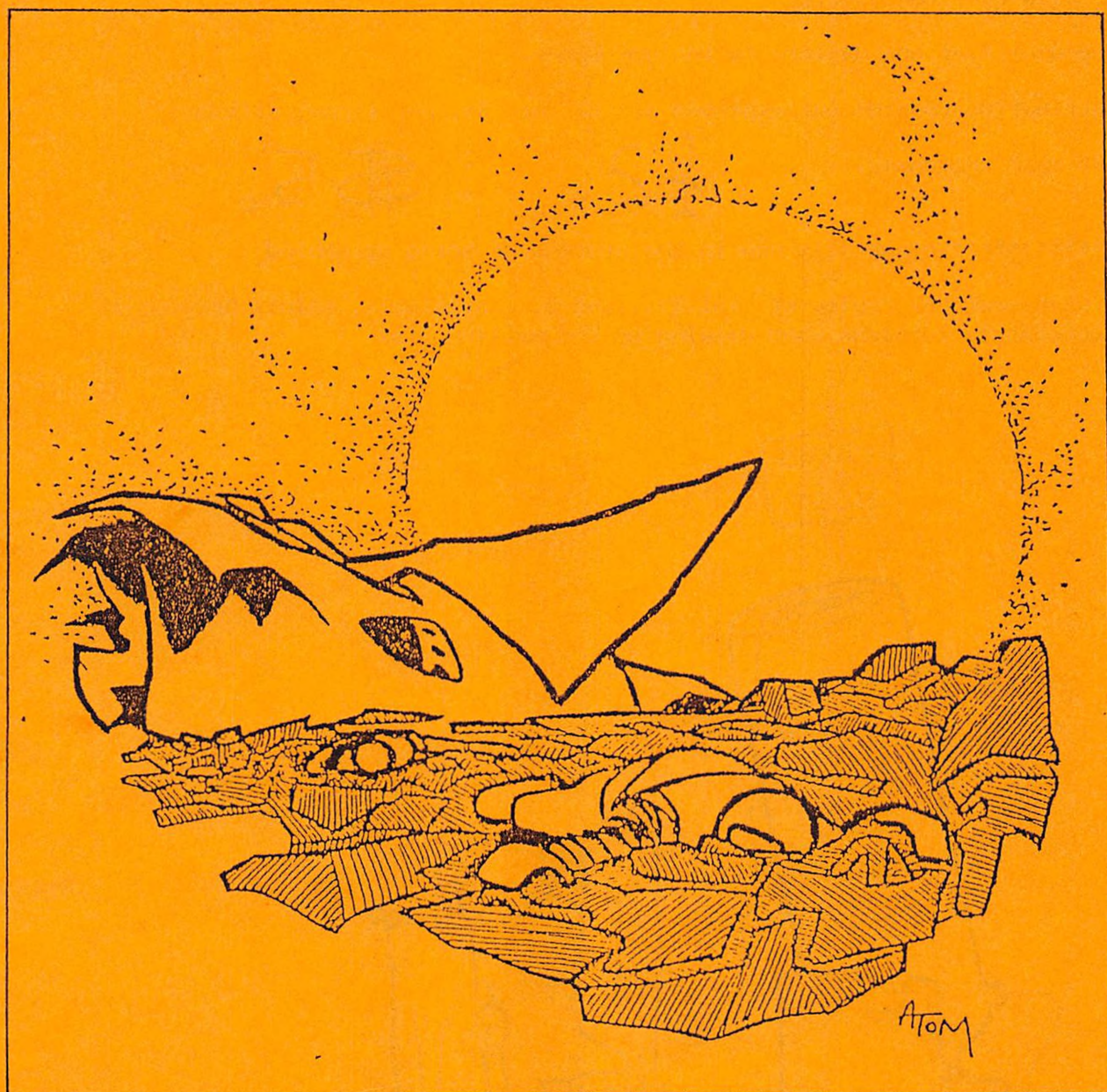


THE IF FILES



VOL.2~1999.

John Berry,
4, Chilterns,
South Hatfield,
Herts.,
AL 10 8 JU
U.K.

Beware!!!! this is another

Shoestring

Publication.

The Author.

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29 Kestrel Rd
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B63 2PH
U.K.

The Printer.

of this, THE IF FILES, volume 2 of FABLES OF IRISH FANDOM.

Which is available....overridingly....by Editorial Whim.....
but also for "the usual".

"The usual", I now declare to include money.

A Contribution towards our expenses of £2 or \$5, per issue, will be

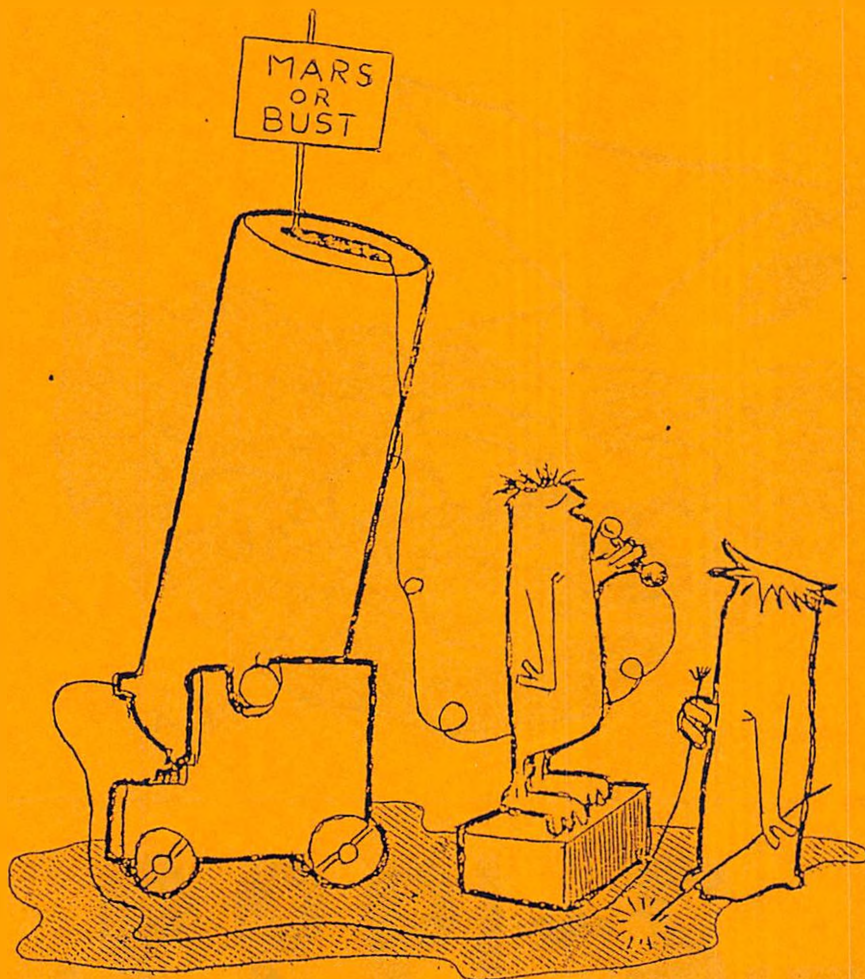
VERY MUCH welcomed.

£2.

\$5.

*****volume 3 is now in the process of being assembled.

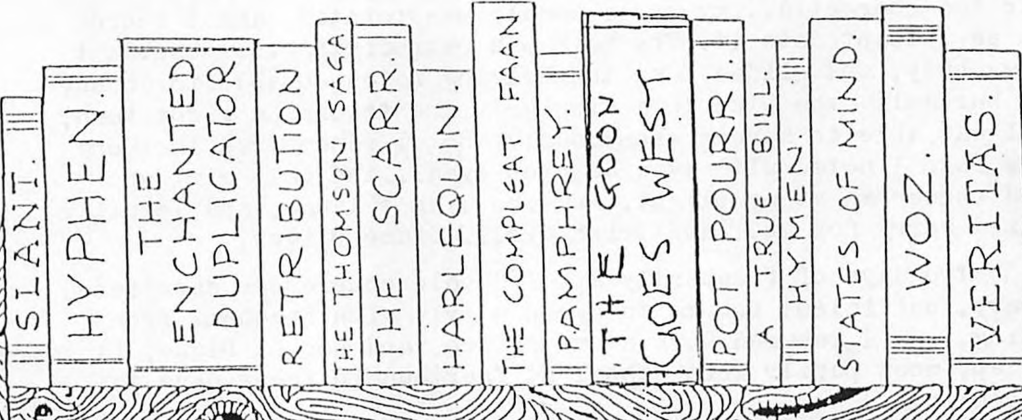
I do have some few copies of Vol.1....and 2....available, mainly because I
was moderately ruthless when drawing up the mailing list.



"He says he's quite comfortable, and yes, he wishes to go through with it".

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I have evolved a fascinating new theory . I believe that there is a sort of obscure mental affiliation between all fen. My theory is that fate has planned that the paths of all fen shall cross at one time or another, either directly or indirectly. I maintain that a single innocent act by one fan will completely alter the life of another, without either being aware of it. Here is an example so you can judge by yourself. I call it :-

LAST: RESORT.

Last week my constabulary duties took me to Bangor, County Down. Never heard of it ? Why, Bangor is a very refined seaside town (ten miles from Belfast). It is famed for the hauteur and dignity and age of its inhabitants. George Charters lives there, and just once Chuch Harris was allowed to visit it.

Well, the Diesel pulled into Bangor Station, and, wiping my feet, I stepped onto the platform. A strange sight met my eyes. At least, a strange sight for Bangor. There was a milling throng of perambulators, babies and mothers, wailing, screaming and shouting. The irate mothers waved handbags and umbrellas...the latter being used as weapons, and were being liberally flailed into the centre of the riot.

The Bangor Station Staff, hurriedly removing their top hats, ushered the indignant women and their infants away, to reveal a bedraggled human being sitting dejectedly on the platform. A black peaked cap with the letters 'P.I.B.C' surmounted in gold, was pressed firmly over the eyes of this unfortunate person. There was, however, something familiar about this apparition, the way it jerked crab-like on the platform, as if vainly trying to protect itself, albeit unsuccessfully. I had seen something similar whilst playing ghoddminton. I began to ponder...no...NO, it couldn't be. But it was. I rushed forward and pulled off the peaked cap. Ghod, I thought. If only Willis could see this. There, prostrate, lay George Charters. THE GEORGE CHARTERS. I dragged him to his feet and helped him to sit on a platform seat.

"I say, old chap," I remarked, this is rather an embarrassing situation for a hard-cover merchant to be in."

He reached up, and with a delightful 'plop' abstracted the end of a baby's feeding bottle from his left ear-hole, meanwhile, with a red-spotted hankie, dabbing disgustedly on his trouser leg, he removed mute evidence of a toddler's indiscretion.

"Please don't tell Bob Shaw," he pleaded. I soothed him.

"Tell me, George," I asked, "what do the initials P.I.B.C. stand for ?"

He groaned in anguish, looking furtively around himself. He whispered "Perambulator Inspector Bangor Corporation."

"Ghod, George," I replied. "How can a man of your literary status satisfy yourself with such an unfannish occupation?"

"I assure you, Berry," he grated. "My reasons are neither mercenary nor paternal."

"How did the whole thing start?" I asked him. "I admit Bangor is on a high social plane, but why have a pram inspector?"

"It's a long story," he began. "Last summer, a scruffy family had the audacity to bring into Bangor a pram such a horrible condition that the local Alderman called an Emergency Meeting and my appointment is the result. My ambition is to meet the same family this year..." he continued his story but didn't notice the ghastly change in my complexion as my mind raced back a year previously...

I'll always remember August 1954...two significant things happened to me. The first was the day I met Walt Willis and became a spoke in the Wheels of IF. The second was caused by a chance remark by Walt. He told me that an aged but intellectual fan lived in Bangor. I rushed back and told my wife about fandom and Bangor.

"I always knew that one day you would mingle with the aristocracy...fancy knowing someone in Bangor."

As an afterthought, she added..."It's a lovely sunny day...let's take the children to Bangor."

The one difficulty was that we didn't possess a conveyance for our five-month-old daughter Kathleen. We explained our plight to our next door neighbour, who immediately offered the use of her collapsible pram.

"It's very simple to fold," she explained. "My husband will demonstrate."

We followed her into her rear garden.

"Jasper," she called. "Come here and show John how you fold the pram."

I couldn't quite hear his mumbled reply, but he came out of the house dragging the pram behind him. Placing it carefully in the centre of the lawn he placed his hand on my shoulder.

"I want you to enjoy yourself this afternoon," he said kindly. "Take my advice, leave the baby here and my wife will look after it."

"No" Diane shouted. "I want my baby to get the benefit of the invigorating Bangor climate."

Jasper turned to me, opening and closing his hands in a helpless gesture. He turned his attention to the pram, metally sparred with it, paced round it two or three times, then suddenly leapt at it, so as to catch it unawares. There was a blur of activity, and the pram lay neatly folded at my feet.

"It's pure technique," explained Jasper. "The salesman who sold it to me said a child could master it."

So saying, he walked around the folded pram, leapt once more, and in a few seconds, behold, there was the pram in its natural shape.

I helped him out of it.

"Slipped up there somewhere," he admitted.

My wife pushed the pram round to our house, placed Kathleen in it,

and we walked to the trolley 'bus stop. A trolley 'bus appeared in the distance. My wife carefully removed the infant and pointed to the pram.

"Fold it up," she explained, "I'll take the children onto the 'bus, "whilst you stow in under the stairs."

The next three-quarters of an hour later (and four trolley 'buses) are imprinted indelibly on my mind. It wasn't so much losing three finger nails, and I didn't mind the crowd...I mean, they were helpful, and, if I may say so, in quite good humour. No, the annoying thing was the fact that, by some strange mechanical quirk that contradicted all known physical laws, the legs of my trousers were irrevocably enmeshed in a complicated assemblage of metal cross-pieces with which the pram was constructed. This in itself was not so bad - what made the situation ridiculous was that one of the pram wheels was hooked onto a lamp bracket. A well-meaning member of the crowd, whom I took to be a skilled mechanic, touched a hidden lever on the pram, and it folded beautifully. He re-mounted the vagrant wheel...and my trousers were also released.

We eventually got to Bangor, where I had to pay a mechanic to re-assemble the pram. The fact that he inadvertantly knocked off the unhappy wheel and couldn't get it back on again resulted in a tri-pram, but the baby liked the new rocking movement it caused, and my little son played with the now-spare wheel. The one minor detail which my wife detested was having to push the pram in the roadway against the kerb to keep it on course.

However much we put off the evil moment, we knew that eventually we would have to start back to Belfast. I thought of leaving the pram on a deserted stretch of beach, or in a ditch, but such sensible ideas were out of the question. The unenviable situation was that I perforce had to fold it up again to get it on the train. This ruling was made by irate station porters who said it was 'in the rules'. that prams, in the 'open' position, were not allowed on trains because of blocking which would ensue in the corridors.

Do you believe in the theory of 'Mind over Matter'?

No, I'm serious. If any of you are presently working on a thesis about this subject, you may certainly quote the following authenticated example. A melee had now started on the platform, including the porters, and pro and anti pramites, folding and unfolding thereof. In a pause during the confusion, everyone looked at the pram, and I certainly shook my fists aggressively at it...and suddenly, it literally folded, on its own volition, before my very eyes. Trouble was, it folded into five separate pieces.

Jasper was delighted to receive a five pound note in lieu of dumped remains (dumped on the platform), and I am rather pleased at the appearance of a new word in the Oxford Pocket Dictionary, attributed to myself - MONOPRAM.

"...and the Law of Averages states that they are bound to return to Bangor," said George.

"Er...anything unusual about the brute who would s-stoop to bring hid own f-flesh and b-blood in such a c-contraption ?" I stammered.

"Strange you should say that," he frowned. "The Stationmaster said that the fiend had a large oustache and a funny accent." His frown increased. "You have a large moustache and a funny accent."



"George," I said.
 "Really, George. Do you honestly think that a fan could be guilty of such an atrocious crime ? Me especially, who has always had such a high regard for the sanctity of Bangor."

"I see what you mean," he said apologetically. "Of course, knowing you, it's impossible."

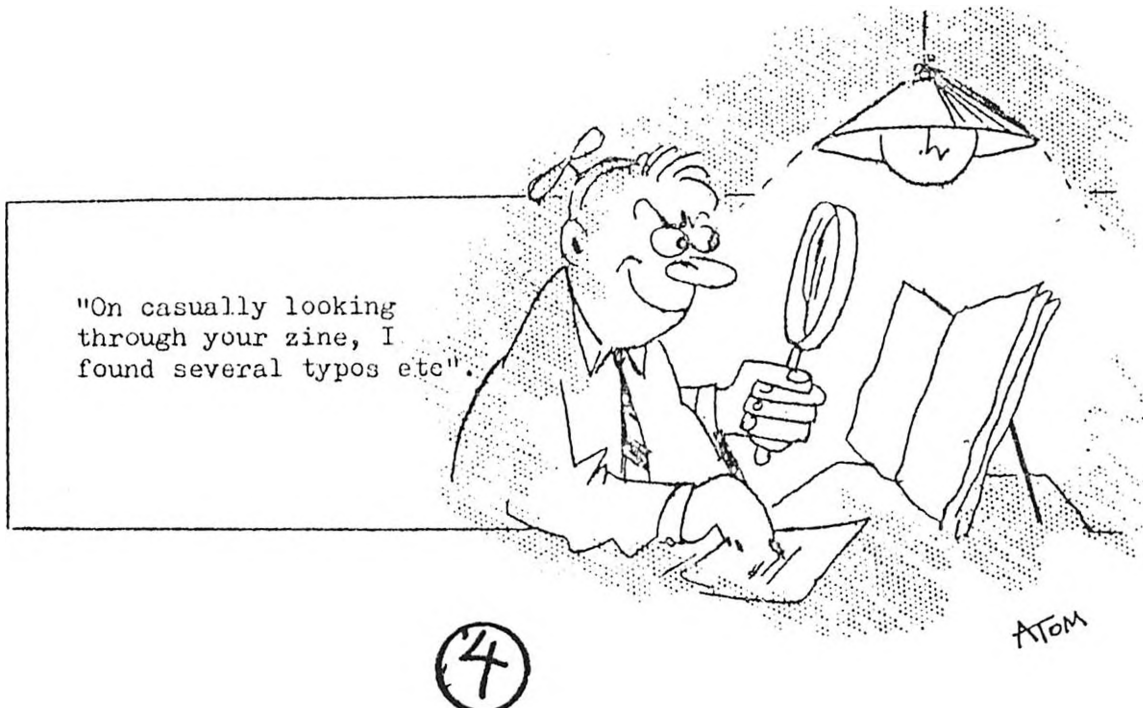
A klaxon in the distance denoted the approach of another trainload of excursionists.

George staggered to his feet, and flicked away a few crumbs adhering to his uniform. He placed the peak cap on his head regimentally.

"When I awoke this morning," he confided, " something told me that the monster would come back to Bangor today. He may even be on this oncoming train. Ghod help him if he is."

George hobbled away, waving his hand-towel meaningly.

Convinced ?



BLESH THIS HOUSE

I have always been impressed by the atmosphere at 170, Upper Newtownards Road, Belfast. I do not mean the twice-weekly fanac sessions. I am referring to the Willis Family itself. Walt, for instance, a Big Name Fan, permanently attired in ink-stained trousers, telling everyone about his visit to America. Madeleine, the fannish Perfect Wife, eager to fight for her husband's prestige, and a veritable cyclone when it comes to the Ghoodminton Court. Carol, a pretty girl seven years old, already familiar with such scientific words as 'blast-off' - 'extra-terrestrial' - 'positron pistol' and 'Chuch Harris.'

I decided to bring my household up to the same fannish standard. The first thing I did (to create a general impression of fannish good faith) was to invite the stalwarts of Irish Fandom to my house, MON DEBRIS. The evening went splendidly. My wife Diane was delighted. She said that Walt, Madeleine, BoSh, James and Peggy White and George were all very nice people...if they were fans, there must be something in it.

So far so good.

My next step was to get Diane to read HYPHEN. To try and whip up a mite of enthusiasm I told her that Walt had printed an article of mine in it. She said :- "Just goes to show you can't go by appearance...I though Walt looked very intelligent."

She was serious, too.

Well, eventually I persuaded her to read HYPHEN after she persuaded me to buy her a couple of pairs of nylon stockings. I like to think that I got the best of the deal, figuring that I would have to buy her the nylons, anyway.

Progress was slow but steady.

My next attempt at indoctrination was rather subtle, I thought. I decided to try and introduce fannish jargon into our conversation. I arrived home from the office one evening, smiling cheerfully, and as I crossed the threshold, I asked:- "Any egoboo ?".

"No" she answered. "You'll have fish and chips like the rest of us."

I resorted to psychology. I gave the matter a great deal of thought, and decided to interest my small son in space ships, rockets and flying saucers. I explained how they worked, what they were for, and what they looked like. My theory was that whilst I was at the office, he would talk to his mother about them, and so make her used to hearing the expressions, and gradually come to accept them.

The following night I sat down to my evening meal, and as Diane poured tea; she seemed rather pleased.

"Colin has been talking about interplanetary flight all day, haven't you?" she said, turning to him.

I chuckled to myself. Success at last. I turned to him to pat his arm. Something hit me between the eyes. I saw brilliantly coloured lights and garish flashes of stars. Slowly, removing buttered crumpets from my lap, I managed to attain a sitting position on the floor. Colin was screaming.

"Daddy has broken my flying saucer with his head," he screeched.

My wife held up the remains of one of our best china set saucers. She shook her head slowly. I felt rather pessimistic. I had tried so hard. (Excuse me a sec...the bandage has just slipped over my eyes, and I cannot see to type properly...ah...that's better.)

So I went up to 170 again, to see where I had gone wrong. Yes, there was that delightful atmosphere again. I looked at Madeleine, as, with typical feminine disdain, she tried to break Bob's fingers with her ghoddminton bat - then suddenly I clicked my fingers. Of course, ghoddminton, that was the secret. That was where I had made my mistake.

I ran down the stairs of 170, mounted my bike, raced to MON DEBRIS, screeched to a halt and rushed into the house. With perspiration flying off me I yelled simply..."GHOODMINTON."

My in-laws were in the house. At first I hadn't seen them because I was blinded with enthusiasm. My father-in-law is a big Irishman. He is also a sportsman.

"Ghoodminton?" he asked incredulously.

"Yes," I panted.

My brother-in-law Terry was also present. He is big and broad and young and strong.

"Ghoodminton?" he asked with eyebrows raised.

"Y-yes," I faltered.

"Where is it running?" asked father-in-law. "Ascot or Aintree?"

"It isn't a horse," I explained. "It's a game. Walt Willis invented it."

"A game," they screamed in unison. "How do you play it?"

I explained the basic rule, really, all you had to do was to knock a shuttlecock with your bat into your opponent's half of the court, so that he couldn't return it.

They looked round my lounge pensively. Suddenly they moved as one. The china cabinet, mirror, pictures and other miscellaneous and breakable articles were dumped under the table, which they had placed in the middle of the room. In no time at all, the carpets and mats were rolled up, and placed against the walls. It was nice to see such consideration. Yet, somehow, I sensed impending doom. They asked for the ghoddminton bats and a shuttlecock, pointing out that they had prepared the court.

I explained that those items were the monopoly of Oblique House.

"We must improvise," they asserted.

I was powerless to stop them. As a bat, father-in-law chose a thick encyclopedia, which looked very small in his huge fist.

Brother-in-law, choosing to ignore his father's intellectual bent, selected an oak firescreen. Their eyes flashed round the room, looking for something to use as a shuttlecock. I don't know why they used a marble ashtray - they don't smoke.

Need I go on ?

Eventually the insurance company paid up when they finally accepted my excuse that dry rot had forced the floorboards to collapse. We wanted a new dining room suite, anyway.

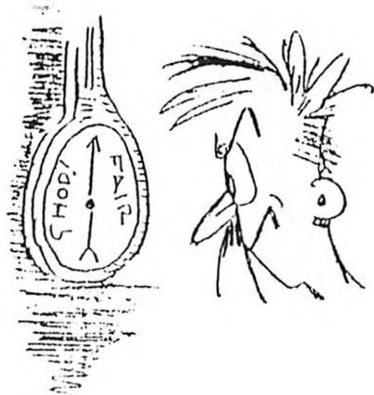
But, it is so frustrating, I still cannot get Diane interested in fandom...



Immediately upon returning home from the Irish Fandom's Annual Excursion to Portrush, County Antrim, in 1956, I was gripped by an urgent desire to write everything down, lest I forget anything important. I scribbled rough notes until the early hours of the morning and presumed I had covered everything. A few weeks later, therefore, I was surprised to hear that George Charters had also written about the trip, in the form of a letter to Chuch Harris. Chuch kindly gave me the letter to read, and after doing so, I discovered several incidents mentioned that I had forgotten. But more than this. The report was so well done, that I thought it a great pity that the letter couldn't get a wider circulation. So with Chuch's permission, and coin of the realm in my palm from George, I have incorporated parts of his letter in my ICE CREAM SUNDAY. Mostly, the extracts cover conversations, although I would like particularly to draw your attention to George's description of Peggy White's ice cream, from which you will gather the title of this factual epic originated...



