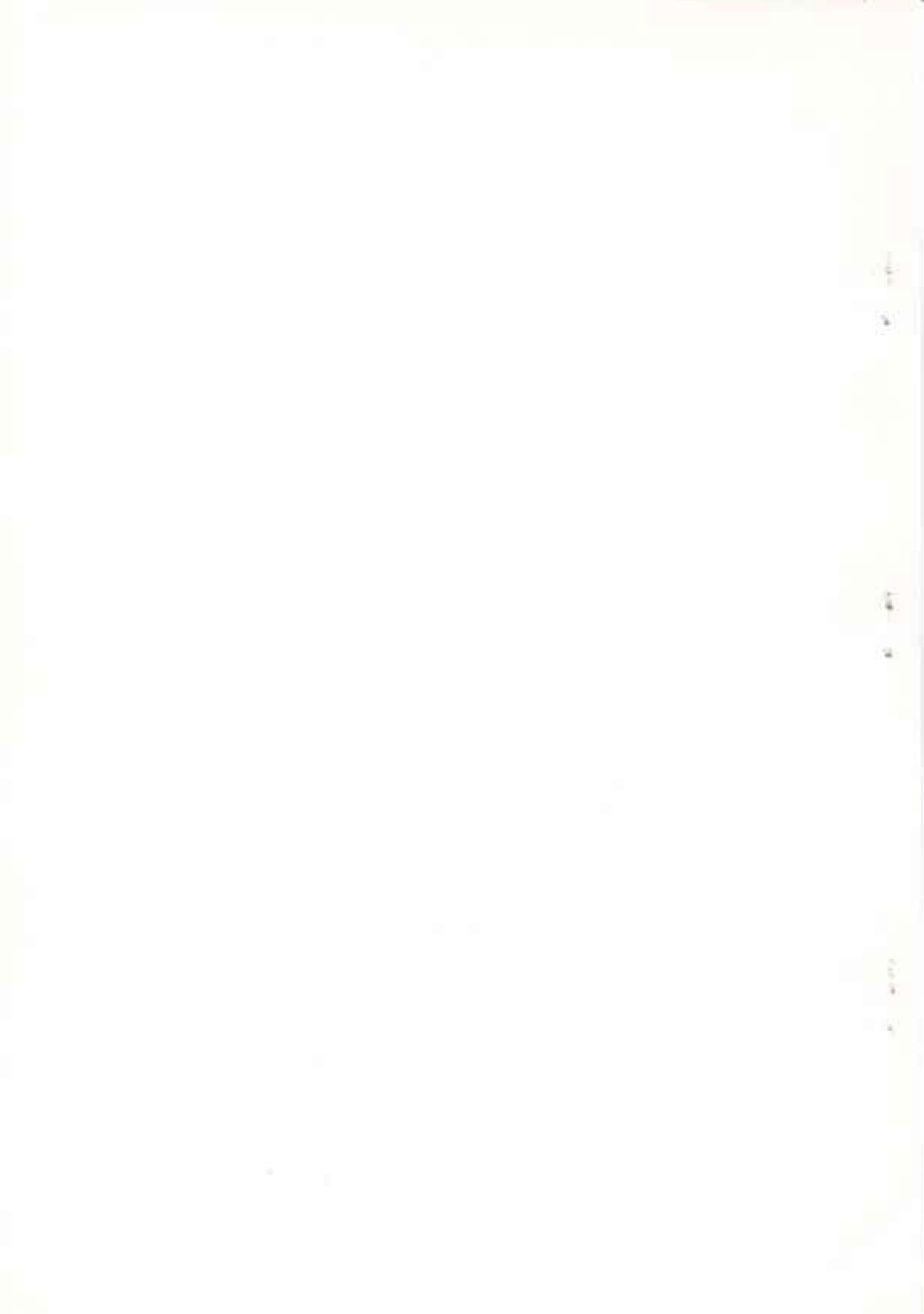


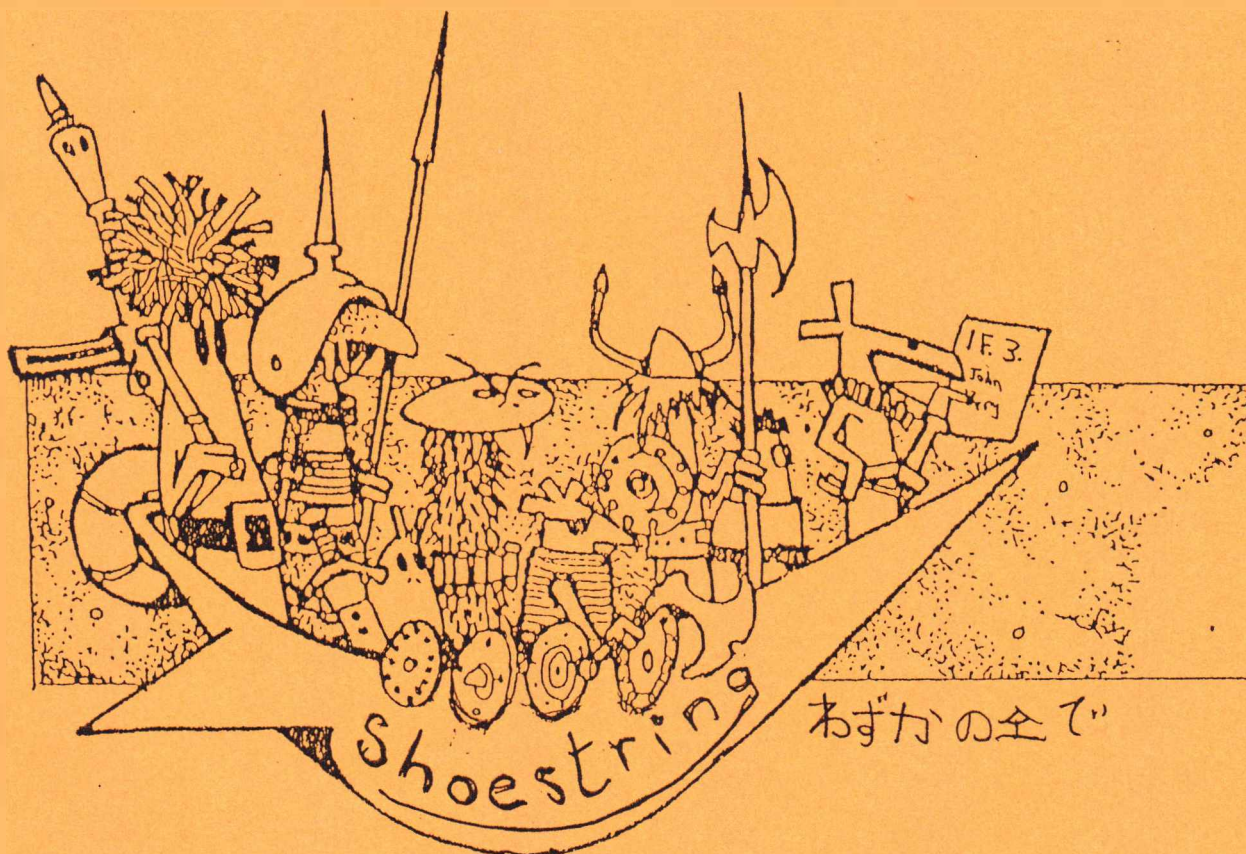
# TALES OF **O**blique House.



## VOL. 3 ~ 1999.







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TALES OF OBLIQUE HOUSE. Vol.3. of FABLES OF IRISH FANDOM.

Available largely upon editorial whim, but also for "the usual".

We also accept money.

A contribution towards our expences of £2 or \$5 would be very much appreciated.

no.1. and no.2. still available. Actually if you are really keen and I've run out, why, I'll run you a copy off. (er very probably).

Ken-ch.

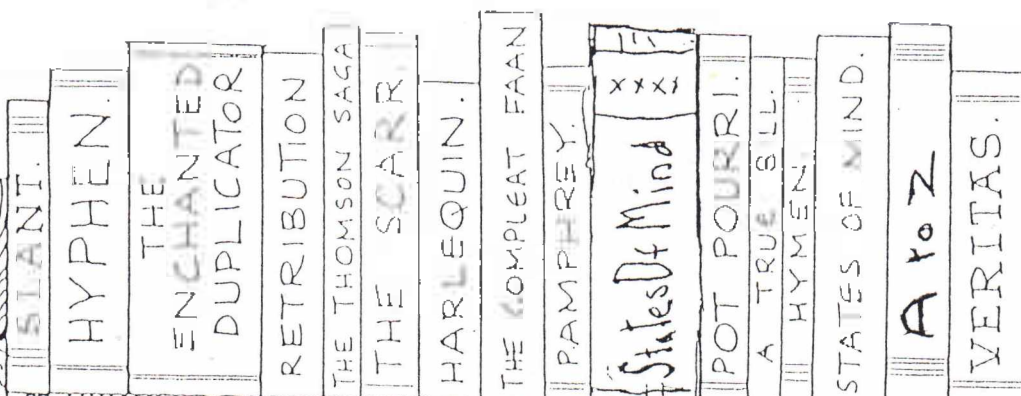




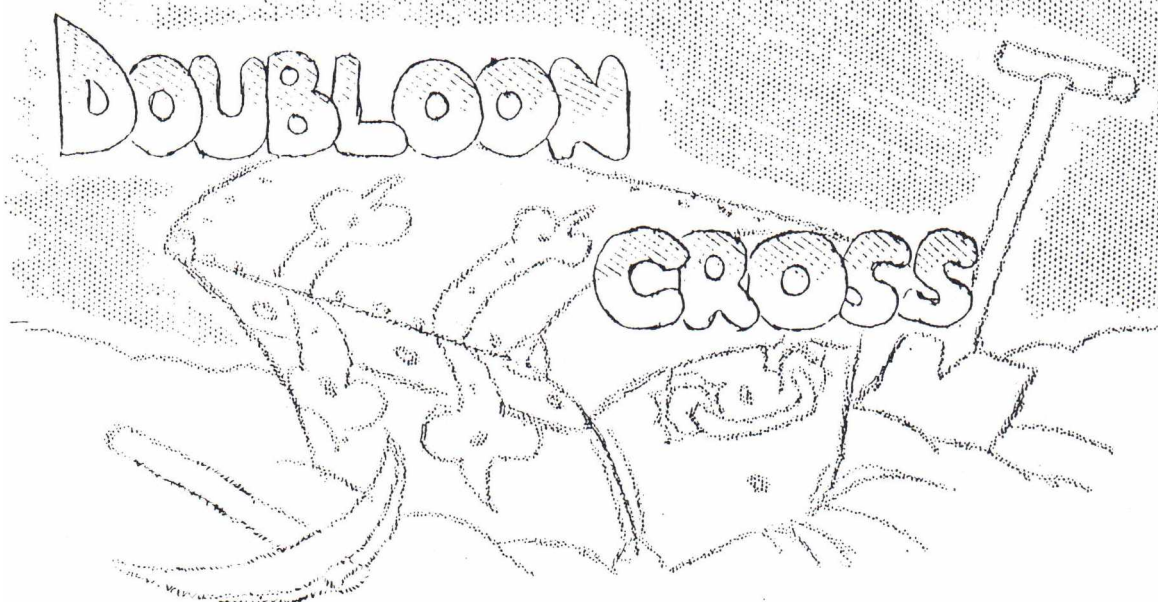
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The artwork, of course, is by ATOM. The late, great, Arthur Thomson.  
(with some headings and 'incidentals' by John Berry himself.).



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3



I had been fanning rather a lot, so Diane, my wife, called me over. "Tonight," she told me, gripping me by the belt of my raincoat as I dashed past her on arriving home, en route to the days mail, "tonight you can forget all about fandom, and sit here with me and watch TV. I'm tired of being left by myself night after night."

I reluctantly admitted I needed a rest, so after tea, and the usual nightly frolic with the kids, I curled up on the settee next to Diane, switched off the lights, and watched TV.

The doorbell asserted itself.

"I'll go," I bluffed, snuggling further into the settee, but Diane, spoilsport that she is, wouldn't move, so I had to get up and see who it was.

I ouvre'd the porte.

James White leered at me, as only he can leer. He looked furtively to left and right, blinked a couple of times like a bewildered owl, and pushed past me.

"Where can we talk?" he asked excitedly.

I pointed to the living room.

"Carry on," I said. "Don't mind about Diane. She knows all about you."

She did, too. I had to threaten her with something. The only way I could get her to permit me to go to Walts nearly every night was to threaten to send for James White to measure her for a costume, if she didn't. I had told her that James, a certified sartorial consultant, worked on the theory that if, for example, he measured a girl for a skirt ('How's that for thighs?') and the waistbelt was too loose, rather than alter the garment, he altered the girl. 'Service with a smile' as he smilingly put it.

When Diane saw him, her face went whiter than the TV screen, and she backed out of the room.

"O.K. James," I said, "give. We're alone."

He threw over a scrappy hunk of paper.

"I was browsing round a second hand bookshop today," he said mysteriously, "and picked up an old June '38 ASTOUNDING. That piece of paper fell out."

I examined it...it was about three inches square, and was dirty and tattered. Printed in untidy scrawl was the legend '364 289. Due South. Large rock. 47 degrees North for 78 yards.'

I mused.

"So?" I prompted.

"Have you no imagination?" he hissed. "I find an old sf book, a collector's item. A scrap of paper is inside, bearing a series of mystic symbols, obviously indicating a secret hiding place where treasure is buried. And all you say is 'so'."

"You mean you intend to investigate this?" I exclaimed. "You really think it will reveal something valuable? Treasure Trove, maybe? But why come to me?"

James breathed on his glasses, so that I couldn't see the expression on his face.

"Weeell, there might be some digging to do," he explained, "and, well, my clothes are too good to wear for such a degrading chore."

"I'm with you, James," I said enthusiastically. Fancy James wanting me to help him. That's the sort of esprit de corps we have in Irish Fandom. "When do we start?"

"Tomorrow is Saturday," said James. "I've already looked at a map, and the reference quoted is near my own house. As you know, my house and the surrounding ones have only been built a couple of years, and prior to that, the area consisted of uncultivated fields. Come round, say, at half eleven in the morning. Keep those clothes on."

"Right, James," I said proudly, and steered him to the front door.

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My first impression of James next morning reminded me of the opening shots of Victor Mature in the film SAFARI.

He was attired in a white jacket, white shorts and a pith helmet. His latest acquisition, a .177 mm air rifle, was slung nonchalantly over his left arm. A large bulging pack lay at his feet, criss-crossed by a pick and a healthy-looking shovel.

"Pick up the kit," James commanded, "and the hunt will commence."

I unzipped the front of my leather jerkin, and leaned against the wall.

"So help me, James," I gritted, "I don't mind helping you dig up a field, but I ain't a coolie. What's the idea of the rigout, anyway?"

James permitted a flicker of resignation to shiver his gaunt frame.

"I'm working on a new story for Carnell," he confessed. "It's about a big-game hunter in the Congo who is transported to Betelgeuse by a matter transmitter, and there he fights the inhabitants, the Umjuju's" ...and at this, James broke the gun professionally, inserted a small lead pellet into the end of the barrel, and snapped it back into the active service position..."who've got seven arms, eight legs and have retractable reproductive organs. Well, this big-game hunter, assisted by Pedro, his servant"...James surveyed me meaningfully..."finally kills all the Umjuju's and then teleports himself to..."



Reluctantly, I picked up the pack, the pick and shovel, and grimaced at James, signifying my intention of following him to the bitter end. These pro-authors are run characters, y'know...you've got to humour them ...and perfectionists like James White like to write from personal experience, and who am I to stand in the way of James White, Esq, Ted Carnell and NEW WORLDS.

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James strode purposely down his front garden path, along Riverdale Crescent, and into the rough country North West of Belfast. I followed. The pack on my back, a pick under my left arm, a shovel under my right. James continued on, oblivious to the puzzled glances of inquisitive Belfasters. I wasn't oblivious, though. I felt very embarrassed. It wasn't so much the kit I was carrying, but I felt a blasted idiot stripped to the waist with a wide-brimmed straw hat on my head.



As we progressed deeper into the hinterland, James frequently carried out a strange ritual. He would suddenly stop, point his air rifle into an empty sky, fire, and shout triumphantly, "I've hit it." Then he broke the gun, blew through the barrel, gazed in awe at the blue smoke that puffed out, then reloaded. This happened many times, and I felt so bewildered that I asked him.

"What's the idea of firing into an empty sky, James?"

He gave me a disdainful look.

"Well, John...er...Pedro, this is an air-rifle, ain't it? So I'm aiming at the air."

He grinned. I think it was a grin. He bared his teeth, anyway.

"Did you hit it?" I asked sarcastically. James is short sighted, see, and I honestly think that when he looks through the back-sight, up the barrel, he thinks the foresight bead is a duck, or something. That's what he shouts everytime he fires, anyways.

He sniffed, and continued for a few more yards, finally stopping. He examined a map.

"This is the map reference," he announced. "Now let me see, due South to large rock. Follow me."

I trailed behind him as he staggered along. Occasionally, when he came to a stunted gorse bush, he would make a great show of hacking away at imaginary vegetation. I began to suspect that he had a split-personality.....

We retraced our steps to the outskirts of Belfast, by a slightly different route, and came to a large rock.

James leaned against it, and took a swig out of his water bottle. (One of his many hot water bottle, he types during the night, see.) Then he pulled out a compass, took a bearing, and strode forward with a confident gait, disappearing into one of the worst patches of vegetation we had

encountered. I followed the track made by James through the swaying grass, and eventually found him, hands in hips, with a self-satisfied smirk plastered over his face.

"This is 47 degrees North of the rock. Now dig."

I knew the task was hopeless. James had too much imagination. From a little scrap of paper in an old ASTOUNDING, he had built up a fantastic fabrication, and dressed us both up in unusual garments, and now he wanted me to actually dig.

"DIG," he ordered.

"It's obvious it's only a hoax," I began.

"DIG."

"...and nobody would be fool enough to come here to this remote part of County Antrim..."

"DIG...DIG...DIG".

