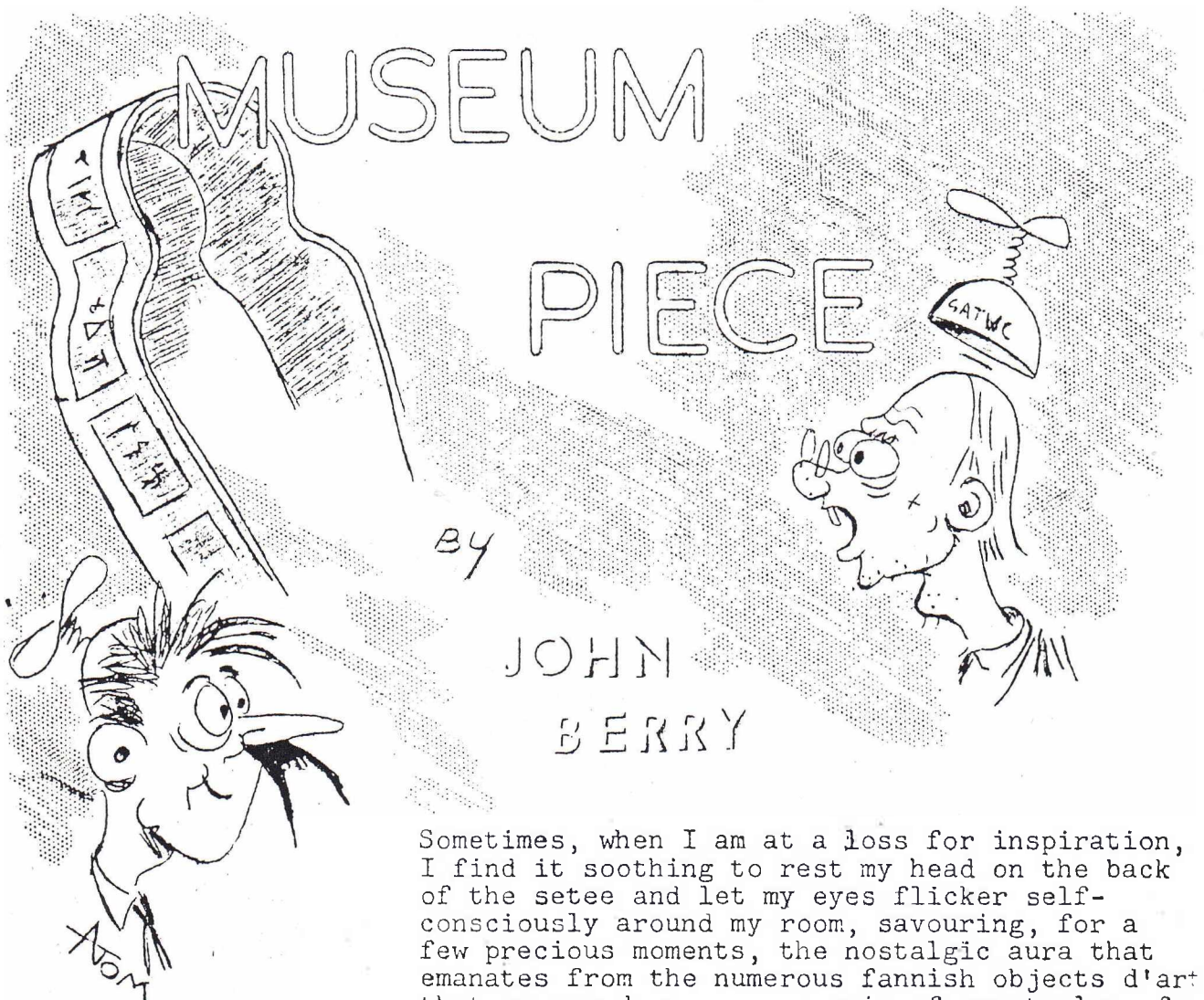
"Sorry," I replied, and we sat on the front door step, flapping our soles, and watched Walt's car lumber away, his tired feet ringing despondently on the concrete road, causing many curtains to be thumbed aside.

At Oblique House, the remains of the car can still be seen. Before he left for Canada, Bob Shaw converted it into an aviary for his budgerigars, and somehow, even now, when I look through the wire mesh, a feeling of nausea sweeps over me.

For the past few months, Walt has been using a Morris Minor, but it is laid up at the moment for the re-fitting of its third gear box.







BY

JOHN
BERRY

Sometimes, when I am at a loss for inspiration, I find it soothing to rest my head on the back of the settee and let my eyes flicker self-consciously around my room, savouring, for a few precious moments, the nostalgic aura that emanates from the numerous fannish objects d'art that surround me a pair of spectacles, for instance, hanging in a place of prominence over the fireplace - a souvenir of my first game of ghoddminton with a previously bespectacled James White the two highly polished buttons recessed into the wall, bearing the imposing inscriptions BACK SPACER and TAB KEY, reminders of my preliminary skirmishes with the dreaded Shaw-Berry typer a plaster cast of the famous BoSh teethmarks embroidered on one of my wife's early rock cakes, hanging triumphantly over a cracked alabaster finger bowl the original autographed hard cover edition of Max Brand's 'Battle's End', given to me by the venerable George Charters as a reminder of a reminder of I shudder involuntarily. How well I remember that day a few short months ago, the day Walt Willis, George Charters and myself went to Belfast Museum.....

.....

"My idea in bringing you along to the museum," explained Walt in his

patronizing way, as we mounted the marble steps and passed through the swing doors, "is to help me carry home a couple of wheels for my car. You see, the History of the Motor Car section is being dismantled to make way for a fossilized skeleton of a dinosaur, and an advert in the local paper said that spare wheels are going cheap. I might get a bargain."

We nodded. I wiped the sweat from my forehead as I leaned George against a glass case. We really shouldn't have brought George along. He had just come out of a hospital for what he claimed was an ear operation (although we secretly thought he had been for a monkey-gland course of injections), and he sure looked a pathetic figure with his white bandage draped round his head. His wizened features creased with the effort of being assisted upstairs. But Walt had said it would be a good idea to take him along...the fresh air would do him good.

A peak-capped attendant saluted Walt.

"The sale is down there, to the left, sir," he said, looking rather mystified at the mint copy of OTHER WORLDS thrust into his expectant paw by Willis.

Walt cleared his throat.

"Look, John," he explained. "I may be some time at the sale, getting the right type of wheel. Why don't you take George and show him around? I am sure that some of the exhibits will interest him. The penny farthing bicycles, for example."

Without waiting for a reply, Walt slunk away.

"Penny farthing bikes," wheezed George. "I used to have one back in '98. Could get up a fair speed, too."

I gripped George's arm and led him along the corridor.

.....

There was quite a selection of old decrepit bikes. I must confess that when George staggered over to one, and leaned on a handlebar, he blended perfectly with the background. I could see he was happy being with his first loves once more after so many years, so I viewed some of the exhibits nearby.

I was terribly interested. Right down the middle of the room was the reconstruction of an old Viking sailing boat, about thirty or forty feet long, which was discovered in 1936 under the mud on the banks of the Humber. Naturally, as a poster stated, some of the original woodwork was missing, and substitution was provided, although I did consider the legend 'BEST JAFFA ORANGES' showing through the paint on a hunk of wood supporting the prow as an unrivalled example of vulgar ostentation.

An opened and empty mummy case, or, to use the correct definition, sarcophagus, thrilled me enormously. I admired the superb way the

colours in the workmanship had survived the ravages of man and time.

I moved on.

Inspected Norman tapestries, Dresden china figurines, Neolithic pottery, and bronze arrowheads. The rooms were pretty well deserted because of the sale downstairs, and I was able to pursue my panorama of history in solitude.

But what about George? Where had he gone?

A high-pitched cackle of merriment caused me to glance round, and George, valiantly pedalling a penny farthing, squeaked into view.

"Hi yi, Silver" he bleated, "Davy.....DAVY CROCKETT. King of the..."

He seemed relatively stable, so I grinned knowingly as he glided past, a tip of bandage flapping in his slip stream.

I perused a visored helmet, contemplated its usefulness at ghoddminton, when I heard a horrible crash, a bleat, then silence.