I awoke early on Sunday morning, the 10th day of June 1956. I sensed that something important was due to happen on that day, but in my semi-somnolent condition, I couldn't comprehend exactly what. I ripped aside the curtains and glanced outside. I should have known immediately. A mist obscured all visibility over fifteen yards, and rain was lashing down like stair rods. My front garden was flooded, and the barometer had changed from VERY FINE to ABSOLUTELY SHOCKING. Of course, it was obvious. This was the day Walt Willis had chosen to lead us on IF's Annual Excursion to Portrush... that fabulous seaside resort on the northern Irish coast.



However, I had great faith in Willis, so I goaded my protesting wife into making a few cress sandwiches, and, donning my waterproof cycling gear, ventured into the protesting elements. A howling tempest-like gale blew the mist away, revealing dark, sombre clouds, scurrying overhead. (I borrowed that sentence from Wuthering Heights.)

Splashing my way to the railway, I felt really dejected. James White, fresh from his triumphant honeymoon, had promised to arrange the maximum

amount of sunlight for this venture. Was it possible, I faltered, was it possible that James had lost his power to control the sun ? He used to do it for Bea MaHaffey.

And then, as I approached to within fifty yards of the railway station, the sun burst through. Honest, folks. I saw James on the pavement, mopping his brow.

"You're leaving things a bit late, James," I commented.

"Forgot," he grinned weakly.

"Everyone here ?" I asked.

"All except Bob and Sadie," he explained. "Sadie had four teeth extracted last week, and is conspicuous by her abcess. That pun, by the way; was by arrangement with Walt. In any case, you couldn't expect 'em to travel 4,000 miles just for our 1956 trip."

A point, I suppose.

I joined the queue at the booking office, purchased my ticket, and crossed to the platform.

Walt, working on the principle that time is money, had erected his collapsible canvas kiosk near the Ladies Toilet, and was flogging prozines to the awed travellers. James was carrying out taxi-ing trials with his model aeroplane on platform four, and George was hobbling across the platform hotly pursued by three young girls, quavering over his shoulder..."Sadie booked me first."

It was good to see that my friends were taking things quite normally.

I walked over to where Madeleine and Peggy were marshalling Carol and her young pal Jennifer towards the train.

"We'd better hurry," I said, " or we won't be able to sit together."

Madeleine lay a restraining hand on my arm. She looked at me proudly.

"Walter has booked a compartment for us all," she smiled. Such touching faith.

I wandered off to buy a newspaper, I wanted to see the latest sports news. (The result of a big vice scandal.)

In the nick of time I ran along the length of the train, looking vainly for our private compartment. I suddenly saw smiling faces pressed against a window, over which was a notice stating :-

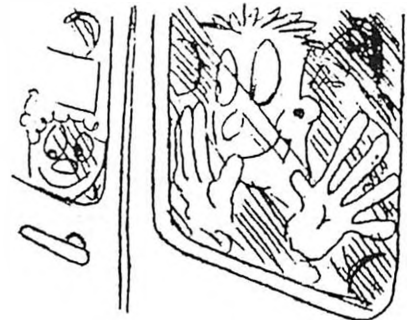
THE WILLIS PARTY ?

I reached for the door handle, when a porter suddenly barred my way, a look of bewilderment on his face.

"You can't go in there," he whispered hoarsely, looking fearfully over his shoulder.

"But I am one of them," I insisted.

He backed away, the look of bewilderment being replaced by one of extreme panic. He looked like a man who had lost his last vestige of faith in human nature.



After a minor scuffle, we settled in the carriage. James and Peggy, with typical post-honeymoon realisation, wanted to sit together... quite understandably. A sort of romantic aura emanated from them, because after a few moments, Walt dragged George off Madeleine's lap, and took her into a corner of his own. A feeling of nostalgia crept over me. I saw James glance out of the window. I did likewise. We were travelling alongside Belfast Lough, and all I could see were layers of grey slimy mud, with stones dotted here and there, the sea a vague shadow in the distance.

"Look at them non-existent billows," sighed George.

"Oh yes," replied James, "The Cruel Mud."

I listened sympathetically whilst George tried a little applied psychology on the two girls.

"There are some sheepses," he said.

"You mean sheep," Carol chided, "the word has the same form in the plural as in the singular."

"Oh yes," replied George. He likes to agree with children's opinions. "And all dressed up in their best sheepskin coats."

"And what is that?" asked Jennifer.

"That is a cow," grinned George, "probably from the Isle of Wight."

"Don't be silly," interrupted Carol, "down there they spell it C-o-w-e-s. But why is it lying down?"

"Probably it slipped," began George.

"I know, I know," said Carol, "you are going to make a pun about a cowslip."

"No I wasn't," lied George.

A pause whilst George marshalled his reserves.

"What do sheep say to each other?" asked Jennifer.

"Maaa," said George, carefully sticking to the truth.

"And do the cows say maaa too?" the two girls chorused together.

"No," answered George. "A cow is of the lowin kine."

I could see that this ploy inflated George's ego slightly, as he calculated the girls had never heard the song.

"Where are we now?" asked Carol, tactfully changing the subject.

"Probably in Alsace" said George.

"How do you know?" asked Carol.

"There's an alsatian," said George disarmingly, pointing out of the carriage window.

"You know," said Carol, unconsciously quoting James, "the worst is that your jokes are never funny."

She and Jennifer went out to play in the corridor. This gave us adults the chance to indulge in a serious and constructive conversation, such as is only possible when minors are absent. I took notes :-

Madeleine. "We'll play ghoominton in Portrush."

James. "If we do, I'm making a new rule...Scotland is out."

Me. "Yes."

George. "How about water ghoominton?"

Walt. "Imagine having an octopus for a partner...you'd be squids in."

Me. "Yes."

Madeleine. "We could have flouders for bats, and jellyfish for shuttlecocks."

Walt. "Then we could shout 'plaice.'"

Me. "Oh, yes, yes."

(Hey, folks, notice the skilful way I guided the conversation along.)

At this juncture occurred one of those serious parental blunders that the pschiatrists warn us about. Carol and Jennifer returned from their tour. Carol read aloud a notice painted over the garage door:-

PLEASE DO NOT PUT YOUR HEAD OUT OF THE WINDOW
WHILST THE TRAIN IS IN MOTION.

A childish gleam crossed Madeleine's face.



"Heh heh heh," she giggled. Gripping the leather strap, she pulled the window down.

"Heh heh heh."

She pushed her head outside, her blonde hair blowing over the creamy complexioned face.

Have you ever noticed how suddenly those long tunnels arrive? I know that sometimes the driver blows a whistle, but our driver forgot. I estimate we were in the tunnel for quite a few moments, before daylight once more illuminated the scene.

Madeleine sat on the floor, her black hair hanging fringe-like over her ebony features. She held a little speck of coal in her hands.

"That notice says..." began Carol.

Walt raised a finger to his lips.

"You fuel," he shouted to Madeleine.

"I don't wish to know that," she replied.

"Where did you get the coal from?" asked George.

"It was in my eye," she wailed. "I can't see."

This was the perfect setting for my best pun, which I had purchased from Bob Shaw, ages ago, for three shillings and four pence.

"Let's play Blind Man's Puffer," I screamed in ecstasy.

They didn't let me out until we reached Portrush. I didn't mind the cramped conditions so much, but I found the continuous cold updraught of air most disconcerting.

Walt heaved his bulging rucksack on his back, inspected us, and so began the trek along the sand from Portrush to a geological location known somewhat aptly as The White Rocks, about two and a half miles away. We trudged along a few feet where the sea lapped lazily on the shore. The sky was deep blue, clear of clouds, and the sun gave James its wholehearted co-operation.

A jet fighter roared overhead. It was a de Havilland Vampire. I know. Aircraft recognition used to be my hobby until I met Walt.

Me (with a knowledgeable smirk) :- "That's a Vampire."

George. "Is that the place where the sun never sets?"

Walt. "Yes. Many a true word is spoken in jets."

Every time I open my mouth I put my foot in it...as you'll see later.

Keeping my eyes open for flotsam...or jetsam, I forget which, I picked up a bottle that had been washed ashore.

James roared behind me :-

"I hope you marked it 'Not Known At This Address' ".

Ooooooh.

Walt, with head held proudly erect, continued to lead the procession. James and Peggy walked hand in hand, whispering sweet nothings to each other. The two girls scampered too and fro, making bubbles with those soapy contraptions obtainable from Woolworths.

I was searching large areas of sand on the lookout for a suitable chunk of wood to use as a cricket bat. But George. Giving him due allowance for his years, he was in a pathetic condition...and we had only just started. He shuffled along, ankle deep in sand, an unwanted raincoat flung cloak-like over his shoulders, head hanging down. He reminded me of a painting I saw once, entitled 'The Retreat From Moscow'. (George was out of steppe...all mine.)

Eventually we reached White Rocks, and prepared our base camp. We decided to have lunch. With newly-acquired assurance, we each opened our respective parcels of food, and stacked cakes and sandwiches in front of us. Here was no grabbing or hoarding of food, but, a rare thing for Irish Fandom, a leisurely and I might even say genteel meal. All the same, we missed Bob Shaw.

George produced a flask of tea, which Walt eyed shrewdly. (if you are particularly susceptible to Lousy Willis-Type Puns, skip a few lines.)

George produced a flask of tea, which Walt eyed shrewdly. (if you are particularly susceptible to Lousy Willis-Type Puns, skip a few lines.)

George:- "A good brew."

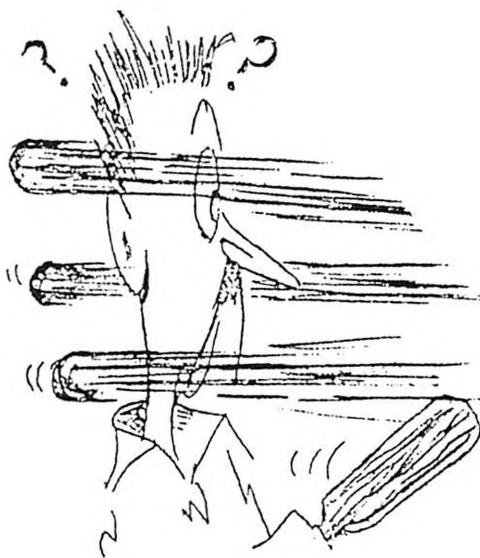
Walt:- "So I see. Tell me, did you make it at home, or get it from a far cafe?"

The meal ended in silence.

James and Peggy wandered away..."to pick some flowers."...they said. Carol and Jennifer joined them.

We played cricket. The bat, a length of timber, the result of my scrutiny...the ball, a motheaten tennis ball donated by Walt.

Madeleine was far too good for us. She revealed once again, as if in final confirmation, that she possesses undoubted strength and athletic ability. Her bowling prowess was uncanny, her batsmanship superb.



Admittedly she had the slight advantage of bowling from the sun into our tortured eyeballs. The fact that the wicket was a cliff and she flung the ball at distances from the batsman varying from between five and seven feet (instead of the regulation 66ft) does not detract anything from a splendid performance.

As for her batting, well, one must admire her tactical appreciation of the situation. The way she insisted upon changing the wicket from the cliff to a sliver of matchwood was very cunning. It was considerate of her to suggest that we bowl blindfold in order to rest our eyes. Typical of

her unselfish nature...

Back from the ramble, complete with bunches of flowers and looks of frustration, came James and Peggy. James announced his intention of wanting to try out his model motor boat, presented to him by a grateful bride.

We trekked to the nearest rock pool, leaving George lying prostrate over our valuables.

One disconcerting feature was that Carol and Jennifer seemed to find great amusement in running to different groups of reposing holiday-makers en route, loudly announcing that :-

"...science fiction author James White is going to launch his motor boat."

This had rather an unsettling effect. People sort of followed us, the name James White obviously having a hypnotic effect. They seemed to reason that a man of such apparent wealth would not let them down. You know how rumours spread. We fought our way through a throng of excited people, before finally arriving at a small pool, the dimensions of which were six feet square and seven inches deep !

Rather reluctantly, James rolled up his trouser legs, and, with big toes rampant, stepped into the pool. There was a sigh from the crowd. In the subdued silence that followed, James produced his treasured craft, about three inches long. He wound it up, placed it tenderly in the water, and watched it whirr round in little circles.

The crowd was not long in showing its disappointment, although I was later reassured to learn that James had intended going for a swim, anyway.

Back at base camp, we rolled George aside and sorted ourselves out.

Walt, being an avid anti-litter fiend, as we who have been at 170 can testify, insisted upon heaping all the refuse together in a niche in a rock, and setting fire to it.

"We must help to preserve the inherent beauty of our countryside," he averred.

The fact that in no time the nearby undergrowth was in flames, was incidental.

"It's the principle," argued Walt, leading us rapidly away from the raging inferno.

He led us away from the beach.

"A short cut across the golf links," he grinned knowingly, looking confidently at his compass.

Listen. I agree that the shortest distance between two points is a straight line. But that cannot always be taken too literally.

I also agree that the Royal Portrush Golf Course is one of the world's best. So did the rest of the professionals playing that afternoon.

The 17th Hole is on a slight rise, immediately above an extensive sand bunker. Willis led us unerringly up the vertical face of the bunker, and we popped up like gophers on the green, in time to see the four pro's preparing for their final strokes in what



was obviously a needle match.

Walt, however, was oblivious to this. With head bent, he led us diagonally across the green. It must have seemed strange to the on-lookers. It wasn't so much the fact that George was on his hands and knees. I think what shook them most was the way we followed Walt like soldier ants. One golfing enthusiast was very shaken, I recall. He was

lying on the ground, studying the contours of the grass ready for his final shot. We stepped over him in turn, completely ignoring his presence. George, sad to say, was unable to find the strength to negotiate this final obstacle, and he lay twitching across the surprised sportsman. One of the players, more alert than the rest, recognised the fact that George was near to exhaustion. He picked George up, and placed him on one of those two-wheeled affairs they use for carrying their golf clubs.

"Caddy me away," groaned George, game to the last.

On reflection, I think it was the little things which annoyed the golfers, such as Carol and Jennifer kicking the balls back into the bunker !

I expect Walt's compass was torn between two poles. We certainly covered a devious route. We had another minor contact with another four golfers, not, I am glad to say, on the same green.

George was our main worry. He had made a gallant effort to reach Portrush. I was relegated by Walt to assist George at the rear of the procession, and did so by chatting amiably about my experiences in the army. (THE HORSED VASSAL...plug) Trying to be sociable, I asked George a question or two about the South African Campaign, and had he been at the Relief of Ladysmith ? "I missed all the fun," he croaked, "I was second in the queue." He didn't make any other reply. I looked round, and to my horror, saw him lying on the ground about thirty yards behind.

I called the others back, and we discussed the next move. The girls demonstrated their developing fannish minds by scattering handfuls of dandelions over the body.

"Don't be disrespectful to the Remains," admonished Madeleine, maternal as ever.

I had to hand it to Walt. He sat down beside George, and whispered in his ear...all about hard covers...cups of tea...HYPHEN ...ice cream...ghoodminton...steak and chips...rocking chairs...

And thus we returned to Portrush. We invaded an hotel, which up to then, prided itself on its centry old custom of, as it stated outside:-

WE CATER FOR THE ELITE

...a notice which I saw being removed as we departed.

No doubt you have all been wondering what is the significance of the title of this superb piece of factual reporting ICE CREAM SUNDAY ?

Please permit me to explain.

After our evening meal, there was half an hour to spare before our train was due to leave.

James, in one of his generous moods, announced his intention of:-

"...buying ice cream for the girls."

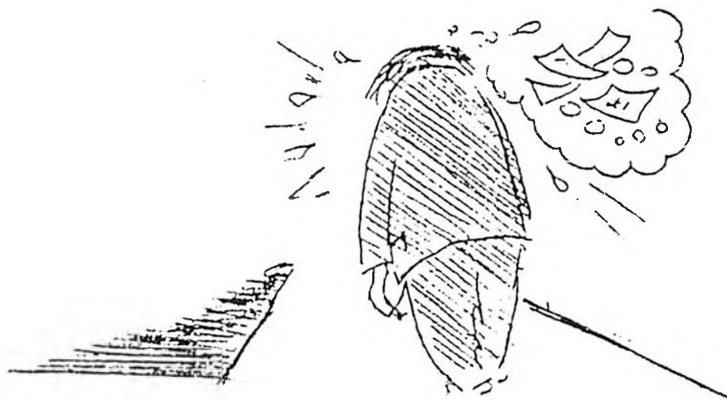
The rest of us humble menfolk watched as Peggy, Madeleine, Carol and Jennifer pushed him along. Even now I can hear Peggy's battle cry :-

"...and Neopolitan Glories are lovely, Madeleine, and only twenty

shillings each..."

James seemed to stumble, but you all know what women are. You and I get ice cream in the shape of mundane, proletarian, tuppony blocks, but Peggy likes it in enormous, aristocratic masses, adorned with fruit, embellished with other comestibles and flaunting all the colours of the rainbow. You or

I would pause timidly before one of these gargantuan, scintillating concatenations (phew) but Peggy rushed blithely on where we would fear to tread.



They went into the shop.

The shop door opened again, and James crawled outside.

"What's Ted Carnell's 'phone number ?" he asked.

We left James drooling outside the shop, and crossed to the station.

With seconds to spare, the females arrived on the platform, very pleased with life. James staggered after them a broken man, consoling himself with the rigour of mental flagellation. One doesn't expect to spend the proceeds of a NEW WORLDS Anthology on ice cream...

Once again a compartment had been reserved for the Willis Party for the return journey. The Railway Authorities, from the very kindest of motives, had decided we needed more room. Of course, the fact that we shared the Guard's Van with six dozen boxes of fresh herring and fourteen wicker baskets of racing pigeon was only one of the accepted hazards of everyday life.

Now I come to a serious matter...a matter of some special significance.

For the duration of the two-hour journey from Portrush to Belfast, I was the butt of the warped minds of Irish Fandom. Yes, you may gasp. Wait until you have suffered. Yet I was so innocent.

Look, let me put the facts before you, and allow you to judge for yourself.

In a weak moment, that I regret sincerely, I told Walt and the rest of my visit to a symphony concert a short time previously. I explained that I sat next to a person of indefinite sex, who bore the name Cedric. Cedric had conversed with two girls sitting either side of me. He was telling them about his skill with the viola. The only conversation I had with him was when he begged my pardon for talking across me, as it were. That was the close of the incident.

To be frank, I thought at the time that it was an Irish Fandom hoax. Cedric was attired in a green corduroy jacket, such as Bob Shaw is

prone to wear on social occasions. I was even more convinced it was Bob, when, at the interval, Cedric produced a large packet of fish-paste sandwiches. However, be that as it may, I suffered. With no regard for the accepted rules of punsterism, Walt and Co. gave me the works. They ranged throughout the instruments of the orchestra. Horrible puns like..." was he an oboe-sexual"...sort of thing.

After having exhausted the entire classical repertoire, they turned to my moustache.

"I am proud to carry about my portable filter, and am prepared to accept a certain amount of ribaldry. But not...wait. Let me record a part if the intimate conversation. Don't let the children see this...

James :- "I would like a nylon moustache like John."

Walt:- "Why ?"

James:- "Every time he kisses his wife, he cleans her teeth."

James, Walt and George :- "Heh heh heh."

George:- "What shape does he assume when he kisses his wife ?"

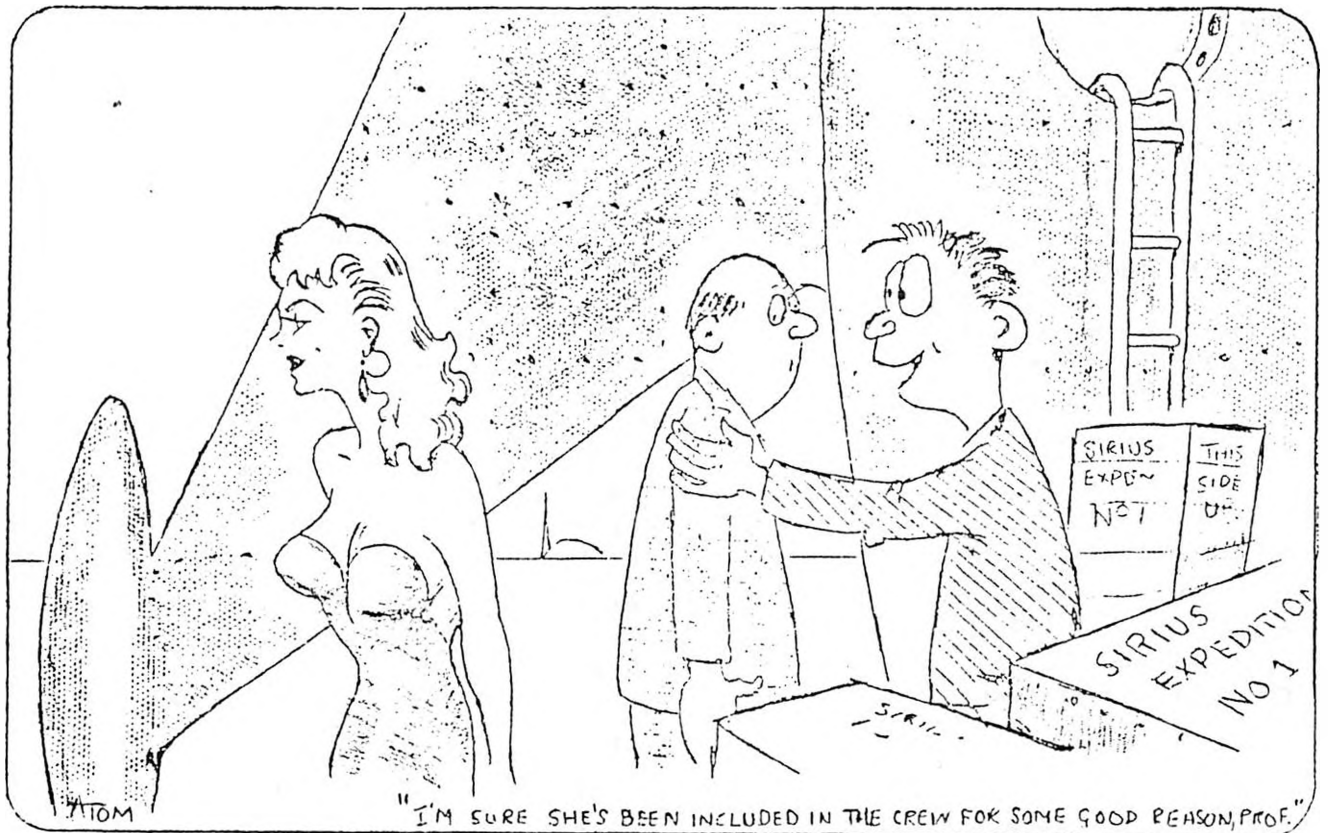
Walt :- "I dunno."

George:- "Elliptical. A lip tickle, see."

James, Walt and George :- "Ho ho ho."

But I am patient and long suffering. The train eventually arrived at Belfast, and we wiped the straw off each other and detrained.

When I arrived home, I was very tired, but found time to appreciate my supper of fried herring and pidgeon pie...



BOB AND THE TYPEWRITER.

Please do not think I am getting any ideas of grandeur regarding my literary capabilities, but for some time past I have had the desire to own a typewriter.

I broached the question one afternoon at Oblique House whilst we were all savouring Madeleine's delicious culinary delights.

"I would like to get a typewriter, folks," I said, "any ideas ?"

There was a deathly silence, then they all looked guiltily at Bob Shaw who was busy popping Madeleine's masterpieces into his mouth, blissfully ignorant of my question.

Walt moved the tray aside.

"Here's a client for your typewriter, Bob," he said.

Bob stopped chewing and looked at each face in turn in utter incredulous bewilderment until his eyes met my innocent visage. Then his eyes softened with realisation.

"Oh yes...yes," he said silkily, "I do have a typewriter for sale. Would you like to see it ?"

Presuming my answer would be in the affirmative, he grabbed me by the coat collar and in a thrice I found myself outside the door of his room at Walt's house. He patted me on the shoulder warmly as he opened the door and ushered me through.

"Of course you need a typewriter, John," he confided, stepping towards a large wardrobe, "and I have the very thing you require...cheap, too."

You must realise that my heart was thumping with excitement. What a glorious opportunity, I thought. Me, getting a pro-author's typewriter. Ghod.

Bob opened the wardrobe door, knelt momentarily as if in prayer, then reached inside, staggered to his feet and stumbled across to the table, with his back to me all the time. I saw the table sag in the middle as Bob deposited his machine on it. He did one or two strange things with his hands; then he turned, eyebrows raised in triumph and waving a hand with professional assurance.