I cut a square of grass, lifted it out, and dug. When I was about two feet down, I felt the pick strike something solid. Filled with amazement, I feverishly scooped out the soil, revealing a small metal casket.

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I was absolutely flabbergasted. I stood there, stupified, awed, and completely baffled. Treasure Trove right enough.

I helped James clamber out of the hole. He was pulsating with excitement.

"Quick, let's get back to my house and open it," he panted, bearing the casket aloft. His air-rifle lay on the ground, covered with red soil, unheeded. James turned, and rushing headlong the way we had come, but I called him back.

"You're going the wrong way, James," I yelled. "There's Peggy waving at us from the bedroom window. That casket was buried in your own back garden."

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"Don't mention the back garden again," warned Peggy, as we applied artificial respiration to James. The shock had been too much for him. To think that his own uncultivated back garden, an area which he had previously steadfastly ignored, should have been the hiding place of such an obviously valuable find.

Finally, our ministrations made James's eyes flicker, and he sat up, looked at me, pondered, then leapt at the casket.

His long sensitive fingers struggled with the delicately carved hasp on the lid. Finally, he uttered a curse, and swinging a 16 lb sledge hammer round his neck, he smote the casket a mighty crack.

The lid flew off, revealing the contents to be composed entirely of torn shreds of paper.

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"You're the detective," James stammered, after we had eventually laid him out on the settee and covered him with blankets. "You find what this is all about."

Then he lapsed into a coma.

I methodically sorted through all the scraps of paper, millions

of them, and separated numerous coloured items. The scraps of paper bore print on them, and realising immediately that there were too many of them to try and jig-saw-puzzle them into a complete page, I sorted out the coloured bits, and after many hours of frustrating jiggery pokery, I assembled a complete front cover of an American issue of FATE.

Hmmmm.

I examined the small treasure chest. It was made of a cheap metal, and after removing the soil encrusted on the lid, I read the legend :-

THE TODDLERS 'TREASURE ISLAND CHEST' CONTAINING PURE  
MILK CHOCOLATE DROPS.

Inside the lid, very faintly, I saw, in untidy print, 'A present to Carol from Daddy.'

A visit to Walt Willis was indicated.

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".....and so we followed the directions on the paper," explained James to Walt, "and eventually found the treasure chest containing those torn up FATES. John deduces that you buried the chest in my garden, and arranged with the proprietor of the second hand bookshop to make sure that I read the primed Astounding."

"Correct," smiled Walt, his face like a sunbeam.

"But why....why?" chorused James and myself in unison.

Walt allowed a proud gleam to flicker from pupil to pupil. He moved a few paces, putting a wide armchair between him and us.

"This is probably my greatest triumph," he chuckled, putting a hand on the door knob, and opening the door slightly, ready to slip through should the occasion arise. He seemed to expect it probably would.

"You mean ...?" snarled James menacingly. I couldn't quite understand what was happening, but I snarled too, to show I was in there pitchin'.

Walt leapt to the door, scurried round it, and poked his head in our direction.

"Yes, the perfect set-up for one of my puns," yelled Walt, unable to hide the rapture from his voice, "you see, the ...."

"Nooooooo," sobbed James, collapsing on the floor, and beating his head thereon.

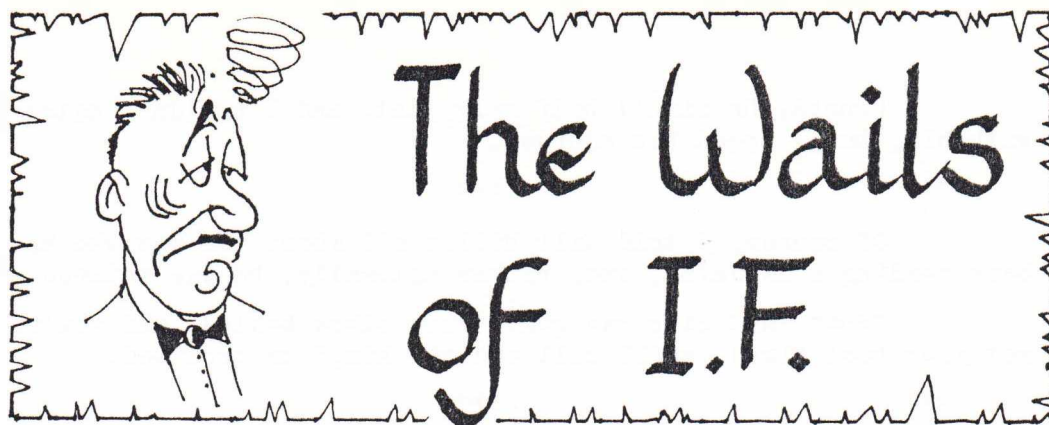
"Oh bliss," screamed Walt, "oh, Great Ghu, how can one man be so brilliant. ?"

"Tell me, please tell me what you are talking about," I pleaded, stepping over the prostrate form of James White, and holding out my hands appealingly.

"THE CHEST," Walt shouted at the top of his voice, "THE CHEST WAS FULL OF PIECES OF FATE."

John Berry ( who wishes  
to thank Walt Willis for  
the use of the pun, which  
originated the story.)





The man was reading SAPSzine THE MONDAY EVENING GHOST.

Nothing really strange about that, if you happen to be broad-minded.

The fact that it was just outside the Gent's toilet in Little Fortingale Street ( designed by Bob Shaw ) added just about the right amount of mystery. I mean, I knew all the fans living in Belfast...Walt Willis, Bob Shaw, James White, George Charters and Ian McAuley, so I presumed this to be a neofan who had yet to discover us.

He was well-dressed, had a rolled umbrella, a bowler hat and was, I guess, around forty five years old...rather too ancient for the average fan.

I was a mite fearful of addressing him outside a lavatory. I mean, OUR MAN IN HAVANA was still fresh in my memory. Another thing, I'd just had a tooth out, and spoke with rather a lisp...and another thing, I'd sprained my elbow playing ghoominton, and it was affixed by a bandage to my right hip, and the fingers sort of shot out like the leaf of a chestnut tree. That wasn't so bad. I'd also got a nail in my boot, sticking up through a hole in my sock, and I had to tread very carefully, rather like a ballet dancer worked up in the passion of Les Sylphides, and trying to earn his egoboo.

But, heck, a fan in Belfast and we of IF didn't know about him.

I sidled up, trying not to let my arm sway so provocatively.

"Nithe evening," I said.

He gave me a steely look and continued with page 17.

I walked round him, wishing I didn't have to glide so delicately.

"I'd like to talk to you," I said, trying to gain his confidence.

"If you don't stop annoying me I shall call a policeman," he said.

"I'm thorry," I said, " but I'm a fan."

"I've read about you in the Sunday newspapers," he gritted, " but I never thought it would spread to the Provinces."

"I'm a faaan...Willis mean nothing to you ?"

"Oh, is he another one ?"

"Yeth, betht one in the Bwitith Isleth, thome thay."

He walked away, and I had no alternative but to follow him.

Crumbs. He didn't half walk fast, and I couldn't catch up with him, but I noted his address.

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Of course, I told Walt Willis all about the man who had been reading a SAPSzine, and, rather naturally, he was interested.

"When that lisp has gone, your elbow healed, and you've got your boot fixed, we'll call and see him," he promised.

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Willis pressed the bell-push. A butler opened the door.

"Who shall I say?" he asked, with typically aloofness.

"Mr. Willis and Friend," said Walt.

We stood in the hallway, looking at the collection of Ming Dynasty mugs on glass shelves.

"Posh place, Walt," I said.

"This'll be great", he enthused. "Pots of money, and a butler. Wait until the Americans get to hear of this. We can hold our fan meetings here when visitors come."

"Mr. Snitchworthy will see you now, sir," he said with a sneer, and we followed him over a tiger-skin rug, through a dining room as big as the Fort Pick Shelby in Detroit, and into a book-lined study.

"Yes?" he asked, in rather a haughty manner.

"I'm Walt Willis," said Walt, and I rushed forward in case the man fainted in such august company.

Snitchworthy wrinkled his nose.

"Willis?....er...I'm sure I have....."

"SLANT, HYPHEN, WOZ and PAMPHREY" I said simply.

He looked at me, and screwed his glasses this way and that.

"I'm sure we've met before...." he started.

"RETRIBUTION, POT POURRI and VERITAS," said Walt, giving me as much egoboo as I dared to expect in such circumstances.

"Yes, but I still don't...."

Walt looked at me and nodded.

I walked over to the bookcase, sorted through the books, and selected a weighty tome. I walked back to Willis and handed it to him. I ruffled up the immaculate parting in my hair, pulled off my bow tie, my smart black jacket, my white shirt, and wrapped my braces round my trouser waist. I looked at Willis for approval, and he nodded. I glanced at Snitchworthy, he was sort of white-looking, if you know what I mean. Like, he seemed thunderstruck. When he poured whiskey in a glass, it clanked against the decanter rather like a carillon contest.

"Excuse me," said Willis. He ripped a curtain off a French Window, a red, plush affair, and tied one end of it to a big mahogany standard lamp, and told Snitchworthy to hold the other end.

"This is it, John," said Willis, and he tossed a shuttlecock over to me. I let out a scream of pure raging insanity. I gripped the book and tore it in half. I let the falling shuttlecock almost reach the floor, and I flipped it up vertically with a clever flick

of my brogues. It hit the ceiling, and dropped down, oh, so slowly. I leered, and folks say it has impact. I curled myself up, uncoiled...the half-tome caught the shuttlecock a superb clout, a sort of ostentatious 'THWACK', and at the same time, in a horrible racous scream, I shouted "DROP IT".

The decanter shattered into a thousand pieces as Snitchworthy dropped it. The shuttlecock took the glass out of his other hand. I bowed low, and Walt, whispering an aside..."A superb performance, John", and bowed too.

"Ghoodminton," said Willis modestly, by way of explanation.

Snitchworthy, with supreme athletic grace bourne of utter desperation, leapt across the room and pulled an elephant gun from the wall, just below a lion's head which I thought looked a mite worried, too.

The rifle bore was about three inches in diameter, and Snitchworthy, stuttering inanely, cocked the gun and started to stalk towards us.

"Chee, he's certainly got the fannish spirit," breathed Walt, "but he's too damn keen."

With that, Willis drew a zap from a shoulder holster and let fly with an accurate arch of H2O which disappeared down the barrel. Not to be outdone, I let fly with two plonkers, and, as you know, I've had lots of practice.

Snitchworthy pulled the plonkers off his forehead and sank back in his chair.

"I...er...what...er...???"

"Your turn, Walt," I hissed to Willis, and he strode across the study, stood on top of a china cabinet, and looked upwards, his noble features glistening with rapture.

"THE BIRDS AND THE BEANIE, by Art Rapp, a fellow SAPSite," said Willis, and continued:-

"Mother, may I become a fan ? Oh yes, my darling daughter.  
Hang your hopes on a mimeo, but don't touch firewater !  
For Big Name Fen are frenetic men, who drink like thirsty

camels  
And leer like BEMS and wish for femmes to prove that they are  
mammals.

So if a fan should ask you in to see his ASTOUNDINGS and  
FUTURES,

It's best to look for a weighty book and beat in on his  
cranial sutures.

And perchance you might be tempted to ignore your inhibitions,  
Reflect that even a mag gets left when its not in mint  
condition."

I clapped loudly, Willis got down and bowed a couple more times.

I don't think I've ever seen a fan like Snitchworthy. Never did I see such thick blue veins on anyone's forehead before. Like pregnant worms, they were. The corners of his mouth were drawn downwards, and his eyes were blooshot and glazed.

Willis then looked at his watch.

"Five, four, three, two, one," he panted, and opened the study door. Madeleine staggered in with a big teapot, and Bob Shaw came behind her with a green track suit on and a hat with a feather in it. Bob turned round, on the back of the track suit, in red



letters. were the words NORTHERN IRELAND. (He had recently represented his country at an international archery competition.) He turned round, and quick as a flash he sort of whizzed his arms about, and an arrow parted Snitchworthy's hair and quivered as it embedded itself in the middle of an embroidered tulip on the embossed chair. Bob bowed and waved George Charters in. George shouted "Yippee, I'm in FAPA", and took his place beside Willis.

"Where's Ian ?" murmured Walt, and Ian came in at that precise moment with a bucket and shovel. He stopped at the desk, and ladled a lump of horse manure out of the bucket. He sat down at the desk, pulled out a magnifying glass, picked through the manure with a pencil, and said with finality... "this horse stands 14 hands high, has a pasture in the townland of Ballymatuffett in County Down, and has too much clover in its diet. Trinity University, Dublin, Failed B.Sc."

The door opened once more, and James White strode in. He whipped a tape-measure round Snitchworthy's shoulders, and whispered..."Come to the Co-op tomorrow and I'll fix you up wholesale."

Walt waved us together in a semi-circle, and said to Snitchworthy:- "Say something."

I've always thought, secretly, that fans are somewhat eccentric, but Snitchworthy definitely was. It wasn't so much the sobbing that got me, but the way he seemed to be praying...and those pitiful eyes, pleading...hoping...

"Please," he said.

"That's what hops on your comb" said Willis.

"No, that's a talented American fan artist," said McAuley.

"No, that's what happens to water in the winter," said Bob.

"No, that's a collection of words," said James White.

"No, that's where an important battle was fought in Germany in World War Two, a gap, you know ?" I said.

"No, that's a symbol venerated by some obscure southern Malayan tribes," said Walt.

"No, that's where a king lives," said Bob Shaw.

"No, that's where you can see the Follies Bergere," said James.

"No, that's what..."

The fist was of iron. It was clenched with ferocity. It was a thing of superb invincibility. It cracked the teak desk top. Snitchworthy stood up. He was ten feet tall. His jaw was hard, and the muscles were so tense I swear he spitted out powdered molar.

"WHO ARE YOU ?" he screamed.

"Irish Fandom," said Willis, seemingly rather bewildered. "Er, who are you ?"

"I'm consultant psychiatrist at the City Hospital...please go through all that again whilst I take notes."

He seemed to have regained his composure.

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We sat supping tea in the front room of 170.

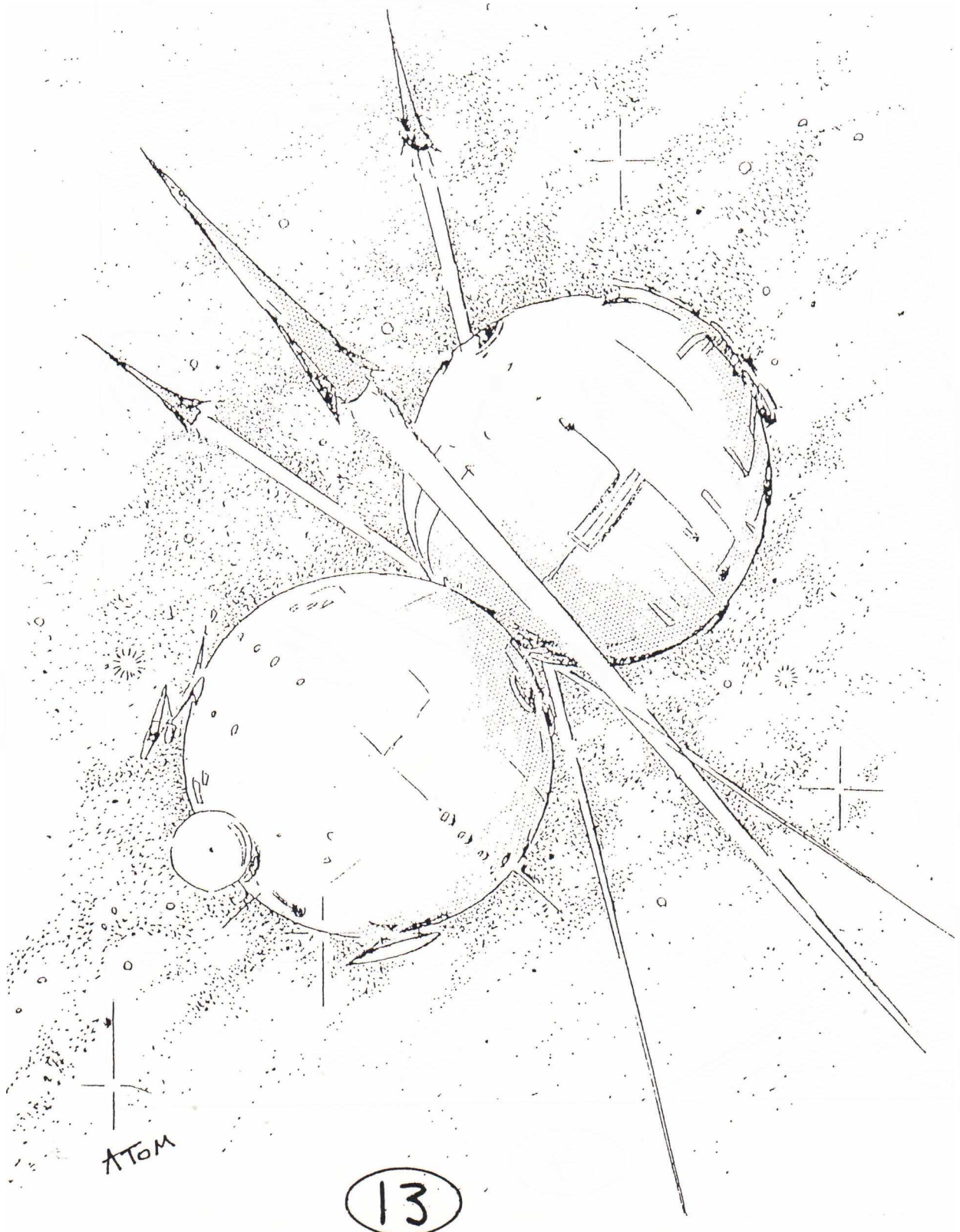
"John, you got us in a right mess, there," said Willis.

"How in hell's name was I to know it was the SATURDAY EVENING POST he was reading, " I said, " it looked like MONDAY EVENING GHOST to me."

"Promise...PROMISE YOU'LL NEVER WRITE IT UP," he hissed.