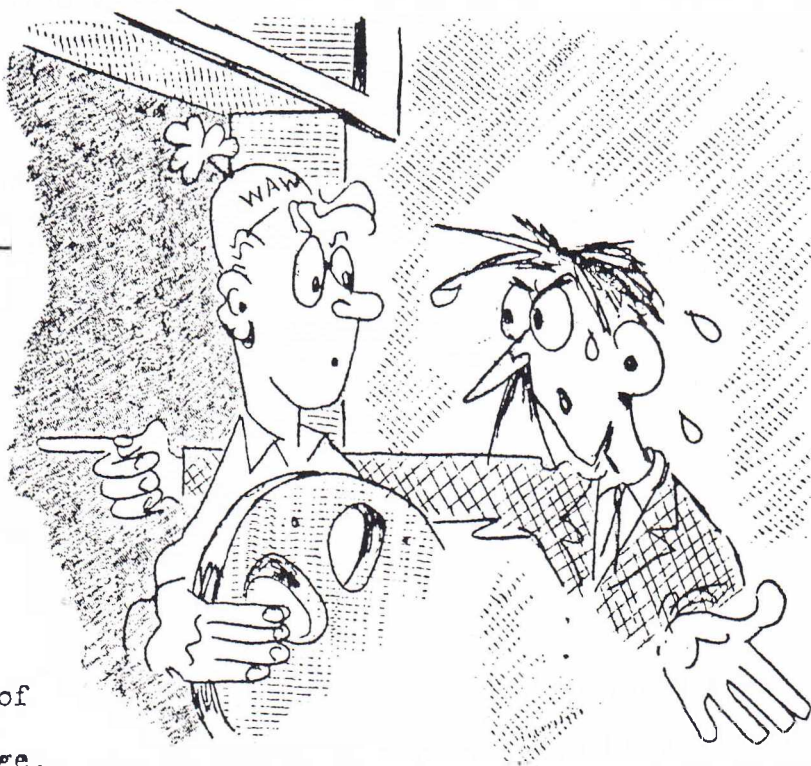
Filled with remorse, I hurriedly searched for Walt, and even as a crowd of attendants appeared, I found the penny farthing wrapped round a plaster-of-Paris model of Cleopatra's Needle.

But no Charters.

Where could he have possibly gone?

I hurried down to Walt, and told him the full story. Leaving his two solid wheels by the swinging door, and frowning pensively, he retraced the path of George's cycling jaunt. A smashed China vase made us turn left to the Natural History section, and a stuffed tiger with a petrified expression took us right. There again was the crumpled bike, and the ruptured needle, even a bewildered array of attendants. But no Charters.

Do you know, honestly, during the ensuing three hour search, I sometimes thought I heard occasional bleats of frustration. And we went back to Oblique House, minus George, in a very unhappy state.



Walt seemed on edge, when I saw him early next morning after breakfast. He seemed irritated.

"There was something wrong last night," he kept repeating. "Something attracted my subconscious mind...what was it...let me...bloody hell."

I raced after Walt as he pushed his car down the Upper Newtownards Road and leapt in after him when the engine eventually fired. With reckless abandon, Walt changed into second gear, and we screeched to a halt outside the museum.

I followed Willis up the marble staircase, through the swinging doors, and along the corridor.

"George," shouted Walt, horrified. "Speak to me. Why didn't you tell us?"

"Mumble, danged whippersnappers," I heard, "mumble, mumble."

I looked up.

I looked down.

I looked everywhere.

Then I screwed my eyes up and looked at the place Willis had his eyes riveted on.

THEN I SAW. SUFFERING CATFISH.

.....

"Have some gruel, George," soothed Madeleine Willis, "you pore old critter."

"Mmmm, thank'ee kindly," grunted George, tucking his bib in, "How a punster of my standing could possibly...."

"But if only you'd drawn attention to yourself, George," explained Walt. "I mean..."

But where was he?" asked James White, who had read about the disappearance of Irish Fandom's Sage in the papers, "Where were you?"

"George went with us to Belfast Museum yesterday afternoon," I said, "and pinched a penny farthing bicycle from its stand, and rode it round and round the museum. Then he crashed..."

"...into Cleopatra's Needle," said Walt, continuing the story, "and the momentum sent him flying through the air, and he landed, of all places, in the empty mummy case. The bandage slipped over his mouth, acting as a sort of gag, and his arms were pinned to his sides. And so he stayed until I found him."

"But the rest of my face was showing," said George, indignantly. "Someone should have noticed. Even before Walt came, a class of students was

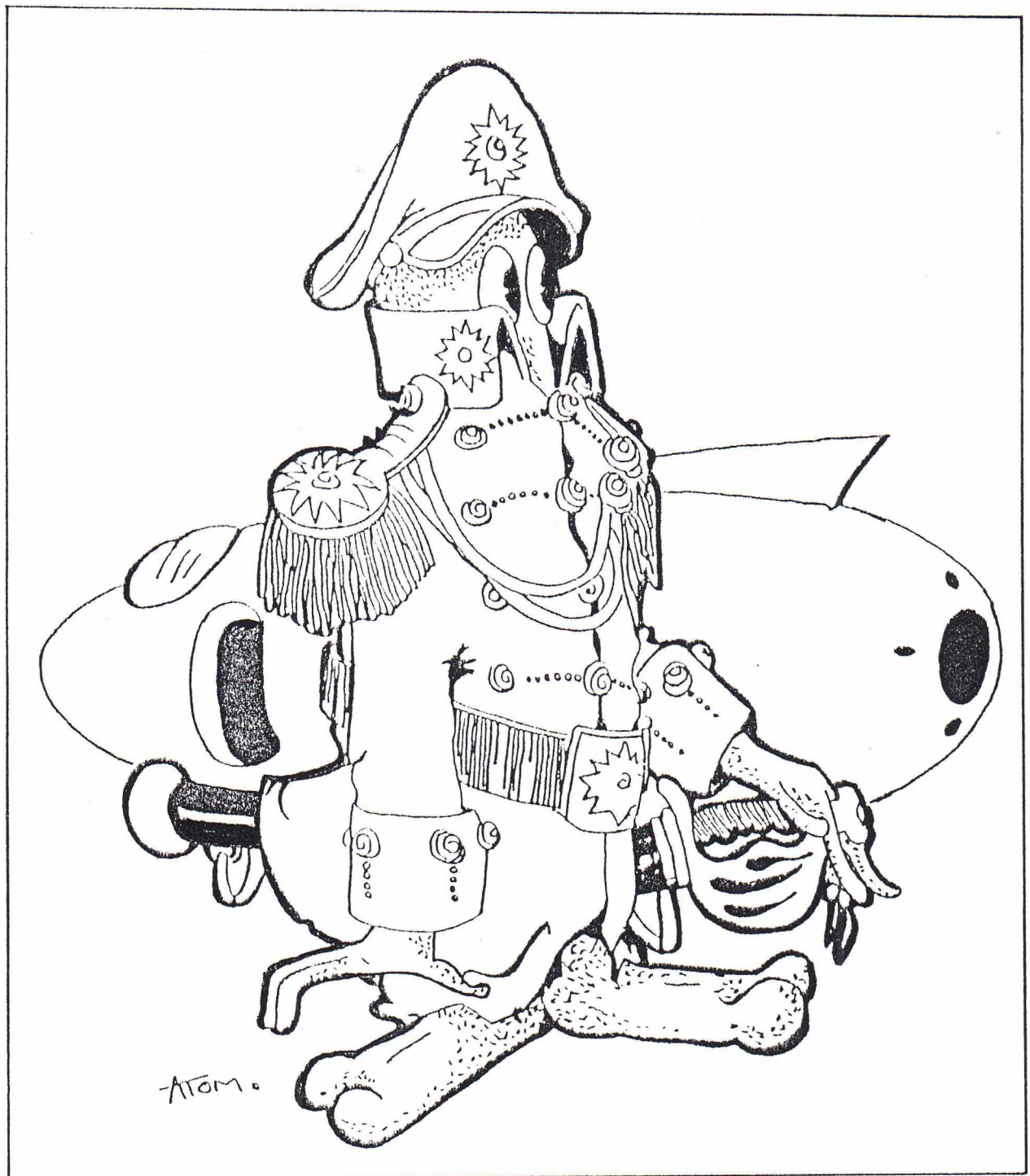
lectured round me. They should have seen that my features weren't all cracked and shrivelled up."