"Here it is. Remarkable condition if I may say so, and dirt cheap."

I looked at it closely. Now I want you to understand that I am not a novice insofar as typewriters are concerned. I have seen, and used, many of the finest models available.

So I looked at Bob's machine again. My immediate impression was of a hunk of rusted machinery suffering in silence. On closer examination, however, it began to look more like a typewriter, if you know what I mean.

Bob put his hand on my shoulder.

"You see, John, it isn't the appearance of the machine which matters, it's the way it types. Let me put in a piece of paper and you can try for yourself."

So saying, Bob produced a clean sheet of paper and began to insert it. After three or four minutes of futile manipulation he turned to me.

"Have a look over there. You'll see a beautiful picture of a lunar landscape, " he suggested.

I crossed the room and looked at it...right enough, it was an interesting picture. I examined it in detail for several moments, being frequently distracted by spasmodic bangs and muttered expletives coming from Bob's direction.

Finally I heard a long drawn-out sigh of satisfaction. Bob guided me back to the table where I noted a ragged, dirty-looking chunk of paper imprisoned by the roller.

"Type something," said Bob, biting his lower lip.

My pet word for breaking in typewriters is:-

'terminologicalinexactitudinously. '

I've typed it so often that I can do it blindfolded so there was no need for me to remove the layer of scum off the keys.

So I typed it.

The keys made a series of staccato noises like someone trying to start a car on a frosty morning.

I peered at the sheet of paper and saw something like this....' ~~thy~~ '.

I must impress upon you that I don't type very fast. Compared with Walt Willis, you would think my hands were crippled with arthritis. So Bob's next remark, savouring as it did of flattery, came as rather a pleasant surprise.

"No no, John," he explained. "You are typing much too fast. I can see that you are an accomplished typist and I can assure you that this is the machine for you. Try typing 'the' again, but a little slower. "

So much more slowly I typed ' termino...'. I looked with apprehension at the result, something like this...

' term olok inexactia e.'

"Hmmm." mused Bob. "There must be something wrong with the gribble draw-back lever. It's probably being gouled by the trumbickel snatch wire. I think I can fix it. By the way, let me describe the functions of these controls."

He pointed to the left of the machine. I looked, utterly in awe. All I could see was a large ball of fluff with bits of wire, string and metal peering selfconsciously out at me. Bob, with lack of foresight, attempted to blow it away. We both began to have fits of violent coughing and it was some time before I was able to get my bearings. We both clawed our way to the table again.

"You would think," said Bob indignantly, " that science could do something about these sudden attacks of smog, wouldn't you ?"

With a knotted fist staring me in the face, I had to agree.

"Well, back to business," said Bob. "This lever here controls the roller movement. Turn the roller handle to the right there and note the smooth mechanical action."

I gripped the handle and turned it...or tried to... nothing happened. I gripped it with both hands and wrenched both forearm muscles but still nothing happened.

"Ah," pondered Bob, " probably the snitch tag needs oiling, let me try."

Bob is stronger than I am, and he knows his machine. He gripped the handle, and just as the sweat started to bead on his forehead, there was a sudden 'click' and the roller spun round and round for several seconds, whilst simultaneously a salvo of ball bearings was ejected with some force from different parts of the machine. They struck the walls and ceiling, leaving dirty black marks.

"I saw Carol playing with this machine the other day," muttered Bob darkly, stopping the flow of blood from his torn fingers with a handkerchief.

There was a painful silence for some moments...I felt rather embarrassed and got down on my hands and knees, collected a couple of handfuls of ball bearings and heaped them on the table.

Meanwhile, Bob had collected his scattered wits and with remarkable aplomb said..." as I said, you can have this magnificent machine dirt cheap. What would you suggest ?"

Rather a difficult situation to be in, don't you think ? I haven't much mechanical knowledge myself, but at a rough guess I would say a skilled mechanic would take about three weeks, at 4/6d per hour, to fix the machine, assuming a man could be found who would attempt the task. I didn't want to hurt Bob's feelings and say something reasonable, like half a crown. On the other hand, I didn't want to throw my money away recklessly and say something fantastic like five shillings.

The situation required great tact. Whilst I was trying to formulate a non-committal reply, Bob leaned over the machine and patted it affectionately. I swear tears welled up in his eyes.

"What about...three pounds ?" he asked quietly, a distinct throb in his voice.

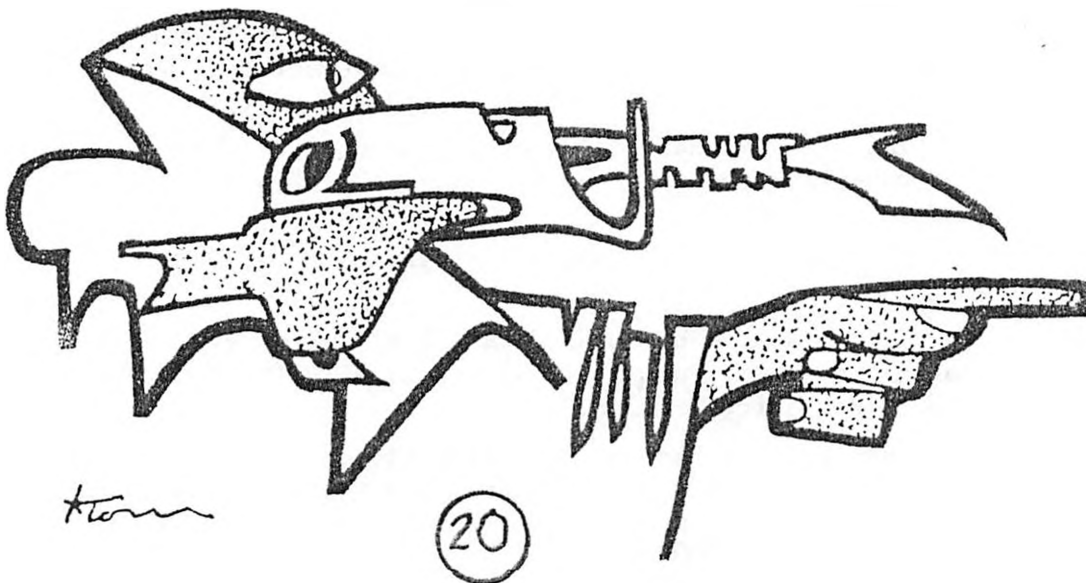
I mean, I am a fan, and Bob is a fan, and...

"Well, er, that is...I...um" I stuttered.

"Settled then," announced Bob, shaking my hand firmly.

He took out his wallet, counted out three crisp one-pound notes, and thrust them into my hand.

"Now take the bloody thing away," he screamed.



AVERSION TO TYPE.

It may come as rather an anti-climax to some of you to hear that I decided to have Bob's typewriter. I didn't really have the gall to accept it and the three pounds, so I gave him back two pounds. Then came the problem of transporting it from Walt's house to mine, a little matter of about three miles. My father-in-law promised he would call round and collect it in his car, but one day when I was out, my wife gave him the article BOB AND THE TYPE-WRITER to read, and he said he would have to think about it...

I telephoned the Ulster Transport Authority, which has the monopoly of freight transport in Northern Ireland, and they did promise to collect and deliver it. I forgot to ask Madeleine what actually transpired when they arrived to collect it, but I did receive a polite letter from the Authority. It stated in effect that although they were £1,750,000 in debt and they were very thankful for any trade that came their way, there was a limit to what their professional pride would allow them to carry. Not only that, they stated, but the Transport Union asked for danger money, and the only way to avert a strike was to return my order with regret.

By this time, quite a pile of articles for typing had accumulated, so it was imperative that I should get the typer home as soon as possible, by some means or other.

My wife suggested a taxi.

"After all, it won't cost that much," she explained, "in fact, the one pound you got from Bob will clear it."

I called at the taxi office on my way to my office. They were pleased to see me. Of course they would collect a machine and deliver it. It would be a pleasure. If I would just tell them where it was to be collected.

"170, Upper Newtownards Road," I said.

All conversation and work ceased abruptly. Mechanics crawled from under cars, gripping spanners. The drivers looked decidedly unpleasant. The boss drummed his fingers on the desk top, biting his lip. He suddenly opened a drawer behind the desk and threw a pile of VARGO STATTON mags at my feet.

"That's just what they gave one of my drivers for a tip for taking a party to the airport terminal just after Christmas," he growled. He rose to his feet and began to walk round the desk towards me.

His initial quote for the fare was too expensive, anyway.

I recollected that Walt often drives about in a new car which he borrows from a near relative who has great faith in human nature.

I rang him up at the Ministry.

"I wonder if you would bring round Bob's typer in your new car?" I asked.

His roar of laughter almost shattered the ear-piece of my telephone.

"Thanks," he sobbed. "Thanks a lot. Just what I wanted. What a smashing back cover quote for HYPHEN. Brilliant." He rang off.

I was left no alternative but to bring the thing home by my own efforts. I waited for a couple of weeks, but there wasn't any sign of fog. I had to be content with driving snow.

I reached Oblique House, saw Bob, and told him of my mission. He didn't stop to speak or compliment me on my nerve; he just vanished in a flash and re-appeared with the typer. He dumped it in my arms, led me to the front door, ushered me out, and slammed the door behind me. I staggered down the path. I heard a lot of subdued laughter coming from behind the door. I reached the gate. I peered up and down the road. Not a soul was in sight. I trudged across the road in knee-deep snow. Still no one at large. I began to feel better. If I could just reach the 'bus stop I would be alright.

Suddenly I heard a shout behind me. I looked round. An old woman was hobbling towards me. Through the snow I could see she was waving a short stick.

Realisation flashed through my mind. The old soul had probably been looking through her window, maybe even feeding little birds, when I had sneaked furtively past, bearing what she thought was an infernal machine. She had probably telephoned the riot squad and was going to bash me into submission before they arrived.

I fled. I tripped over a snow-covered kerb stone. I lay spread-eagled. I put my arms over my head in self-preservation.

"No, no," I screamed.

"You dropped this, dear," she puffed. She handed me the roller. I hadn't noticed I had dropped it. I gave a weak grin. I thanked her profusely. I didn't like the manner in which she backed away.

I found the typer in the snow. I picked it up, putting the roller in my pocket. A 'bus drew up. I gripped the machine tightly. Haven at last. I smiled disarmingly at the conductor, whose mouth suddenly dropped. He pushed me away and pressed the bell. The 'bus roared down the road in fourth gear.

A young couple, obviously very much in love, came to wait at the stop for the next 'bus. They whispered to each other endearingly. They were closely entwined. Suddenly I got an idea. I would creep close to them and when the 'bus came and when they got on I would quickly follow and the conductor wouldn't see the typer until it was too late. What a smashing idea.

I saw a 'bus approaching. I crept close to them, ready for the spring. The girl looked round, saw me, and screamed. The man turned round quickly.

"I've read about men like you in the Sunday newspapers," he roared. I reckon he was about six feet three inches high, and was as broad as a garage door. He punched me in the face.

Was it worth it? I began to ask myself. This fandom business is O.K., but it has its disadvantages. I don't mind making a sacrifice or two for Willis. I don't mind writing him a few articles, but there is a limit to what one can stand.

I picked up my hat, roller, typer and myself. I waited for the next 'bus. I honestly think, upon reflection that the young couple or the conductors had said something about me, because every time a 'bus approached it would suddenly accelerate and whizz past at top speed with white, blurred faces looking out at me. The whole enterprise

became a challenge.

I said to myself, what would Willis do if he was in the same predicament ? That thought gave me new incentive. I had to approach the problem with logic. I must face facts. I was three miles from home. I had a typer, a roller, a black eye, and it was snowing like hell. No 'bus would stop for me. I was cold, my feet were wet, I...

Suddenly I espied a telephone kiosk. As I trudged towards it the answer to the problem struck me. I held my head high because I had the answer. I entered the kiosk and dialled my father-in-law. He said he would come and collect me immediately.

The forty-five minutes wait was worth it. He drew up. I staggered into his car with the typer. I was suffering from exposure and exhaustion. We soon arrived at my house. He lifted me out and propped me against the front door. He returned to his car and waved goodbye.

"I'll fix up that other little matter for you," he shouted, "I pass Shaw's Bridge on the way home."

My father-in-law called at my house last night.

He looked rather apologetic.

"You recall a couple of weeks ago I brought you home in my car from the Upper Newtownards Road ?" he asked.

"Yes," I said, faintly suspicious.

"And you remember you were in rather an exhausted condition ?"

"Yes," I agreed again, feeling rather apprehensive.

"And there is no need to remind you that you pleaded with me earnestly to drop that strange mechanical contrivance in the river at Shaw's Bridge ?"

"Yes" I admitted, remorseless pangs of pessimism shooting through me.

"Well, I thought that, maybe, in the condition you were in at the time, you weren't quite responsible for your actions."

He was quite blunt about it.

He disappeared.

I gripped the edge of the table.

He re-appeared.

"So I've given you a chance to reconsider," he said. His look indicated that he thought he was doing me a great favour. He placed Bob's typewriter in the middle of my wife's beautifully polished table. My father-in-law, I should have told you, is a notorious practical joker. This time he surpassed himself. Oh, the utter irony of fate....

He adroitly ducked to avoid the flower pot, which was the only missile within my reach as he skipped through the door. I heard his laughter above the roar of his car.

I felt...how shall I put it...I felt sort of baffled, sort of resigned to inevitability. I could see now why BoSh had been so relieved to only have to pay me three pounds to get rid of it. As I felt at that moment I would cheerfully have sacrificed my greatest

possession, the autographed picture of Marilyn Monroe, to get rid of it.

My wife came into the room. She seemed rather interested, I might even say fascinated by the object reposing on the mirror-like surface of the table top. She walked to the typer, touched it suspiciously.

"Just what I've always wanted," she cooed, " an electric toaster, although I would have preferred it in much better condition. I didn't realise my father patronised mock auctions."

I tried to be patient. Fate had obviously decreed that the typer and myself were destined to be inseperable companions. I broke the news to my wife as softly as possible.

"I know your opinion of authors is very high," I said, " and I quite realise that you regard them all as being like Clark Gable in that picture where he was surrounded by glamorous shorthand typists and smooth, silent, sleek, streamlined typers."

She looked at me innocently, questioningly. This was going to be tough.

"Well Diane," I said, " Bob Shaw is an author and this was his typewriter."

She paled. She gulped. She sat down.

"Not THE Bob Shaw, who writes for NEBULA ?"

I nodded. It was pathetic seeing her lose her last vistage of faith.

"Did Sadie let him keep it ?" she asked incredulously.

"Well, she did," I explained, "but he wasn't strictly honest about it. He told her it was once touched by Chuch Harris and its value would therefore increase tenfold as time went by."

She looked down for a moment, and then walked over to the machine.

Now, I must sidetrack for a moment. I must explain that before we were married, Diane was a very efficient shorthand typist. I remember they used to tell me that she typed so fast they had to leave her machine on the window sill every night to cool down. So as she approached the BoSh typer, with the light of experiment in her eyes, I sensed that a titanic duel was to take place.

"Is this the right way up ?" she asked.

"I, er, I think so," I confirmed.

She drew up a chair. She did a few preliminary finger exercises. It must have been over six years since she last touched a typewriter. I could see it was her intention to prove to me that she had lost none of her former dexterity.

As I've already stated, her father had placed the typer in the middle of the superbly-surfaced table. Diane calmly reached out and dragged it towards her. There was a noise like a heavy rasp being dragged over a rusty cheese grater. Four deep grooves were furrowed across the virgin table top.

For at least five minutes Diane paced up and down the room. Then she returned to her seat at the table. Her face was set.

"Round two," I said to myself.

She snapped her fingers.

"Paper" she said.

This was going to be good, I thought, remembering Bob's efforts. She had realised the machine's potentialities from the start. She removed the roller, wrapped the paper round it, replaced the roller, and sat poised over the typer, like a great concert pianist awaiting the first stroke of the conductor's baton.

When she spoke her voice was icy calm.

"I think I will type the first five verses of The Charge of the Light Brigade, which I did for my final test," she proudly announced.

I craned forward. Suddenly, she swept into action. Her fingers seemed part of her. Bangs and rattles came from the machine. Twice I distinctly heard a chime...the mellow 'cuckoo' I attributed to our clock. I began to feel better. Perhaps..just perhaps in the hands of a skilled typist the machine would function perfectly.

She stopped and gasped as if short of breath. I nodded sagely; the girl had gone to a great deal of effort. I went over to her.

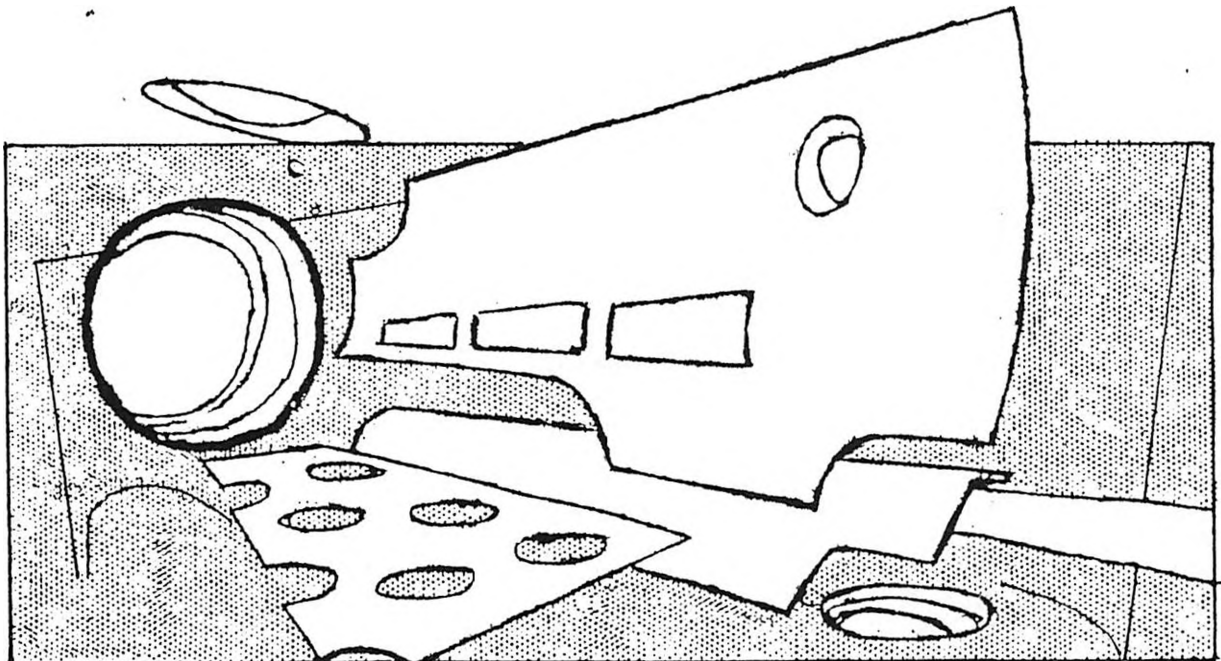
The ribbon was wound tightly round her neck. I hastily removed it. We looked at her handiwork. There was a large hole an inch in diameter in the paper. I ripped out the paper. There was a hole about half an inch in diameter in the roller.

My wife was strangely silent. She removed two keys from her hair. One was lettered TABULAR KEY and the other BACK SPACER.

I had never previously considered my wife to be vindictive.

Many people have jestingly said the BoSh typer resembled scrap metal.

Want to know a secret ?



ATOM.

BELFASTERS

TWO~ JAMES WHITE.

James White is the second victim of mine in this series, and he is , at the time of writing, preparing for his nuptials. I feel that the biography would be incomplete without mentioning his intended spouse. However, more about this poor girl later.

This flower of Irish manhood, James White, has been grossly misrepresented in the past. This is not the first time I have leapt to his defence, and endeavoured to clear his name. I shall not hesitate to do so in the future. It is my intention, once and for all, to tell you the real truth behind some of the unsavoury rumours that malicious wagging tongues have started about this boy.

First of all I want to tell you about:-

THE MAN. James is a male, in his early twenties. He is tall, bespectacled, distinguished, and extremely well dressed when playing ghoddminton. In this case, he arrives in patched coat, darned trousers and old shoes. Tell you the truth, I have only ever seen James in his ghoddminton outfit, so when I say he is extremely well dressed, that is only hearsay. The fact that he is often seen around the centre of Belfast in patched coat, darned trousers and old shoes is merely a ruse to make people clothes-conscious, which is his line of business. The theory is that people look at him, and say to themselves 'Ghod, I might look like that one day' - and so rush to buy his firm's wares before it is too late... which leads me to:-

THE SALESMAN. It is a little-known fact that I met James before I became a fan. He doesn't remember the occasion, but I do...I always will. One day I happened to be standing outside the shop window of his employer's shop, a well-known firm of outfitters. Suddenly, a lanky figure rushed outside, flung a tape-measure round my waist, and hustled me inside, and before I was aware what was happening, I was walking outside again with a large parcel under my arm. Nowadays, whenever I feel too happy with my lot, and want to bring myself back to grim reality, I just open my wardrobe door.

THE PRO-AUTHOR. James is, without doubt, one of the leading science fiction authors in the British Isles today. In fact (summer 1955) he has had ten stories published, three of them being anthologizes. He is a fully qualified 'hard cover merchant' which up to now has been the monopoly of Old Man Charters.

THE CONNOISSEUR. I was talking to James one day. "I understand you don't go home during your lunch hour," I observed. "How do you spend your time

after you have eaten your lunch ?"

"Ah," mused James sagely, "I have discovered a second hand book-shop of no mean calibre. As you know, my science fiction collection is quite extensive, but there are one or two early ASTOUNDINGs that I require. At this particular shop there are thousands of rather old science fiction publications, and I find it most exhilarating and instructive to browse there awhile."

A week later I was casually strolling through Belfast when I espied the dignified figure of James walking with definite purpose. I decided to follow. I must confess that I held James in high esteem (still do) both for his status in fandom, and because of his pro-author activities. I wanted to emulate him d'you see ? So I followed carefully. At last he turned into a shop. I arrived there, and, right enough, the shop window was filled with second hand sf books, as James had stated. Surrepticiously, I slipped inside, and tiptoed over to James. He was making a purchase. What a moment. This great fan, completing his collection of ASTOUNDINGs. It was a splendid example to an innocent neo-fan like myself. I looked over his shoulder. I almost fainted. The book, I saw, was Volume 1 of the SEX LIFE IN ANCIENT ROME. I turned away, I was bitterly disappointed.

I had my name down for that book weeks before James White.

THE SEX-FIEND ? Do you know that some people have actually had the utter audacity to announce to fandom that James is a sex-fiend. The subject never enters his mind. I have already mentioned this important subject in another fanzine, so I only wish to state the following:-

JAMES WHITE IS NOT A SEX-FIEND.

Although I would really be convinced if he would hurry up and return that book.

THE BRUTE. It is sad to realise that James possesses a sadistic streak. Normally, this lies dormant, but every time he picks up a 9" square of cardboard, his eyes take on that glazed look, his pupils dilate...he froths slightly at the mouth. James represents the 'killer instinct' personified....but don't get worried, folks, I'm talking about the Ghoodminton White.

When playing against James, one is faced with the alternative of winning or surviving...and at 170, self-preservation rates pretty high.

THE EGO. I find that one can generally gauge a person's temperament and personality by studying a list of self-professed likes and dislikes. The items below, taken in conjunction with the rest of the 'thumb nail portrait' should give a true picture of the real James White :-

LIKES

Dollars.
HIGH NOON.
Ghoodminton.
Doris Day *
Space Ship magazine covers.

DISLIKES.

Sex-fiends named Harris
NEW WORLDS blurbs.
Vulgar ostentation.
No-operational flying **
Sportsmanship in ghoodminton.

NOTE:-

* - he thought her name was Dollars Day.

** - In his formative years, James was in the Air Training Corps. During training, he was strapped in a glider and towed along the ground in a series of bumps. He has stated that he was 'on ops.'

THE HUMOURIST. James is the possessor of a rather strange brand of humour. As Walt Willis states, it cannot be classified. People say the bacover quotes are the best thing in HYPHEN, and it is no secret that James supplies a lot of them. Here are a few of his clever remarks:-

All the memorable things I say people forget almost immediately.
People laugh at the funniest things.
You're marrying me just to get on the bacover of HYPHEN.
Infinitesimal...at least.
It's not good, but it's obscure.

James is also a great adherent of the phrase 'vulgar ostentation'. He uses it a lot. The following three situations are described by James as 'smacking of vulgar ostentation' :-

1. Whilst walking along a canal bank, he saw a long, long coal barge, with about four square feet of deck space. On the deck was a racing bicycle.
2. When he saw an old lady climbing aboard an airliner, holding in her hand a bird cage with a little canary in it.
3. When he noticed a long, sleek American automobile, with plenty of window space, fitted with a small venetian blind covering the back window.