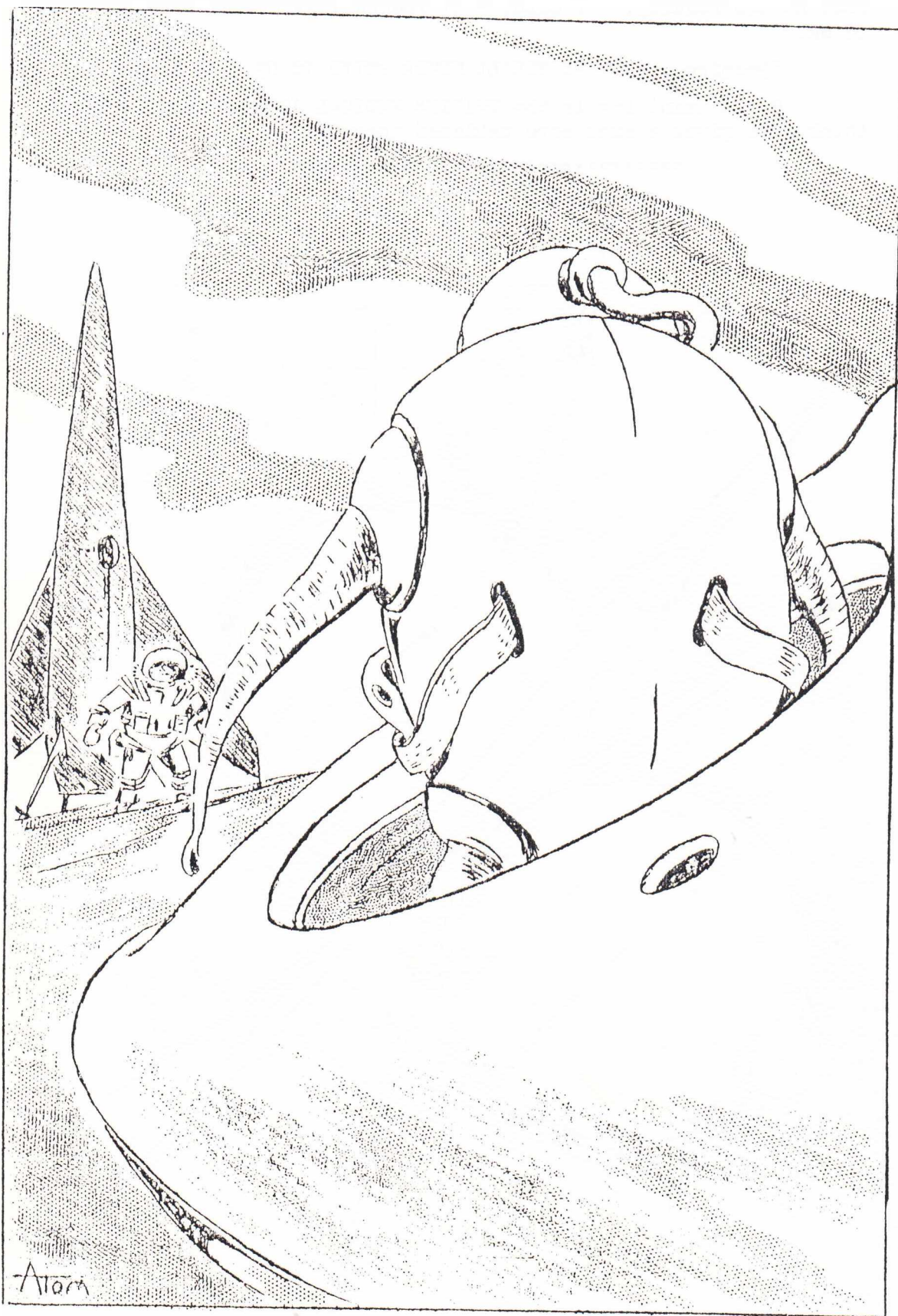
But I mean, its in the BRITISH MEDICAL JOURNAL, and, well, I think I've given a much more unbiased account."

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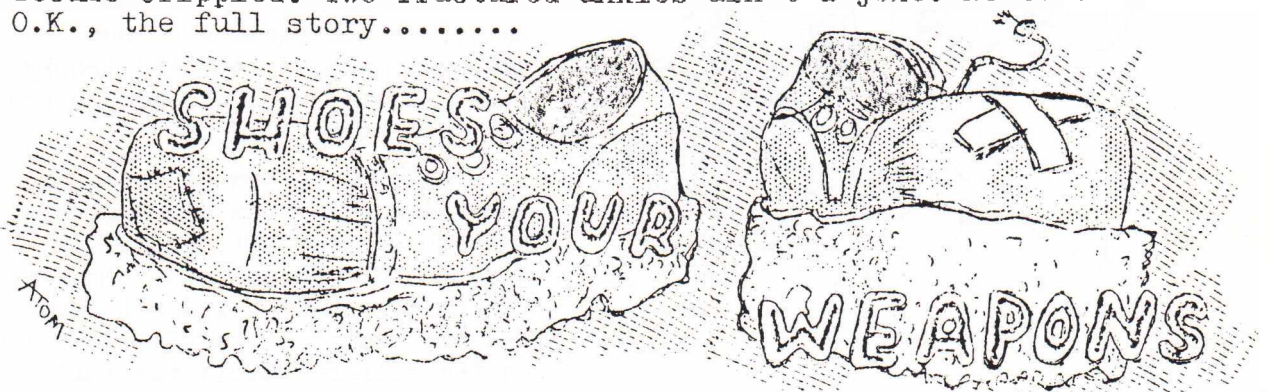
Atom







I am improving daily. With a little effort, great patience, I can hobble along with the assistance of only one crutch for a limited distance. The plaster cast, according to the specialist, will be chipped off my ankles next month, and he assures me that, with proper care and attention, I should be able to walk with as much ease as a normal human being within six months. But being inactive like this, I get time to ruminate, to calculate, ponder....to see all too clearly the elemental error I made. I allow my mind to stagger back. the psychiatrist says I shouldn't, but he doesn't know the full story. When I lie on this couch I am so absorbed with the shape of his secretaries legs that I am sure the answers I give cause him a great deal of worry. Since I became his patient he's lost an awful lot of hair. But I know you're all wondering how I became crippled. Two fractured ankles ain't a joke. No sir. So O.K.? O.K., the full story.....



George Charters started it all. Yes, he's still with us. Anyway, he decided that a fabulous sport such as ghoddminton should have some sort of challenge cup of gold, silver, or even bronze, to play for annually by elimination. The winners name was to be enscribed in ancient English script, George assured us. In fact, he said, he would provide the trophy, and even pay the cost of the inscription...his pension was just about that flexible.

We liked the idea. Besides being poetic, it also served to inspire us to greater heights of endeavour.

The contest for the Charters Trophy was held in September 1955, and I must confess that we sort of decided beforehand to let Bob Shaw win it. Yes. He was a mighty good player, admittedly, but with him emigrating to Canada, we thought it would be a fitting tribute to his flower-like prowess. Accordingly, I played in my most restrained manner, as is proved by the minor injuries inflicted on my opponents, the most serious of which was a cracked White typer finger which held up his pro-activities for a solid twelve hours.

With Bob proclaimed the winner, we waited impatiently for George Charters to make his presentation. He brought it to Walts at Xmas. We sat round entranced as Georges fumbling fingers removed the cardboard, cut away the twine, and revealed.....

#### THE CHARTERS TROPHY.

Looking back, I've kind of reconsidered, and I've got to admit it is the spirit that really counts. The hunk of rough metal alloy definitely looks different. The words "PRESENTED BY GEORGE A.T.W. CHARTERS 1955", stamped on by a steamhammer at the local foundry gives the whole thing an air of surrealism. Sort of Sir Henry



Moorish. I remember even now the poignant expression of wonder as evinced by the first recipient:-

"You senile idiot," roared Bob, holding aloft his bandaged forearm," to think that I suffered this wound for that lump of tin."

Walt raised his arm, cleared his throat and avoided George's hurt expression.

"Folks", I recall he said, "folks George means well. Personally, that MADE IN BIRMINGHAM. PROPERTY OF THE AIR MINISTRY on the back gives a militant air to the whole thing, an abstraction of our national game. I like the trophy ...at least I would if George would get that bolt filed off."

Mumbling to himself, George removed a rasp from his portable bath chair tool set, and did a pretty thorough job of removing the bolt, although I don't think Walt appreciated the six-inch-square on the polished table top that

revealed the sandalwood layer of which it was surmounted was thinner than the salesman had indicated.

"The inscription," yelled Bob.

"Ah" cackled George, and producing a toffee hammer, he punched the telling phrase:-

WON OUTRIGHT BY BOB SHAW 1955

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When Walt gave notice that the 1956 Championships would be held in July, I became obsessed with the idea of having my name under Bob's. I had sensed for some time that my active ghoddminton days were numbered. I just couldn't get enough old clothes to keep me going - I even had to relegate my new clothes to old clothes to sustain my play. So whilst I could still spare a shirt and a pair of trousers, I resolved to reach the ultimate in ghoddminton, before retiring threadbare but triumphant.

I wrote to Bob Shaw. I still have the carbon copy. I do not want to bore you, but this short excerpt will put you in the picture, as it were:-

"...so much so that I beg of you to forward me your ghoddminton shoes. Oft have I admired your elegant feline-like movements, and I am sure that you are naturally gifted with sylph-like agility, your shoes play more than a little part in your triumph, resulting in the outright win of ..."

His reply, couched in his usual flower-like style, gave certain instructions. Packing a pick and shovel on the carrier of my pedal cycle, I pedalled to Shaw's Bridge, just a very few short miles from

Belfast, the scene of that harrowing incident eighteen months before.

I took a SW bearing from a stunted elm tree, strode 25 paces and dug. Inside the cardboard box that my excavations revealed, I discovered a pair of crepe soled shoes covered with green mould. I carried them home lovingly, cherished them with a polishing rag, and then added the eyeholes with string. With a few patches here and there, they looked quite serviceable.

I didn't really have the nerve to be seen with them en route to Oblique House, so I posted them to myself at 170.

Walt gave me the box when I arrived, for the first round of the 1956 championships.

Madeleine, limbering up in the corner of the room, introduced herself to me as my opponent. This was unfortunate. James and Walt I could manage, because, to them, severe physical injury was accepted as an unavoidable risk, but for a true sportsman like myself to injure a female was out of the question.

Well, almost. I had made up my mind to win.

Chuckling to myself, I sneaked under the table and put on the shoes. For the first time I discovered the fieldmouse nest in the right shoe, the builders of which were swinging precariously from my right big toe, attached only by their front fangs.

"Berry is full commented Willis as table for the third

"Take it

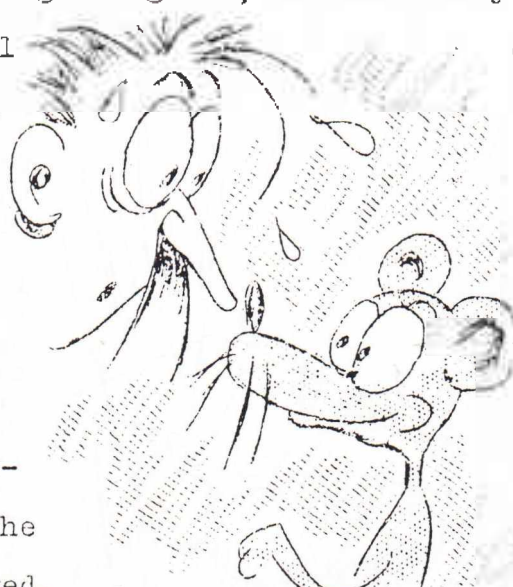
It wasn't so much fieldmice were excrevices of my ifer, the Willis fed up my left leg.

Someone opened passed, and I flew and did a bit of

I limped purthe court, and carethe other shoe.

Walt gave me the word to commence.

Madeleine served.



of energy tonight," I vaulted the time.

away", I screamed.

that the ploring the pants, but Lucat, was stufhand trouser

the door as I to the bathroom, demousing. posely back to fully tied on

.....

She put such ferocious energy into her first service that she slipped and spun round on her axis. Her bat, acting like a turbine, caused a blast of air to whistle in my direction, bringing the shuttle with it.

I leaped to my left to deflect it, but with a - doinge ge doinge - I sprung back to my original position, and for some seconds I swayed backwards and forwards, like the prong of a tuning fork. Even when my head stopped moving, my eyes still clicked to and fro like ball bearings in a roller skate wheel .



I turned round to Walt to explain what had happened, and discovered that although I had actually turned round, the shoes had not. They were still pointing towards Madeleine.

The blasted things were like landing barges.

One consolation I discovered in the second service. If I put both legs at an angle of 45 degrees, I couldn't be knocked down. Leastways, if I was knocked down, I sprang back up again.

Another facet of this strange footwear was that the shoe area was so big that even if I missed the shuttlecock a good half of my ground area was covered by shoe, and I was often able to grab it on a second attempt before it rolled the looong journey to the floor.

The crowning in-justice was to come, however.

My demeanour had so amazed Madeleine that I managed to win the game, and, stupidly forgetful, I leapt over the table to shake hands with her.

I say I leapt. In actual fact I went through the basic ritual of leaping. I managed to rise three feet vertically, and then forced myself forward over the table top. I misjudged slightly, or maybe the weight was too heavy, but the 4" thick crepe soles caught under the edge of the table.

I reached the floor

on the other side of the table.

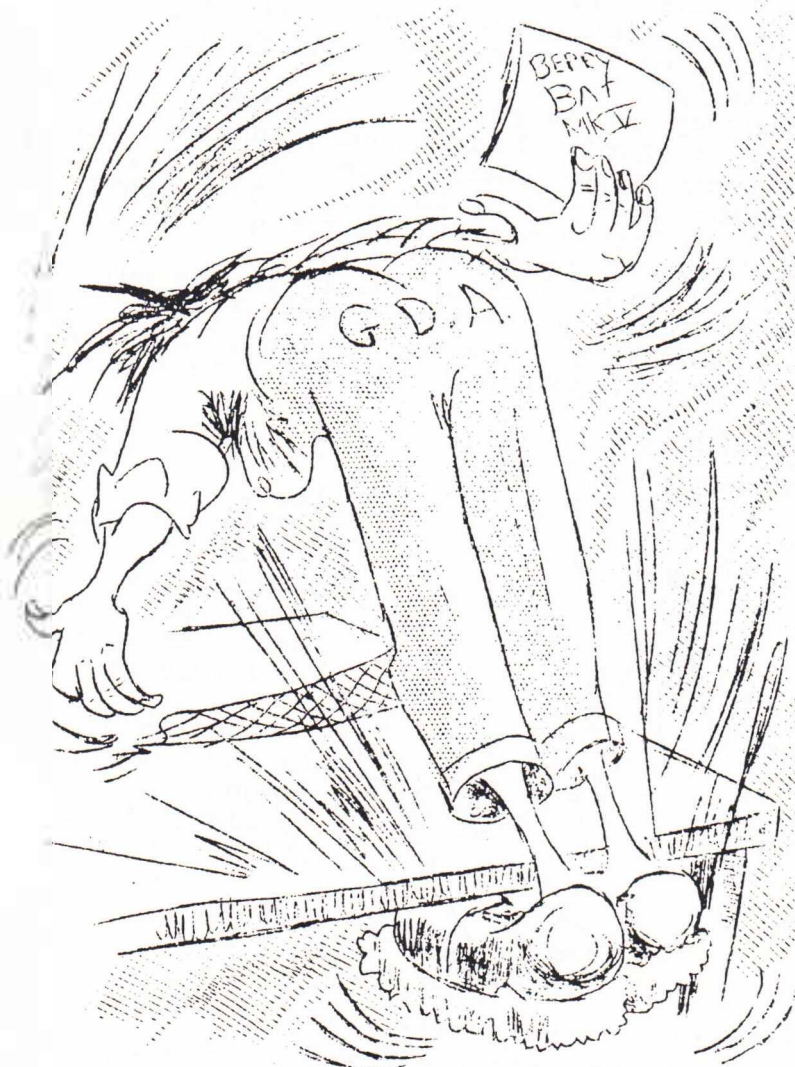
The BoSh shoes did not.

I was still wearing the BoSh shoes.

.....  
After the first three weeks in hospital when I had figured it all out, I wrote to BoSh to complain.

This was his reply:-

...I note your remarks about my ghoddminton shoes, and I'm truly sorry they didn't help your game. I'm afraid I had forgotten about the truly exquisite fragile struc-





ture of your dainty little feet. When I return to Belfast, I will bring you a pair of tiny moccasins which I hope will be sufficiently soft and gentle to be entrusted with guardianship of your pink little piggy wiggies. In the mean time I am sending under separate cover two barrels of foot salve invented by Proffessor Armand Legge, to repair any damage my shoes have caused your feet. Please forgive me."

.....  
Great sense of humour has BoSh.

The footsalve never arrived.

Out of the catastrophe, however, one little happy incident occurred.

Carol now has somewhere to keep her toys.

.....



Atoms  
folio  
of **FANBEMS** 3<sup>rd</sup> series





I can imagine the scene in over two hundred and fifty homes just recently. Two hundred and fifty postmen, with raised eyebrows, each pushing a copy of HYPHEN through the appropriate apertures. Delighted addressee's, letting out rapturous yells of joy and sheer enjoyment, the excitement being ( as the boy and girl campers opined ) intense. (That pun was sold to me for a shilling by GATWC).

But I wonder if they spare a thought for the frustrating hours of agony that contributed to their final pleasure. I wonder ?

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I won't dwell on the ink-spattered personage of Walt, flogging the handle of his duplicator in an effort to beat the deadline. I want to start at the point where all the stencils have been run off, all the hard work ( we think ) has been done. All that remains now is to put the pages in order, and staple them.

This is what happened when HYPHEN II was assembled.

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I arrived at Oblique House fairly early at night, around 7.30 pm as far as I recall. The place was a hive of industry.

"Just waiting for you," said Walt. "Everything is organised. Nothing can go wrong."

He waved a hand airily at his careful preparations. I saw that a long table had been constructed in the middle of the room. Large reams of paper lay in orderly array around this table.