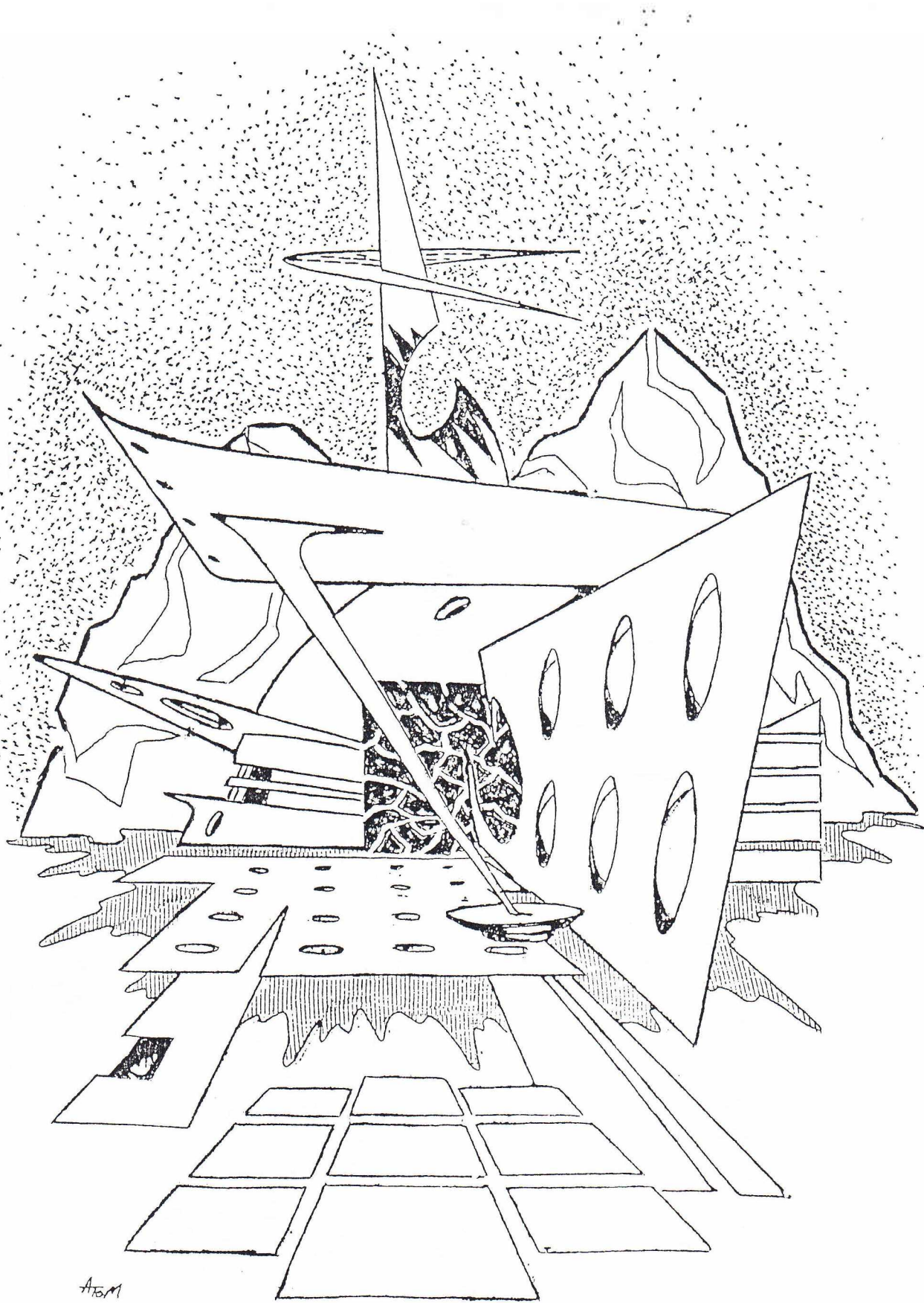
We turned away and tried to change the subject.

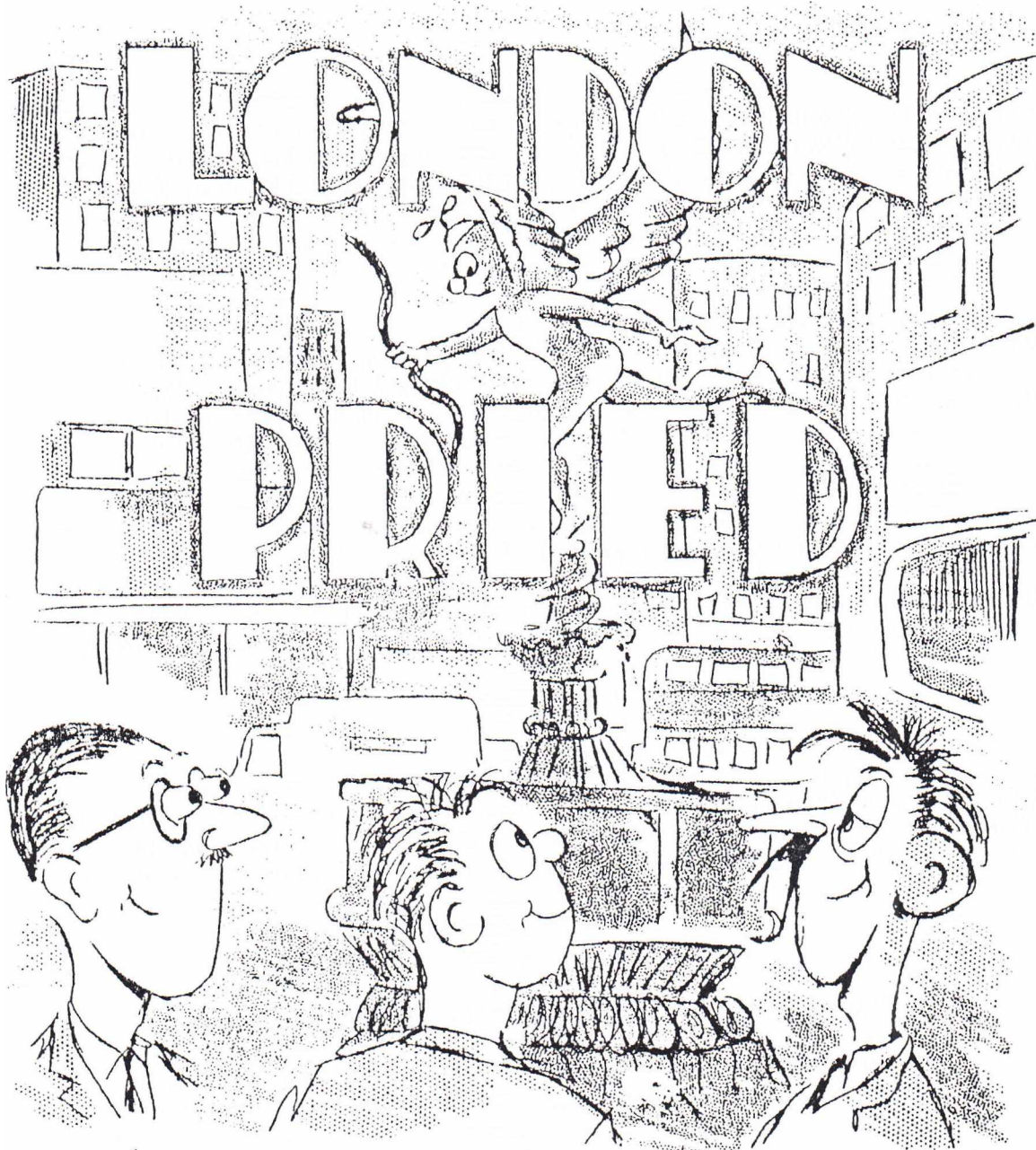
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Yes, those memories all flood back to me as I gaze fondly at my treasures.... an early reject SLANT cover.....an ash tray mat made from the carcase of a budgerigar a taxidermist said it was unprofitable to stuff, ...the framed affidavit made by a chambermaid who was trampled on at Port Ballintrae

But you all know about that.







ATOM

by John Berry.

Illustrated by Arthur Thomson.

I have written something about every fan I have met so far, bringing them, whether they like it or not, into my fannish mythology. One day in the future, when I am an old faaaan, without the doubtful agility of my imagination to inspire me, I shall publish a booklet, many pages thick, incorporating everything I have ever written about them. It may happen sooner than you think. Anyway, foremost in my fables will be the story of my stay with Arthur Thomson and his unfannish but stalwart wife

Olive, at the fabulous number 17, Brockham House, London S.W.2, in May 1956.

.....

During my stay in England, it was natural that I should wish to see the great ATOM, with whom I had co-operated for so long in the production of RETRIBUTION; and whose artistic embellishments to my stories have made them seem 100% better than they actually are. I had long possessed an open invitation to visit Arthur and Olive, but my wife Diane, and the two children, Colin aged almost six, and Kathleen, aged two, were with me in Birmingham, where we were staying with my parents. I tried to persuade Diane to let me go to London by myself, but the metropolis had a fascination for her, and she gave every indication of being unwilling to be left behind. (I didn't find out until much later that Diane discovered that Arthur and myself, in conjunction with Chuck Harris - our guide - planned to investigate the vice area of Picadilly, to write up as a feature article later on.)

Diane's refusal to be left behind meant that the kids had to come to, and, incidentally, it also meant the cancellation of our proposed vice investigation, although Chuck explained in a letter to me later that he went along just for 'old times sake.'