Well, I said it was unclassified wit.

THE PUNSTER. As you have no doubt gathered from various sources, puns are one of the main recreations of Irish Fandom. As is only to be expected, James makes excellent puns, but he is more famous for the fact that he takes credit for making the worst pun ever made at 170. It really is shocking. Unfortunately, it has a commercial basis, and American fans will not grasp its full fruity quality. However, as a moral guide to intending punsters, and as a pointer to James White's intellect, I feel I must quote it, if only in the nature of a warning. A short explanation will make the horrible thing quite plain.

There is a firm of biscuit manufacturers in Britain called Scribbans Kemp. One day, we were discussing the merits of biscuits in general (a fascinating pastime) when James, muching away, said - "Oh well, Scribbans Kemp be choosers."

Sorry.

THE WOOLER. Peggy is a sweet, wide-eyed innocent and charming Belfast girl. But she has seen life. Do you know that she has actually met Chuch Harris, and survived? Then, going a stage further, she came to 170 and played ghoddminton. And now she is married to James White. What a fannish climax. Fancy going to such lengths just to prove herself a fan.

Seriously, I am sure that Peggy and James are going to be very happy, and who knows, pretty soon they may well become very adept at slip-sheeting.

A FINAL APPRAISAL. Now you know the truth about James White. I hope you believe me. To sum him up, I would say without fear of contradiction, that he is a quiet, honest, sober, intellectual and friendly fan, devoid of any unhealthy complex, with the single exception of DOLLARS.

To complete the picture, I feel that an outside opinion will finally convince you that the real James White is as I have described him. The man to do this is Chuch Harris. Knowing Chuch as I do, the fact that in his dislike column, James put 'Sex-fiends named Harris' at the top of the list, will not deter Chuch from making an accurate summation:-

No, don't shake your head in incredulous horror, that is the truth. I Chuch Harris, have been on honeymoon with James, and I know whereof I speak.

As a strictly impartial observer with absolutely no animosity for cracks like 'Sex-fiends named Harris' I state confidently that James White if the Bloodiest Provincial of them all.

A black and white cartoon illustration of two knights in a chariot pulled by a dragon. The knight in the front holds a long spear, while the knight in the back holds a sword and a mace. The dragon is depicted with scales and a long tail.

~~Atom~~



For some considerable time I had looked forward with anticipation to meeting Leeh and Larry Shaw. Although I was unable to go to the convention in Kettering, I consoled myself with the certain knowledge that Walt Willis was going to bring the visitors to Belfast to stay for a few days, and so I would have ample opportunity to give these two BNF's their full quota of hero worship. After all, Walt had practically weaned me on QUANDRY, amongst a selected diet of U.S.fanzines, and I can honestly say that the magic name of 'Leeh Hoffman' was the force behind my inspiration.

So forgive me if I find it difficult to put into mere words exactly how I felt as I walked up the pathway of the Willis Residence, 170, Upper Newtownards Road, Belfast on Sunday afternoon, 8th April 1956. I lingered uncertainly on the doorstep, took a deep breath, and walked in. A delightfully fresh accent floated towards me...an accent familiar to me only through the agencies of the cinema screen. This was going to be my first meeting with American fen, and it really meant a lot to me.

And I wasn't disappointed.

Allow me to sum up those vital first impressions (and need I add that the impressions didn't change ?)

Leeh Shaw was charming, fresh, intelligent, shy, and obviously still suffering the after-effects of the post-honeymoon jitters. Her frequent loving glances towards Larry injected the atmosphere with a certain undefinable aura of affection. Nothing really tangible, but sufficient to cause Walt to edge his chair closer to Madeleine, and to make James White pause a moment to peer at Peggy before returning to his study of Roget's Thesaurus.

Larry Shaw, I sensed immediately, was of the cultured genius classification...a faithful model of the original Willis prototype...unassuming, yet keen, shrewd and far-sighted.





We chatted for a few moments, and then, at a nod from Walt, I leapt to my feet, thrust my right hand upwards in an exaggerated flourish, and shouted the now classic phrase :-

"Ghoodminton, anyone ?"

Leeh, I noted (because I was looking at her at the time) blanched visibly, and sought Larry's hand for consolation. Larry grinned, obviously using all his will-power to do so, gulped once or twice, staggered uncertainly to his feet, and drawled,

"Let's go", and we did.

We paraded to the ghoodminton court. I noted with a certain amount of annoyance that Larry completely disregarded the basic ritual to be practiced by all fen about to play ghoodminton. Admittedly he was a big-name editor, and I didn't exactly expect him to go down on his knees and salaam (as I was doing at the time) but I do consider that, as a visitor, he should have made some sort of token of respect, however slight, to the Marilyn Monroe calendar on the wall.

Walt seated the visitors in a relatively safe corner of the room, and we presented an exhibition game. We played at half speed, freely, and without any venom or animosity, such as is usually present. Admittedly James White broke a chair, and I split two door panels, but I can assure readers that we were restrained.

We turned expectantly, I may even say proudly, to Larry.

"Will you play?" we chorused.

He attempted a weak grin, and gave a muttered answer which we took to be affirmative.

We asked Leeh the same question.

She replied.

I shall always cherish that moment. Leeh, a clear, resonant speaker, gave us an unrivalled oral exhibition of clarity and eloquence. The slight tilt of her head, the proud flash of her eyes had the dignity and hauteur of Grace Kelly. Leeh showed us a dramatic curl of the lips, and a meaningful flutter of her hands. The sheer superlative brilliance of her demeanour left us spellbound. And, as I said, solemn of tone, through arched lips, with her beautiful and cultured American accent, she gave us her sensitive reply :-

"NO."

We consoled ourselves, however. There was still Larry.

I was quite flattered that he chose me as his partner.

I liked the way he stripped down to his red corduroy jacket. He picked up a bat, gave it a half-hearted flick, turned, gazed nostalgically into Leeh's big wide eyes for a few tense seconds, then, grim of visage, strode forward to meet us, like Gary Cooper in the climax of High Noon.

Larry, whilst watching us, had realised the horrible implications of the game, but more, had worked it all out. For a neo such as himself, he obviously thought, it would be impossible to reach our standard of play in the limited time available. More important, however, was the fact that the prestige of American Fandom rested on his shoulders. If he played poorly or made an insipid exhibition of himself, it would take years for American fen to even consider themselves on the same fannish plane as we on this side of the Atlantic.

Breathe freely again, folks.

LARRY DID NOT LET YOU DOWN.

He evolved an idea completely new in the realms of active ghoominton...an idea so compelling that I myself started to store hormone tablets and hope to try it out fairly soon. It consists of turning one's self into a sort of human dynamo, whipping round one's own side of the court keeping the bat moving at many hundreds of revolutions per minute, making it, indeed, into a whirr of flashing cardboard. The immediate effect is to create a local area of great pressure which needs extra brute force for the opponent to get the shuttlecock to penetrate the energy field. Also, referring to the Law of Averages, the shuttle is bound to hit the cardboard sometime, as Larry proved.

Walt and James were our opponents, and I must place on record that after a particularly gruelling game, Larry and I lost, the final score being 21-19, a very good score considering an absolute novice was playing.

This bhoy acquitted himself extremely well, and I told him as much as I helped James to carry him back to Leeh.

After a rest, Leeh and Larry went out of the room, and returned a few moments later armed to the teeth with an array of historic weapons. The most lethal instrument was a razor-sharp curved sword, which Leeh proudly slashed through the air, whilst Larry flaunted a wicked-looking handmade dagger dating from the late 14th century. For one horrible moment I thought they were going to challenge us to another game of ghoominton on their own terms, but Madeleine, who had suddenly turned white, suggested a cup of tea, and we trooped downstairs.

Conversation, as usual, was brilliant, the visitors making their fair share of witticisms.

Leeh described a visit to an antique dealer in Belfast, where she and Larry had made their purchases.

"And on the floor," she recounted, "were dozens of swords and shields, and all sorts of funny things. One specimen in particular was a horrible-looking thing with teeth..."

"The proprietor, I presume," leered Willis. He was probably quite correct...he had been there with them.

We concluded the cup of tea, and retired to the Drawing Room.

George Charters sat happily sucking the clay pipe presented to him by Leeh. Peggy White was warming up for one of her brain-washing sessions (it requires extreme mental effort to keep up with the diverse facets of her conversational dexterity) and I think Walt noticed this, and saved the situation by announcing that he had obtained a new tape recorder, and was going to play a tape he had just received from Dean Grennell. For the record, it was nice to hear the voice of such a Good Man, and we laughed heartily as Dean persuaded Bob Bloch to recount his experiences at the Cleveland Con. This seemed to bring back happy memories to Leeh and Larry, after all, they met at Cleveland...

Time passed quickly, and all was ready for the evening meal, and I think all past visitors to Oblique House will agree that when Walt and Madeleine (in this case assisted by James and Peggy) prepare a meal, no expence is spared to provide the guests with the choicest delectables obtainable. The repast on this occasion was no exception, in fact, I would say they excelled their previous best. It was obvious that Walt wanted the meal to be well-remembered, and considered it so important that he had refrained from including his home made ginger cakes.

The Shaws (Leeh and Larry) were seated opposite me, and as we progressed through all the dishes, I happened to modestly mention that I held the esteemed honour of being Champeen Tea-Drinker in Excelsis of Irish Fandom. Larry politely asked what my score was...? I told him it was $8\frac{1}{2}$ cups, my having beaten Bob Shaw by half a cup. Larry squared his shoulders and shuddered and challenged me to a tea-drinking duel. It was a guesture we much appreciated, because Larry in effect was trying to prove he was a better tea drinker than Bob Shaw. (I should add that Bob had already drunk nine cups before our contest commenced during December 1955, which explains his low score.)

Madeleine and Peggy produced the special $4\frac{1}{2}$ gallon Irish Fandom Teapot, brought in an extra quart of milk, a bag of sugar, two pieces of string, and at a signal from Walt, we began.

I immediately sank four cups in about one minute, aiming to



discourage Larry, and at the same time gain a winning lead. Larry, in rather a more genteel manner than myself, swallowed four cups also, and I had no alternative but to gulp down three more cups in thirty seconds.

Before continuing any further with this factual narrative, I want to include here a special notice for the attention of the U.S. Defence Department:-

'TAKE A NOTE OF THIS NAME...LARRY SHAW...I WOULD RESPECTFULLY RECOMMEND THAT IMMEDIATELY UPON THE COMMENCEMENT OF HOSTILITIES WITH A FOREIGN POWER, MR. SHAW SHOULD BE MADE A FOUR-STAR GENERAL AND PUT IN CHARGE OF THE DEPARTMENT OF PROPAGANDA.'

Thank you.

Never in all my extensive tea-drinking career (competitive tea-drinking, of course) have I witnessed such a superb display of bluff and intruige by a losing opponent.

Whilst I was sitting back in great discomfort after my ninth cup, feverishly searching for the length of string, I saw Larry rapidly passing cups to Madeleine for refuelling. I knew of course that the cups belonged to Leeh, Peggy, Walt, etc, but a percentage belonged to Larry...but I didn't know how many were his ? This left me with no alternative but to keep passing my cup, too. Another magnificent ploy, which I really admired, was his vigorous sugar stirring. What superb spoon control that bhoys displayed. The effect was twofold. First of all, the rapid spooning created friction, thus converting at least 20% of his tea to steam, which evaporated round him like a cloud. Secondly, the whirlpool of tea sloped over the rim of his cup into the saucer, thus creating a deficit of contents per cup...a great advantage, you'll agree.

By continually passing other people's cups, as I have explained, Larry caused the Willis supply of milk to dry up, and after my eleventh cup, and Larry's eighth, the contest was declared finished, because of lack of fuel. I think I won, but of course the contest was inconclusive. Larry seemed quite composed, and seemed to be in a position to continue indefinitely, whereas I was rapidly losing my last vestige of self-control.

However, later that evening, Larry and I had occasion to pass each other on the stairs quite frequently, and we promised to have a return contest at some future date.

Monday 9th April 1956.

During the day, Walt had driven Leeh and Larry round some interesting parts of County Down. Also, Leeh told me, he took them to a farm where he had arranged to obtain the services of a horse, and so Leeh was able to gallop around the countryside at leisure, which she seemed to appreciate. Besides having an interest in antique weapons, and rusty armour, the visitors professed a desire to examine historic buildings. I returned to Oblique House that evening, and met Leeh and Larry returning from the trip with their arms full of jagged lumps of rock taken from the turrets of various castles they had visited during the day on the Willis organised sight-seeing tour.

After tea, Leeh confessed that they had again scoured Belfast junk shops for swords and things, and after a little prompting, produced their captures. The collection now included a Persian helmet



with bits of metal hanging down the back like a Venetian Blind, two highly decorative shin-guards from India, and a horrible looking thing which Leeh flourished with reckless abandon.

Walt tried to organise ghoddminton, but Larry said he was tired after his excavations during the afternoon, and Leeh murmured something about being saddle-sore.

I cannot understand why people seem so reluctant to play our National Sport.

Tuesday 10th April 1956.

Walt had again arranged a tour in his car, this time a drive through lovely County Antrim, where castles and ancient sites abound. I was invited to go along with them, but in my mundane occupation as a member of the constabulary, I was detailed for extra duty in Belfast during the day, on the lookout for two strangely dressed characters reported as having acted suspiciously in the vicinity of antique shops and junk stores in the city centre.

Notwithstanding, I made my way as quickly as possible to Oblique House. Tuesday is a normal meeting night, and everyone was present...George Charters, James and Peggy White, the Belfast Shaws, Walt, Madeleine and myself.

Once again Leeh and Larry produced numerous barbaric weapons they had purchased that day, including a curved sword complete with a beautifully decorated scabbard, which I admired very much, and decided was the best item in the collection. After examining this and other fine things we witnessed the novel sight of Leeh parading round the room attired in jumper, slacks and Persian helmet.

At this juncture, I suggested ghoddminton. Larry whipped out of his waistband an ancient muzzle-loading flintlock and intimidated, with a certain amount of oozing menace, that it still worked. I didn't doubt it for a moment, and picked up an engraved chunk of Turkish armour, just in case.

I may have written too much about ghoddminton. We play at 170 so much that to even refrain from mentioning it on one page is not portraying a true picture of the sequence of events. Let me say that on this Tuesday night, Larry played once again, giving his all, despite protests from Leeh as he gradually sank lower and lower to

the splintered floorboards. As I said before, this boy was game, and a few stray red corpuscles dripping here and there did nothing to dampen his efforts to show us a few brilliant if unorthodox strokes. We asked him if he would return to America as a fully qualified ghoddminton instructor, and spread the gospel throughout the States, but he slumped into Leeh's lap, and said the game wouldn't be the same if played elsewhere.

He may have a point...

Wednesday 11th April 1956.

I carefully drew the curtains at the rear of my living room, completely cutting out the sordid panorama of my uncultivated back garden, which I felt might tend to give the visitors a false impression of my horticultural capabilities. For they had agreed to visit my abode. I hoped that my budgerigar would give a recitation, but he complained of a sore throat, although it did promise to say 'Marilyn Monroe' if asked nicely.

With a tortured groan from the gear box, the Willis car drew up outside my house, MON DEBRIS, as Chuch Harris had named it, was open to the good ol' U.S.A.

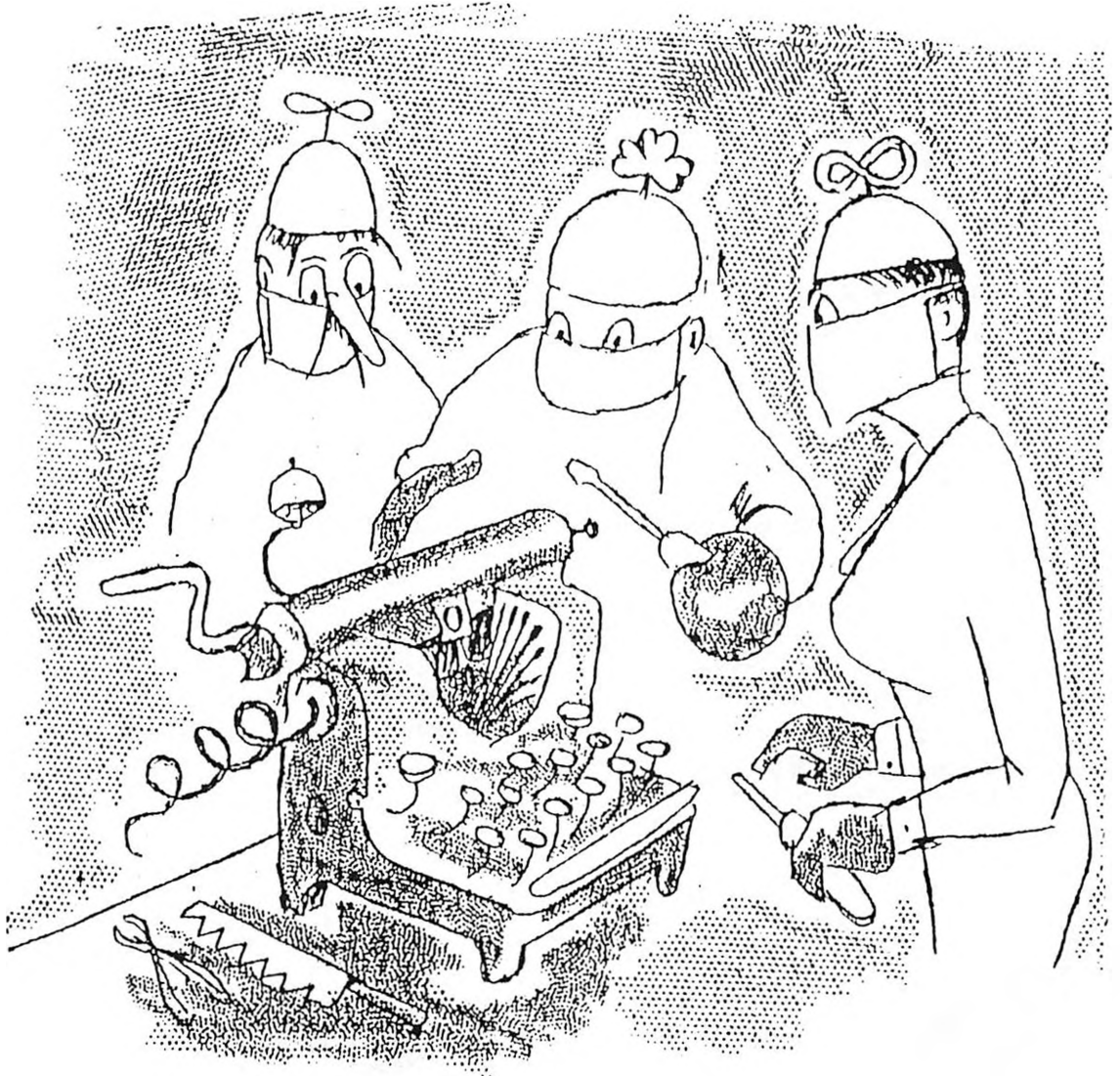
After preliminary introductions to my wife Diane and my little two-year-old daughter Kathleen, Leeh expressed a desire to see my issue .45 Webley revolver. I was pleased to oblige, but had reckoned without James White. James, falsely labelled as a sex-fiend, is one of the nicest chaps I know. His one eccentricity, if I may call it that, is a desire to emulate the American-type gangsters seen on his trips to the cinema. Without an apology, James grabbed the .45 from Leeh's experienced grasp, and was completely transformed. The innocent look in his eyes was replaced by a gleam of fanatical sadism, and he leered aggressively at each of us in turn. I thought it best to humour James and let him play with the .45 for some hours, and never have I seen him so gloriously happy. He swaggered repeatedly round the room like a poor man's Dillinger, and occasionally spat out of the corner of his mouth. James was currently working on chapter 17 of his novel, and I fear, as Larry confided to me, that James was concentrating just a little too much. James said that a man in his story had a .45, and he, James, wanted to be able to portray the correct feeling of security and superiority the revolver provided. This seemed to satisfy everyone. Me... I want to read the story first.

Before they had a chance to test my budgerigar, I asked the guests if they would like to assist me to collate the second issue of my fanzine RETRIBUTION. I was somewhat disappointed with Larry's enthusiastic reply, which tended to prove he had never heard of RETRIBUTION, but I produced the 44 pages, and asked Walt to take charge.

Walt was suffering from pre-HYPHEN gafia, and snapped into concerted action; he placed the pile of pages in their correct order in a semi-circle round the room...on tables, arm chairs, the budgerigar cage, anything that happened to be handy. He organised a single file of fen, and when satisfied that all was ready, gave the order to trudge forward. You suckers who possess a copy of RETRIBUTION 2, and haven't already thrown it away, please treat it carefully. No other fanzine has ever been assembled by such a bevy of B.N.F's. I took particular pride in watching Larry stacking the

copies neatly into place. It is not often that a Big Name Editor (INFINITY, if you please) assembles a fanzine, especially the esoteric RETRIBUTION. I hope his reputation will not suffer if his colleagues get to hear of it.

After supper, when the hour approached for our visitors to leave, Leeh announced a desire to see for herself the dreaded Shaw-Berry typer, complete with the original Berry Patent power unit. I found a couple of tins of baked beans in the kitchen (the original large tin of peaches having been eaten at Christmas) and dragged the machine downstairs. Although professing admiration for my engineering skill in using the tinned beans (attached to the platen with wire) to make the machine function, Leeh said, after some moment's meditation,



that she would make the machine function properly.

This interested me, for besides making sure my family would eat the following day, it also meant that my fanac would be made much easier. Leeh, ignoring the rust and dirty oil that clogged the mysterious innards of the wreck, proceeded to make many mechanical and structural adjustments. The roller moved freely without the beans, the paper feed left the paper in virgin condition, instead of screwing it up like a ragged ball, the - oh, much more. The only thing which baffled Leeh was trying to make the bell work (she had just uncovered it for the first time...I didn't even know it was so

sophisticated as to actually have one) when the end of the line had been reached.

Leeh, Larry and Walt (James had gone home because I took the .45 from him) had a conference about the non-ringing bell. They looked rather grim, and after a whispered conversation, Walt announced that he was going to operate. He wrapped a handkerchief over his nostrils, adjusted my wife's rubber gloves, peered inside the typer, and waved an impatient finger.

"Screw driver," he mouthed.

"Screw driver," I repeated, handing it to him.

"Piece of twisted wire," he said, somewhat louder.

"Piece of twisted wire," I panted, giving him one of my wife's hair grips, that I had bent a few times.

"Paper clip," he shouted, rather nastily.

"Paper clip," I gasped.

Silence.

I could almost smell the anaesthetic.

"Knitting needle," he sobbed.

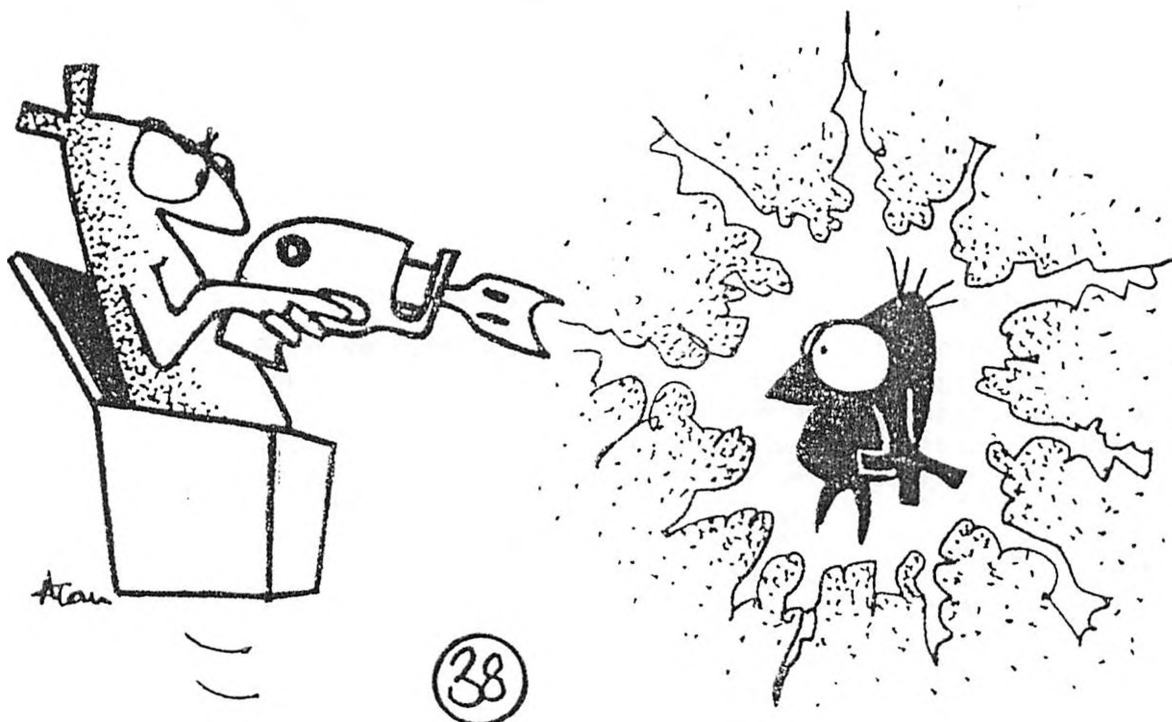
"Knitting needle," I whimpered.