"The pages start here," said Walt, pointing a knowledgeable finger, "and carry on numerically. Pick up that page, and the next, and so on, until you have circled the table. You will then have one complete ish. Stack it neatly on that chair."

The chair he pointed to caused me to wince inwardly. It was my guilty secret. A couple of days previously, I had been having a practice ghoddminton tourney with James White, and in an attempt to return one of his craftier shots, I leapt awkwardly in mid air, and landed on this particular chair, a light wickerwork affair. It just collapsed into pieces.

James and myself had hurriedly re-assembled it, and James very sportingly, (after ten shillings had changed hands) promised he would not mention the debacle to Walt.

I didn't mention it, either. Dammit, I had only just finished paying a final instalment to Walt for a window I had broken a month previously (Ghoddminton, naturally.)

So as you can imagine, when Walt pointed to that chair,



I didn't feel too good. I realise now that I should have owned up to my misdemeanour.

"Do you feel O.K.?" asked Madeleine, watching the perspiration dripping from my nose.

"Y-yes," I gulped, dragging my eyes away from the chair, which James swears was only standing up because of some gravity-defying draught of hot air seeping through the floor boards from the room below. James didn't know I had the chair tied up with white cotton to a nail on the wall. I know I should have owned up. Of course, it is easy to be wise after the event.

Well, to continue. Walt lined us up next to page 1. Walt was at the head of the procession, followed by Madeleine, then me. Bob was busily engaged working his way through Walt's complicated card index system, denoting subscriber's addresses. Carol walked around with a roll of 1/2d stamps hanging from her tongue. ("Expensive, but it keeps her quiet," quoth Willis.

With a final expert perusal of the situation, Walt gave the word of command, and we trudged forward, picking up pages, circling the table, stacking HYPHEN neatly on the chair.

The organisation was tremendous. I felt really important, shuffling along, putting HYPHEN together. The chair was standing the strain remarkably well, everything considered. I don't profess to know much about stresses and strains, but I thought I was witnessing the physical laws which govern the construction of humped-back bridges. You know the theory, the more weight you put on it, the stronger it gets. Fascinating, isn't it?

The way we continued to stack HYPHEN was marvellous. The pile on the chair was easily two feet high when the first interruption came.

Bob waved an index card.

"Can't read that" he said.

Walt muttered a curse under his breath.

"Halt, men," he ordered.

Obediently, Madeleine and myself collapsed into the nearest chairs, our fingers still spasmodically jerking up and down with the rhythm we had acquired paper picking.

Walt walked across to Bob, breathing heavily. They had a muffled conversation, then Walt returned.

He snapped impatient fingers at us, so we resumed our monotonous perambulations. As we progressed, our speed got faster and faster, until we finally broke into a steady trot. The pile was almost four feet high when the second interruption occurred.

We all heard a distinct 'ping', like a ricocheting bullet.

The noise was so strange that Madeleine and myself had the audacity to break formation without orders.

Bob's head was turning round in circles like a radar scanner, and his eyes were somewhere near his ear lobes. Carol turned away from her pattern on 1/2d stamps on the wallpaper, and Walt leaned forward like an Indian Scout. Where the hell did that noise come from, we all wondered?

I thought I knew. I looked at the chair for confirmation. I was correct. The cotton that was holding up the chair had parted. I looked



up to the nail on the wall and all I saw was a ball of frayed cotton swaying slowly to and fro.

Ghosh. I held my breath for what seemed a couple of minutes, but the chair seemed intact. Was it a great hoax, I suddenly thought? Had James told them, and they had put an identical chair there, and Walt's insistence upon piling HYPHENS on the chair was merely some form of demoniacal mental torture? If only it was true.

I looked round guiltily, but they all appeared as mystified as I tried to be.

"What the hell was that?" asked Bob.

"Probably the mating call of the lesser spotted wickdiddle," I suggested, trying to put them off.

"Extremely unlikely," announced Walt, "but I will investigate later, HYPHEN comes first."

This time, it took us rather longer to get into step, but with words of encouragement from Madeleine ringing in my ears, I managed to complete the task. Towards the end, Walt stood on the table, whilst we handed them up to him. I would say the pile was about six feet high.

Walt stepped down gazing at this tower of literary achievement with modest but undeniable pride.

Madeleine, Carol and Bob stepped forward in admiration. I stepped backwards in trepidation.

It was bound to happen. You've known all along, haven't you? But the way it happened.

There was a sharp crack, and the chair disintegrated in a heap of matchwood, but the amazing thing was that the pile of HYPHENS balanced on the seat of the chair.

Walt, Madeleine, Carol and Bob all made a concerted dive under the table, landing on me in a most undignified manner. We all gazed at this elemental struggle between gravity and HYPHEN. HYPHEN was game. Oh, yes. This was no half-hearted surrender, but a fight to the bitter end.

First of all the pile swayed one foot out of the perpendicular, then back again. Then it swayed out a foot and a half and back again. Finally it swayed out two feet, and back again.

Walt, with gritted teeth, raised a fist, shouting:-

"NOT AN INCH, NOT AN INCH."

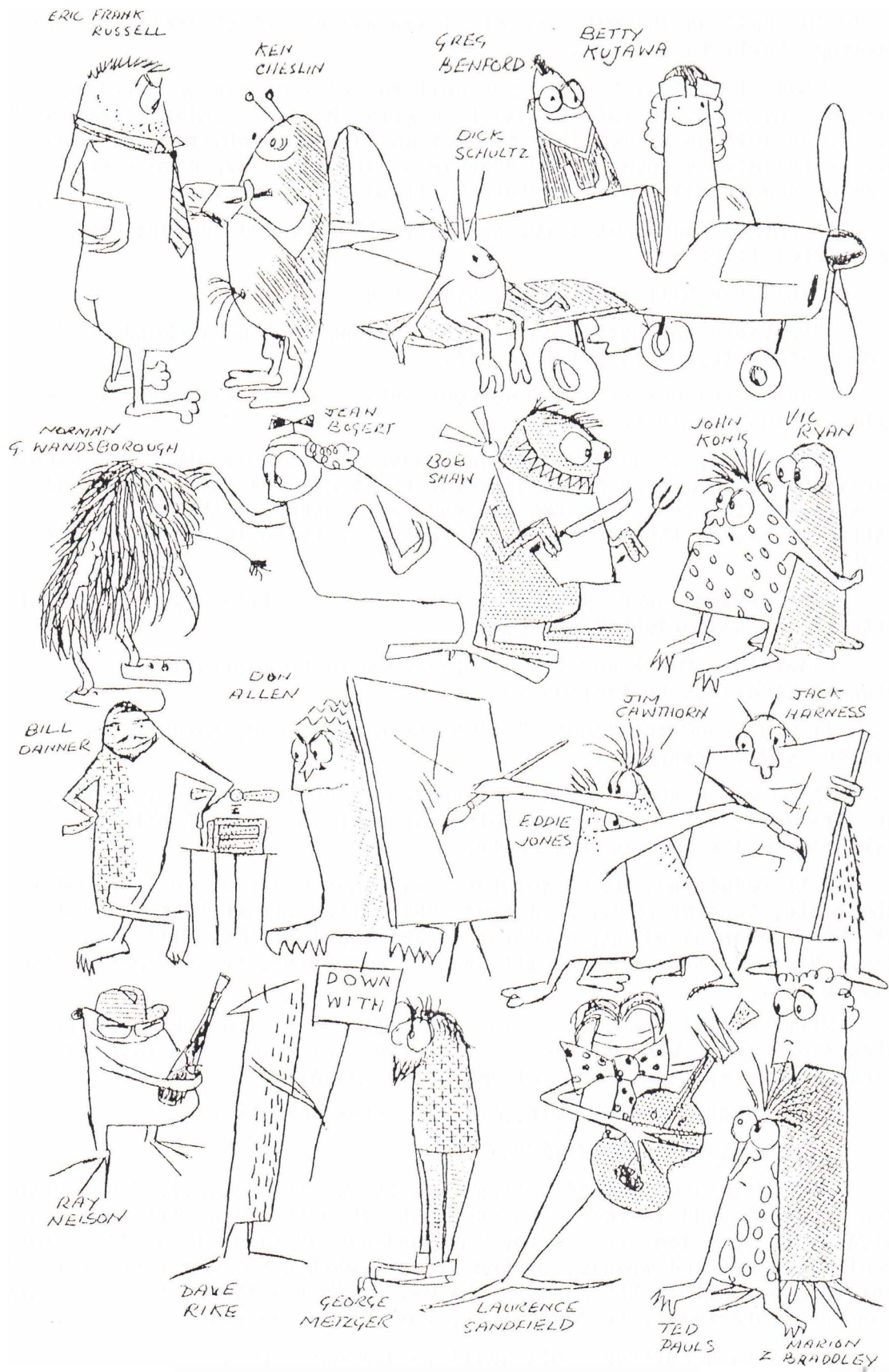
HYPHEN rallied magnificently. But it was to no avail. For perhaps ten tense seconds there was no movement, then the pile parted in the middle. It took ten minutes for the hundreds of pages to settle. They would have settled sooner, obviously, but what with Walt running round the room screaming, Bob beating the wall with his fists, and Madeleine sobbing hysterically in the corner, what do you expect?

There was a further panic until we dug out Carol.

There is only one thing worrying me now.

Can I get to James White before the rest of them ???

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# the Parting Shock

The summons from Bob Shaw had been short, but I could tell it was imperative for me to be at the fanac room at Oblique House at 7.30 pm on the dot. I brought along Diane, my wife, who had been trying to withstand fandom for some time. I knew that Bob and Sadie would shortly be leaving us to travel to Canada, and although Walt had a new male neo lined up, I decided to try and get Diane to replace Sadie. Our group would seem so strange without Sadie's presence, and I thought maybe it would stimulate the rest of us trying to convert Diane. I had worked hard on her, nurtured her dormant fannish instincts with care and deliberation. Now, I felt, she was ripe for Willis. There was something personal in it, too. I wanted my wife to share my mail, bask in my egoboo, type some of my articles.

Usually, as one approaches our room at 170, one is conscious of vibrant activity. More than once I have found my way barred by the aged form of George Charters gasping for breath on the first landing, or maybe Bob sniffing hopefully for tea on the second floor. Normally to even get to the room is a hazard, as the door forms an integral part of the ghoominton court and several fen have copied my trick of using the door as an extra means of momentum for serving.

But tonight all was quiet. In fact, this was so incredible that I would have thought myself in the wrong house except for the familiar and well-used First Aid box fixed to the left of the door, adjacent to the Shuttlecock Fund collection box. (Tobacco Coupons not accepted.) I whispered encouragement to Diane, opened the door slightly, and peered 'round it.

Suffering Catfish !

Without wishing to depreciate in any way the normal attire of our members, I must say that what I saw was ridiculous. I might at least have been warned. Willis, for instance, is normally a cast-iron certainty to be dressed in filthy trousers and grubby shirt, duper stains rampant. Shaw, less pretentious, normally favours a check shirt, well worn flannels and co-respondent's shoes with big toe-vents that were not a feature of the original footwear when purchased several years earlier. James White, by trade a purveyor of immaculate clothing, usually follows the recognised precepts of psychiatry by wearing such old clothes as he can muster in an effort to forget the tribulations of his profession.

But the assembly I saw waiting for Diane and myself would have done credit to the London Circle.

Willis was in his office kit, bow tie, spats and striped trousers. James was adorned in the same general style, except for the addition of a spotted cravat. Bob was wearing his social outfit, although I noticed the lace trimmings had been removed from his knee-length Harris Tweed coat. Sadie, Madeleine and Peggy were all in evening dress, complete with flashing jewellery and beautifully manicured finger nails.

I sensed Diane attempting to attract my attention, which she achieved by dragging me away from the doorway and pressing me against the bannister on the landing.

"I can't stay in there," she shrilled, "...look at me."

I surveyed her jumper and slacks, the latter complete with my own patent pan-lid knee pads.

"But you always maintain you like to dress differently," I urged, edging into the dark shadows of the door in an effort to hide from her my gardening jerkin and wellington boots. We were ready for ghoddminton, you see, we always played it. But what was the idea of this formality?

George appeared, nestling under his shawl.

"Come in, children, come in," he panted. "This is gwine to be good. Heh heh heh."

We re-entered behind George.

"Who is the old critter,?" asked Diane in a stage whisper, then she put her hand to her mouth in case George had heard. However, I could see by the way he was happily ruminating in his sports bath chair that he had not heard her comment.

We joined the group. The chairs, benches and stools were formed into a semi-circle facing the far end of the room, where a long curtain covered the gable-end of the wall.

Bob stood up and turned to face us. This...this was the real thing. This was the parting we had so long dreaded...the frightful blow to Irish Fandom was now about to take place. I could see why Bob wanted us all together just this one time more. The atmosphere was one of compassion, of...of heartfelt sadness and foreboding.

"Mr and Mrs Willis, friends, and the Berry's," began Bob, his voice trembling with the emotion we all felt. "Sadie and myself have to leave you so very soon and I would like to say a few words to you before I unveil my parting gift, here behind me," indicating the long curtain. I felt pretty awful. This was really something. I have attended many touching ceremonies, but this was emotion personified. This atmosphere, of all things, typified the deep understanding that exists amongst all of us of Irish Fandom...sincerity, feeling, vibrant consideration and honest-to-goodness companionship. I looked at Diane. Tears were in here eyes. She looked at me nodded mutely. A sign that she accepted fandom, realised the full meaning of the beanie.

Bob continued his touching speech and I noted the surreptitious sniffing of hankies. How happy I was to have purchased the dreaded typer off Bob...what a great favour he had done me.

"...and during my sojourn with Irish Fandom, I have progressed from a simple neofan right up the scale to become a vile pro who owns his own typer and married Sadie," continued BoSh. "Fellow fen, until



I came here I hadn't lived, so to show you how much I have loved and cherished these few precious years Roscoe has granted me, I want to leave behind a small token of my appreciation."

The pathos was gripping. With tear-filled eyes, Bob reached for the cord to pull the curtain, when Walt leapt to his feet. In a choking voice, he addressed us.

"Before Bob reveals his magnificent gift to us all," breathed Walt, "I think we should all say a few words about this bhoys...this paragon of fannish art...this utterly likeable glutton. James, as senior pro, would you like to say something?"

James shuffled to his feet and looked grim.

"Because of my long association with Bob, I would like to say one thing. You all know that I am on a diet and am mostly restricted to arrowroot biscuits and water. How often during these years have I seen Bob's jaws munching onwards, ever onwards. Cream Puffs, tarts, chocolate cakes and custard pies, etc, have all found their way down this fantastic gullet. WHY HAS HE TORTURED ME ? WHY ?"

With a suppressed sob, James vaulted over his chair and attempted to strike Bob with his ghoddminton bat, but in his haste he fell over a spare table leg. We picked him up and led him back to his seat.

Walt cleared his throat with an embarrassed rasp.

"With those treasured words, which I am sure touched Bob deeply, we come to George. Hey, Sadie, wake him up. Hey, George, say something for Bob."

George screwed up his eyes and ran a gnarled hand over his wrinkled face. "Er..heh heh heh," he commenced, "unaccustomed as I am to, er, heh heh heh, what was I, oh, er, heh heh heh, now that James has sold his first story, er, where's my hot water bottle, hey, who's pinched me humbugs, oh, er, heh heh heh..."

Gently, Sadie led him back to his bathchair, leaving him to reflect on his childhood memories, happy in the knowledge that in Irish Fandom, at least, age is respectfully revered.

Walt struggled to retain the atmosphere of sorrow at Bob's departure. "John," he pleaded, "say something."

I stood and faced the assembly.

"I have always liked Bob Shaw," I shouted. "Don't think these scars across my body caused by his reinforced bat cause me any concern. I - I like Bob Shaw. He sold me that dreaded hunk of metal, the Shaw Typer, but, all the same, I like Bob Shaw. He uses my moustache as bait for his warped humour, but I don't care. I like Bob Shaw. True, he usually scoffs my share of food. Hey, come to think of it, he always scoffs my share. Hey. I've just thought. What makes me think I like Bob Shaw ? I - hey, Walt, put me down. I..."

"And lastly friends," beamed Walt with his foot in my mouth. "I want to say something about this great friend of mine. This bhoys is one of the most unassuming characters I have ever met. His literary ability is undreamed of, his humour is puckish, his ghoddminton skills unlimited. Without his assistance and guidance, SLANT and HYPHEN would never have appeared. Canada's gain is our loss. Okay, Bob. ..."

Bob rose and gripped the cord in his big fist. He beamed at us as the curtain gradually parted. What was it ? A marble slab with his best pun enscribed upon it? A ghoddminton score board ? His science fiction collection in a built-in bookcase ?

The parted curtains revealed, as if in confirmation of that old adage... 'Man's inhumanity to Man.'

Bracketed to the wall, overlooking the ghoddminton court, was...the...most...horribly...rusted...pedal...cycle that the elements had ever hammered away at. It was incredible, even worse than the wreck reposing under Shaw's Bridge.

A sign escaped from the opened mouths.

Suffering Catfish !

"It's nothing, I know," said Bob coyly looking down, " but I wanted you to remember the real me, as I have always been..."

Folks, sometimes things happen too quickly for my mind to grasp the full sequence of events. For some seconds a blur of action centred around Bob and Walt. My fingers were trodden on several times. When the fanzines finally settled, Bob was revealed sitting in the middle of the floor, an indignant expression on his face, the rusted frame round his neck.

I helped Diane down from the top of the bookcase and we hurried home.