Frankly, I felt unhappy about inflicting the whole family on the Thomsons, but Arthur insisted I take them along, and, jestingly, I agreed, as long as he allowed me to pay for all breakages. I'll never learn to keep my big mouth shut.

But to introduce two small children to an uninitiated young couple is always a trying time - and my offspring are more precocious than most. However, by the time I had worked it all out, the train was steaming into Paddington Station, London. I marshalled my family on the platform, and we followed the crowd to the ticket barrier. From fully fifty yards away, I saw a head facing me, a head somehow familiar, a head, in fact, moving slowly from side to side like a radar scanner. As we approached, I recognised the visage of my old ghoddminton opponent, Chuck Harris. I saw his head submerge slowly...there appeared to be a slight scuffle immediately ahead, and he burst forth breathlessly in front of us.

"Quick," he shouted, "put these on before Arthur see's you."

He handed me a carrier bag. With a certain feeling of remorse, I opened it, and saw four pairs of battered shoes inside. The truth struck me immediately. Chuck had also met James and Peggy White in London, the year before, on their typing honeymoon tour, and had similarly equipped James, who, according to Chuck, is the 'bloodiest provincial of them all.'

Chuck seemed rather hurt when I displayed my hobnail boots, but he rapidly pulled himself together, and led us past porters and ticket collectors, to Arthur.

Arthur Thomson.

THE Arthur Thomson.

ATOM.

I introduced my family to him, and gripping Chucks arm for support, Arthur took us to a large black car, driven by Olives father. We embussed (to quote a regimental phrase branded forever on my brain during my military career), and I had a chance to size Arthur up, as he gave us

a descriptive tour of all the places of interest we passed by. As a matter of fact, his powers of oratory were tested to the maximum, because our car was emeshed in a concentrated traffic jam, and it took us three-quarters of an hour to leave the station.

But we eventually arrived at Brockham House. It is a large modern block of flats, rising up to eight storeys, situated in the Streatham distict of London. And number 17 was really the nicest and most compact flat I have ever seen. It was also Chuck's first visit to the Thomson abode , too.

After lunch, Arthur and Chuck announced their intention of taking us on a guided tour of the important places in London. As I said, the flats were eight storeys high, but number 17 was on the second floor. Nevertheless, Arthur insisted upon showing us the modernity of Brockham House, and he ushered us protestingly into an automatic lift. The most startling effect of this lift was the novel way the door suddenly clanged shut without any warning. (Our subsequent lift journeys were prefaced by a rapid ferret-like procession into the interior of the lift, no one volunteering as a client for decapitation ..or worse.)

I want to explain to some of you provincials how this lift worked. Inside the door was a long row of buttons. The second button from the top, when pressed, caused a light above it to flicker 'Lift Working'. The requisite button is then pressed, in our case 'Ground Floor.' In our very first trip, we discovered an elemental flaw in this arrangement. We shuddered as the door sliced home, and then, proudly, Arthur artistically braced his right fore finger preparatory to depressing the 'Ground Floor' button., when suddenly the lift shot upwards ...and upwards. It slammed to a halt at the top floor, and a little boy holding a basket of kippers popped in.

"Fourth floor," he announced cheekily, and what could Arthur do but deposit him as required. Again, at that second, a fundamental error in the electrical wiring of the lift shaft was revealed. It is my own personal theory that at one precise split-parsec, someone at the ground floor and someone on the top floor were pressing the 'Lift Working' button simultaneously.

The lift was caught in two minds.

It shunted up and down the shaft in a violent spasm of indecision. Arthur finally controlled this fiendish hunk of mechanism with a skilful ploy. He pressed the eigth-floor button, and as it screeched to a halt on the eigth floor, he rammed his fist violently on to the 'Ground Floor' button. As the lift was at the eigth floor, the potential passenger let go the switch to enter, and this gave the 'Ground Floor' client the full possession of the curcuit.

We staggered outside in a perspiring huddle. Arthur grinned weakly, and led us buswards and thence townwards.

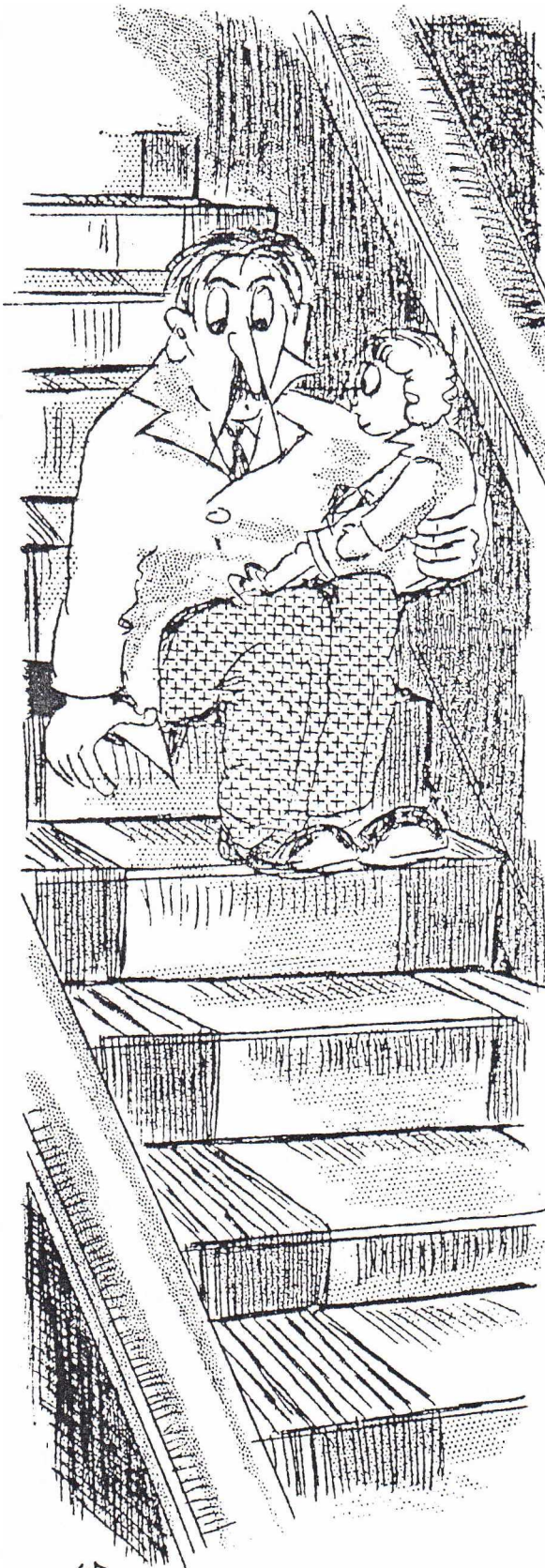
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I wish here and now to publicly refute a remark, rather, an allegation made by Chuck Harris. I want to explain exactly what happened. The Harris version , if spread, will undoubtedly label me an ignorant peasant for the rest of my fannish life, me, who accidentallywait now. Here is the unsavoury incident from the beginningmore.... IT IS A TRUE VERSION OF WHAT HAPPENED.



Atom

52

After we got off the bus, Arthur led us to Kennington Oval underground station. We purchased tickets, walked along a few tunnels, the walls of which, incidentally, were plastered with adverts for brassieres, panties, nylons, and numerous unidentified methods of 'corsetrey', and eventually we came to a long descending escalator. I was carrying Kathleen at the time, and couldn't really see very well. She wanted Arthur or Chuck to carry her, but from the way they were dabbing at their clothing, I felt I had to share the chore. And, as I said, being so unused to the moving staircase, I couldn't see very well, and in fact, was rather unsteady. I felt myself swaying forward with the movement, so I instinctively jerked backwards, and by some slight mishap of overbalancing, sat on the stairway. Immediately, the racous Harris voice informed me and the rest of the travellers within three hundred yards range, that :-

"you are not supposed to sit on the escalator, stupid."

I ask you, readers. I knew that, honestly. I did. I wasn't really sitting on the escalator. I just tripped. Honest.

From then on, throughout my subsequent underground trips, I was labelled as 'The Man Who Sat On The Escalator'. If some of the travellers forgot, or hadn't heard about it, Chuck went out of his way to inform them.

That's my story, and I'm sticking to it.

.....

.....

Arthur and Chuck proved to be very efficient guides. Hoping not to bore you to much, I would like to give a short list of the famous places we visited :- Picadilly (we almost lost Chuck), Whitehall, the Cenotaph, the Horse Guards, number 10, Downing Street, the Houses of Parliament, fed the pigeons at Trafalgar Square, etc. One slight incident worthy of mention did occur

as we sauntered past Big Ben. Seriously , folks, this is an exact eye-witness account of what happened.