More silence.

"Sledge hammer," he screamed.

I decided Walt was getting too technical, and I led him away for a glass of water.

It was long after midnight when they departed. I was sorry to see them go. I wish they could have stayed longer...much longer. I have seldom met such nice folks as Leeh and Larry - two American fen whom we shall long remember over here for their charm, their interest in all things fannish (not forgetting antiques and castles) and the way they impressed us all with their sincerity and enthusiasm ...and the undoubted affection they obviously had for each other.



CUFFED IN THE FRAY.

It is surprising the change that comes over a visitor to Oblique House after he or she has played ghoominton. When I specify 'change' I mean both physical and mental. Fen in general seem to regard ghoominton as a somewhat effeminate form of recreation. After all, they argue, a shuttlecock hit with a square of cardboard is only a stage removed from ping-pong.

I have tried to dispel this inaccurate conception about the lethal qualities of the game. This hasn't been too successful, because some misguided people think that I am inclined to exaggerate somewhat. I must impress that if played correctly, ghoominton is quite a dangerous form of recreation. And we in Willisland play it correctly. I don't want to dwell too much on this aspect, but I want you to realise that during my months at 170 Upper Newtownards Road I have seen heavy damage inflicted to the following items:- two windows, one large wooden table, one small wicker chair, a table lamp, two pictures, the floorboards and a wall. As far as personal injuries are concerned, Madeleine has a complaint now officially recognised as 'Ghoominton Finger', Walt has garnered two bloodshot optics, I have four scarred ribs, and we don't call James White 'Lefty' for nothing.

So you can appreciate that we are rather peeved when we mention ghoominton to visitors and they sneer contemptuously (as they do) and mutter "kid's stuff."

Then an impending visit caused us to reach a decision. We would put ghoominton over in a big way.

I want to tell you about two individuals who stayed at Oblique House a few weeks ago. Two very nice fellows, actually. Mal Ashworth and Tom White. Typical fans. I sized them up immediately as being worthy ghoominton opponents. Mal showed signs of being the aggressive type...a second Madeleine. Tom was obviously going to baffle us with science.

Walt had prepared a plan of campaign, and we began the first phase. We let them watch Walt's television set whilst we encouraged Walt's daughter Carol to twiddle with the focus dial. The effect of this was to cause partial second degree eyestrain, as was proved by two interesting events. First of all, Mal said he wanted to take photographs of us, and as he bumped his way down the hallway he produced a minute mechanical contraption which I thought was a miniature Edwardian snuff box, but which he claimed was a camera and he even manipulated it as if it was a camera. Secondly, Tom White wanted to show off his petrol lighter and he set fire to the curtains and my moustache in that order.

Phase Two, to get them ready for the slaughter, they were given a heavy meal. Madeleine and Sadie Shaw exceeded themselves, as they usually did when catering for Bob Shaw. As Mal and Tom sat back and, prompted by Walt, stuffed themselves with cakes, we grinned knowingly to each other.

The third part of the shock treatment was a clever gambit known as pun-worrying. Walt, James and Bob, aided by the Dribbling Terror (George Charters) threw complicated puns around the room

with slashing speed and reckless abandon. I calculated that at the end of the session, Mal and Tom were around fifteen puns behind. At this stage, with one phase to go, they were in prime condition ...eyesore, heavily dined and mentally ruptured.

Then Walt uttered the classic phrase:- "Ghoodminton, anyone ?"

We paraded in the chamber and brought into operation the final part of the visitor's pre-ghoodminton treatment. We sat Mal and Tom down in front of a very effective electric fire. Soon their eyelids were trying to carry out the Laws of Gravity. We thought of the sleep the two victims had lost the night before, en route from England in the cross-channel boat, and we gloated.

At last the stage was set for another chapter in the history of ghoodminton. Two poor souls would shortly be let loose to preach the perils of the game to the world in general and fen in particular. We would teach them to sneer at Walt's brainchild.

As a prelude we played an exhibition set to give them a rough idea of the hazards, although, with great cunning, we played at half speed. We licked our lips in anticipation as Walt dragged Mal and Tom to their feet.

"Tom partner Madeleine, and Mal partner John," announced Walt.

The game began. I started to work away at Tom, giving him an occasional hack across his batting arm. Then the first casualty occurred, and strangely enough, it wasn't a visitor. Mal returned the shuttlecock with such force that it hit Madeleine in the neck and temporarily stopped the flow of blood to (or from) her brain. We dragged her away, protesting feebly.

Bob Shaw took her place. I want to tell you about Bob Shaw. I maintain that the boy should have been a ballet dancer. The rhythmic Grecian suppleness of his body movements is so beautiful to behold, and as he flits across the court, arm flowing in a superbly artistic parabola; one can almost visualize him approaching the climax of the 'Waltz of the Flowers.'

The contest resumed. Bob had not even had the opportunity to perform his first pirouette before Tom White, suffering from the after effects of Phase One, hit Bob on the back of his head instead of the shuttlecock. On reflection, it may have been the shape of Bob's head that baffled him. In any case, Bob was out of action. Instead of two visitors receiving medical attention, our two best players were.

James stood up and we grew silent. The way he gripped his caniboard foretold of the horrors to come. I would describe James as being ponderously inevitable. The sight of blood stimulates him.

Inside thirty seconds he was lying beside Bob and Madeleine. It was rather tragic, the way it happened. As you may know, it is a foul if the shuttlecock strikes you in the face. The rule is that if this happens you shout "FAYCE" at the top of your voice. This gains a point. This happened to James, but Mal misunderstood the resultant shout. He was so bewildered as he saw James scowling at him shouting "FAYCE" that he obliged with the edge of his bat.

George crawled into the fray and it was at this juncture that I regained a little of our lost prestige. I drew visitors blood.

Well, to be honest, I did so indirectly. I returned the shuttlecock so fast that as Tom swung his head round to follow its flight he almost cut off his head on his collar. He even permitted to allow a little pool of blood to form on the bare floorboards and thus received the proud distinction of letting blood flow for the cause.

But the initial shock treatment we had given Mal and Tom began to tell. The human frame can only stand so much. They were too tired to defend themselves and gradually allowed themselves to be beaten to the ground. The odds, despite our precautions, were slightly in favour of the visitors...three injured to two.

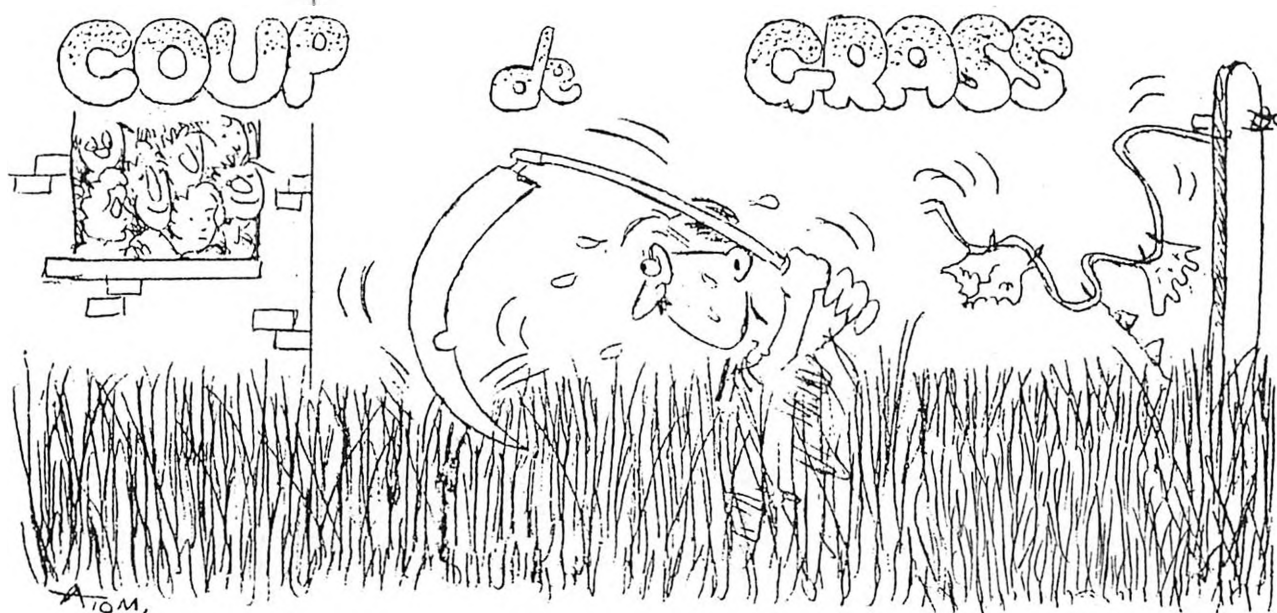
A moderate ghoddminton score.

Mal and Tom produced sufficient strength to have supper, change into their best clothes for the return trip to England that night. We quickly recovered, being used to it, but Mal and Tom jerked about the house like cripples with rigor mortis.

A trolley-bus service runs past 170 so we were able to prop the two visitors against a convenient wall until one arrived, and we took them to the boat. For a small consideration, two strong porters promised to dump the fans in their bunks. The ship sailed away into the night.

We haven't heard from Mal or Tom since, but I am given to understand that the next issue of their fanzine has been indefinitely postponed.





"Phone, " said the boss.

I grabbed the receiver.

"Sadie here," I heard . "Bob asked me to ring. It's about the James White party next Saturday night. Walt has decided to present the newly married couple with a crazy - paving footpath."

"Ugh," I said, bewildered.

"Bob wants to know how many you can carry ?"

"Three chunks of crazy-paving is my limit," I replied, trying to orientate myself. I felt the hot breath of my boss singing my ear lobes. Sadie's clear, loud voice reverberated through the now silent office.

"Good," she answered. "We are taking a load in the car, but you and Bob will have to carry your share on the trolley bus."

"I can't carry paving on a trolley bus," I protested. I looked up. My associates were staring at me with oscillating optics. They edged nearer.

"You won't get into the White House without a piece of paving," the earpiece screamed aloud . I changed the phone from one clammy hand to the other.

"I - I -" I faltered.

"You can't let a sex-fiend down," she explained. "Call round at Walt's at 7.20.p.m., next Saturday, cressed for the drill."

I heard Sadie's phone replaced. I looked up. My co-workers were still looking at me, mouths agape.

No wonder they call me Flash Gordon.

Oblique House at 7.20.p.m. Saturday 23rd July 1955 represented a hive of activity. A large car was parked outside the house, and fen were scurry- ing about with hunks of paving stones. Walt, who had temporarily put Carol in charge of the prozine kiosk, was supervising the loading into the boot of the car.

When the front wheels were about six inches off the road, Walt gave the order to cease. Two chunks of paving were lefttwo dirty chunks moss covered jaggedabout two feet square.

"Entrain, men," ordered Walt, and everyone dived into the car. Two of us were left standing on the footpath. BoSh and myself.

The car grated spasmodically down the road, Walt at the wheel, oblivious to the smoking gear-box flinching in the gutter.

"I'm afraid there is no alternative," grated Bob, and he picked up a chunk of paving. I did the same. I could hardly lift it. I expect it must have looked incongruous to see two well dressed men staggering across the road armed with filthy masonry.

The trolley-bus driver was startled, it was obviously a precedent as far as he was concerned. I thought I detected a slight flicker of recognition when he saw my moustache, so I presumed he had heard tell of a similarly adorned gent, months earlier who had tried to board a trolley-bus with a hunk of rusted metal. (Me actually, on that ill-fated expedition to transport the Shaw-Berry typer to my house.)

We dumped the paving stones under the stairs, and sat together on the upper deck, trying to forget our troubles. By one of those unfortunate coincidences which always seem to occur at the wrong moment, I discovered that my doctor, Grymble by name, was sitting behind me with his wife. I introduced BoSh, and we chatted quite amicably until we reached the centre of Belfast.

We had actually got off the bus, before Bob suddenly remembered our mission. He leapt back on the bus, staggered out again with the biggest chunk, shouting :-

"Here's yours, John." He then re-appeared with his own flagstone.

As Dr.Grymble and his wife tiptoed away, I blurted out something about a fancy dress ball, but somehow I don't think they were impressed.

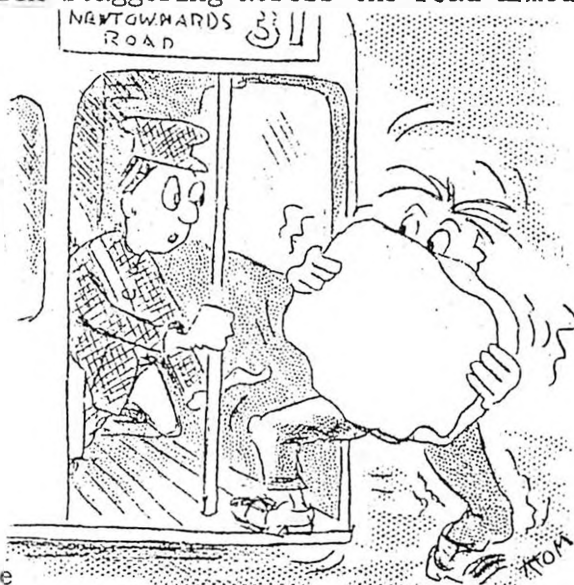
"I have to meet Diane here at eight fifteen," I gasped to Bob. We looked at the clock. It was just after eight oclock.

"Let's dump these somewhere," suggested Bob, and we sneaked down a side street, placed our charges against the wall, brushed ourselves, and re-appeared in the busy centre of Belfast looking quite presentable except for a slight film of green slime on the front of our suits.

Whilst waiting for my wife , Bob and myself patronised the premises of a nearby retailer of alcoholic beverage, and feeling refreshed, spent the ensuing three-quarters of an hour putting the passing femmes into different clearly defined physical categories, quite a pleasant inter-flagstone pastime.

Diane eventually arrived, looking quite pleased with life, until we joined her in the bus queue with our kit. She seemed satisfied to stay several yards behind us I felt quite hurt.

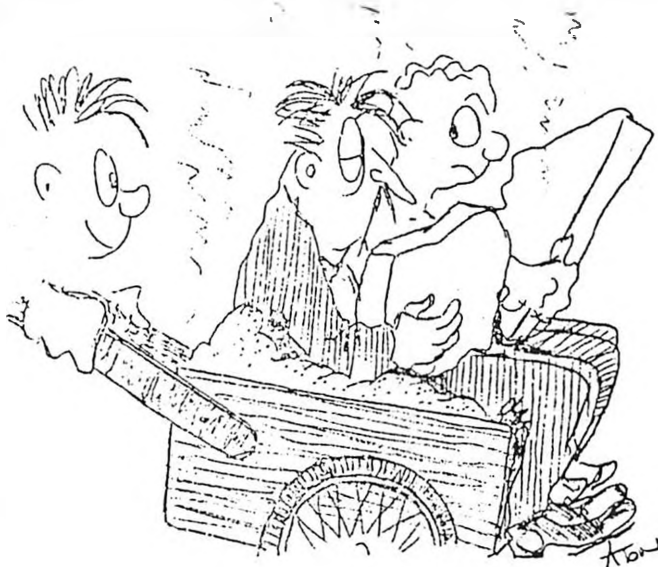
The remainder of the journey was uneventful, except that the conductor insisted upon quoting some obscure section of transport law relating to excess baggage, and made both of us sit under the stairs with you know what.



I began to think that White was taking advantage of my respect for him, a thought considerably strengthened when I learned from Bob that we had to walk over a mile from the bus terminus before we reached the White House.

The trek commencedDiane taking up the rear guard a couple of hundred yards behind. We rapidly neared the point of exhaustion, and were saved in the nick of time by an urchin, who, for a handful of small change, condescended to transport our paving in his handcart, with which machine he had been assiduously collecting a natural fertiliser deposited upon the public highway. Thus we arrived at the White House, the urchin jestingly tipping the paving and Bob and myself most uncereemoniously on the front door step, together with a sample of his wares.

Diane arrived ten minutes later.



To assist the geographically minded amongst you, I would like to point out that the White

~~AA666~~ abode is situated to the north west of Belfast. The house itself is a beautifully designed and built edifice, although I thought the large hoarding in the front garden:-

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smacking of vulgar ostentation, overshadowing as it did the HYPHEN PUBLICATIONS permant on the Willis car. The housing estate is known as Riverdale Estate, and is inhabited by the elite. In fact, a clergyman actually lived next door to James, although I understand he has since vacated his residence, due no doubt to his being nearly beheaded by the White Model Aeroplane, but more about that anon.

Peggy, the perfect hostess, brushed Bob and myself down with the yard broom, and we crossed the White portals. The others had arrived earlier, and the party consisted of Walt and Mrs, Sadie, chuck harris, GERARD QUINN, and the venerable George Charters (also in a happy mood, due to his having that very day reached pensionable age.)

I toured the house, seeing the cleanliness and comfort, noting it all down in my mind as being Pre-Harris, because I suspected that it might never look the same again.

A mouthful of White decibels roared through the house :-

"The back garden," so I joined the rest outside.

The back garden.

James, always a great exponent of the phrase ' vulgar ostentation had at last hit the jack-pot.

As a conservative estimate, I would say that the grass and other vegetation reached to ear level.

"But I cleared an area," explained James hurriedly, and led us unerringly junglewards, where we eventually arrived at a small clearing.

"How did you manage to do that ?" asked Chuck, eyes protruding.

"I have a scythe," answered James proudly, and before we could move, Chuck had fought his way back to the house, and seconds later returned waving the implement round his head like a helicopter.

It was at this juncture that the audience began to collect. Heads popped out of the bedroom windows of all the surrounding houses, and I do think that the occupants had collected their friendseither that or the housing situation is critical.

In the meantime, Chuck had circled the garden about three times, and as far as we could see, had done nothing tangible to ease the undergrowth problem, although the clothes line of intimate garments garlanded round his neck did serve to remind us that the secret of Chucks success is his ability to combine business with pleasure.

A shout from the house revealed James standing on the balcony holding aloft his model aeroplane.

Yippee.

I'm crazy about model aeroplanes.

I don't profess to know what strange power plant the machine was equipped with, but it roared away from James like a home-sick hornet. At this point, the bewildered head of the clergyman rose from above hedge level, intending, no doubt, to investigate the Harris Phenomena, and that worthy gentleman gazed in horror as the plane approached him just short of supersonic speed. Thanks to a thermal, a disaster was narrowly avoided, but 'ops' were suspended for the night.

Then Chuck saw a cat stalking through the grass. An innocent black feline known locally as the White Moggie.

With a cry of 'Safari ' Chuck hurtled after it, and we all laughed, and went in for supper, but Chuck came back later on, and we had to give him some too.

Supper.

Mmmmmmm.

Peggy must have studied under the same culinary teacher as Madeleine. The table was literally sagging in the middle with the weight of good things, but Bob Shaw noticed this, and removed about a third of the food, thus turning a potential minor catastrophe into a very real major one.

As usual at an Irish Fandom meal, witticisms were hurled about with abandon.

James came out with one of his best ever, an inference that artist Gerard Quinn was 'self unemployed'.

Walt, Chuck and GATWC were in good form. But Bob provided the laugh of the evening. A large insect , a Daddy Long Legs flew into the room, and Bob shouted,

"Quick, someone, give me two slices of bread."

I always thought Bob was a vegetarian.

After supper, James took us to his den, and allowed us to touch his typer, examine the HYPHEN file, fondle a couple of his manuscripts, and gaze entranced at his Quinn originals.

Then Chuck noticed a pair of binoculars.

With a shouted reference to heavenly bodies, he bounded down the stairs, and into the night. Gerard, Bob and I followed.

The midnight sky revealed the splendour and beauty of the mystic universe. Bob talked about Mars and Jupiter and Saturn. Gerard spoke poetically about the Milky Way. We gazed in turn through the glasses.

Chuck, when his turn came, focused the binoculars on the bedroom window of a young girl, residing about ten streets away, as she was innocently preparing for her slumbers. I think it was a disgusting exhibition on Chucks part. In the lowest possible taste. I admit that being President of the Fully Certified Sex-Friends gives him some licence, but that is going too far.

What possible pleasure could Chuck derive from the fact that the girl was wearing a pair of lavender pyjamas, with a dark green silk pyjama cord?

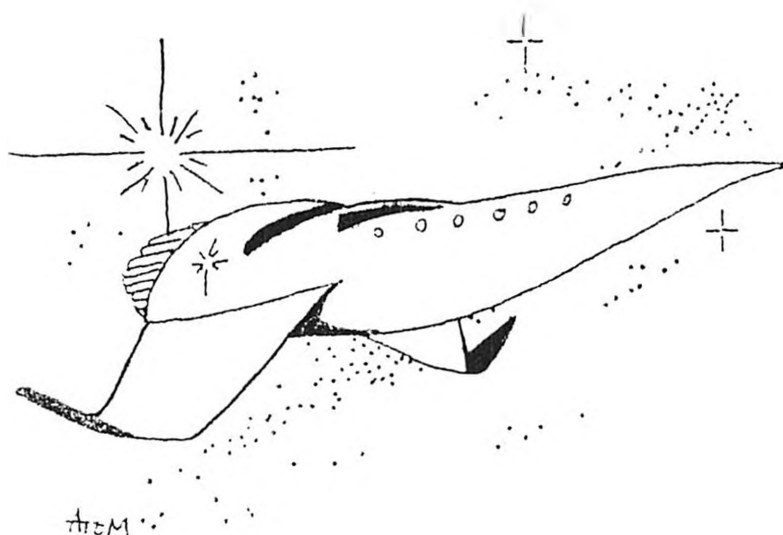
But all good things must come to an end, as Chuck said when the girl put the light out.

Walt drove us home, Diane and myself finally retiring after 4 am.

I'd like to tell you more about the party, but I haven't got the time. I am a busy man. I've got to hide my budgerigar, cut the lawn, warn my neighbours, etc.

Walt and Company are coming to my house tonight.

.....





One aspect of the true Thomson I must mention is the inborn determination of the Scot. (Although Arthur has lived for many years in London, he originally came with his family from Glasgow.) This particular affinity for being relentless is an accepted part of the Scottish tradition...grim...efficient...never harbouring the thought of surrender.

An example of this occurred the day after Olive and Arthur arrived in Belfast. We had arranged to go to Portrush, as it was the traditional site of Irish Fandom's Annual Excursion. The train left the station at the far side of Belfast at 10 am, and we had planned to meet Walt and Madeleine Willis, James White and Chuch Harris at platform 2 a few moments before the train steamed in.

Before we had retired for the night the evening before, we had planned our schedule for the morning...up early...get all the sandwiches made, children washed, bathing costumes packed and at the 'bus stop (to travel to the centre of Belfast to connect with another 'bus that was to take us to the railway station) in time to allow for the fluctuations of the Sunday 'bus service.

I awoke on Sunday morning and saw that it was 8.15am...which meant immediately that our schedule was minus 45 minutes. I gave a loud clarion call of distress, and in a flash, we had all the children dressed and were down in the living room, Arthur with one of my children under each arm. We were a disorganised rabble, in great panic.

Arthur, deep in thought for a moment, stepped forward and shouted 'STOP'. Everyone did so. Then Arthur, like a great military commander, gave a series of rapid but sensible orders, and although we all continued to rush about at top speed, there was a system where previously there had been disorder. We all knew what we were supposed to do, and Arthur, lying on the settee with his feet curled up so as not to be in the way, gave us an encouraging word here, a nod of approval there, and speedily the table was set for breakfast and sandwiches had been cut.

We devoured breakfast quickly, and sorted out the parcels and bags and children. Arthur lined us up with military precision in the front garden, and distributed bags and packages amongst us, according to our capacity. So as to be in a position to provide immediate strategic succour in case his system broke down, Arthur obviously had to have his hands free, and we all thought we saw the reason for this...

We started off on the trek to the 'bus stop, two or three hundred yards away, and Arthur, once again with great foresight, brought up the rear. He explained that he wasn't carrying anything, because he was there to pick up things that might possibly get dropped, although I'm glad to say that his services were not required.

On arrival at the 'bus stop, Diane looked at her watch and announced it was 9.30 am...and we had to travel three miles to the centre of Belfast, catch another 'bus, travel a further mile to the railway station, and even then look for Willis and Co.

Came 9.35 am, and no 'bus.

Arthur, I was glad to see, was giving the matter great attention. He hinted to me in his subtle manner that I should have maybe found out the 'bus schedule. Anyway, he promised to re-sew the lapels back onto my jacket when he got the chance.