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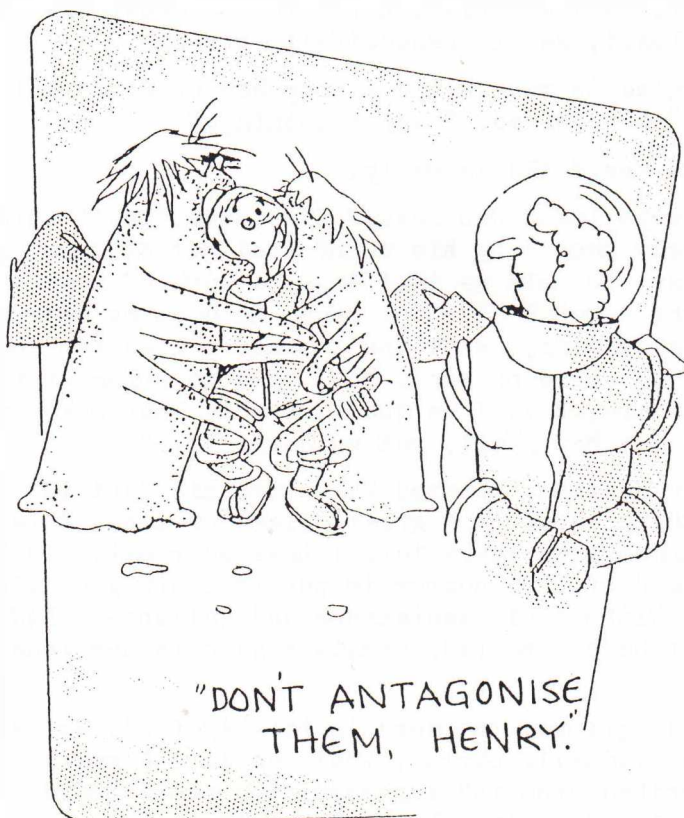
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I sometimes find it difficult to assure normal people that fandom is such a happy existance

But some things are difficult to explain to the uninitiated.  
Very difficult.

Even now, I think Diane might have made a very good fan...

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# BELFASTERS

## THREE ~ BOB SHAW.

To attempt to present every aspect of Bob's personality would require the pen of a writer much more experienced, much more perceptive than mine. Just take a look at the paragraph headings and see the diversity of his character. There is so much I want to tell you about this bhoy, this born humourist, this paragon of the fannish art, this bastion of Irish Fandom, so, without any palaver, here, first of all is Bob Shaw :-

THE MAN. Bob is a handsome hunk of Irish manhood, broad, tall and well built. His noble features are inclined to light up in rapture at the slightest provocation, such as if someone breaks their arm playing ghoddminton. Yes, he undoubtedly has a great sense of humour. By trade, Bob is a draughtsman, and such is his skill and prowess that he deals with really big jobs these days...he was telling me a few days ago that he had just finished the plans for the Gent's Toilet in Little Portingale Street, Belfast...this bhoy is in the Big Time. Bob is around 24 years old, and is married to a charming girl, Sadie, who can handle a mean teapot, which Bob considers one of her greatest virtues. Which leads me to:-

THE GOURMET. This is a touchy subject with Bob...I don't quite know why. I admire him for it. I would be happy enough to possess his capacity for table-clearing. Frankly, my wife is delighted when he visits us...in her naive way, she considers that the ultra-rapid movement of all the available comestibles is a compliment to her culinary achievements.

THE SCHEMER. This will interest you, and don't think it's unique.

We were sitting in front of the fire at Oblique House waiting for Madeleine to bring the supper. As always, the conversation was brilliant, and I hated to leave, but it was getting very dark and the front light of my pedal cycle didn't work. I told Walt about this.

"Use my bike," he explained with a generous wave of his hand, the matter, as far as he was concerned, dealt with.

"Nunno," interrupted Bob, "why borrow Walt's bike, when I'll let you have my lamp, then you can go home on your own bike."



GOURMET



It seemed so easy the way Bob put it. I was kind of hypnotised by the way he swept his right hand in a confident gesture. Then I remembered about the dreaded typer I had purchased from him.

"Does...does your lamp work, Bob?" I asked.

Bob dropped his armful of custard pies, and moved his head so rapidly in surprise that the two chocolate fingers flew from behind his ears.

"Does it work?" he thundered incredulously. He looked appealingly at the others, who carefully avoided his eyes.

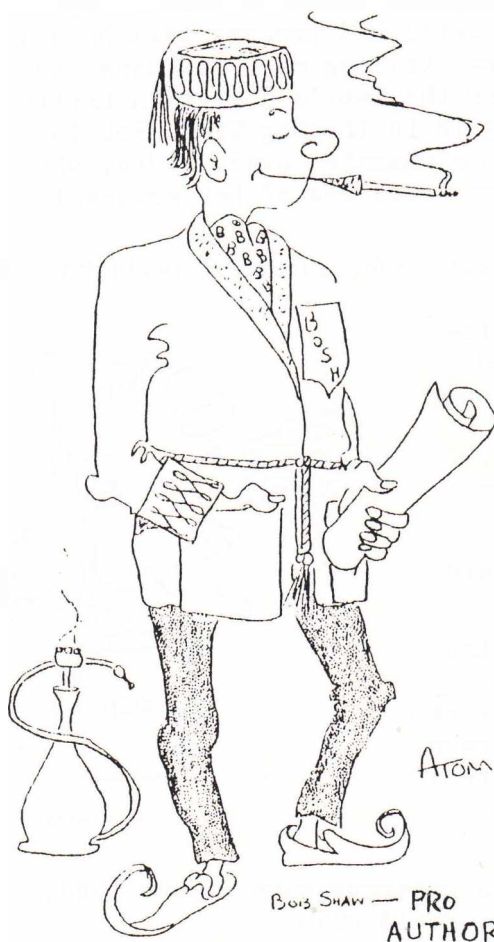
"He asks does it work," repeated Bob, trying to whip up a mite of moral support.

I was lulled into a false sense of security by his suave manner.

"Thank you, Bob," I said.

"Just fetch it yourself, John," he grinned, "and test it. You'll find it in the shed at the back of the house."

As I left the room, I thought I detected pitiful glances from Walt and the others. I reached the shed. It was very dark, and there wasn't any means of illumination. I - look, I don't want to bore you with trivialities. About how I clawed my way round the shed...how I inadvertantly stuck my hand in a primed wasp trap of Carol's (a nearly empty 5 lb. strawberry jam pot donated by the Shaws)...how I trod on the prongs of a rake...how I - oh, much more. Needless to say, I didn't find the cycle lamp.



I shuffled back into the dining room. You know, sometimes I instinctively know when I have made a miscalculation. In this case, my instinct was unnecessary.

Bob lay back on the settee, the top two buttons of his trousers undone, his face wreathed in smiles, hugging his stomach affectionately.

"Where did you go?" he grinned amiably. "You've just missed Madeleine's Coffee Kisses."

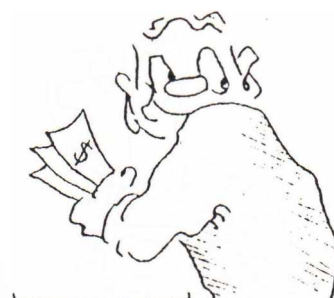
GHOD. Madeleine had at last produced her masterpiece, the Coffee Kiss, baked from a secret recipe that George Charters had found in one of his childhood books, "Early Victorian Delicacies", whilst he had been cleaning out his attic.

Would you believe it if I told you that the most thumbled book in Bob's library is written by a certain Mrs. Beeton?

THE PRO-AUTHOR. Bob has had several stories published, and his biggest achievement to date is the publication of one of his short stories in the NEW YORK POST, which has a circulation of over one million. Bob is modest about his growing success,

and now that he has sold me his old typer, there is nothing to stop him reaching the front rank of science fiction writers.

THE SCRAP METAL MERCHANT. I must be frank in this biography. Bob has so much talent that he could have gained fame in two or three fields, as a ballet dancer, for example, but most definitely as a scrap-metal merchant. He seems to reflect a mystic aura which turns anything metal that he may own into technicolour rust. His bike, pump, typer, lamp, etc, have all succumbed to the spell. I can prove it. Cheap, too. The Shaw Typer. Are any of you in the scrap-metal business? You can have it for nothing. I'll even pay transport costs. Please, won't someone take it off my hands. My dustman hasn't been back since I proposed that he should take it.



'VILE HUCKSTER'

Heck, I'm beginning to feel somewhat despondent...

PUNSTER IN EXCELSIS. You'll never make a pun again after you've read these two brilliant examples of Shavian Wit.

"Listen, John," he said to me one night. "I have noticed that you always use the words 'a cry of frustration'".

I nodded. It was true...I love that expressive phrase.

"Well, I thought of a magnificent pun today," he grinned. "This is the set-up. One afternoon, your wife is out, and you decide to prepare a special dish. You go out and purchase a few oysters, shellfish, crabs, etc, and when tea-time is near, you drop the whole lot into a frying pan. When Diane comes in, you know the contents of the frying pan onto the floor, as if it was done accidentally. Then you give a loud shout. Diane will say, 'Was that a cry of frustration?' and you will be able to reply, 'No, it was a fry of crustacean.'"

OOOooooohhh.

Now grit your teeth. This one is even more involved, but it's clever.



--RACANTOUR--  
--RACOUNTER--  
HELL! YOU SPELL IT!

I wrote an article for OOFSLA ! about a robot Bob Shaw and a robot budgerigar. I couldn't get a title for the piece, and asked Irish Fandom to help me out. Bob Shaw came to my rescue immediately.

"This is my idea, John," he explained. "Imagine that in your story the two robots break down due to some mechanical defect. To mend the bird would be quite easy, because all you would have to do would be to insert a finger and make a small adjustment. But to try and fix the robot Bob Shaw would be much more complicated. You would have to open the door at the back of the robot, put both arms inside, and fiddle about with the inner works for hours."

"So, I yawned.

"So," said Bob, " you could call your story - 'A Hand in the bird is worth Two in the BoSh.' "

Do you like his style ?

Bob's best pun was when he called Orson Welles by his given name, Orson Cart.

That's his best one.

THE FAN. Bob is a well-known fan on both sides of the Atlantic, and has been active for several years. His humorous articles have appeared in many fanzines, his Fansmanship Lectures, originally published in SIANT, being particularly famous and well-known. Since Bob has turned pro, his flow of fanish material has almost ceased, although he has the proud distinction of having his own column, The Glass Bushel,

appear in every issue of HYPHEN to date, and I for one hope that this state of affairs continues for some time. Bob is a keen ghoomdinton exponent, and as far as finesse is concerned, is easily our best player.

THE BIG GAME HUNTER. We all have our own pet phobias, our own little secret fears. Bob isn't unique in this respect. I would like to tell you about a safari he embarked on the other night.

We had been playing ghoomdinton as usual, and I was just helping Walt to clear up the plaster, when Bob shouted for us to be quiet. We watched him. A gleam of pure triumph was in his eyes as he tiptoed across the floor, carefully avoiding the table leg. He reached THE CALENDAR, looked at it carefully, then turned to us, and with a finger to his lips, gave us a threatening 'shush'.

He raised a ham-like fist, and gave Miss Monroe a nasty thump. This was too much for me. I don't mind Bob Bob trying to wallow in my blood, or attempting to decapitate me...but assaulting Marilyn Monroe...

Anger surged over me, and I was just about to tear up his bat, when Bob lifted THE CALENDAR, and displayed a small red-black spot on the wall underneath.

"I've killed a fly," he yelled in jubilation, " my first today."

So help me, folks, that is the honest truth.

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Well, that is Bob Shaw as I see him. He is one of fandom's nicer personalities and a gentleman to boot.

I wish I could have the job !

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more in  
Sorrow  
than in  
hanger

To get you in the proper perspective, so to speak, I must sidetrack a little and tell you about another of my hobbies, once an important one, now, unfortunately, relegated to an hour or so a week. (No, not that.)

From the age of fifteen I acquired an interest in aviation, all aspects of it. As the years progressed, I formed a large collection of aeronautical periodicals, papers, drawings, and journals. So when fandom struck me in 1954, I was obsessed with its ramifications and possibilities, and selfishly cast my aviation hobby to one side. I still continued to purchase the odd aviation periodical, but beyond scanning the pages and reading one of two items of major aeronautical interest, I filed them away, referring to them but little.

Several months ago, quite by accident, I discovered that a youth down the avenue, about fourteen years old, was interested in aeroplanes. I gave him the freedom of my collection, and soon he brought a friend along, then another. All were terribly enthusiastic, embryos of my former self. I eventually arranged for them to come to my house one night a week, and as I nostalgically regaled them with my accumulated knowledge of facts and figures, which had miraculously hibernated in my brain over the years, I realised that these boys regarded me as an authority. I was to them what Willis is to fandom.

So when, a few short months ago, the local aircraft factory in Belfast announced a completely new top-secret prototype vertical take-off jet, these boys announced their intention of discovering the dimension, design details, etc, whilst the 'plane was still on the secret list. I had inspired them, d'you see? Because I held them spellbound when I told them of my activities, when I was their age, in World War Two, ferreting out details of many secret Royal Air Force aircraft. (AERO-FILE).

To maintain my prestige, therefore, I was forced to undertake

a similar promise. I chuckled to myself after they had departed. For I had an inside contact actually working in the factory.

George Charters.

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George isn't quite as advanced in years as I sometimes make out in my stories...he only looks venerable. He is, in fact, still working. He has a clerical appointment at the aircraft factory, and works the night shift. Naturally, he doesn't get paid a big wage, because he's also getting his old age pension.

I realised like a flash that George was in a very favourable position to carry out a little espionage for me, so one day I broached the subject.

"George," I said, " your aircraft factory is building a new secret aeroplane. It takes off vertically and has a lot of unusual features. Know anything about it ?"

He ruminated pensively.

"I've heard tell of it," he gnashed cautiously.

"Have you seen it ?" I asked eagerly.

His eyelids creaked as he shook his head.

"Do you work anywhere near where it is being constructed ?" I pressed.

"Not too far away," he admitted.

"Well, see if you can find out anything about it for me," I said.

"Any little details. If you do, I'll give you some old Max Brand books I've got at home. Might be a First Edition amongst them."

This was true, to a point. I had been browsing 'round a second-hand bookshop, where James White got his old sf mags...I purchased a bundle of dirty books for a few coppers. Dirty, I stress, in condition, not in contents. The Max Brand's were certainly old, but probably not First Editions. But that was George's worry.

He nodded sagely, promised to do his best, and staggered off.

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The next few weeks were particularly frustrating. Fruitful, to a degree. But frustrating. Every time I saw George ( every Tuesday and Sunday at 170) he would give me a little snippet of information, and then grabbed my dangled inducement.

I'd sidle up to him and murmur furtively..." anything to report, George ?"

He'd look carefully 'round the room, and twist his mouth into an inscrutable prune. A wrinkled corner of his mouth would then lift, and he'd mutter a stealthy phrase, such as ( on 7th April last) "...the waffle-flange has oscillating flick-jubes..." or ( on 27th of May ) "...the clod retainers are bent at an angle of 73 degrees."

When I asked him necessary dimensions, he'd open his arms like an angler, or stare at a fixed spot on the wall, as if mentally assessing a height...or a length...or a span.

I found these calculations rather disconcerting, because, in the privacy of my father-in-law's garage, I was trying to build a third scale model, utilising only the details George had been

able to give me. As I progressed, I became more and more annoyed, because the object, as it grew, looked less and less like an aeroplane...even an unconventional aeroplane.

But as I knew, and George frequently stressed...

"...this aircraft is revolutionary in design, see...it's unorthodox, and " ( in a whisper ) "it's got seven inter-twined snitch-tage."

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There is a large meadow at the rear of my father-in-law's house. I chose this field as the site for the first flight of my large scale model of the new secret aircraft. I had some spectators, the three young aviation enthusiasts, my wife's family, and sundry neighbours, who had no doubt heard the strange noises emanating from the garage over a period of time, and, knowing I was concerned, wanted to see what it was all about.

I ignored the crowd, and commenced to lecture to my three proteges as they gazed in migled awe and wonder at my tarpaulin-covered creations.

"When I was your age, as I've told you, it was wartime, and my chief interest was trying to discover whatever details I could about the many secret types of aircraft which were flying. This I did in a number of ways. Now, as you know, this new secret 'craft is being constructed in Belfast It is a new design, and nothing like it has ever been seen before."

Their eyes flickered at the peculiar bulges jutting out at all angles from the tarpaulin.

"Now," I continued, " I have a contact actually in the factory, and as a result of what he has told me, I have been able to construct an exact replica of it, to demonstrate to you what can be done with a combination of knowledge, intelligence, skill, patience and endeavour."

I strode to my scale model, and the crowd edged away in the long grass as I took off the cover.

I looked at my machine, and turned proudly to the spectators. It's funny being the centre of attraction, being on the inside looking out. The crowd acted as if they were marionettes...controlled by one set of wires.

Their eyes grew in size, as one, they shook their heads...took several paces backwards...and gulped.

I was rather perplexed.

"You see," I repeated to the three students, who seemed to be hypnotized, " you see, this aeroplane, as my contact said, is unconventional."

I looked at the machine.

"That's right," I said slowly, " unconventional."

"Which is the front ?" asked one of the boys.

"Hmmm." I walked round it a couple of times. "I'll just start the engine, and you'll see how it rises vertically until it reaches operational height, when it will commence to fly round in a circle. Leastways, that's the way I've planned it."

I lifted the dustbin lid, and rapidly turned the crank. The



engine ( off my retired mechanically propelled pedal cycle...all 49 c.c. of it ) staggered into life, and the machine strained at the leash. It did more than strain. It hopped up and down like an impatient child. The noise was frightful, and I didn't like the way dirty black smoke burst out of the drumbikle switch-back glotto, into which I happened to be peering at the time, thinking it was the observation gasket.

I ran towards the crowd, shouting for a towel to wipe my face, but they all swivelled round and rapidly disappeared over the horizon, leaping hedges like racehorses. I knew that my appearance may have been somewhat alarming, but, after all, they knew who I was...

I was attracted to the rear by something pulling at my coat. I turned round. My scale model was about to devour me. I could see straight away that something was amiss. Contrary to my expectations, the wing flippets were whirling round and round, rather like the action of a dredger. The black smoke had now developed gigantic proportions, and was gushing out of three places, including the adjustable snap-tockle.

I caught up with the others three fields away, and did a circular tour of the area before returning home.

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I must confess it is the first, and probably the last patent I shall ever take out.