Chuck suddenly shouted, "A shirt," and he raced down the road, ignoring all natural and physical obstacles, until he disappeared into a gentlemen's outfitters. He came out a few moments later, looking very spick and span, and I must admit I could see the improvement. Funny how you miss these little things in the first instance ...

Much to my chagrin, we returned to the Kennington Oval, and at this juncture, Arthur, who had been unusually quiet, made a suggestion. We had crossed the road, and should have turned left to walk the odd three hundred yards to the bus stop, but Arthur pointed to a blitzed church on the right, and led us past it, muttering confidentially :-

"This is a short cut."

I have to report that we did reach the bus stop, but, unfortunately, we could only see it through inch thick iron bars and a huge padlock. We retraced our weary steps, and Arthur, sensing that his prestige had fallen somewhat, said,

"Well, secretly, I only wanted to see if the church fell down as Chuck passed by it."

Hope Pete Rigby doesn't hear about this propensity.

Eventually, we reached number 17 once more, but before continuing , I would like to pay tribute to the sterling way in which Arthur and Chuck looked after the two children. They took turns to carry Kathleen, held Collins hand, brought them ice cream, and kept them generally happy and contented... all this besides keeping Diane and myself informed about every little detail pertaining to the historical associations of treasured London landmarks.

.....

We met Olive ...Mrs. Atom.

Great fannish material, this girl.

Sad to say, however, she maintains a rigid anti-fannish aura, although I gained the impression that she was thrilled beyond words with Arthur's success as a fan illustrator and vile pro. to boot. She is a charming girl, fresh, quiet and capable....made immediate friends with Diane, and throughout the rest of the stay, they belittled fandom at every opportunity (with, I was glad to see, a twinkle in their eyes) whilst Arthur and myself strained to show them what they were missing.

I expect their one-shot will be out any day now.

.....

The buzzer at the front door hummed away, and the opened door revealed H.Ken and Pam Bulmer. I had heard so much about them and was thrilled to actually be able to talk to them for a few hours. Pam is a beauteous femme, and was, I should imagine, a great attraction in the States. There was something Irish about her whimsical humour..she probably hadn't quite recovered from a surfeit of Willis.

H.Ken was my idea of a vile pro (with sincere apologies to James White.) His luxuriant facial hairs made my struggling specimens withdraw in confusion. Kens shrewd observations and witty remarks were well up to the standard I was weaned on at Oblique House, although, with great kind-

ness he refused to make a pun, even the remotest suggestion of one.

Together with Harris, who had donned a false beard, we had quite an evening, ensuring that I shall not be deprived of material for months to come. The Bulmers and Harris departed all too quickly.

During my stay in Birmingham I caught a rather rasping cough, which was brought on by the change of air.

Although the London atmosphere had somewhat improved it, Arthur was concerned that I might not sleep soundly, and suggested I sample some of Olives medicine, which, he assured me, had completely cured her. He led me to the kitchen, and worked for some time with his back towards me, finally turned round and levered a tablespoon into my mouth, tipping up the obnoxious contents. The taste, or rather, the fumes reminded me of anti-freeze mixture, but I'll agree it removed my cough. It also removed my voice and two layers of skin off my epiglottis, I felt it would be unkind to remonstrate.

Arthur and I had planned to stay up after the others had gone to bed, so that, free from an anti-fannish undercurrent, we could plan future RET's. But when beads of sweat dropped down my nose and plopped onto the floor, I felt rather like retiring. I did, too.

Good stuff, that medicine. I complimented Olive on her physical endurance the following morning, and she replied in a hoarse whisper that a teaspoonful in a tumbler of water was fairly efficient. I didn't tell her that Arthur had given me a tablespoonful. She might not understand. Neither did I.

Sunday was one of the nicest days I have ever spent. Not only was the weather magnificently fine, but Arthur and Olive went out of their way to make us feel at home. Mmmmm-mmmm. Nothing is more homely than lying in bed reading the News of the World. For lunch, Olive served up cold chicken, pork, ham, and just about every different kind of salad vegetable obtainable (coming home, BoSh ?)

We spent the afternoon on Streatham Common, taking photo's and playing football. Well, Arthur and myself played football. We put Colin in goal, out of the way. When he played outfield he would insist upon taking the ball from us. Colin did shine later on, however. He saved a certain goal by deflecting the ball past the pile of coats with his nose, a trick he had learned from me.

We stopped the flow of blood without having to put a tourniquet round his neck. (Which my team once tried to do to me.)

From Colins point of view, one of the highlights of his visit was his collection of bus tickets. Well, when I specify bus tickets, I perhaps am not exactly accurate. In London buses, the conductor possesses a sort of drum shape appliance, and when the amount of fare is stated, he takes a deep breath, turns a handle, and rolls and rolls of paper are spewed out.

Hmmmm. After each trip, Colin stuck the strips end to end, and made quite a sizeable roll. Bit small, though. All the same, it looks

like a miniature toilet roll.

Hummmmm.

I suppose one can take austerity too far.

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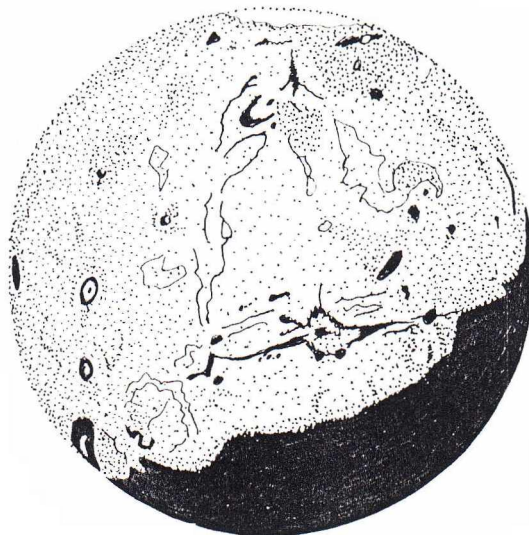
In the evening, Arthur illo'd my Goon Casebook, and we planned quite a few fannish publications that you'll be seeing in the future. Arthur then produced dozens of drawings he had done throughout the years, all extremely brilliant. We spent hours looking at them. Seems that Arthur is in great demand in spheres other than fandom... he designs superb posters for dances, etc, and also has the distinction (at least, I think it's a distinction) of illoing the Shop Stewards Gazette at his factory. In case you don't know, Arthur works at an aircraft factory just outside London, producing Hawker Hunter fighters. But back to the drawings. My only mortification was that Arthur couldn't find his nudes. However, he said he would be seeing Chuck Harris soon (how that name keeps popping up) and would forward them. Olive showed us photographs, revealing Arthur in his past glories, as a motor cyclist ('I came off quite often '), as an airman, etc. Gradually, as the evening wore on, and the children were tucked in bed, a new Arthur Thomson was revealed....a fan possessing a quaint sense of humour, an ability to tell stories and act the different parts to perfection, and a humourist with a veritable stock of fannish and unfannish anecdotes. His masterpiece of the evening was his version of the record 'Johnny and Marcia', which he had heard just previously. The record is banned by the B.B.C, and after hearing Arthur's rendering, I mopped my brow and swore to get the record myself. I purchased a new gramophone O.K, but I can't get the record anywhere. Seems such a pity to waste a gramophone. I've done the next best thing, though. I've invited Arthur and Olive to visit my house here in Belfast. If I can just get Walt to bring his new tape-recorder over to my house at the same time.....