Exactly at 9.37 am, the 'bus came. Arthur stood behind and pushed and we found ourselves in nail-biting agitation, near the exit, so that as soon as the 'bus reached the terminus, we could evacuate quickly and sprint to the other 'bus stop.

It seemed an eternity...those slow dragging miles, but finally, at 9.50 am, we reached the centre of the city. We got off quickly and started in the direction of the other 'bus stop. It was about two hundred yards away, and I saw a 'bus parked there, the driver with one foot on the cab footrail, obviously preparing to get in and drive away.

"That's our 'bus," I yelled to Arthur, who was dragging the two children behind us, and we sprinted at top speed to the 'bus, and arrived in a panting heap to see the driver get onto the road, slam the door behind him, and light a cigarette.

"No harm done, actually, Arthur," I admitted. "It wasn't our 'bus, anyway."

Arthur failed to see the logic of this; I got the impression he wasn't too thrilled with the situation. Little things told me, like the way he screamed in a shrill falsetto voice, and ran round the 'bus, gibbering in an inane manner.

Then he seemed to take a grip of himself. He came back to us, his strong hands clutching his sides.

"What time is it now?" he asked through gritted teeth.

"Seven minutes to ten," said Diane.

"Correct me if I'm wrong," said Arthur, "but the railway station is a mile away, this 'bus will not move for some time, and as John has admitted, it's the wrong 'bus...and we have to be on the train in six and a half minutes."

"Well", I agreed, "except for the fact that it's five and a half minutes to ten, I'd say you actually summed up the situation fairly well, considering."

Arthur stood still, and I'll never forget the look on his face. His teeth stood out like the front grill of a Chrysler...his face was set, grim, resolute, and I could sense the traditional determination of his Scottish forebears gaining the upper hand.

"There seems only one thing to do," said Arthur, and with four minutes to go, he did it.

He stepped into the middle of the road, and put up his hand, palm to the front. There was a screech of brakes, and leaving a trail of blue smoking rubber behind it, a taxi screeched to a halt, the front bumper caressing Arthur's ankles.

I swear this happened. I'll never know how Arthur knew that a taxi was passing at the moment...my own theory is that it was just sheer luck it happened to be a taxi. As far as Arthur knew, it was a car...any car ! Arthur showed his gums to the driver, opened the door and squeezed us all in. He jumped in after me, and accidentally trod on my face. He did say he was sorry, though.

Then he tapped the bewildered driver on the shoulder.

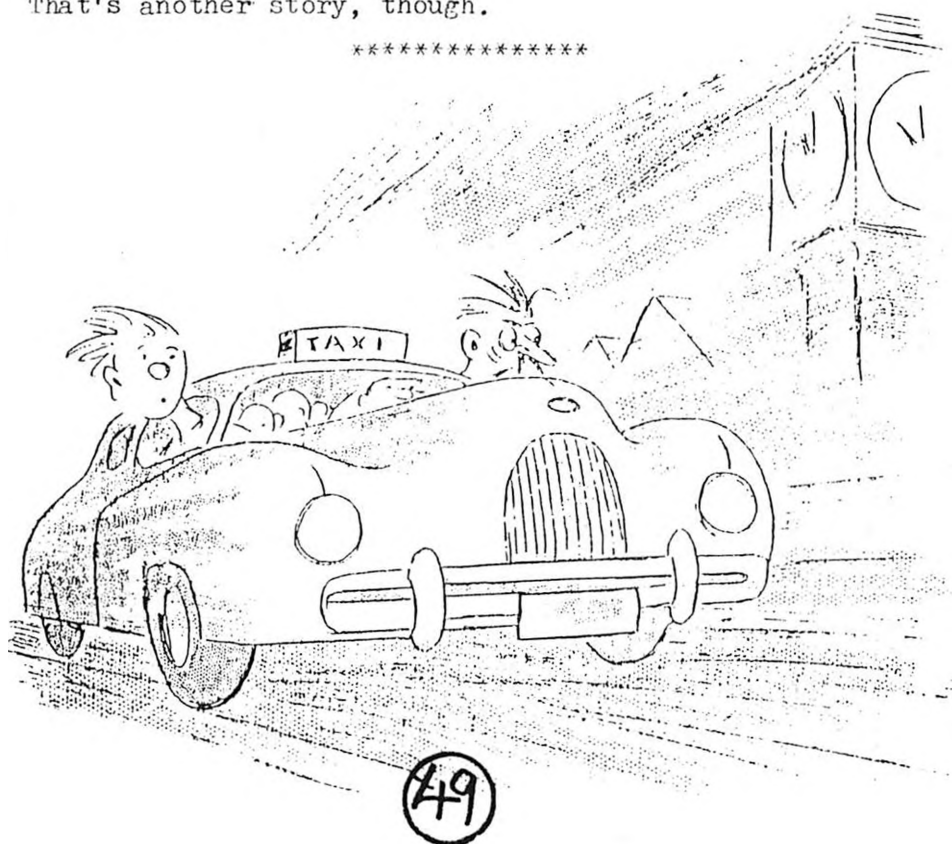
"A train leaves York Street Station in three minutes," hissed Arthur," and we want to be on it."

With a grinding of gears, the taxi shot forward, and with Arthur's hot breath warming his ear lobes, the driver trod hard on the accelerator and broke the speed limit within three seconds flat. With the station clock showing one minute to ten, we jerked to a rubber-searing halt, and mentally lashing us, Arthur paid for the taxi and rushed for the tickets, whilst I shepherded the party past the ticket barrier, which was slowly clanging to a halt.

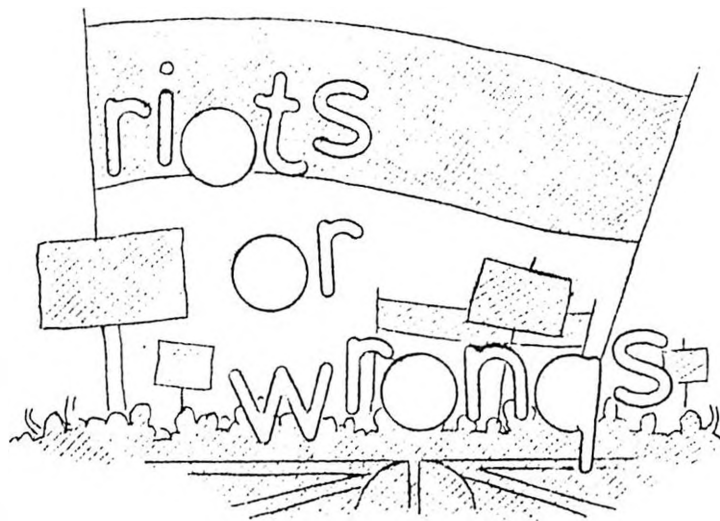
The guard started to wave his green flag, and put his whistle to his mouth as Arthur vaulted the barrier, and offered the guard a sticky toffee. By the time he had unwrapped it, and prised it off his gums, we had found the Willis carriage and burst inside on top of a lot of startled fen, who had given us up for lost.

Some of you, upon reading this, will think I have broken the habit of a lifetime and exaggerated ! But, so help me, its all true. Whereas I had been prepared to give up in unconditional surrender when we arrived late at the first 'bus stop, Arthur, with his true grit, refused to submit, and we had much to thank him for, because the day at Portrush was brilliant. In fact, the sun was so strong that I got sunstroke, and became delirious for twenty-four hours, and if it hadn't been for the fact that I needed a haircut, and my hair was hanging over my shoulders, I might have expired.

That's another story, though.



The journey by train from Portrush, on the north Antrim coast, to Belfast, takes two hours. The scenic beauty en route is delightful, but the Willis Party had admired it going to Portrush in the morning, and after a magnificent day on the beach at Portrush, felt less inclined to gaze at the green hills of Antrim, and more inclined to take stock of their contemporaries.



Walt Willis had booked a compartment for us all, because, from bitter experience, we knew that there would be great difficulty in keeping together otherwise. The party, under the command of Mr. Willis, consisted of Madeleine, Chuck Harris, Olive and Arthur, Diane and my two children, James White and myself.

We reached platform three, and found our compartment. We trooped inside. The train was really crowded, and some holiday-makers began to look grim, and make sporadic sorties into seemingly crowded compartments. Walt instructed us to spread ourselves out, and he installed Harris at the window. This gibbering visage served as a sort of human scarecrow, and we were untroubled, that is, except for when the party of Girl Guides passed by, but somehow we managed to hold on to Harris until the train steamed out.

It was at this stage that I discovered I couldn't move. Contrary to advice from the rest, I had pranced about the beach all day in my trunks, letting Sol get a good lingering glimpse of the pale Berry Torso, after all, it was three years since we had had such a good day in Northern Ireland. I'm not decrying the climate. It's just true.

And not only was I incapable of movement, I couldn't keep still. This may seem an abstract sort of phrase, but look at it this way. I couldn't move because the blistered flesh on my back was grating against my shirt, and I couldn't keep still, because, foolishly, I had not visited the 'Gentlemens' before entraining. I was afraid to get up and search in the corridor, because an appealing bunch of faces were longingly pressed against our window, and I knew that if I left my seat, not only would I lose it for ever, but the surge would probably get out of control, and there were the women and children to think of. I tell you, it was rough.

So, for some time, the train puffed slowly along, and we were strangely quiet. Then we came to the level crossing.

Now, this episode I am about to relate must be read with bated breath. Harris nearly caused a furore of fantastic proportions. Seriously, this incident is about the most tense I have ever experienced. Let me detail it in all its sordid pattern

The level crossing, thank goodness, was in our favour. Otherwise, I don't pretend to know if I would ever be able to write this for posterity. For on the road leading to the crossing, and stretching as far as they eye could see, were rank upon rank of Orangemen....the loyalists of Northern Irelandwho hold as their pinnacle of faith the legend of King William of Orange or, as he is affectionately known, King Billy. Harris, of course, was aware

of the political significance of this, as is obvious from a scrutiny of his semi-documentary one-shot of early 1955, THRU DARKEST IRELAND WITH KNIFE, FORK, AND SPOON. And as the train slowed down at the crossing, presumably to let the passengers see this stirring sight, Harris, before anyone could stop him, rushed to the window, and gave a racous shout of 'Down with King Billy'.

For some seconds, a horrible silence seemed to shout out loud. The procession stopped, and the incredulous Orangemen staggered backwards...they knew only two kinds of people would have perpetrated such a blasphemy... an ardent political opponent who had just made his will, or a certified mental defective. As good fortune would have it, the engine driver didn't belong to any of these two categories, and the train shot forward and rapidly gained maximum speed. We pulled Harris off the luggage rack, and sorted ourselves out, and then beheld the ardent loyalist at the door, pulling the door open to get hold of Harris.....

Willis, his mind in full slashing control of the situation, tapped his forehead meaningly, pointed to Harris, and gave a confidential aside, "he's English, you know." The intruder smiled at this, as though it explained everything, withdrew satisfied.

Harris seemed genuinely surprised at the trouble he had caused, and asked if he had indeed blundered, and Willis pointed suggestively through the window at the mass of Orangemen vaulting ditches like racehorses, gradually falling back as the train gained speed.

At this, Harris lapsed into a meditative silence, and settled in the corner of the compartment, staring moodily through the corridor window.

And, a few moments later, Arthur Thomson crawled from under the seat, ruminated for some time, and allowed a sly sneer of triumph to spread across his face.

He pointed out of the window at a large, sombre building.

"What's that, Walt?" he asked silkily.

"Ah, that is a lunatic asylum," answered Walt gravely.

Arthur turned to me.

"Where you ever in there?" he asked.

Hmmm. I hoped he was jesting. Maybe Harris, but not me

I shook my head.

Arthur paused for a few seconds, to prepare for the full effect of his punch line.

He coughed loudly, to draw attention, and said in great jubilation, "John was frightened to commit himself."

Willis, White and Harris leapt across to Arthur and shook his hand warmly, and patted him on the back.

Right enough, I had to admit it was a good pun. I hoped it was spontaneous...although deep in the cavernous recesses of my mind, I had a sneaking suspicion that on the journey to Portrush that morning, Walt and Arthur had been conversing in whispers at just that point. Probably coincidence...far be it from me to detract any egoboo from Arthur for a clever quip.

The train arrived in Belfast shortly afterwards, and as soon as it had almost stopped, Irish Fandom en bloc, and all Honorary Members except Harris, leapt from the train and scurried like rabbits down the platform.

At first, I thought their motives were similar to my own, and I wanted to get there first, but I heard Willis whispering feverishly, "Suppose the Orangemen contacted the police...".....

Harris soon appeared rushing down the platform, and we broke cover like a flock of startled Roebuck, dispersing wildly over the railway station.

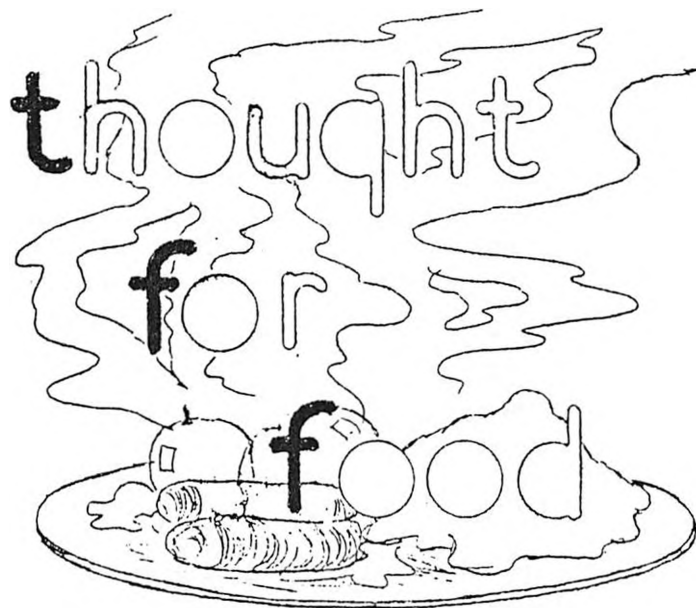
As Walt pointed out as we clustered round him in the dark recess of the station waiting room later, if the worst came to the worst, we could always say that Harris had caught sunstroke, or he was out on parole and had momentarily gone beserk. Arthur thoughtfully suggested we completely disclaim any knowledge of Harris, but I'm glad to say there wasn't complete unanimity about this, Walt pointing out that Harris owed him 3/7d.

When we thought it expedient, we trooped surreptitiously out of the station, and went home by taxi. Harris arrived home soon afterwards, furtively looking over his shoulder, much chastened.

Me.....weeelll, I just burst out laughing.

Guess that was a good pun about my not wanting to commit myself.....





In a previous saga, I mentioned the quaint little seaside resort on the County Down coast. We stayed there a couple of days, 'we' consisting of Arthur and his wife Olive, Diane, myself and our two children, Colin and Kathleen. The visit was prominent for a variety of reasons, which I intend to describe in great detail. But first I must tell you all about the place we stayed in.

There is a widespread racket in Northern Ireland at all the seaside resorts. Rich landlords built small caravans or minute shacks, and charge people an extortionate rate to

stay there for a month. Some folk have the notion that to be huddled for a month in an area a few feet square, exposed to the full blast of the sea wind and living in the most primitive conditions imaginable, is a holiday.

It so happened that during the Thomson's stay, Diane suddenly hit on the superb idea of us all going down to Ballyvester and staying with her mother and father and an aged aunt who were on holiday there.

Diane presumed that her parents were staying at a boarding house or at a hotel...and Arthur and Olive especially liked the idea of a couple of days down by the sea, so we went.

Diane had been to Ballyvester before, and using her strongly developed sense of direction, eventually led the frustrated procession to a large house. Olive put the two children down, and Arthur put Olive down and I pulled the handle of the suitcase he was carrying out of his mouth and propped him against a wall. Diane disappeared inside and came out a few moments later, bubbling over with delight.

"This is the right place," she smiled. "The landlord says we can go round to the back entrance."

We trekked down the side of the house, and turned left into a small ante-chamber. Very small.

Arthur and I took our jackets off, hung them on the wall, and stacked our suitcases underneath.

"What a big house this is," smiled Diane, and we nodded in anticipation.

She went to find her parents, but they'd gone down to the sea. Later, they came back, and we introduced them to the Thomson's.

We talked for a while, and Diane asked if we could go to the dining room and have lunch, and he father gave an inscrutable smile, and pressed a knob on the wall.

"Ah, the valet," murmured Arthur a split-second before a large rectangular hunk of polished wood hinged to the wall dropped on his cranium.

"This is the dining hall," said her father. "In fact, we all have to live and eat and sleep in this one room. If you can call it a room. It's actually a converted garage, and it was the only accommodation available with the short notice we gave. And that thing balanced on Arthur's head is the table. If you'll all go out and give us a bit of room, Diane and her mother will lay the table."

Outside, Arthur seemed somewhat baffled.

"I thought that...that room was a hall cupboard," he moaned, "and there's nine of us altogether...that'll mean three sittings...unless we have lunch out here."

But by some method involving disciplined breathing and a firm promise to use only one hand to manipulate knife and fork, we all managed to sit down to lunch at the same time. Arthur developed cramp on the underside of his chin, where his knees had been in contact, and he used his initiative in true Thomson style by going outside and leaning through the window, and continuing eating his lunch standing up. I must confess he seemed the most comfortable. I felt sort of inferior sitting under the table accepting scraps from my wife as they became available, but I said to myself the seaside is the seaside, and weeeell, it's only once a year, and it is only natural to expect a little discomfort.

After lunch, we organised a trip to Donaghadee, a port one mile north of Ballyvester. The main road led directly to it, but Diane's father said that if we went along the sea shore, we'd get there in about ten minutes.

Although having the children was undoubtedly a hinderance, I felt that hopping from rock to rock for half a mile was in a sense an unwelcome hazard. True, it was only seven hundred yards by way of the shore to Donaghadee, and a mile by road, but after we'd waded the third sewage stream, Arthur suggested we try the road anyway.....and we went on a cross-country route that seemed needlessly complicated, and we eventually reached the main road two miles south of Donaghadee. We caught a 'bus, however, and had quite a chat with Dianas parents, who got on the 'bus at Ballyvester, and seemed genuinely surprised to see us. Arthur mentioned the rock-hopping and chasm-wading, and Dianas father said that of course, the beach route was only used during low tide.

I gave Arthur one of the children to carry, as I didn't like the way he was fondling his bucket and spade.

During the afternoon, we toured Donaghadee, the highlight of which, to me, was what can only be termed as a 'bloody provincial' haircut. Previously, I had always thought the bowl on the head routine was a music hall joke. It's quite true, though....and cheap.

The 'bus service didn't seem to be too well organised, and we walked back.

And we were tired.

Very tired.

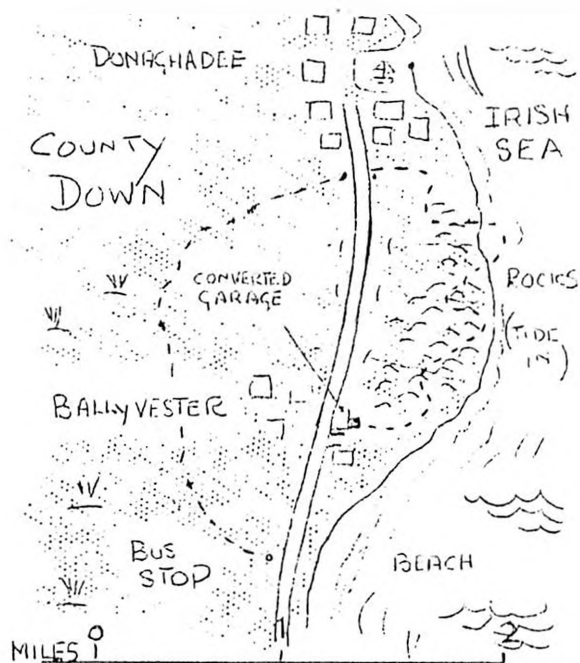
But also hungry.

VERY HUNGRY.

We sat down in the pseudo room, and Arthur ran a tongue round his lips, and muttered something about 'liking a cup of tea.'

The women were talking animatedly amongst themselves, and didn't appear to hear, so Arthur gave a horrible groan of anguish and in a semi-jocular mood started to eat the table-cloth. Someone passed Arthur the salt. That did it.

Arthur, in case you don't know, is a patient man. But I could see he was annoyed....and his anger was fostered by his hunger. He bared his teeth and



looked round the room. He spotted the wall-switch which controlled the hinged wall-table, and discovered he was sitting exactly where the table was scheduled to drop. Being intelligent, Arthur got out of the way, and rammed the switch with a vibrating fore finger.

We helped him from under the wall-bed.

But I was hungry too.

And said so in no mean manner.

Eventually, when we discovered that Colin and Kathleen were also hungry, Arthur organised a permanent chant which was terrible to hear, and eventually the women took the subtle hint.

And now I come to the climax of this story, revealing to you all the utter genius of Arthur...even more magnificent because of the wonderful spontaneity of it.

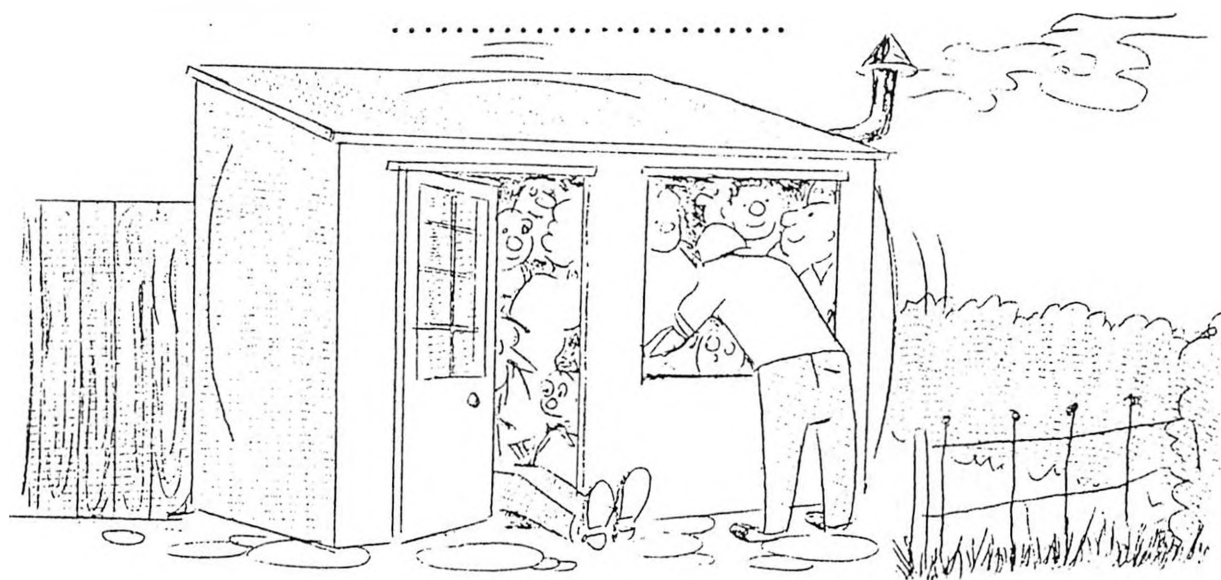
The wall-table was lowered, a flowered table cloth was thrown over it, and the women commenced to squeeze past each other, bearing plates of delectables. Arthur, the two children and myself tried to restrain ourselves from leaping headlong on to the table, and clearing it in one fell swoop, but culture and protocol dictated a different technique. As soon as one back was turned, Arthur would whip a cake off a plate and pass it round. Sometimes, if backs were turned for several seconds, his hands would be a blur as he passed the eatables along the waiting queue. It was fantastic to see four faces, innocent and immobile, awaiting just slight inattention on the part of the table layers, and as soon as this occurred, four pairs of jaws went up and down so fast the Adam's Apples looked like yoyo's at a contest. Of course, to allay suspicion, Arthur saw it was necessary to remove the plates from whence they came, and as Kathleen was the smallest, we had her crawling on her hands and knees, putting the plates back.

Several times, Diane or Olive or someone else mentioned the long time it was taking to lay the table, and eventually, out of deference to the others, we sank in a corner and by a few murmured monosyllables, let them know we were still hungry.

Which we were.

Diane's mother remarked somewhat meaningfully that the sea air had certainly given us an appetite. It was pleasant to be reminded of Bob Shaw again, and if he ever reads this, I would like him to know that there is a good chance his table-clearing record will be broken.

If it does ever come to a contest, we shall know where to hold it.



During his triumphant visit to Northern Ireland, Arthur Thomson gave many glimpses of his own particular brand of genius, for which he is so rightly famed the fannish world over. One instance I have in mind really spawned itself into the primary experimental stage during an emergency meeting of Irish Fandom at a place called Ballywalter, in County Down, on the coast of the Irish Sea.