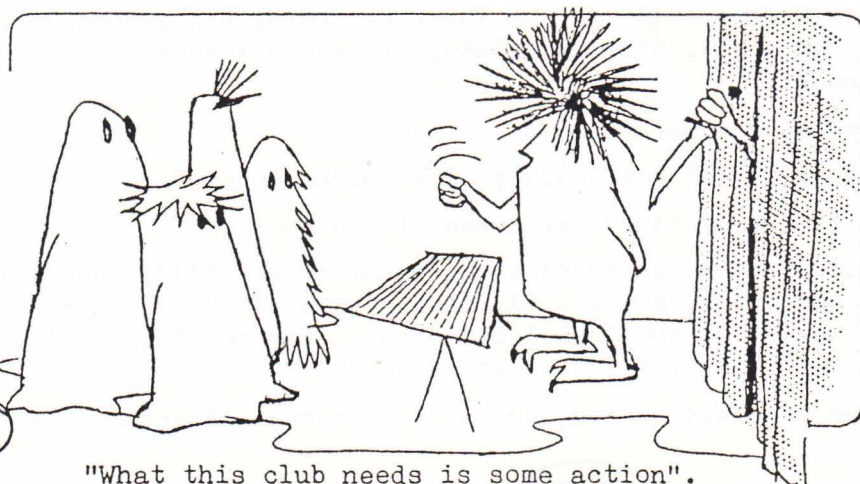
The futuristic Berry Combine Harvester is now in mass-production and should revolutionise farming methods.

As the owner of the field told me, my machine cut, reaped, and stacked his hay in three-quarters of an hour. True, it also stacked two and a half miles of his hedgerow ( but as he philosophically put it - he intended enlarging his fields, anyway ) before admitting defeat at the base of a big elm. A couple of things still worry me, though.

Did I make a slight miscalculation, or did I misunderstand George ? Is the factory really working on a combine harvester, and is this nonsense about a secret vertical-take-off plane propaganda for the Reds ? Or has George Charters been compiling his Max Brand library at the expense of his imagination and my gullability ?

If you ever hear of the Short S.C.1, and that it has flown, you'll know the answer.

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# SWEATING IN EVERY EXTEMPORE

As those of you who have read WILLIS DISCOVERS AMERICA will realise, Walt is a true punster. But what actually is a punster? Allow me to quote a paragraph from that standard work of reference :-

CHARTERS, Geo. PUNS OF AN ANTIQUARY. Vol IV. 1904 - 1908

Page 137 states ( I quote ) :-

....and although it is relatively simple to define a punster as such, one must bear in mind the involved mental activity that a real master undergoes before the full spontaneity of the subject matter on hand is forthcoming. By that, I mean that the inherent intellectual prowess of the average man is such that only by dint of an intensive pre-occupation of the technical elementary skills required will fully bear out my original thesis, fully documented in one of my earlier works, PUNS FOR THE BILLION. (Written on the back of a motor cycle.) For example, when I was four years old, I made a pun which would have shaken the literary world, if Victorian modesty had not forbidden me to mention it. Now that such inhibitions have vanished, I feel free to mention this earlier triumph of mine for the first time.

My father was working in the garden, and was putting the finishing touches to his lettuce bed. Later on, he found that the surface of the ground had been badly scratched.

"How did that happen?" he asked.

"It was a bird, pater," I said. "I seed him do it."

Such originality of wit at that tender age.....

On that ring of authenticity, I will leave Georges' classical masterpiece, and revert once more to Willis, I am certain that little quotation was both interesting and constructive.

Now, Walt is different. You all know how he likes to be original. As far as puns are concerned, do you know that he actually creates spontaneous puns SEVERAL MONTHS BEFOREHAND ???

For example, a billhead in my desk from Messrs C.Threwit, dated 21st December 1954, stating blandly :- Amount due..17/6d for one pane of glass, is a case in point.

I recall I entered the ghoominton chamber one night, and saw a large piece of timber, about 3 ft x 2 ft, placed against the wall. Walt continued to look at it all night, and on subsequent nights. Also, I began to notice that when Walt was playing ghoominton against me, and my back was to the window, he purposely served in such a way as to make me leap backwards.

One night, the inevitable happened. I leapt backwards to try and return the shuttlecock, and I inadvertantly placed my posterior through the window, without, I hasten to add, any damage to my person....to my dignity, yes, but not my person.

Walt gave a cry of triumph, and rushed forward with the hunk of timber, and placed it over the smashed window, covering it completely.

"What's that?" we asked, sensing the worst.

"Ah," grinned Walt, raising a finger, "that's a berricade."

But rest ( get it ? ) assured, theres more to come.

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I myself am only a very mediocre punster, the worst in Irish Fandom. So you must forgive me if I constantly refer to my bible for help and explanation. I am not capable of exposing Walt myself. So grit your teeth once more whilst I pick up the Charters ANTIQUARY. May I refer you to Volume XIII, ( 1926 - 29 ), page 1,274 :-

I quote :-

The avid punster will by now have realized that although it is apparantly his or her forte to suddenly discover the appropriate situation to produce a pun, in reality, the punster is oft the cause of the said situation. It is an unwritten law of punsterism to actively participate in any nefarious undertaking which contains even the minutest possibility of eventually producing a fitting climax. The cost, either financial or physical, is of small import when the final masterful result is considered. One of my earlier successful experiments in this direction occurred in the fall of '95, when I carefully sawed away the three middle rungs of a long ladder as the footman was descending. He hit the crazy paving at maximum velocity with his elbow. The butler came panting to the scene.

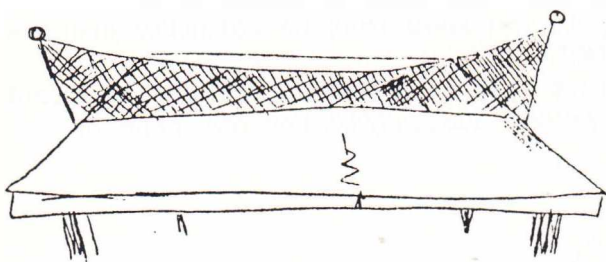
"Very unfortunate, Mr. George," he gasped.

"Yes, Roberts," I replied, " but very humerus."

Reluctantly laying aside that Morroco bound volume once more, I revert to Walt, to see how he handles this situation.

When preparing for a ghoominton session, I invariably divest myself of coat, pullover and shirt, and dump them as far as possible away from the scene of combat.

I noticed that Walt began to persuade me to drape my clothing over one particular easy chair. When I had formed this habit, he taught me to throw the clothing over my shoulder, and land it on the chair. I didn't get the basic





idea, but it seemed to please Walt, and I like to think I'm co-operative. I began to get quite adept at this novel method of depositing my garments, first of all whirling the items round my head like a bolas.

Then, one day, Walt seemed unduly excited. Just as I prepared to cast my clothing, preparatory to playing, I noticed him gesture Madeleine to sit in the chair. My chair. My target. In any case, it was too late for me to avoid finishing my performance, because I was whizzing round like a top. The garments flew through the air and landed all over Madeleine.

"Oh look, Walt," she said, "John is using me as a coat hanger."

"I know," yelled Walt in exultation, "that's because you are so hat-rack-tive."

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For my third and final example of this fascinating art. I am compelled to reach up once more, and pull out the latest volume of the Charters Antiquary. Vol XXVI ( 1950-54 )....let me see...page 113:-

#### PUNS AND THE VERBAL PRELUDE.

This aspect of our science is badly neglected these days, purely for want of a little appreciation of the frailties of the human mind when confronted by an intellect like ( although I am being unduly modest ) myself. It should be possible, with a subtle hint here, a gentle reminder there, to sway the conversation round on exactly the channel you require, when it will be only a matter of time before some idiot presents you with the perfect opening. In this respect, I would like to give you an extract from my latest privately printed hard cover edition of my amatory confessions, entitled PUN GENT AMOURS. "...and I was particularly anxious to bring into play my latest pun ' I don't want to be in a jam'. So I went along to a shady night club I knew in Paris, on the Rue de la Shilcorn, and spent the entire evening taking girls away from their partners by brute force. Naturally, I recieved numerous blows and insults, but at 3.30.am, when I was getting desperate, I whipped a girl away from a nasty looking apache, who snarled, " Keep your hands off my preserves." I was jubilant. That enabled me to .....'

Phew. Pausing only to dump Volume XXVI back under the table I will now explain what Walt does when things don't go according to plan.

It is a fact that I have a great interest in aviation, especially from the aircraft recognition point of view. Walt is aware of this. It so happened that there was a big air display in Belfast, and several times, when we happened to be alone, I mentioned this fact to Walt. I saw Walt bite his lip somewhat, but I couldn't discover why. One night, when we were all present, a jet plane flew overhead.

Walt drummed his fingers on the marble top of his desk.

"What sort is that ?" he asked, sort of agitated.

"That's a Canberra," I explained.

"Er...will it fly over at the weekend ?" he asked.

"I ....I don't know, Walt," I answered. I sensed I was missing the point.

"Ah..er..um..will you be seeing other types this weekend he asked desperately.

I knew there was something he wanted me to say.

"I...I suppose so," I replied. I do hate this verbal sparring.

Walt snorted with exasperation.

"Won't you be going somewhere to see aeroplanes on Saturday next?" he grated, giving each word added emphasis.

It suddenly dawned on me.

"Oh yes...yes" I cried, "I'm going to see the air display."

Walt heaved a sigh of relief, then gave one of his triumphant  
leers.

"Oh, an air display," he said, kind of surprised, "tell me, is it true that it's being organised by the BRYLCREEM people?"

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There now. I think I have said enough to make you see that Walt only got to the top by sheer skill. You will doubtless agree when I say that Walt is Ghods gift to pundom. And a word about Mr.Charters. Don't miss his book, PUN GENT AMOURS. It's all true, and so naughty. Don't be caught with a copy....





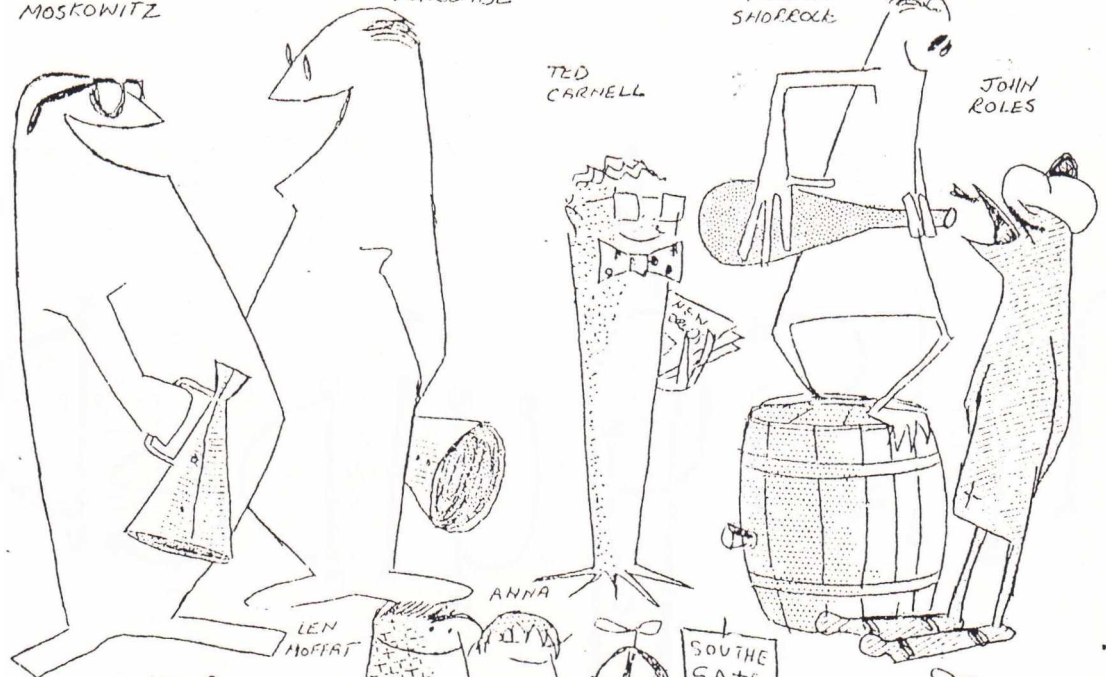
SAM  
MOSKOWITZ

CHARLIE  
DUNCOMBE

NORMAN  
SHOREROLL

TED  
CARMELL

JOHN  
ROLES



LEN  
HOFFAT

ANNA

ARTHUR  
C. CLARKE  
& FRIEND

SOUTHE  
GATE  
IN  
'58

RORY  
FAULKNER

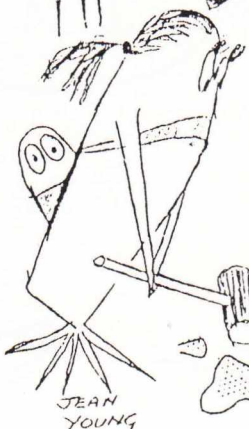
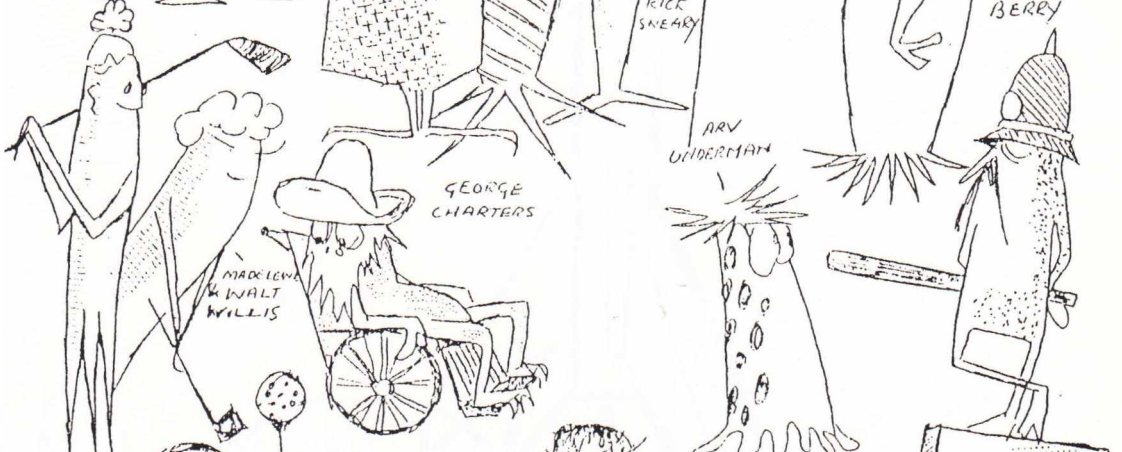
RICK  
SNEARY

JOHN  
BERRY

ARV  
UNDERMAN

GEORGE  
CHARTERS

MADRIEN  
& WALT  
WILLIS



STEVE  
SCHULTHEIS

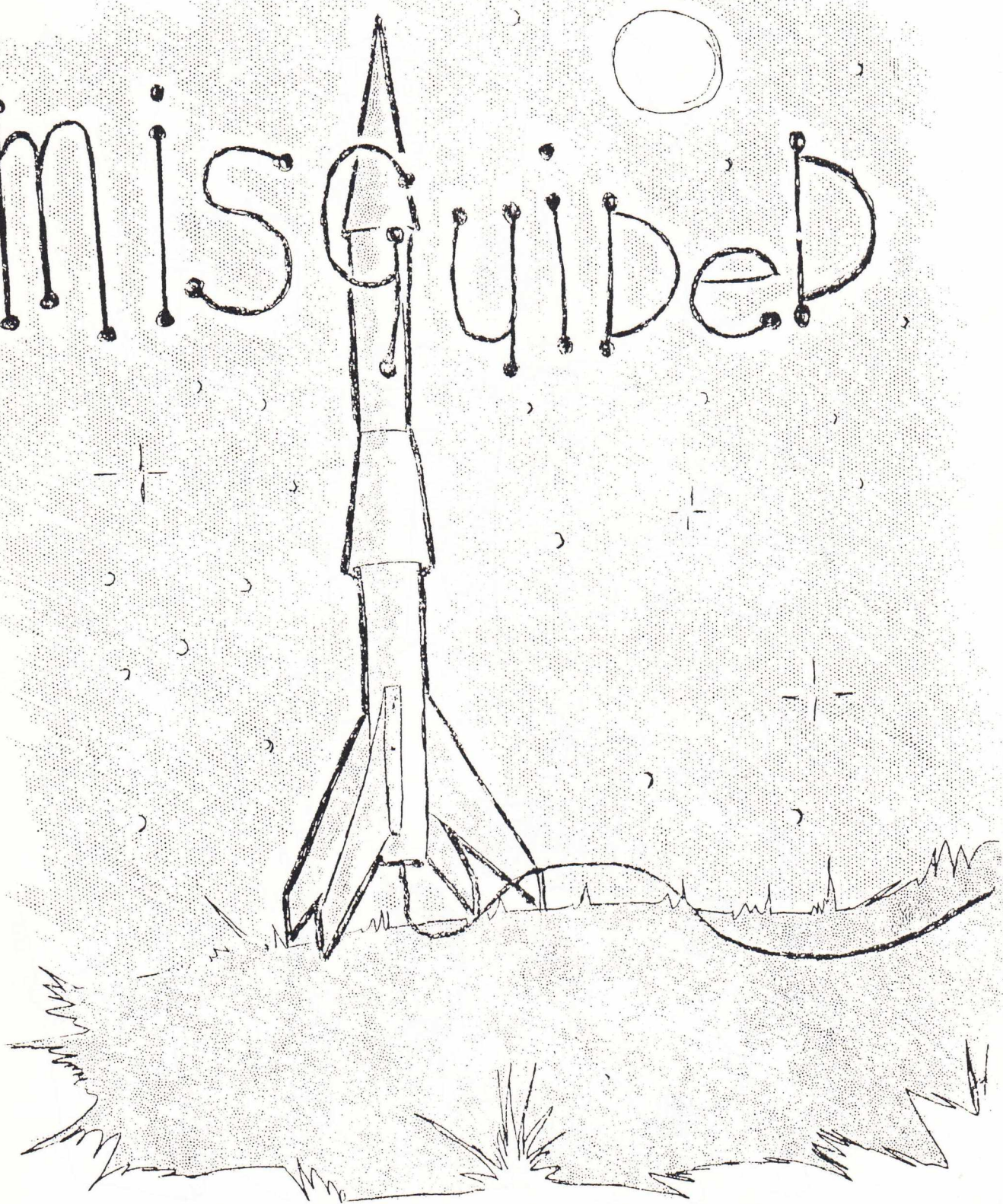
VIRGINIA

NORMAN  
SHAW

JIM  
HARMON



misguided





It was really bed-time for my son Colin, but I'd recently procured a TV set and in a somewhat misguided moment had decided that it would be educational for him to stay up and watch the newsreel. He still does, by the way, although the subsequent result of his newsreel viewing a few weeks ago should have made me change my mind - or sell the set. The thing was that Colin rapidly appeared to acquire similar tastes to myself as a result of his viewing. He prattled all day about aeroplanes, space-ships and kindred subjects, and on this particular evening, he...