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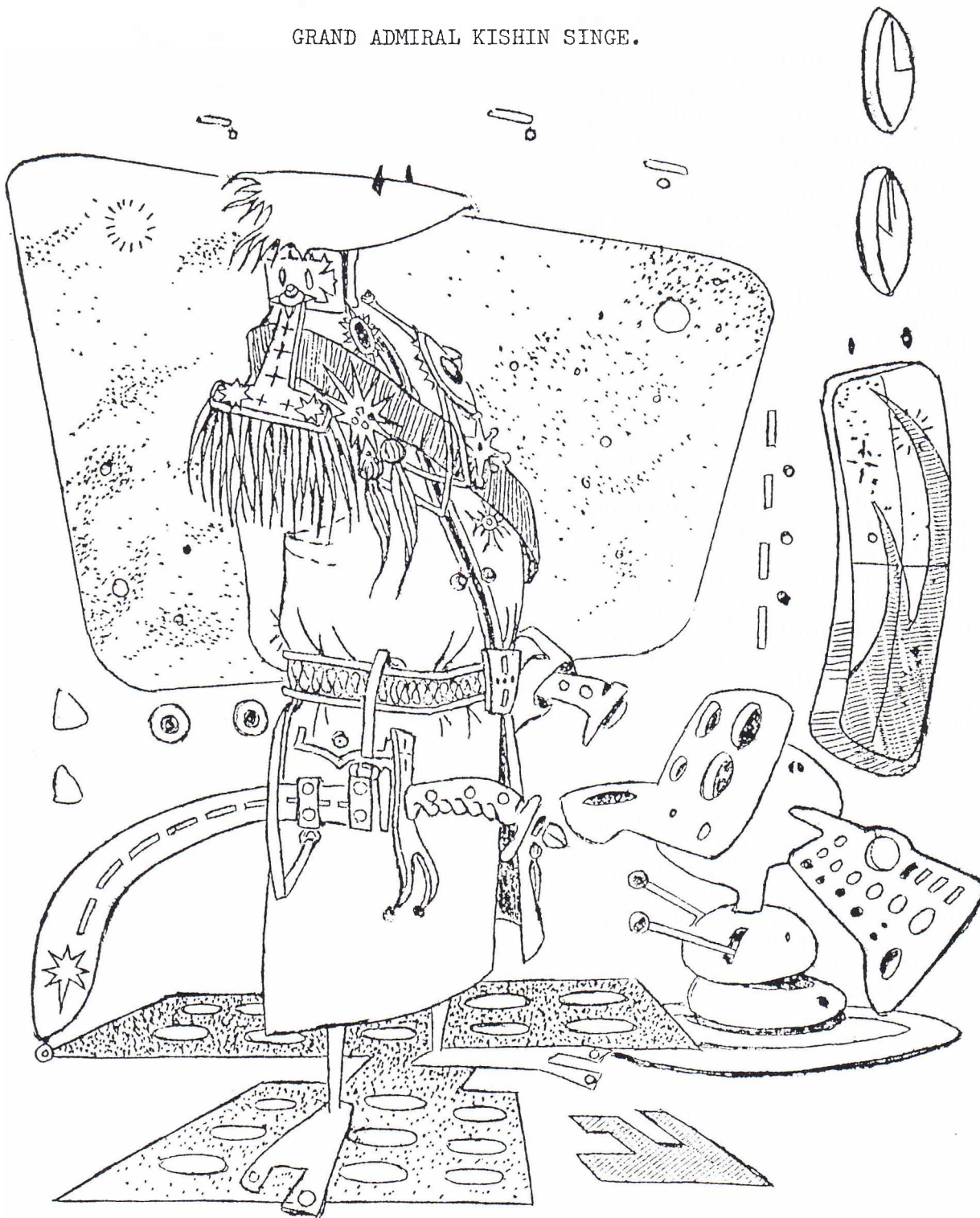
We said 'good-bye' to Olive early next morning, and, taking a last lingering look at Brockham House, Arthur took us to Paddington Station, and stayed chatting to us until our train moved out towards Birmingham. Seemed so incongruous, leaving Arthur, and Olive, and Chuck, and the Bulmers, to go back to Birmingham. Sort of unfannish.

But don't forget that this story isn't finished yet. As I mentioned above, the Thomsons are visiting Belfast within the next few months.

Boy, am I looking forward to that ?



GRAND ADMIRAL KISHIN SINGE.

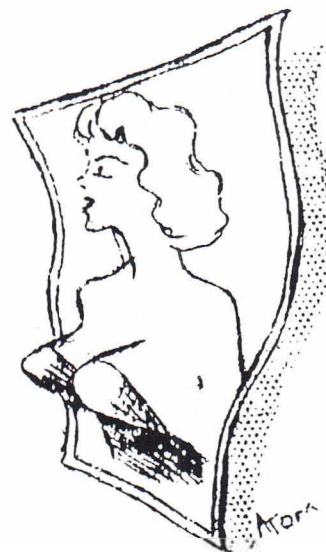


Conqueror of the Five Worlds, Lord of the Asteroids, Marshal of the
Black Legion -- on the deck of his Flagship the Star battleship
Taka Poda.



DOCTOR IN "

JOHN
BERRY



(With acknowledgments to Walt Willis
for his assistance in straightening
out a couple of obvious points.)

"Good night, all."

I waved a cheery hand at the assembled
fen, took a long lingering glance at THE Calendar out of
the corner of my eye, stowed away my reinforced bat,
raised my cap to Walt and departed.

It was twilight outside Oblique House. I
sniffed the air and beat my chest. Mmmm ! I felt great.
Dammit, that very evening I'd made a pun, broke George's
glasses, had seven cups of tea and eaten three - yes -
three of Madeleine's Coffee Kisses. Life was good.

I pumped up my front tyre and was creep-
ing down the Willis path when I heard a slight :

"Pssst !"

I paused.

"Pssst !"

I looked round cautiously.

"Pssst !"

It came from the side of 170. I spied a shadowy figure lurking there,

"Psst, you fool, pssst," it said.

I leaned my bike against the prozine kiosk and tip-toed back. I saw Bob Shaw looking very furtive. Heck !

"I....I didn't mean to take that extra cake Bob, honest," I faltered. I had thought at the time I had gotten away with it. I ought to have known that Bob wouldn't miss my crafty snaffling of the last of Madeleine's greatest culinary achievements - the Coffee Kiss.

"Tsk, tsk," he whispered, a temporary frown creasing his boyish features. "I'll forget about that just this once, but don't do it again. No. I want to see you about something else."

"The...the typer works great, Bob, really it does," I whimpered. That boy is touchy about some things.

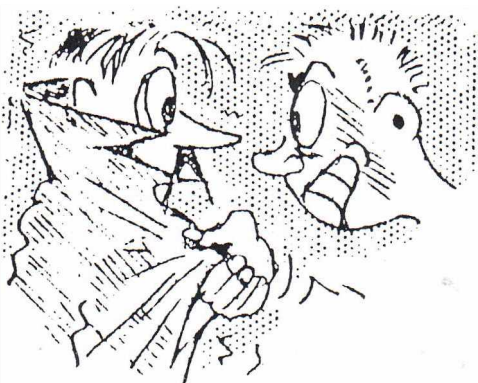
He picked up a couple of sections of crazy paving and flung them over the hedge.

"Forget the typer," he snarled. "I want to see you about a different matter altogether."



"I've told everybody I know about you having a story printed in the New York Herald Tribune," I breathed.

He ran round the garden three times, came back, grabbed me by the lapels and pushed me against the wall.



his mouth working aggressively. Then he relaxed, flicked casually at my coat with thumb and finger, and forced a disarming smile. He patted me on the shoulder.

"I've always taken you to be a sport," he began.

"Oho !" I thought.

" -- a man willing to take a bet -- "

"Crikey," I gasped.

"-- a fan to whom money is of secondary importance--"

"Ghod !" I groaned.

"-- above all, a fan who knows a good thing when he sees it --"

I screwed up my eyes.

" -- and a comrade, to boot. I want to make you a sporting proposition." He relaxed, flicked away a couple more imaginary specks of dust off my jacket, straightened my tie, and gave me three Nebulas.

"Er....." I began. I mean, he's Sadie's husband, a big name fan, a pro-author.....

"It's like this," he said in his persuasive way, "I'll give you thirty shillings if you can make Walt, Madeleine, George, Peggy and James run up and down the first flight of stairs at least fifteen times."

He paused, picked me up and repeated his proposition.

ion.

"Fifteen times each... up the stairs... Walt and all of them..." I managed to gasp. I mean.....

"Settled, then," he grinned. I felt sort of trapped.

He dragged me down the path, propped me on my bike and pushed me away.

.

You know, it's no easy task to try and get half a dozen big name fans to keep running up and down the stairs. But the effort was worth thirty shillings to me. Therefore I spent some considerable time in thinking out the problem and at last the germ of an idea spawned itself in some devilish recess of my mind. An idea, I must confess, aided and abetted by a Weird Tales plot I heard George Charters gabbling about in his delirium on the seventeenth hole at the Royal Portrush Golf Course, back in the good old days.

But it might, it just might work.

At the same time I worried quite a lot about Bob Shaw. Oh, I admit he is generous enough but he doesn't give neofen thirty shillings without some motive, however obscure. My only conclusion was that he was in the furnishing business, dabbling in stair carpet as a sideline. I waited impatiently for Sunday.

.

I played my part carefully.

I crept up the stairs, lingered outside the fan room, pulled my tie askew, ruffled my hair, arranged the ends of my



moustache in a downward trajectory, groaned horribly, opened the door and collapsed in a heap on the floor.

"It's after me," I cried in terror.

They crowded round sympathetically, Sadie running her cool fingers across my forehead. I made a couple of mental notes.

"What's after you?" asked Walt.