James White, who, during the celebrated BeaCon, revealed his uncanny control over the sun, was specially ordered to provide the maximum amount of sunshine during the period when Chuck Harris and the Thomson's holiday coincided. (Harris was staying at Walt's house at the time, whilst the Thomsons stopped at 'Mon Debris', my house.) There is no doubt that White succeeded with his sun control yet again, and I've the remains of three layers of skin on my back to prove it. The ATOM face, however, nurtured under the hot tropical sun during his active service days in the R.A.F.(plug), remained completely unaffected by this brutal and prolonged assault by a White-inspired Sol, except..... yes.....except for his nose.

HIS NOSE.

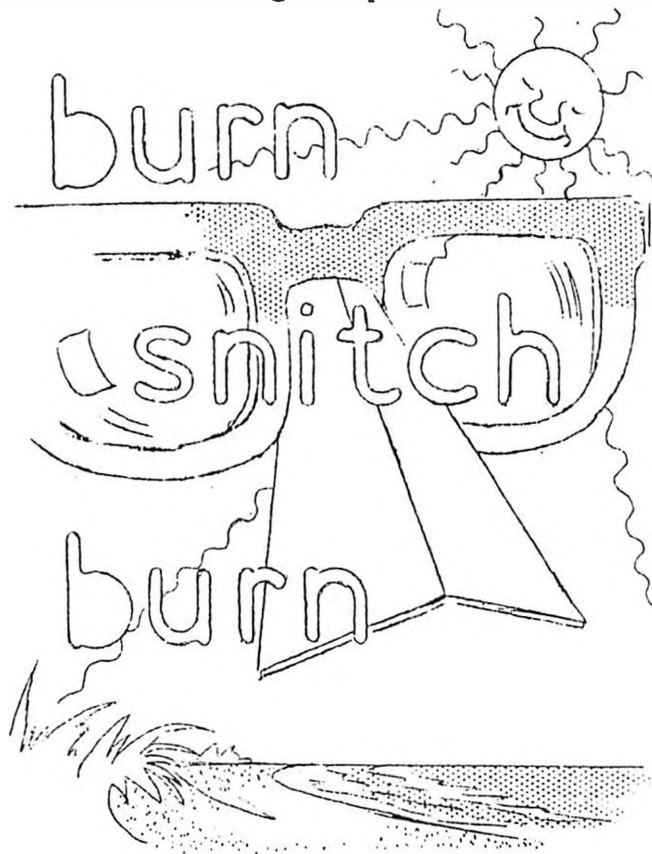
The Thomson Snoot, as Arthur confessed to me one night in a fit of cruel remorse, bears the hereditary stigma of being exceedingly blister prone. Looking at him in the dim confines of my den, his nose resembled a warning beacon similar to the type

installed on the hills round Belfast airport (Nutt's Corner, so named after Benccliffe landed there in '55.)

I snapped my fingers. Deep in the recess of a cupboard in a bedroom there reclined a bottle of Calamine Lotion. I found it, and suggested to Arthur that as the following day promised to be even hotter, he could still sunbathe if he took the simple precaution of dabbing his snitch with the lotion.

Next morning he did so. He lay on his back on my garden lawn. The luxuriant brown glow of sheer sunburn on his face was spoiled only by the blatant splotch of snow-white Calamine on his beak. Arthur dozed off on the lawn, and awoke twenty minutes later to find himself surrounded by all the youngsters of the neighbourhood, who sat round in a respectful semi-circle, mouths open with awe, eyes protruding with delight. Arthur sat up, yawned loudly, and ran a hand through his hair. A titter burst forth, followed by a sporadic burst of applause.

"CoCo the Clown is about to commence his act," announced Colin, my offspring, jingling a pocket full of coins, and standing near the open gateway. Maybe 'standing' isn't quite the right word to describe his posture all he needed was a set of starting blocks to emulate Jesse Owen waiting



for the crack of the pistol.

.....

"I'm not going through that again," said Arthur later, as we split the 4/9¹/₂d three ways. "We're supposed to be going to your wife's mother at Ballyvester tomorrow. I can't go in the sun with my virgin nose, and I can't put Calamine on it...I mean..."

Much perplexed, Arthur shook his head in frustration, and wandered off to bed.

.....

The sun, a white-hot disc in the clear blue sky, blasted down with monotonous fury on the frizzled populace below. Ballyvester, a few miles north of Ballywalter, consists of a fairly small sandy beach, gradually leading on to a grassy bank. Whilst the rest of us cavorted merrily on the sand, playing cricket, Arthur slunk away into the undergrowth, one hand clasped firmly over his bonker.

I felt sorry for him. During our frequent trips to the seaside, Arthur had shown himself to be an enthusiastic follower of King Willow, and the thought of him being unable to play, and having to rest his kisser under the shade of a large bush, adjacent to where some High School girls were changing for a swim, moved me sorely. I felt I should have been there with him.

But after an hours lapse, Arthur emerged from the bushes, revealing his presence with a racous yell of something that sounded like "It's my turn to bat."

I turned to hand him the cricket bat, and suddenly caught sight of his face.

HIS FACE ?????

A chant of amazement started amongst the rank and file of sun-bathers as Arthur approached us, stepping proudly over the prostrate figures. In the distance I heard Colin shouting something about "Roll up and see the only human Spoonbill in captivity," but I ignored the inference, factual thought it undoubtedly was.

For Arthur's famous prowess, his flare for spontaneous inventive genius had asserted itself in a magnificent crescendo of glory.

Attached under his spectacles by devious means was a large oblong of cardboard, which rested on his proboscis like a glacier on an Alpine Peak. It completely obscured the lower part of his face, and when he spoke, the frustrated decibels, caught in a paroxysm of indecision after playing a metaphorical game of 'ping pong' with the cardboard and his epiglottis, sneaked down the front of his shirt in abject surrender, giving a last despairing muffle en route.

Arthur took his stance at the wicket, and I ran up to bowl. All I could see was his beezee-shield. The sun reflected off it like a shaft of sheet-lightening, and someone swam out to sea to get the ball back.

Arthur was quietly magnificent in his hour of glory. Although people laughed at his ostentatious conk-protector, two or three people appeared later that afternoon similarly equipped. Within 24 hours, being without a Thomson Anti-Sol Nose Shield (as the patented production model was so named) was to be relegated as being socially inferior. It was a sign of prestige to stroll along the beach with ones family, all nodding sagely to each other, mumbling away behind oblongs of cardboard. It showed that you were on holiday, were extremely sunburned, and concerned about your ultimate appearance.

Of course, Arthur Thomson is back in London now, and as I was initially seen with him, I'm getting all the blame.

You see, the majority of people living in the north eastern part of County Down have all got beautifully sunburned faces, and horrible white noses.

My answer to this was the Berry Visage Shield For Sunburned Faces With Adjustable Recess For White Nose.

I must confess that sales didn't go too well.



Arthur Thomson has rightly gained fame in the fannish field as probably the most gifted artist fandom has ever known.

Particularly so in the field of true cartoons. Several fen are adept stylo virtuoso's, and although their semi-sercon illo's are executed with originality, the basic artistic format remains static. ATOM alone has the ability to inject authenticity

into his cartoons....most especially in his character studies of James White, Ken Bulmer, Steve Schultheis, Chuck Harris, Eric Bentcliffe, George Charters, to name only a few. This is the ATOM famed everywhere, the artist with the cultured and prolific stylo and the unbounded imagination.

But those of us who know him well...really well...realise that there is something much deeper to his personality. Those of us who have had the fortunate experience to listen to Arthur making most perceptive remarks during a taper session fully understand the machinations of this brilliant mind. I recall a taper session at Walts, we were making a tape for Jean and Andy Young...it was one of those taper sessions when everything went right...conversation flowed merrily along like a rippling mountain stream. Merry quip followed closely on the heel of merry quip. Then Arthur, who had been strangely quiet, raised a hand, and with a refined accent, composed of a mixture of broad Glaswegian and subtle Cockney, made a most revealing remark, and we all sank back in our chairs, struggling to get the full significance of the profound observation. Even Willis, with his great mind, found it necessary to reflect on the astute Thomson comment. I am sure that Jean and Andy derived some considerable benefit from the sage remarks.

Arthur also has the rare ability to repeat incidents with a superlative zest...the necessary qualifications for a gifted raconteur, which ATOM undoubtedly is. You haven't lived until you've heard him give the full story of the time he was approached in Picadilly by a woman of uncertain virtue." Of course," said Arthur philosophically puffing a cloud of smoke towards the ceiling, "it's not so bad a woman coming up to you and saying 'Hello, dearie,' but when a male comes up and says it, weeeell...." With righteous indignation, Arthur vigorously tapped the end of his cigarette, and ground the ash into the carpet. It's the proud significance of his gestures that combines to make his story-telling so wonderful an experience

However, it wasn't until we visited Ballyvester, on the County Down coast, facing the Irish Sea, that I had the distinction of seeing Arthur make with a superb example of his genius. It has never been my privilege to witness better. Others, since that memorable date, have had occasion to hear a replica of the first spontaneous flash of consummate skill. It has even



been set to tape, but those who hear it will only shrug and say it's a hoax, or a recording of the real thing, and assert that no human being could possibly have done it. If I had not been a witness, I would have agreed with them, but I stake everything I possess that Arthur did it. Alone and unaided, he did it. And quite magnificent it was, too.

Of course, environment had a great deal to do with it. One can't expect to work up much enthusiasm, for example, if one was sitting on top of an iceberg in the Antarctic with Jayne Mansfield. I probably could, but as I said, one can't expect it. So in this case, it was the atmosphere of the surroundings that constituted the back-cloth, as it were, for the fantastic incident.

I can see the vista as if it were happening now.

It was almost ten o'clock at night. Four of us were walking along the sandy beach at Ballyvester. The sky was overcast, although it was quite warm. Just the four of us on the whole deserted beachOlive, Diane, Arthur and myself. Conversation wafted along as conversation usually does. Stories, jokes, anecdotes, mostly all tinged with a lannish reference, but, for the sake of the two non-fen, set up in such a manner that they couldn't really object to what we were saying as being too esoteric.

Then the great moment arrived.

Arthur stopped, a look of celestial bliss on his face. He was obviously in a trance....completely on a different plane altogether.....

His eyes flickered once or twice, and a coy grin interrupted the thin line of his lips. The rest of us stepped backwards, awed by this strange behaviour, yet somehow exulted with what we sensed, we knew, was to be something utterly out of this world.

Then Arthur did it.

He ran a couple of fingers through his hair, knocking it over his face, as any well-bred Irish faaan would normally do. Slowly, oh so slowly, a transition took place...his kind features assumed an awful transfixion, as if he was reading a Reaney mss for the first time. His arms rose slowly to shoulder height, and stayed at the accepted scarecrow angle. His fingers spread out like an open Mizere. Then, with a measured movement, he slowly tilted his head to one side.

For some seconds he stayed like that, and Diane put a comforting hand round Olive, his wife, as she appeared to be taking the thing far too literally.....I peered between their two heads, gauging the distance to the nearest cover. I knew Arthur was fooling, but, well, frankly, I've learned never to take a chance.

And so occurred the climax to the whole uncanny performance.

I don't profess to know how he did it. My mind can only accept so much, and even though he did it before my very eyes, and I know it happened, I'm still a little befuddled. Wouldn't you be ?

With his eyes half closed, he opened his mouth slightly.

"Squarrrrrk...quarrrrrk."

He gave a superb rendering of a seagull. It was the last word. The performers on the B.B.C. who make a living out of giving bird impressions have never reached the peak of perfection which Arthur displayed. It wasn't so much the noise, although that was authentic seagull. No. The realistic part of the performance was the way he willed us to see a seagull. At each squark, he raised himself on tiptoe, and the way I was rooted to the spot in bewilderment, I quite expected to see him taxi forward, flap gloriously towards the horizon, and disappear into the infinit.

I've often thought about that incident since.

I feel that in his own way, Arthur, for one brief moment, had reached the elemental truth...had plumbed the mysteries of the Universe....had shown us a fleeting glimpse of something ethereal and wonderful, which the human mind is only capable of comprehending on very rare occasions.

When we finally walked back, we were silent in the presence of this strange media. Arthur was ashen of face., like a soul that has touched the unknown. Once or twice, as if in silent experimentation, he did a sporadic flap of the hands, and emitted a tentative squark, but it was nothing in comparison with his climax a few moments previously.

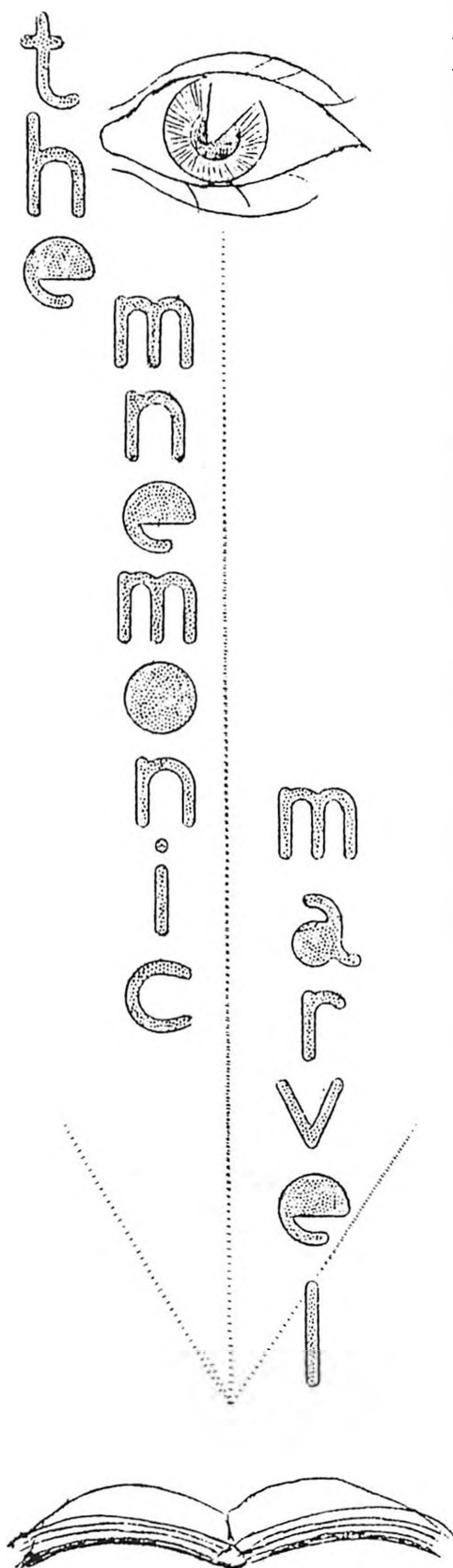
As I say, a poor facsimile of the original noise has been recorded for posterity on tape, but us three who heard the real Thomson-inspired seagull, will always remember it as one of those unexplained phenomena that can only be discussed in whispers.

. Some readers may think it a waste of time to spend so much space on the description of a mere vocal impersonation...but I am satisfied in my own mind that I couldn't do justice to the subject by taking less words.

Of course, there is one other explanation,

In his own subtle philosophical way, Arthur could have been giving us the bird.





There are some aspects of the diverse Thomson personality which are not appreciated by the great majority of fen with whom he has been in contact. I myself only began to notice them on the second week of his stay at my abode in June '57. I can write with great accuracy about these facets of the True Thomson, because, with the typical authentic outlook for which I am famed, I took great care to close the door after the Thomson's when they retired at night, and spent some considerable time in tabulating all the things I had noticed in a small black notebook I keep for my amateur psychological studies.

Did you know that Mr. Thomson has a new and deadly way of reading prozines (and for all I know, of reading fanzines?) I gave him carte blanche permission to examine the whole of my library (weeell, both shelves of it) and, to my certain knowledge, he completely refrained from touching the volumes of The Decameron Of Boccaccio and other quantities of pornographic literature of some significance to fandom. The bhoy turned out to be an avaricious sf readercan you imagine that, actually reading science fiction ?

I recall his strange demeanour. He would glance at his watch and say, " Ah, I've fifteen minutes to spare, I'll read some science fiction until the dinner is ready.", and with that, he'd nip upstairs to my den, and return in two minutes with several American soft cover sf books.

SEVERAL.

And then he.....but allow me to quote verbatim from the notes I took immediately after witnessing this strange and uncanny Thomson Phenomena.....

' so I carefully watched whilst he picked up an IMAGINATION, dated, I think, April '57. He looked at the cover painting for some seconds with a distinct curl of the upper lip, and then he turned to the contents page. With a rythmic flick of the right thumb and forefinger, he then methodically turned over page after page, presumably, I thought, looking at or for the illos. In exactly two minutes and fifteen seconds he breathed a sigh, and placed the book face down on the arm of the settee. He licked his lips, wiped his eyes, and did the same with a December '56 AMAZING, and a few moments later with two more IMAGINATION'S and a SCIENCE FICTION ADVENTURE. " I say, Arthur," I said with commendable host-like enthusiasm, " which one have you decided to

read ?" Arthur looked at me with a bemused expression. "I've just read the five of them," he explained matter-of-factly. I looked at him with disbelief. "Surely you are jesting ?" I explained. Arthur wiped a hand across his forehead, and did something with a bottle of OPTREX (+) Then dinner was served.'

This most revealing page of notes gives a true picture of what happened. As I explained before, this was written fairly soon after the incident occurred, so I can safely say I have eliminated all possibility of exaggeration. However, the following day I was prepared for further detailed observations, and I'll print below the pertinent notes enscribed immediately afterwards :-

'announcing that he was going to do one hours reading, Arthur asked my young son to accompany him to the library, and they both returned shortly afterwards, staggering along with armfuls of books, quite possibly the rest of my sf collection. This time, with stop-watch in hand, I made some expert observations, with the following result.:-

S.F. MAG.

TIME TAKEN.

Other Worlds	10 seconds.
IMAGINATION Vol 8 No 4	1 minute 16 seconds.
IMAGINATION Vol 5 No 3	2 minutes 23 seconds.
AMAZING Vol 30 No 6	59 seconds.
etc	
etc	

With grim determination, I looked at his eyes as he was reading, and I discovered a most significant fact. When he looked at a page, his eyes didn't go from left to right, then back again for the next line. THEY WENT DOWN THE CENTRE OF THE PAGE.

This was completely revolutionary to me, a new dimension, if factual. I secretly suspected a hoax, people seem to have the impression that I am hoax-prone, a sort of experimental field for new hoaxes to be tried for some sort of provisional expectation as to the probable result.

I made myself clear on this point, and Arthur slung a hand in careless abandon, and challenged me to ask him a question..ANY question, about the contents of any of the books lying at his feet....and I did.... I picked a story at random, and he gave me a consise and accurate resume of the plot and the activities of the central characters. I was forced to admit that Thomson could indeed peruse and digest a small book in a very few moments. He seemed concerned that I had not witnessed the technique previously, and explained that it was employed by proof readers, etc.....

That's all I have written down in my notes about this particular mystic ability.....just one of Arthur's remarkable gifts. It is a fact that during his service with the R.A.F, he did a tour of duty in the Middle East, and I recall that when I stayed at his house in May '56, he showed me some snaps in the Family Photograph Album , and one of them depicted Arthur in close conversation with a strange Indian-like personage wearing a white turban and a loin-cloth. I recall also that Arthur turned the page over quickly. Was it possible, I wondered later, that for the gift of an ATOM illo depicting a fakir lying on a bed of nails, the mystic gave Arthur one or two of the

(+) OPTREX is a brand of eye lotion sold in the British Isles.

secrets these Easterners possess, the mental force necessary to let the mind control the body ?

As I say, I wondered.

But on reflection, another point impinges on my befuddled mind. I remember now that on the day before he returned to England, Arthur purchased a large trunk....and seemed rather secretive about its purpose. Then, with scant minutes left before his taxi departed for the trip to the Liverpool boat, he suddenly shouted from upstairs ..

"John, can I help myself to something to read on the journey back to London ?"

I shouted out confirmation.

.....

I've since worked out that the boat left Belfast at eight pm..it arrived in Liverpool at seven am.the next morning..the London Express left Liverpool at nine am.and got into London just after two pm.

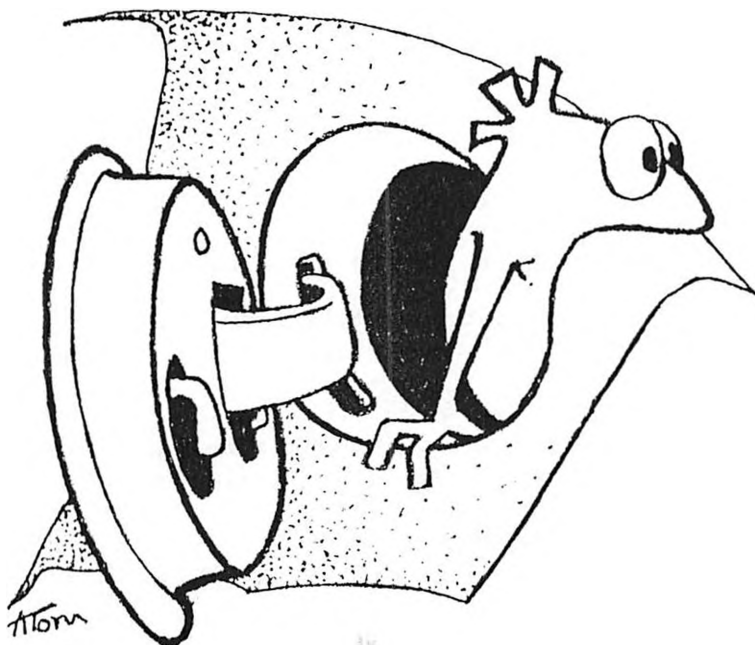
Hmmmm.

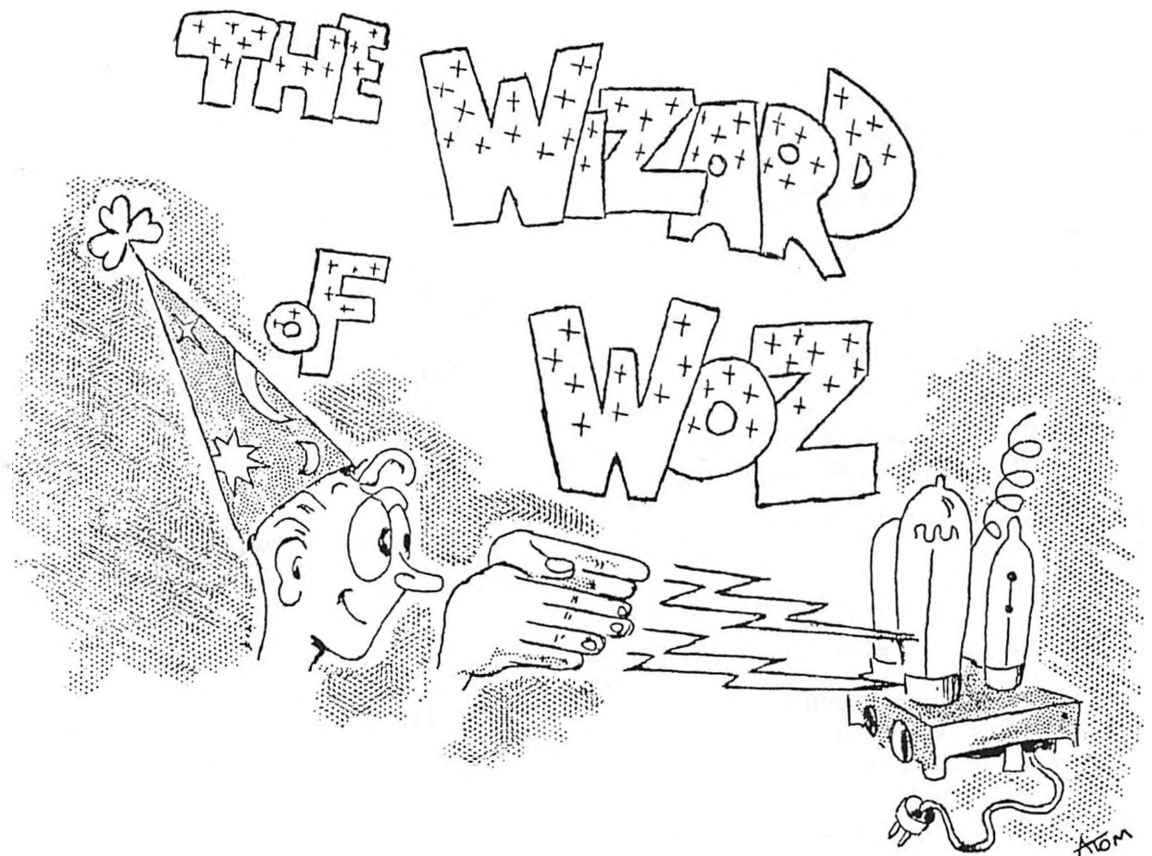
That makes about nineteen hours of solid reading.

Hmmmm.

Guess one of these days he'll let me have back my Decameron of Boccaccio, and my other vast quantities of pornographic literature of some significance to fandom.

.....