The whole story from the beginning ?

O.K.....O.K.

# Missile



ATOM

One evening I was lying back comfortably on the settee, next to my inquisitive offspring, watching the day's events flash across the 14" screen.

It has been my practice from early TV viewing to read aloud the captions as they appear, thus preparing Colin for what is coming.

On this fateful evening, I read - 'United States fires giant rocket.'

Colin sprung forward on the settee, nostrils quivering like a 'G' string.

"Rockets," he gasped in an awed voice.

The screen portrayed the usual sort of thing...picture of rocket on its launching ramp...usual excited 5..4..3..2..1...whoosh...gradual rise of rocket...throbbing flame from the orifice...steady acceleration...long smoke trail hurtling skywards. In other words...THE WORKS.

"Hey, Dad, will you make me a rocket?" yelled Colin, clutching the lapels of my jacket, "will you, will you?"

I utilised a little-known judo grip, and released myself from his hold. I was just going to make a negative reply, and then I pondered. I had made a rocket once before, for a Willis Halloween Party. (BRAUN'D OFF.) I had purchased a shilling rocket, removed the thin stabilising stick, substituted three balsa fins, painted the body with black and white squares, and it sure looked good. It stood all of ten inches high, and performed exceptionally well...even to the slow rise from the launching platform, and even in the darkness it had obviously reached quite a good height.

Another thought occurred to me. James White, vile pro and stalwart of the British Interplanetary Society had challenged me to construct a two-stage rocket, which he asserted to be an impossibility, at least at the scale I was working with.

A surge of elation swept through me. I felt the pioneer instinct pulse through my blood vessels. I felt dedicated.

I turned to Colin. "I will make you a rocket," I vowed ardently.

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Construction of the Berry Two-Stage Rocket was simpler than I had expected. There were two major difficulties, however...(1), ensuring that the upper stage did not lose any of the powder before it was released from the first stage, and...(2) how to release it from the first stage at precisely the second required. I solved both problems one evening when my wife entered from shopping with a new pair of nylons.

My masterpiece stood twenty-three inches high, and the diameter at the base, including fins, was eight and a half inches. I had painted the rocket a brilliant red hue, and by a stroke of foresight amounting to genius, I painted on each fin the legend:-

IF FOUND, PLEASE RETURN TO WALT WILLIS 170, UPPER NEWTOWNARDS ROAD, BELFAST.

If nothing else, I was an optimist.

I could hardly wait to apply a match to the blue touch paper.

I thought about that. It seemed a very primitive way of firing a two-stage rocket, perhaps, though, the genius of Walt Willis would come up with a more scientific and imaginative form of ignition.

By the time the rocket was completed I was even more enthusiastic than Colin. I was impatient to see it blast upwards.

I invited Irish Fandom round to my house to see it...

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They were really impressed; most of all James White. He seemed so serious with his questions on its construction that I secretly suspected that he intended to prepare a thesis on it for the next B.I.S. meeting. His main probe, as before, was how I controlled the blast-off of the second stage rocket.

"It looks good," mused James, focusing his magnifying glass with scientific circumspection," but how have you solved the problem I mentioned previously?"

I stood in front of the fireplace, feeling somewhat of an intellectual, a rare sensation...and I leaned back slowly, and thrust my thumbs through my coal lapels. I let a furrow crease my brow. I looked nonchalant.

"Well, if you must know, James," I confided, "I cut a chunk of cellophane, shaped to the size of one penny, and used it to glue the two components together. This will conserve the powder in the second-stage, and due to its inflammability will not contain the heat during its transitionary period."

But James had fainted. Right enough, it was fairly hot in the room, I always forget to open the living room window. I was rather disappointed in James, though...just when I had the opportunity to show him that, I too, had a scientific mind. When he recovered from his swoon James grabbed Peggy's hand for moral support - definitely for moral support...I knew it wasn't passion because he had his typer with him. From this, and the film of perspiration on James's brow, I finally deduced that he had difficulty in appreciating that the crucial stage of my rocket's performance depended upon a sliver of cellophane. That is one of the benefits of reading books by Willy Ley and Arthur C.(EGO)Clarke.

George Charters dragged his way along the edge of the table, and scrutinised my rocket with his rheumy eyes.

"Heh heh heh...what is it?" he cackled, "A phallic symbol?"

"It's a rocket" I said gently.

He sought the seclusion of his bathchair. "Eh?" he mouthed.

"It's a rocket."

"Beggy poddon?"

"ROCKET...ROCKET," we yelled in unison.

"No, don't do that," he bleated, "it makes me go to sleep. I don't want to miss the orgy."

Madeleine reached for the budgerigar cage-cover, and placed it over George's almost bald head.

"You'd think he'd try hair restorer," muttered Paggy, showing us a glimpse of her kind heart.

"Let him decide for himself," sneered Willis, "after all, he's master of his own pate."

We clubbed Willis to the floor with cushions.

"When are you going to fire it?" queried James.

"Where are you going to fire it?" pondered Willis, seeing his name and address on the fins.

"Carryduff," I announced.

"Carryduff?" Walt repeated doubtfully.

(A little explanation is due. Carryduff is a delightful place.

as Eric Bentcliffe can testify. It is in County Down, about eight miles west of Belfast. My wife's family live there, including her brother Terry. Terry is a big, strong Irishman. I once took him to Oblique House to play ghouldminton...he did more damage in one game than I did in two years, and I am insured up to ten shillings of damage per game. I suppose the most artistic thing that Terry did was to furrow parabolic depressions about an inch thick and six feet long across the walls and ceiling of the Willis chamber with his agricultural boots, as he leapt to and fro in pursuit of the shuttlecock. Terry was one of the reasons for apprehension displayed at my mention of Carryduff.)

"But why Carryduff?" asked Walt, trying to control the twitch at the corner of his mouth.

"It's like this," I explained. "I expect great things from my rocket. For miles around Carryduff there are only fields and just a few isolated houses. Also, and almost as important, there is an ideal launching site just at the back of Diane's mother's house. It is an ancient burial mound, over two thousand years old. There is a deep ditch all round it, and in the centre is a high, flat-topped mound, which overlooks the surrounding countryside. I think it is kind of poetic to launch it from there."

Gleams appeared in Walt and James's eyes.

"I like it," announced Walt.

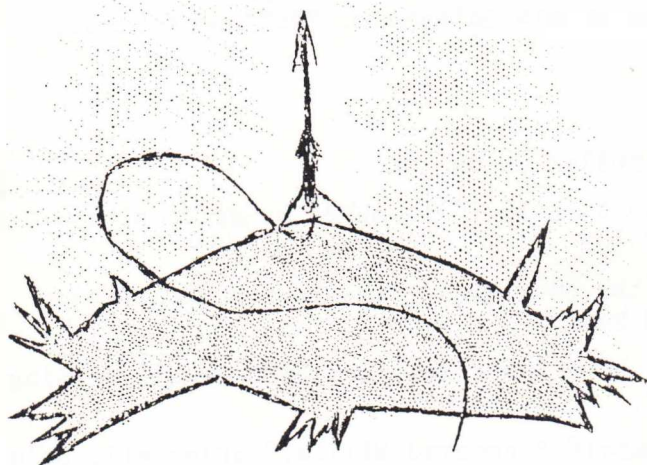
"Just one small thing," I added. "I am confident that you can help me out. It is an ideal example of vulgar ostentation if my rocket has to be ignited by a mundane match. Can you invent ignition that works by electricity."

"Will do," murmured Walt, looking at the mechanism of George's bath-chair.

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The day came. It was dry and still, and James estimated the cloud base at 1,500 feet, but I wasn't too disappointed. That morning, Terry had excavated a patch of grass in the centre of the mound, and had transplanted an inverted dust bin. This was the launching platform. I placed the rocket in its centre...it looked challenging, a symbol of Man's supremacy over Nature.

I muttered 'Per Ardua ad Astra' under my breath, and turned to Walt, enquiring..."Have you organised the ignition?"

Without replying he opened a black box and produced coils of wire and a cycle dynamo. He turned, motioned Madeleine, and walked along the top of the mound, down the side, then into the deep chamber which Terry had excavated to protect George.

The Sage of Irish Fandom was happily asleep, his head, hanging forward, supported by a forked twig. Working rapidly, Walt fixed the dynamo to the support which rose vertically from the

chassis of the bath-chair and held the handles which George turned to propel his conveyance. Walt disengaged the gears, and with dextrous fingers, fixed one end of the wire to the dynamo, and telling Madeleine to stay with George, left the shelter and laid a trail of wire to the launching platform. From his pocket he produced a converted lamp holder from the centre of which reared a bare filament.

"We'll have a test," announced Walt, and signalled to Peggy. "Follow this wire until you come to Madeleine. Tell her to wake George up, and make him turn the handles of his bath-chair."

Peggy obligingly tripped away and disappeared from sight.

A pause...a stifled groan...another pause...

And then the filament glowed red.

"Diane," yelled Walt to my wife, "follow that wire, and tell Peggy and Madeleine to stop George turning the handle."

Walt tenderly placed the bare filament under the rocket, opened the blue paper, and inserted the filament. Typically efficient, he twisted the blue paper round and round to hold the filament in place, then he stepped back.

"Get your watch ready, James," breathed Walt huskily. We stepped back proudly, and gazed at fandom's supreme accomplishment in rocketry.

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Our pre-launch calculations had, at the time, seemed so efficient. With Walt Willis in charge, what else could we expect? I felt happy and composed, sure that the Willis Mind had allowed for every eventuality.

But he had not reckoned with advanced senility.

Walt, James and myself had gone to the far side of the rocket to avoid tripping over Walt's wiring system. Suddenly, before our eyes, the wire jerked. This caused the rocket to gradually tilt... TOWARDS US !!! We were fascinated, horrified, petrified. We just couldn't move. It seemed so uncanny. As the rocket reached an angle of 45 degrees it roared into life. For two or three seconds it seemed to strain at the leash...then it roared away. James, luckily enough, had his bowler hat on, but we other unfortunates can at least claim the distinction of being the first fen to suffer third-degree burns from a rocket exhaust.



Amazed, I watched the undoubted perfection of my design. Away in the sky the rocket arched over, and magnificently, the first stage dropped away and tumbled downwards. With renewed vigour, the smaller rocket blasted on, still at the 45 degrees angle. At the same time, the sound of a horrible scream coinciding with a crash of broken glass made me realise that the first stage had landed...



"Bloody Hell," blurted Walt, summing up the situation in his usual masterly fashion.

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"I admit the tomatoes weren't growing too well," observed my father-in-law," but I will expect you to pay for all repairs. I mean, it wasn't as if there was some doubt as to whom the rocket belonged."

"Yes, sir," blushed Walt.

"Have the three fems recovered?" I queried, being somewhat bemused by the rapid turn of events.

"Out of breath, somewhat shocked, but otherwise alright," assured Diane's mother. "I presume you will report the old gentleman to the proper authorities," she added, re-pocketing the smelling-salts.

"I think we should at least question George," said Walt. "admittedly he sometimes has spasms reminiscent of second childhood, but chasing three young ladies, and shouting aloud his vile intentions for all to hear is going a bit too far."

"Our wives, too," seconded James.

I wheeled George in for the Inquisition.

"Davy...DAAVVVY CROCKET," he bleated.

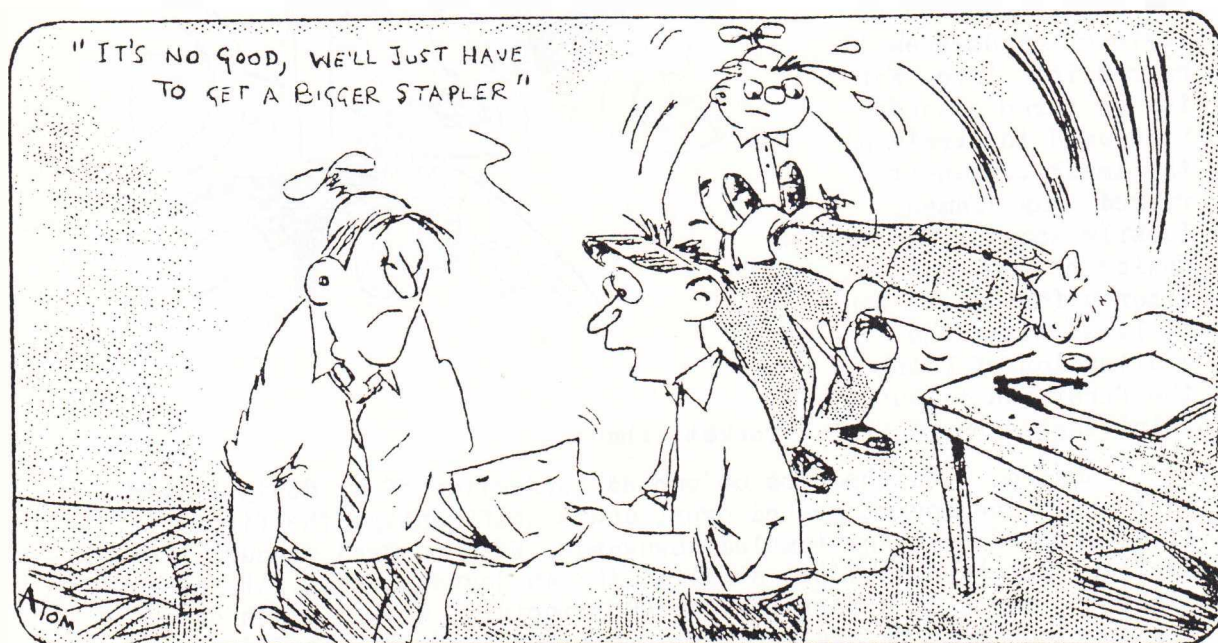
"George," said Walt sternly, "pray explain your strange behaviour. It is most unfannish of you to pursue our wives around the mound, leaving them in no doubt as to your intentions if you caught them, which, thank Ghu, you didn't"

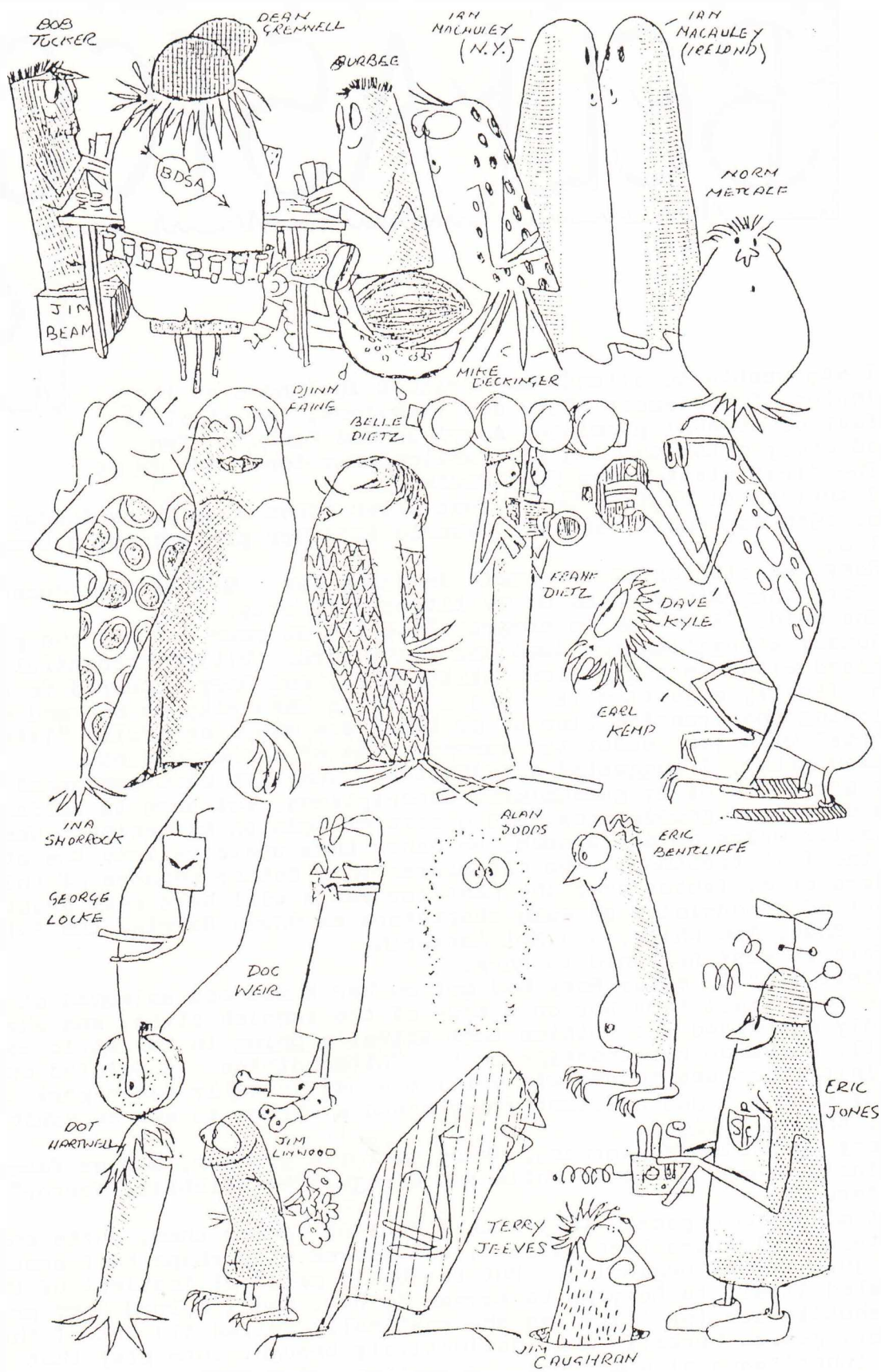
"Me cattypult," said George, waving aloft the forked stick we had seen before." Me cattypult. Heh, heh, heh."