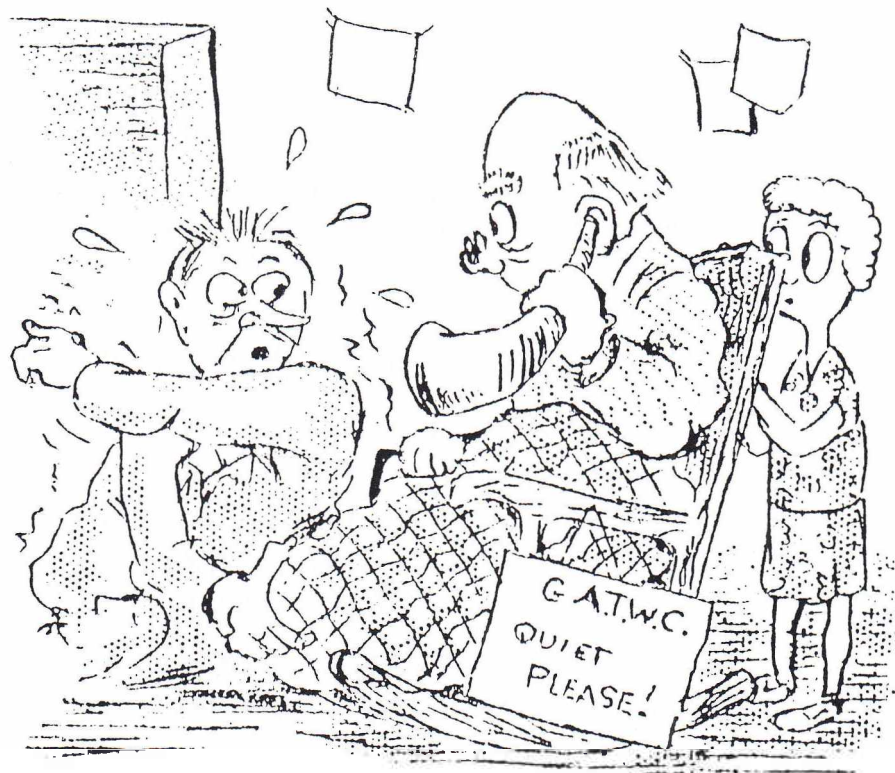
"The mutant." I cringed.

They exchanged meaning glances.

"Pray elucidate accurately the exact nature and appearance of this improbable apparition," observed George, nodding instructions to Carol to rock his chair faster, "or - in those memorable words of Max Brand - what the 'ell 'appened?"

"I..I was coming up the first flight of stairs," I faltered "and I heard heavy footsteps follow immediately behind me. I looked all round - and there was nothing there."

"Ignoring for the ungrammatical phrase 'there was nothing there' began George, "I would respectfully hazard a suggestion that this poor unfortunate neo-fan



is suffering from a surfeit of Kuttner....."

"Aw, shut yer trap, Grandpa," sneered Sadie, echoing our sentiments with her usual native charm.

"The first flight, you say?" said Bob, sweat beginning to break out on his forehead.

I nodded vigorously, catching his slight wink.

"In that case," said Bob, straining at the leash, "I suggest we investigate."

We gathered at the appropriate landing.

"Allow me to demonstrate," I suggested. I tripped down the stairs, paused on the first step and looked upwards. I saw a row of shadowed visages gazing at me in anticipation. Bob, behind them, was waving his cupped hands over his head like a punchdrunk heavyweight acknowledging the plaudits of the crowd. His grin was like a slice of water melon.

I sort of coiled myself up and ran up the stairs. "It's there again," I cried in well-feigned anguish.

They all shook their heads, except Bob. "I fancy I heard strange footsteps," he ventured.

Walt raised an authoritative hand. "I shall try," he announced. With gritted teeth he bounced up the stairs like a marionette controlled by a castanet player with St. Vitus' Dance.

I saw Bob give Sadie a hard jab in the back.

"O-oh, yes, I heard something," she stammered in a strained voice.

Madeleine looked bewildered. She ascended the stairs like a fairy on a toadstool. Lovely. I could watch her climb stairs all day. Walt pursed his lips pensively.

"Help me downstairs," pleaded George. "It's up to us hardcover merchants to expose hoaxes like this." It

took him almost ten minutes to stagger up the few stairsI like enthusiasm but I maintain that a man of his years would be better occupied patrolling the promenade at Bangor, in his bath chair. There was an embarrassing lull.

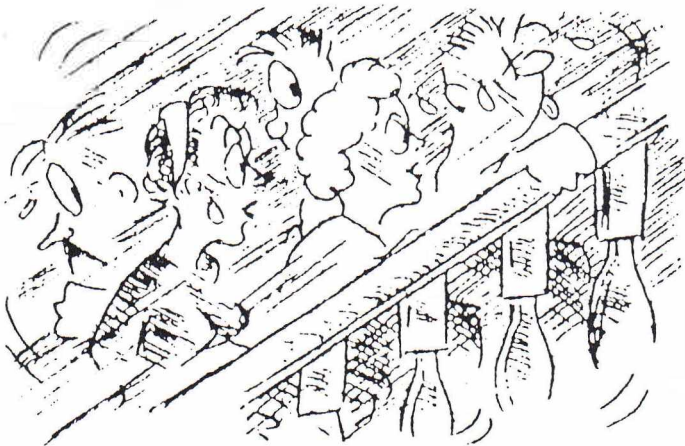
"Perhaps....if two people tried together..." I suggested.

Walt and Madeleine, with the air of martyrs, ran downstairs and up again.

"Faster," I suggested.

They repeated the performance.

"Maybe...maybe three people...?" I hinted.



With a push from Bob, Sadie joined the procession. And then Bob.... and me. It was fun. It reminded me of rush hour on the escalator at Piccadilly Circus.

"Stop!" Walt shouted suddenly.

We swayed to a halt.

"It has occurred to me that this trouble could be caused by a displaced board," he announced. He seemed somehow apprehensive, thoughtful. With a purposeful gesture he shepherded us up to the landing and pulled up the stair carpet.

I saw Bob glide away, wraith-like.

There was a hollow groan, followed by a thud. We all craned over the bannister. Walt had fainted. Clutched tightly in his hand was a large technicolour portrait of Marilyn Monroe.

"Pssst !"

Bob turned his head in my direction, grinned and sauntered over.

"You're up early in the morning," he laughed.

I clicked my fingers meaningfully. "Give," I said.

He handed over three crisp, clean ten shilling notes. "You can thank Bob Pavlat for that," he explained, still looking happy.

"Bob Pavlat ?" I cried in surprise.

"Yes. Heh !. Heh!" laughed Bob. "That was the best hoax I have ever played. I saw a big envelope for you in the fan room and inside was a large picture of Marilyn Monroe he sent for you. I borrowed it and slipped it under the stair carpet..."

"But how...?" I began.

"Yuk yuk," continued Bob, "yesterday morning I bet Walt a five pound note that before the day was out you would be encouraging all the members of Irish Fandom to run down Marilyn Monore."

Sorry, Marilyn....if I'd known...but, gee, thanks Bob.....and you, Bob.

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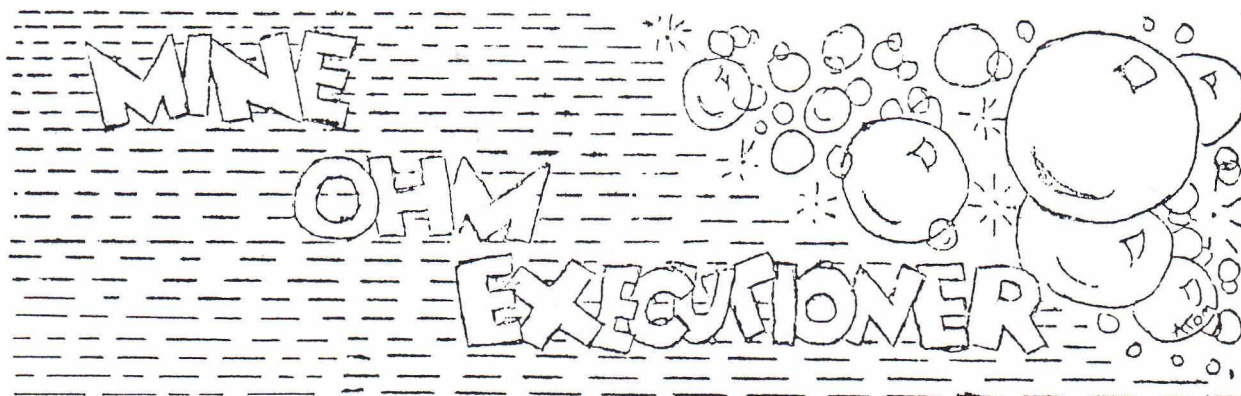




Every conceivable hazard is at this moment confronting me in this effort to describe for posterity the harrowing events of yesterday evening. It is not so much that I am draped in a blanket in front of a roaring fire. It isn't so much the fact that I have a water bottle tied over my moustache. The fact that my hair almost turned white overnight is purely coincidental... I like to think it makes me look rather more distinguished. No. Merely that for a person with such a delicate upbringing as myself, the shock of coming into contact with a depraved person such as James White on a festive occasion such as Christmas is really too much. Add to this the fact that I was supposed to be a guest at The White House...