SEVEN YEARS AGO I WAS GIVEN A WIRELESS SET. Had I known as much in those days, I would have classed it immediately as a fannish radio. As soon as I switched it on, I realised why it had been given to me as a gift. With perseverance, sweat, luck, and the wind in the right direction, I could just about get the Northern Ireland Home Service, although I live two and a half miles from the local transmitter at Lisnagarvey. It was impossible to get any other station.

I arrived home early one morning and, optimistically, tried to get a Test match commentary from Australia, although I knew it to be impossible. I was right. I gritted my teeth, pulled out the plug, and flung the set across the room. Satisfied, I went to bed.

When I went down for my dinner, my wife was jubilant.

"I can get A.F.N.," she cried, and it was true, despite a large crack across the top of the plastic casing. With a little dial twiddling, I could even get Japan.



"I believe this is what is sometimes laughingly referred to as..a moment of truth".

Three days afterwards, my small son, on a crawling expedition, discovered a length of wire and pulled.

I went out and purchased a wireless set.

After several years of constant use, the new set stopped working yesterday afternoon. I took it to be repaired, but I knew it would take some time, and my wife is a very keen listener.

"Er... Walt and the others are coming up tonight, aren't they?" mused Diane.

I nodded. I wasn't really paying attention; I had particularly wanted to hear the start of the Promenade Concerts.

"Didn't you say that Walt used to fiddle about with wireless sets?" said Diane.

I jumped up. I snapped my fingers.

"Brilliant," I cried, "brilliant !"

I rushed upstairs, rummaged through an old trunk, and discovered the remains of the original wireless set, which I shovelled into an old shoe box. Heh, heh, heh...

- - - - -

Walt, sitting cross-legged in an armchair, laid down my illustrated volumes of Boccaccio's Decameron.

"What did you say, John?" he asked.

"I was telling Diane about your pre-fandom hobby," I said innocently.

"Ah yes," he murmured modestly, "I used to make wireless sets, and gramophones."

"True," agreed Bob. "One of his earlier successes was his combined radio and chesterfield suite - that big thing like a meat safe in the front room."

"Marvellous," breathed Diane, her eyes wide with admiration, "did you... did you ever repair wireless sets?"

Walt sneered.

"I could put radios together with my eyes closed - and did so, too, quite often," he boasted.

George tapped the floor significantly with his walking stick, and pulled the blanket tighter round his shoulders.

"Allow me to rectify that remarkable statement," he croaked. "It is my contention, based upon life-long observation, that without optical assistance, it is unquestionably impossible to manipulate the immeasurably complicated components which contribute to the functional object that it was originally intended to construct. As Marconi said to me when I lent him my Max Brand Anthology, 'Charters' he said ..."

At a signal from her father, Carol pushed George out of the room in

his bath-chair, and left him mumbling in the kitchen.

"Could you... I hate to ask, but could you repair our set?" asked Diane, her voice throbbing with awe.

Walt picked up a slice of cake.

"Sure," he munched, "Sure."

Heh, heh, heh...

I emptied the conglomeration of radio parts before him, but he was busy talking to Sadie.

"It's ten to ten now," I heard him say, "I guarantee you will hear the ten o'clock news." He turned round and saw the assembled chaos... groaned... looked again... muttered an incantation to Roscoe... got down

on his hands and knees...

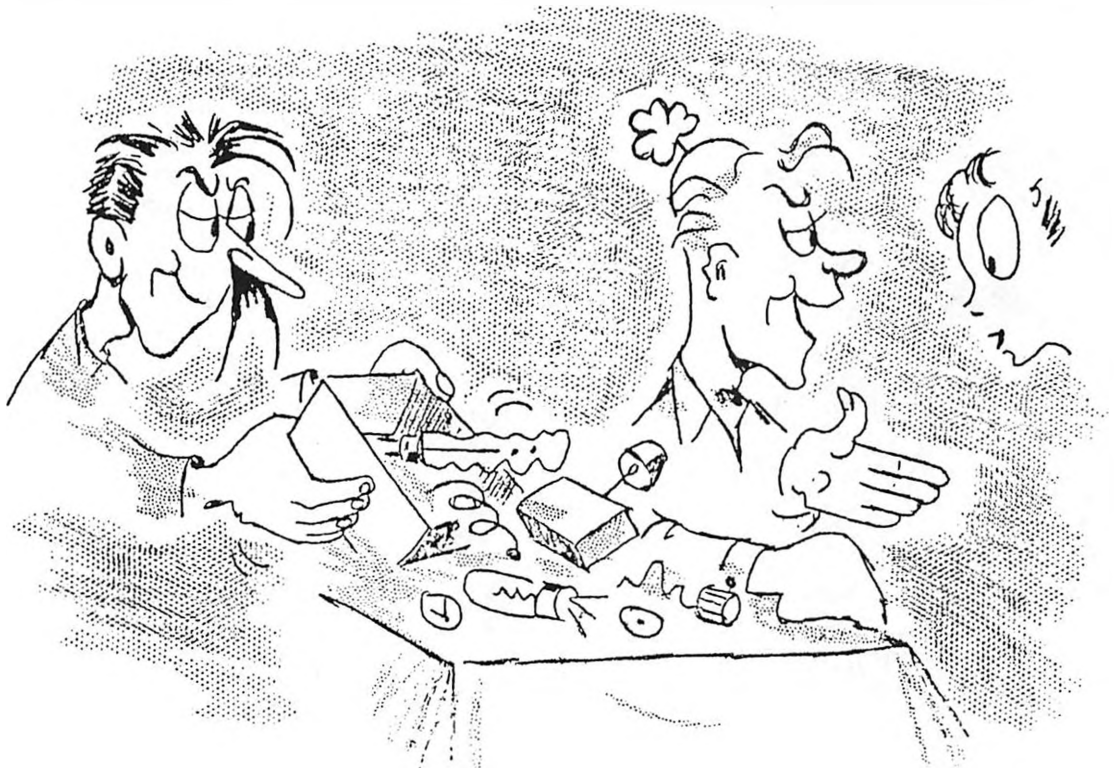
"Fetch George in again," ordered Sadie. "I know he is only third on my list, but..."

Carol wheeled him in again. He was still at it.

"...with a muttered oath, I followed Hard Covers, my cat, into the coal cellar and, after suffering subsidiary elongated lacerations, was able to equip myself with an essential item of my crystal set, to wit, one..."

We all gloomily nodded as one, and he was speedily returned from whence he came.

Walt, in the meantime, had carried out a rapid inventory of the



equipment. He turned to me, his face ashen.

"As you are my host, and I am your guest, I will attempt the task. But don't mention wireless sets to me again. Ever!"

He smiled lazily.

"EVER !" he screamed.

As he bent down again to start the job, he paused for a second. A frown crossed his intelligent brow, closely followed by a look of radiant bliss. He set to work. No kiddin', folks, Walt used to be an electrical genius. It is perfectly true that he manufactured a combined radio and settee - I have splintered myself on it. So I presumed that he had some motive for his subsequent unorthodox actions.

He produced coils of wire from his pocket, and soon wires were hanging like creeping vines from the chandeliers. He wound a length of fuse wire under the table, round the chairs, through the budgerigar cage, past the cuckoo clock, and into the electric light socket. His eyes began to glaze over, his breathing became rapid. Frequently he repeated the phrase "It's just possible... it could be done... it's just possible."

"A bicycle," he shouted suddenly. I rushed outside and wheeled in my velocipede, creeping past George.

Walt snarled. He took off the front wheel, and tied the front fork to the table leg. With dexterous skill, he affixed a wire mesh to the bicycle dynamo.

"Get on and peddle," he ordered. I nipped smartly into the saddle and peddled - hard. He looked mighty dangerous... so strange... so possessed.

A gradually mounting hum emanated from the peculiar construction he had assembled on the hearthrug from my bits and pieces. Bob, Sadie and Diane backed to the far walls, their hair standing erect.

Walt turned a couple of dials.

"Faster," he urged, "faster !"

There was a brilliant flash. When the smoke cleared, there stood Chuck Harris on the mantle-piece. Fancy seeing Chuck Harris.





CHUCH HARRIS ??? He should have been at Rainham.

"It works," screeched Walt. "My matter transmitter, it works."

I felt elated.

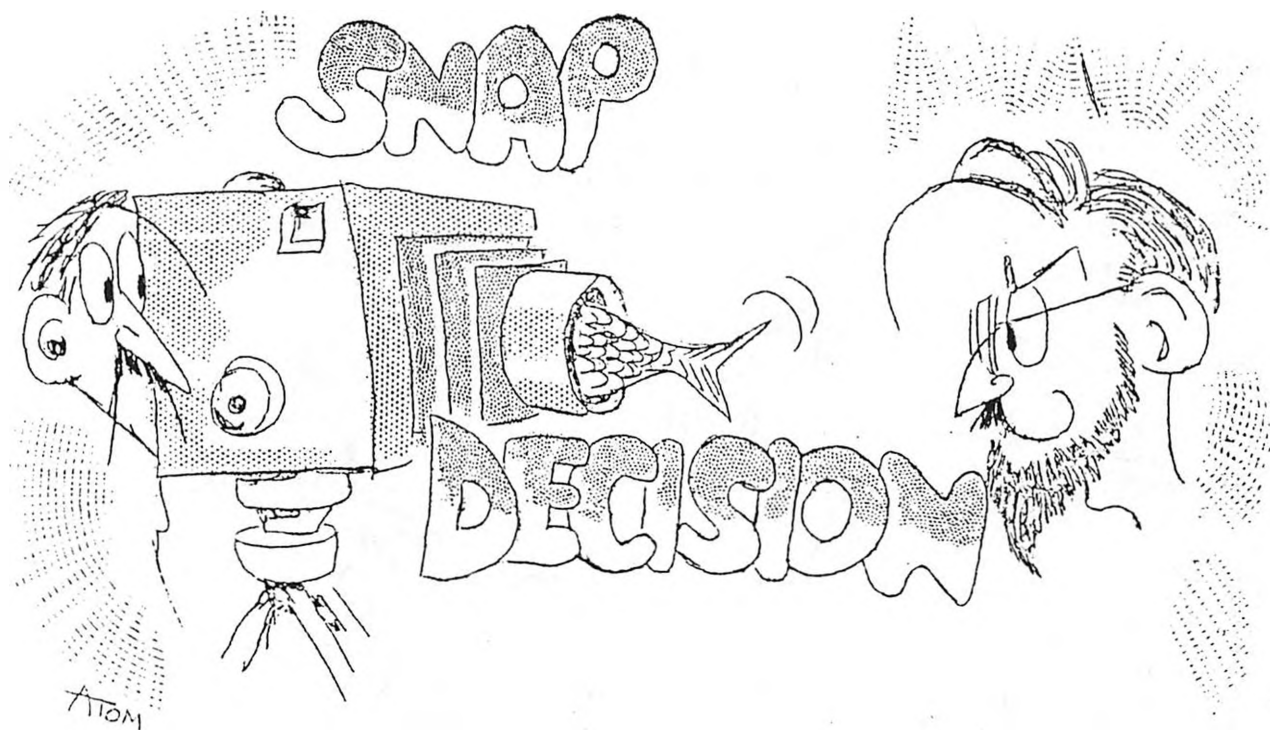
"Try and get Marilyn Monroe," I suggested excitedly.

"Ah, no," said Walt craftily. "I am going to send you somewhere. Take your pick - Neptune, Uranus, Jupiter... ?"

"Walt, no - o - o - o - o" I screamed.

But I needn't have worried. Diane, my loving wife, burst into action. She had made a few quick mental calculations and discovered that my monthly pay packet was due the following day. Just as Walt prepared to despatch me on my grim journey, she switched off the light. There was a brilliant blue flash - when it died away there was a hole about three feet deep in front of the fireplace. Chuck was hanging from the chandelier. The others were blinking in amazement.

WILLIS HAD VANISHED.



Willis gave me a dirty look and allowed the fingers of his left hand to drum a requiem on the polished table top.

"So you haven't brought the negatives ?" he asked grimly.

"How did you know?" I said, nervously.

Right enough, I had let Willis down. I allowed my mind to shuffle back over a year and a half to August 1955. Chuch Harris had been staying at Oblique House, and he, Walt and Madeleine had motored down to an obscure port in the Republic of Ireland to see Ken and Pam Bulmer off on their TAFF trip to America. Chuch had taken many photographs of this momentous occasion and upon his return to Belfast, I had offered to get a complete set of negatives produced and developed. I knew a photographer d'you see, who could provide a portfolio of top-class pictures. Chuch agreed, and although I say so myself, my friend provided a superb set of enlargements from the small 35 mm negatives. Chuch was delighted, as were the rest, and, flushed with enthusiasm, I promised that quite soon, I would ask my friend to do another complete set for Madeleine, and another for Ken and Pam...

I promptly forgot all about it until a week ago, when Walt asked me for the negatives.

And this was the deadline.

"Well, where are they ?" snapped Willis. I could see he was very annoyed. George Charters was blatantly examining a prozine well within his view and Walt didn't even rattle a tin box, or show any indication of noticing this normally rash activity.

"I'll pop round to my friend and personally examine all his negatives, Walt," I stammered nervously, "but - but why the particular hurry just now ?"

Walt cleared his throat.

"Pam and Ken have written up their TAFF visit, and intend to produce a foto-sheet with the publication - but only if you produce the negatives."

Heck !

"Give me another couple of days, Walt," I pleaded. "I'll do my very best to find 'em."

I searched as diligently as I could in the confines of the dark room. I spent several hours going through my friend's collection of negatives, but I couldn't find them. At least, I must qualify that. I did discover several others of, shall we say, general interest, and made an order there and then - in fact, they were done whilst I waited. But, unfortunately, no Harris-Bulmer-Willis negatives. I felt really depressed.

At home, I fortified myself with a cup of tea and idly flipped through the pages of PICTURE POST.

I yawned.

A very uninspiring issue...Trade Union Convention pictures... hmmm...complete life cycle of the siphonaptera...ugh...photos of Hans and Lotte Haas on an underwater expedition in the Red Sea...hummm ...the slums of Glasgow...and...HANS AND LOTTE HAAS ?

HANS AND LOTTE HAAS !

I knocked my cup of tea over at the startling discovery. If I partly closed my eyes and dimmed the light, Hans and Lotte Haas looked JUST LIKE KEN AND PAM BULMER.

What a miraculous discovery.

Quickly, with a much renewed interest, I read the entire article, and at the end, I saw in small black print...

'This is an excerpt from their forthcoming book, UNDER THE RED SEA, published by Bladder and Twineham, London S.W.2'

I pondered.

London S.W.2.

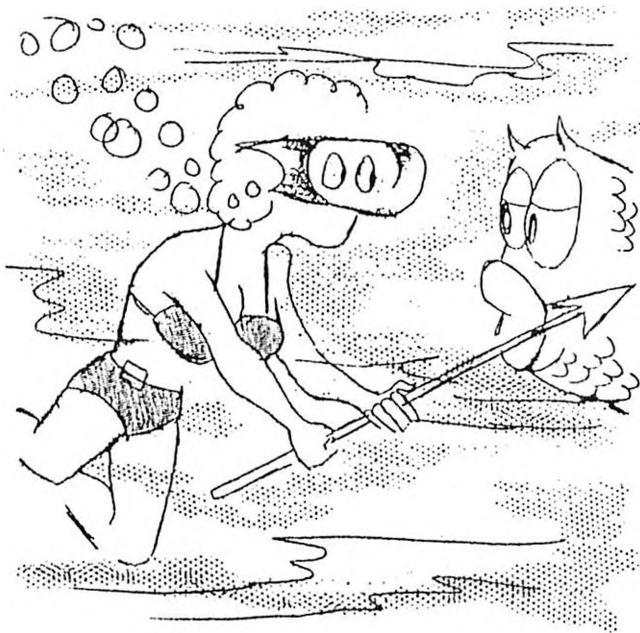
That was Arthur Thomson's postal district...the chances were, I thought, that the book publishers would be within a reasonable distance from Arthur's flat. There was a slight chance that Arthur could pull a few strings and obtain the Hans and Lotte Haas negatives for a sufficient time for my photographer friend to develop them.

It was a slim chance, but...

Arthur's reply came back in forty-eight hours...inside the EXPRESS envelope was a strip of negatives.

"...but," wrote Arthur, "I must get the photographs back by return. That is important. Otherwise I will finish up at the Old Bailey."

I raced round to my friend. He chided me for mixing up his negatives. He was interested in my suggestion. He put a negative in the enlarger, fiddled with the lens, bit a mite of focussing, and quite a nice picture was revealed in the dimly lit laboratory.



Yees, the Haas's did look a mite like Pam and Ken. Admittedly, a few arab dhows drifting in the background did sort of spoil the general effect, but after all, I consoled myself, the port in the Republic of Ireland was rather obscure.

By some misapprehension, Arthur had included a snap of Lotte spearing a devil fish at 30 fathoms, but I decided to take a chance. For all I knew, Pam may have met Arthur C. Clarke (Ego) in the U.S.A, and did a bit of undersea exploration

with him. I mean, one can't say that the TAFF organisation is stereotyped.

I felt that Ken would derive much egoboo for one of the snaps. A shadow flitted across the face of Hans as he stood, stripped to the waist, balancing himself on the carved prow of a fishing smack, holding triumphantly aloft the striped carcass of a tropical ling. But after all the Gulf Stream is warm, isn't it? I mean, there was just a possibility. I hoped the small size of the boat wouldn't give fen the impression that the TAFF scheme couldn't afford to provide a liner for the Atlantic crossing. The subtle impression of arabs sitting in the background didn't worry me, as my friend pointed out, when printed, the photographs would be small. He convinced me I was a genius.

However, my friend told me that it would take time to properly process the negatives.

"But," he said, "leave them here. You can rely on me to post the photographs to the publisher first thing in the morning. Then I'll send you the negatives to give your mate Willis."

Just to make certain, I telephoned him in the morning...the shots were en route as promised. I received the negs from him first post.

I took the negatives to Oblique House to show Walt that I had kept my promise. He said he would send them to Pam and Ken, and said he was sorry for the hasty way he had reprimanded me.

Please note my future accomodation address, as from this moment :-

c/o Box 99 G,
G.P.O.,
Bulawayo,
Southern Rhodesia.

I've arranged for an old school friend of mine to forward all correspondence to a secret address in Belfast that only he knows. I haven't been round to Oblique House for some weeks now. Daren't risk it. I've even shaved off my moustache.

It's like this, Arthur went round to the publishers a couple of days after he had sent the negatives to me, to ensure that the photographs had been returned. Out of idle curiosity, he happened to pick up a new book, sticky off the press, and he...let me use his own words :-

"...and I looked at the illustration index and read ...page 73, 'Hans and Lotte Haas standing besides a hideous gargoyle'...I turned to the page, and there was Pam and Ken talking to Chuch Harris. With mounting horror I looked at the index again...page 194, 'Lotte chatting to a Bedouin Sheik and Fatima, one of his many wives'...that was Pam talking to Walt and Madeleine. Page 227 promised even more, but by this time I was on my hands and knees, and couldn't focus on the page properly. I think it said...' Hans and Lotte preparing for one of the greatest thrills of all time'. So I'm catching the first 'plane over and I'll see you tonight."

My new temporary abode is a mite crowded, though.

My photographer friend feels it desirable to take up residence with me, too.

And, er, has anyone seen the Bulmer's TAFF Report ?



How I met Walt Willis.



Faned Ken Cheslin has informed me that quite a number of fans who commented on Volume 1 of my Irish Fandom stories, wanted to know how I, being an Englishman, with no ancestral association with Ireland, became an active member of Irish Fandom between 1954/61. Even fans I have known for almost forty years, such as Vince Clarke, suggested I should remedy this situation, and therefore I have prepared this brief account of HOW I MET WILLIS.

It all started in 1942...I was working in the office of an aircraft factory south of Birmingham, (where I was born,) having failed miserably at undertaking the School Certificate Examination at Yardley Grammar School. I am not proud of stating this, but I failed every test, although supervising teachers were heard to discuss creditably the aerodynamics of the paper aeroplane I launched in the Examination Room some moments after being given the frightening words.. "You can now turn over your paper."

Several weeks later I was sitting innocently at my desk in the offices of the factory, and had just sent a bent paper clip hurtling across a crowded room with the aid of a heavy-duty elastic band, a split-second after release grabbing my pen and looking up at the rusted rafters bearing my notorious bewildered expression. The victim, my superior, who had been smitten between the shoulder blades, turned swiftly, seeking the assassin, and later confided to me that he didn't know the identity of the bastard who had fired it...although he knew that I was the only person who definitely did not fire the missile.

Next to the office where I worked was a HOLLERITH office... masses of young girls punched holes in cards, later to be assimilated into rolls of documents of financial viability. The HOLLERITH office faced the cycle sheds, and it was my wont to run with my bike, and vault onto the saddle, a nonchalant expression on my face, seeming to ignore all those beautiful young faces gazing with awe at my cycle-mounting prowess. One afternoon, trying to impress a particular girl who paused in her finger-tapping to see me...I was perchance rather too energetic...my cycle saddle was pointed, and I scored a canon as I leapt onto it. The pain was excruciating...I couldn't move my body, and glided past the heaving faces, unable to do anything but guide the bike in a straight line towards a right turn, when I was able to scream anonymously. But I remembered that one girlie face I noted with my wide-open eyes...the only girl who seemed concerned at my plight, and who didn't laugh, and actually appeared sorry for me...an Irish girl...Diane Oliver.

Two days of frequently applied cold compresses sanctioned recovery, sufficient for me to cycle slowly with frequent free-wheeling, and I resumed work at my office, and sought Diane, 14 years old. (Yep, most pupils left school at fourteen in those days to commence work.)

I sat next to her in the work's canteen and conversed... she was really beautiful, with black hair, very dark brown eyes and lips looking as if they were made to suck oranges. She told me that her father was born in Belfast, but her mother was English. After the First World War, they settled in Shirley, near Birmingham.

I pestered her for a date, and she eventually accepted. I took her to the ODEON cinema, Shirley, although thankfully the back row was already full of young persons who, unlike myself, had no interest in Will Hay films.

After about a year we had visited each other's houses, and were, to use the local vernacular, 'going fairly steady'.

Eventually I was 'called up' for the army, and the night before I left I took her for a 'slap-up' meal at Shirley British Restaurant, to plight my troth ! Rationing during wartime was strict, and each person was allocated, via a Ration Book, to small quantities of essential food items, like butter and sugar and lard, etc. The government wished to give the populace a boost by organising so-called British Restaurants; empty local premises were given a lick of paint, and a counter and tables and chairs were arranged. The main dish on the menu - actually, if my memory serves me - the only dish on the menu was beans on toast...extra toast just might be available, and a second cup of tea was always a probability. British Restaurants were always crowded, because the beans on toast were very cheap, and other than the ODEON, there was little else to do in Shirley.

We looked at each other eyes across the plates of cold beans, and I whispered sweet nothings to her, and she whispered sweet nothings doing to me...

I reckon my almost five years in the army was spectacular... within a few months I was an acting, unpaid lance corporal in the Parachute Regiment...I used to call for Diane and swagger around Shirley with my parachute wings on my right arm, and my red beret rampant.

To my surprise (and I may say sheer utter amazement of my parents and the people in the rugged council estate where we lived) I was selected to be an officer, and duly 'passed out' as a Second Lieutenant in an infantry regiment. Diane and I still wrote to each other...she told me that her family were returning to Ulster soon... and I was sent to Germany with a platoon, and stayed there until almost the end of 1948.

Although I could have returned to the aircraft factory upon demobilisation, my correspondence with Diane had reached a stage where I headed to Northern Ireland after release from the army.

I joined the constabulary in 1948, and in 1949 was sent to County Down as a village constable. Diane and I were married in 1949, and son Colin was born in 1950. In 1954, when our daughter Kathleen was born, I was posted to constabulary H.Q. Each lunchtime I trolled through the streets in the city centre, searching for science fiction magazines, and I began to notice in their pages frequent references to a 'fan group' in Belfast, and a certain Walter Willis seemed to be the figurehead.

Actually, I cycled along the Upper Newtownards Road every day to and from H.Q, and I speedily plotted 170, a three-storey building with an untidy garden. I wrote to Mr. Willis and sought an appointment...I wanted to know what HYPHEN was ?

Recently, in his nostalgic column in MIMOSA, I REMEMBER ME, Walt recalled the time he received my letter. Because he was a high-ranking official at Stormont, the Northern Ireland Parliament building, he was thus able to 'pull' my file and scan all my personal data, and be completely knowledgeable before we met. Possibly he wondered why a policeman wanted to visit Irish Fandom ?

I can now reveal for the first time that I also made enquiries via police sources at Stormont, prior to my visit, and I was told that Mr. Willis was 'a thoroughly pleasant gentlemen'.

And my article COMING UP FOR THE THIRD TIME in Volume 1 continues the story of my initiation into Irish Fandom...