Mind you, it also hurt me to think that the rest of them aided and abetted that debauched vile pro in his terrible experiment.

Dear reader, do not expect this to be a narrative charged with brilliant humour and pungent wit, such as I usually do. What you are about to read is a gripping epic, full of red-blooded drama, sombre and sordid conflicts and heart-rending situations. This... this is pure pathos...shocking in its elemental brutality...



We were seated round the dining room of The White House, the country seat of vile pro James White. Peggy, his charming wife, was in the dining room, clearing away the debris after a frontal attack by a ravenous Bob Shaw. George Charters, The Aged Fan, was supping his gruel happily in the corner of the room, his few remaining hairs waving errily in the humid atmosphere of the room, where logs crackled merrily. Walt Willis stood with his back to the fire, reminding me very much of a dirty-postcard purveyor in Port Said, attired as he was in a fez-shaped paper hat, brown shirt, voluminous ghoominton trousers and sandals. Handsome Belfast science fiction artist Gerard Quinn was also present, as was Sadie Shaw, and this was the complete party held on 26th December, a date branded on my brain forever.

Slowly, the lights in the room dimmed, and at the same time, the strains of a long-playing record of DRAGNET oozed into the atmosphere with subtle inflection.

"Deeeeeeeee de de deeeeeeeee".

James slunk into the centre of the room, and gazed at us meaningly. Gerard Quinn sidled up beside him. The room grew still as this malevolent pair gyrated with obvious evil intent.

"I want to try out my new secret weapon," gloated James, his arms arched downwards, long finger nails twitching claw-like.

"It's lethal," screamed Gerard, a look of rapture creasing his aesthetic visage, disturbing his black locks.

"We want a volunteer," they hissed in unison. It was uncanny the way every eye clicked in my direction.

"Try...try George," I panted.

George's mouth opened slowly, revealing his rampant tooth, magnificent in its solitary confinement. But he needn't have worried.

"No use," said Walt. "If you used George, you still wouldn't know whether the machine worked or not."

James and Gerard nodded at this astute observation by the Brain.

"John it is, then," they chorused, lifting me, dumping me on a chair facing the doorway. With fiendish grins, Peggy, James and Gerard opened the door, and slammed it behind them. I sat transfixed as a loud hum emanated from the room. Everyone else seemed so silent, so engrossed, so optimistic.

"Deeeeeeeee de de deeeeeeeee."

The door opened and James slipped in.

"Just warming up," he grinned.

"Hey, James," munched Bob, "didn't know you wore a toupee."

I looked up. Suffering Catfish. A small square of black cloth leered at me from its seat of triumph on the White Bonce.

"Care to make a last request," sneered James.

I rose a few inches from the chair in instinctive protest.

"Don't be a meanie, John," purred James, tying me to the chair-back with a length of strong half-inch Manilla hemp.

Ferret-like, James closed the door behind him. The hum increased, and slowly, the door was opened wide.

"Deeeeeeeee de de deeeeeeeee."

Sighs of celestial bliss roared behind me, as the opened door revealed James White leaning over an ironing board, on which was surmounted a vacuum cleaner overpowering me with hot air, vibrating in its enthusiasm. Peggy was vigorously churning a bucket of unknown substance, and Quinn pedalled furiously at the White Power Station. With a beckoning curl of the left forefinger, James signalled to his spouse, and she lifted the bucket, and allowed its contents to dribble into the mouth of the cleaner. A cloud of technicolour bubbles enveloped me. Millions of them, big soapy ones and little soapy ones. Each bubble caught the reflection of the malignant James White visage. Millions of James Whites were looking at me. It was horrible...a grim taste of the burning depths. I breathed in bubbles full of oxygen and breathed out bubbles full of carbon dioxide. Strings of little bubbles dribbled out of my nostrils and exploded like miniature machine guns.

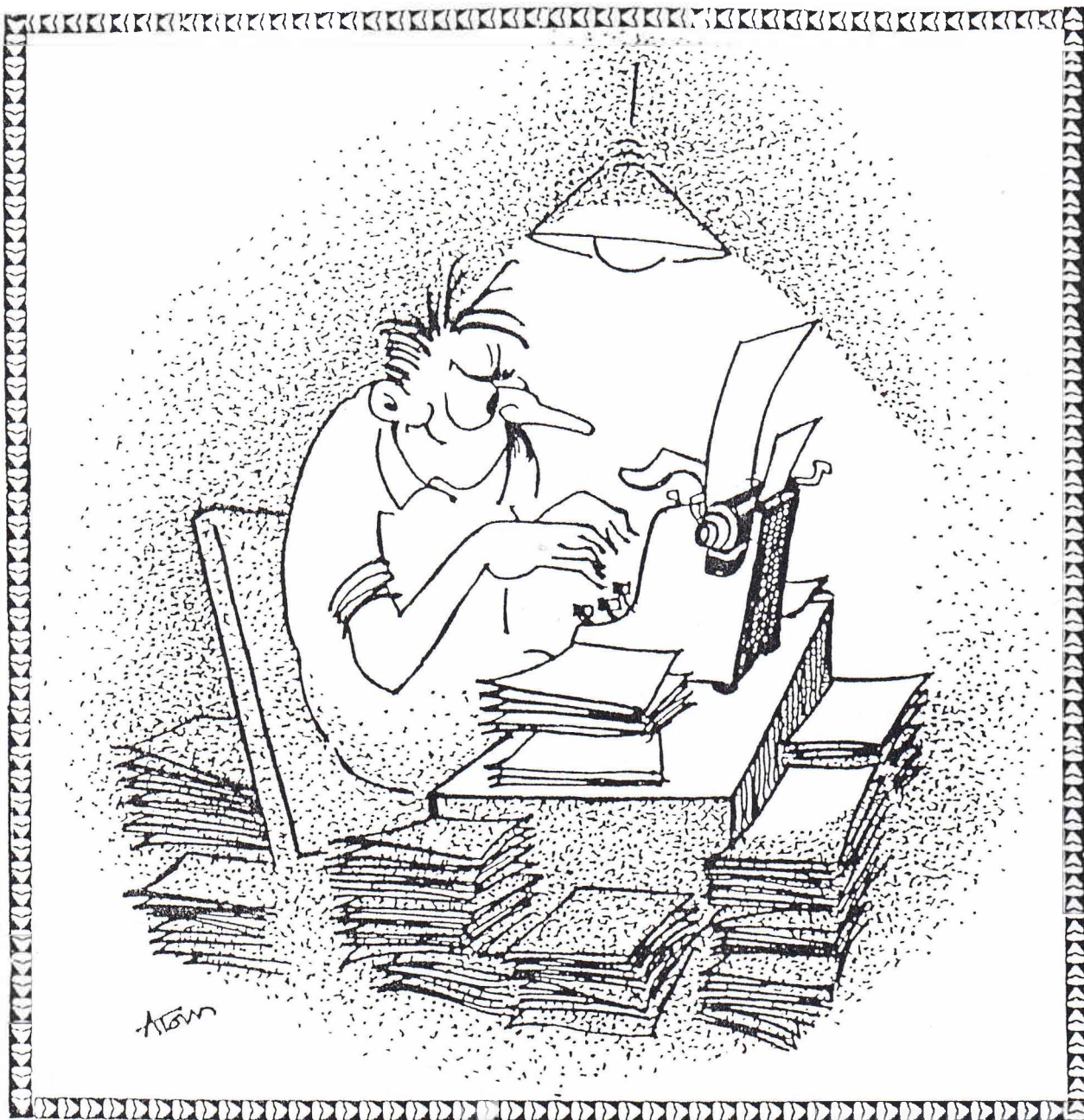
"Burst the bubbles," yelled Bob Shaw, pounding me with a cushion...and they all joined in this spontaneous bout of self-expression.

"Heh heh heh," I heard George cackle as he raced around the room in his bathchair, stabbing bubbles with his clay pipe, "Heh heh heh."

I am glad I was able to make his remaining days happy ones.

The incident cleared up, to my satisfaction, the reason why James White wears cycle clips at home, a detail I had previously attributed to vulgar ostentation.





John Berry (nick-named the Chronic Leer of Irish Fandom by James White) wishes to thank the numerous faneds who published his Irish Fandom stories for the use of the appropriate ATOM illos.

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THE ARTIST, AT WORK