Oh, the utter irony of it.

There isn't sufficient 'give' in that sort of elastic...

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# BELFASTCON

OR

I was unable to attend the WorldCon in London at the beginning of September 1957, and therefore, the visit to Belfast of several prominent American and Canadian fen immediately after the Con was particularly important to me.

The first visitor was Rory Faulkner.

I arrived at Oblique House just after three o'clock on Sunday afternoon, 15th September, and was ushered into her presence by a beaming Willis.

Rory was sitting at the table drinking tea. Willis introduced us, and Rory congratulated me on my literary efforts.

She said, "Allow me to congratulate you on your..." and she paused, obviously struggling for just the right word. Willis thoughtfully interposed with the suggestion 'illiterate', and Rory appeared to sample this, finally rejecting it. She seemed to take pity on me, and closely following the frenzied line of my lips, she added carefully "literary efforts" with just about the correct tone of condescension.

Soon after, I suggested ghoddminton. Some fen have announced that they are tired of my ghoddminton descriptions, but here in Belfast we have developed ghoddminton into a sort of fannish barometer. Whenever a visitor makes an appearance, we usher them upstairs into the attic for the full treatment. We can assess them better because of this. Readers of my fables over the past few years will have read about the effect of ghoddminton on such characters as Chuck Harris, the Bulmers, Larry Shaw, Tom White, and Mal Ashworth.

This is what happened to Rory...

First of all, after Rory had got on her knees and salaamed at the attic door, Walt took her on a tour of the fannish attic, and she proudly expressed the opinion that actually being in the attic would greatly enhance her prestige in the United States. I pointed out that the initiation was incomplete until she had actually taken part in the bloody combat. She hesitantly expressed a desire to see an exhibition game, and we obliged.

Rory then stepped forward, chose me for a partner, and we faced the combined talents of James White and George "The Dribbling Terror" Charters.

It might be expected that with a visitor facing them, White and Charters would have been gallant, and played at perhaps half speed, even just at the beginning. But the basic primeval instinct of White revealed itself to Rory as he served to her, and I helped Rory prise the shuttlecock (or 'bird' as she poetically called it) out of the wall.

Rory geared herself, and instinctively brought into play that in-born inheritance of womanhood...deception. She served, with a gentle flip of the wrist, and the bird seemed to go out of play....seemed to do so. James realized too late that it was too close to the border-line to be left, and he flung his right arm upwards and backwards in a vain attempt to reach it. The delicate twang of an over-strained right



# THE STATES HARPSIDE.

forearm muscle reverberated round the attic walls. I rushed to congratulate Rory on her ploy. From then on, we played a fast and furious game, losing by the narrow margin of 21 points to 17.

We all staggered downstairs, and I apologized and left for home, shuffling along the Upper Newtownards road in a most embarrassing way, with my knees locked together in a vain attempt to hide the rent at the rear of my trousers.

I would like to make a few serious remarks about Rory, and I know she won't mind if I mention her age (69) and the fact that she is a great-grandmother. Speaking for myself, and I'm sure the rest of Irish Fandom will concur, I treated Rory as if her age was of no consequence at all. I've put that badly; I mean, normally, I would grab a great-grandmother by the arm, and gently lead her to the nearest rocking chair. But Rory seemed so fresh that it was a natural gesture to ram a ghoddminton bat into her hand, and indicate the court.

I hope she won't be annoyed when she reads it, but I mean this as the most sincere compliment I can pay.

Monday, September 16 was, in a way, an anti-climax. Walt Willis had received a telegram to say that Steve Schultheis would be arriving at Belfast at 7 pm. The weather, typical Northern Ireland type, was dull, lowcast, and a perpetual drizzle covered everything. Walt phoned me just after 7 pm, from the air terminal, and said in rather a worried voice that the plane had left Liverpool, but had been unable to land at Nutts Corner, the local aerodrome. I hurried down to 170 and told Madeleine and Rory of the development, and whilst Walt waited in the vain hope that Steve would arrive, I had an interesting conversation with the two femmes. The main topic of conversation was the ten-minute program the BBC-TV was showing that evening, regarding the Worldcon.

Rory had told me Sunday that she had been interviewed, and although Walt had spent every minute in front of the TV screen since he had returned from the Con, with no luck, he had presumed the BBC had decided not to show the feature.

When I arrived home from the office on Monday night, the commentator said at the commencement of the evening's programs..."all those interested in seeing aliens from outer space will see something to their advantage if they continue viewing..." I knew this would be about the Worldcon, and I also knew that Walt would leave his house at 6:45 pm to meet Steve, and even more significant, he probably wouldn't have his TV set switched on. It was imperative that I inform him, so Rory would see herself on TV. I recalled that the people next door to Walt had a telephone, but I was somewhat frustrated by not being able to

think of their name. It was a dentists, that I knew. I had gone to their house one foggy night two years ago, under the mistaken impression it was Walts. It wasn't until I saw one of my back teeth dangling in front of me that I discovered my error. Oh yes, it was but definitely a dentist's; but the name? As the programme progressed, I began to get desperate. The telephone company, through some archaic protocol, refused to divulge the number. In a flash of genius, I rang police headquarters, and got the operator (whom I fortunately knew) to scan the Belfast Street Directory, and tell me who lived at 172 Upper Newtownards Road...he soon gave me the name, 'McCartney'.

I looked up the telephone number, and with seconds to spare asked the polite voice if it would pop 'round and tell Mr. Willis to turn on his TV.

The message was delivered, as Walt ultimately told me when he got home at just after 8:30 p.m., soaked to the skin, worried even more about Steve whose plane had been diverted to the Isle of Man.....

The TV programme....weeeell, it was most excellent. The camera showed various views of strangely garbed fen, and interviewed several, including John Brunner, Jean Bogart, Frank and Belle Dietz, Dave and Ruth Kyle; and they all professed to come from such places as Betelguese, etc, and I swear that from the way the commentator backed away, he believed them. Rory Faulkner flashed onto the screen, and was accordingly interviewed (she was the only one in conventional dress) and acquitted herself admirably.

John Campbell and Ted Carnell gave with the merits of sf, the readership, etc, and John Campbell expressed the opinion that if we really wanted, the Moon could be reached in 24 months. Someone helped to carry the interviewer away, and he finally re-appeared, considerably disheveled, and confronted Ruth Kyle, who pulled a positron pistol from her girth like Wyatt Earp, and the bewildered commentator completely disappeared.

As I left Walt's on Monday night, he was still muttering about "poor old Steve" ...he wondered what would happen if Steve arrived in the middle of the night, opened the gate to 170, and tripped over the Willis Anti-Bryan Road Trap, a typically Willisian sort of structure designed to stop toddler Bryan (the Junior Willis) from getting onto the Upper Newtownards Road. Rory suggested putting a red lantern on it, but I pointed out that with a unit of the U.S. Navy in Belfast Harbour, and 6,000 U.S. sailors walking around town, weeeelll.....

I left them working out whether or not it was worth the risk.....

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The awe-inspiring meeting between myself and Steve Schultheis (sometime known as The Cleveland Op) on Tuesday, 17th September 1957, was something fine and noble and good. I can see it now, the squeal of brakes as Walt Willis seduced the green Morris Minor into hitting the kerb outside my house....the hollow ring of my hobnail boots on the tiled hallway as I rushed to open the door....the urgent protestation of the hinges as I flung the front door open wide. And there was Steve, for a long time one of the leading G.D.A. agents in the U.S.A.

In dress, he was immaculate. He made the sartorially-conscious James White look like a ragged tailor's reject. He wore a light raincoat and a light trilby, brim turned low, with a sort of plastic covering over the trilby. In his right hand he held a brief case...in his left hand an electric iron with a snort length of insulated wire attached to it. He stood on the running board of the car...in the pouring rain...and he looked. He looked again. Then, with a strangled sob of "Boss, Boss!"

he leapt onto the front path, lurched through Walt, Rory and Madeleine, who were standing still, transfixed with the pulsing drama of this historic meeting, and landed in front of me. We looked at each other. I fought back the tears of deep personal pride. For the first time, I had met a United States G.D.A. agent, one of the few who had fought to the bitter end all the evil machinations of Antigoon in that wonderful land.

"It's good to see ya, Steve," I murmured, trying not to see the loving way his left hand gripped the iron. I took a deep breath, directed Steve into the living room, and ushered into the Berry house (named 'Mon Debris') the other three fen.

Steve and Rory took off their coats, and I was able to see the real Schultheis. This boy looked good. He wore a long jacket of some strange material vaguely reminiscent of the border of a hand-sown French handkerchief. His trousers had such a sharp creased I was alarmed to ask him to take a seat in case he sliced open an artery. His socks were of a delicate puce, his shoes like mirrors. I backed behind a settee so that he wouldn't notice the threadbare appearance of my trousers, and the tuft of shirt peeking out from under my jacket sleeve at the elbow.

Steve sat down, and with gentle care placed the iron on the arm of the chair. He opened his brief case, and produced a flash camera and a stack of specially printed G.D.A. Field Cards, which he dutifully handed over to me for subsequent distribution.

Rory expressed disbelief in the fact that my typer, the famous SHAW-BERRY machine, worked by two tins of beans, and I suggested they should visit my den. Steve blanched visibly at this, and mentioned something about being issued with a dustcoat. However, he stood up, running both fingers up and down his trouser creases, and flicking imaginary spots off his clothing.

Upstairs, at the entrance to my den, I felt I should make a little speech: nothing, really....just a gentle reminder that if they sat down at my desk, they should watch out for splinters...to take no notice if a mouse or two scuttled across their toes...to ignore the heaps of fanzines and papers scattered over the floor. Steve uttered an involuntary prayer, Rory took a firm grip of herself, Walt and Madeleine exchanged significant glances, and I kicked the door open, and we entered.

Steve produced his camera, fitted a flashbulb, and began looking through the focus, murmuring something about 'the folks at home not taking my word for it'.

Rory slowly sat down, a thoroughly abashed faaan, and Walt and Madeleine exchanged more significant glances.

Steve looked at my tea-chest constructed desk, walked round it once or twice, and asked to see the typer in action. I showed them the tins of beans and the length of wire, and shouted for my son, Colin. (Since I last wrote about my typer, something else has spawned itself from the inner recesses of the machine. It is a long perpendicular rod about half an inch wide and two inches long, and periodically, about once every three words, it pops up out of the bowels of the machine, and the roller won't move. I normally utilize a hammer to knock this metal strip back again, and then re-commence typing, but with visitors, I had to be more mechanical. I had my prestige to think of. Colin came in, and on my instructions, he stood at the right of Steve, and held his finger over the slit where this funny thing pops out of. I allowed the beans to swing free, and Steve commenced to type. I looked over his shoulder. With laborious care, he typed:-

"This is not true. I am the subject of a Berry allusion."

He stood up and took a couple more pictures, trying hard to control a nervous twitch at the side of his mouth. I beckoned Rory forward, and she did a few preliminary exercises, then attacked the machine with all fingers moving at once. This had never happened to the typer before, and it didn't take too kindly to it, especially when Rory suddenly turned red and began hitting the keys, in fact the whole typer, with her fists.

Madeleine put her arm gently round Rory and led her away, and Steve diverted his attention to a few PLAYBOYS I leave lying around for inspiration.

After her fifth cigarette in as many minutes, Rory suggested we go down stairs. I liked the quaint American way she said, "Let's get the hell outa this." Nice.

Downstairs, Diane prepared supper. Sad to say that Madeleine, whom I once hoped would take over Bob's mantle as a heavy eater, disappointed me somewhat in her capacity for cake-shifting, although Steve did his best to show that he didn't intend for Bob to get all the glamour.



My one faux pas of the evening was when I placed a plate onto Steve's knees. I'll never forget his cry of horror. "My creases!" he sobbed, and grabbing the iron, shot out of the room, to return a few moments later with an even sharper crease in his trousers. I've got to hand it to the bhoy, credit where credit is due, say I, and Steve is well worthy of the title of The World's Best-Dressed Faaan.

Later, we spent two hours on a new game we play at Irish Fandom sessions; a game not invented by any particular one of us, but rather integrated by the cohesion of our pliable minds. It requires considerable appreciation of the abstract, a nimble mind, great general knowledge, and a sense of the ridiculous. I've detailed the basic elements of this game, provisionally called 'Chain Reaction', in another fanzine, but very briefly. It consists of starting spontaneously on a word in the general conversation, and developing a rapid-fire abstraction of similar sounding words...not by giving the word, but by giving its definition. For example, Rory, in conversation, said the word 'ovation'...immediately, someone else said "I thot that word meant a general term for craft that fly in the sky" (aviation)... then someone shouts "No, that's if you don't like something" (aversion), and maybe Steve screams "Stupid, that's a sort of blind you pull down the window" (venetian), and yet another faaan sobs "Don't be ridiculous; that's a term meaning respect mingled with awe" (veneration), and so on. Note that the words I've put in brackets aren't mentioned, they have to be guessed by the participants, and someone in the group is bound to get the word soon, and give his definition of a slight variance in sound, but meaning something completely different, before other fen do; which means that they are perhaps two or three words behind. The technique of the game is to keep the definitions flowing...it is a sign of inferiority to ask what the current word is. We played for two hours without stopping...we started with 'frugal' and finished with 'priceless', and there were no long pauses; Rory and Steve in particular came out with some brilliantly original combinations, and, as usual, Willis gave us yet another taste of his profound intellect.

I guided them to my front door at an early hour of the following morning, and arranged to meet all at the abode of James White that night, "With," added Walt hopefully, "with Boyd Raeburn".

Walt phoned me up on Wednesday, and asked me to go to Oblique House at 5 pm...he said it was important...I detected a throb of pity in his voice, and was rather perplexed at this unusual aspect of Willis.

I arrived exactly on five, just as Walt's car drew up to the kerb. Four fen got out; Walt, Rory, Steve, and a fourth whom I recognized from his cheesecake portrait in a recent CRY OF THE NAMELESS...the one and only Boyd Raeburn. I had been looking forward to meeting Boyd a great deal... he seemed always to be a fannish enigma. His fanzine A BAS was in the top category, admittedly, but the first time I heard him on tape, I was much alarmed at an apparent over-exerted superiority complex tinged with a modicum of sarcasm.

Boyd's first words to me concerned RETRIBUTION 7, wherein Ethel Lindsay had alleged him to be sixteen years old. His complaint was that he hadn't received a copy of RET, and had been bewildered by frequent jocular remarks as to his age. I assured him that RET 7 had been sent to him, but I suspected that possibly most of the C nadian copes hadn't arrived, because I hadn't heard from any of the RET recipients there, not even from Bob Shaw, a most consistent writer.

By this time we had assembled in the living room of 170 when Walt made the grim announcement. He was very sorry, he said, very sorry, but after that day, no one else would ever be allowed to play ghoddminton again, at least not in his house. By some strange coincidence, he explained, the room underneath our ghoddminton chamber had suddenly shed all its plaster. He waved his hand to emphasize the importance of his remark. Ghoddminton is amongst the most celebrated of our activities at 170, and to play it elsewhere would be sacrilege, but, he said, he had made the unhappy decision. BUT, he concluded with a grin, as Steve and Boyd had not witnessed a game, we could all go up and perform for the last time, as long as we helped sweep up the rest of the plaster afterwards.

It was a solemn moment as, for the last time, we moved the still usable furniture out of the way, locked up the cat, barred the windows, and prepared the chamber for the final affray. As an exhibition, Walt and Madeleine took sides against myself. Madeleine insisted I take off my hobnail boots, and Walt made a tentative suggestion that there was a possibility that my boots had caused the disaster downstairs. However, we played, to the wide-eyed wonder of Steve and Boyd....I felt really brutal, moreso than usual when playing ghoddminton, and stripped off to my vest and trousers with reckless abandon. I played with my full concentrated fury, and by some miracle, succeeded in winning the set against the combined guile and skill of Mr. and Mrs. Willis.

We turned to the visitors (Rory had left the room on some urgent pretext) and asked Steve and Boyd to play. They showed a certain understandable lack of enthusiasm, but warily began to strip off for the final contest. Steve folded his clothes with much less care than usual, and three quarters of an hour later announced he was ready for anything.

Walt took Steve as his partner, and I dragged Boyd to my side of the net.

The final game was fast and furious, and Boyd and myself won by a narrow margin. Just as we finished, Madeleine rushed up to say the remaining chunks of plaster were falling off, so we reluctantly got dressed and went downstairs. When the others departed, I spent a few moments of quiet contemplation...thinking that maybe my wife would be delighted at having no more clothes to repair...and how happy Walt would be now that his attic-furnishings were reasonably secure...I wished that Bob Shaw could have been there. That gifted idyllic sway of the hips as he wove a poetic arc of movement in the air in pursuit of a shuttlecock will always delight me. Sadly, I went downstairs after the rest...

I rushed home, because we had all arranged to be at The White House that evening.

Our baby sitter came rather late, and it was an hour after the deadline when my wife Diane and I reached the imposing portals of 10, Riverdale Gardens, Belfast...The White House. I guided Diane past the puddles, and discovered two new ones en route; and rapped on the door. Peggy, the Perfect Hostess, opened the door, and with a gentle push precipitated me into the living room. I heard rapturous screams of delight, and pulled two plonkers off my forehead. Rapidly urging Diane into the room again in front of me, I perceived James White, hiding behind an armchair, and aiming his plonker gun at me again...there was a blinding flash, and when my eyes had re-orientated themselves again, I saw Steve hanging from the chandeir, fitting a new flashbulb into his ubiquitous camera.

I grabbed the first two objects I could lay my hands on, and prepared for a counter-attack, but James emerged from cover and said Peggy wouldn't like it if the vases became broken. He let me have several shots with his plonker gun, and then we all sat down for a high-powered fannish conversation. I took my first look at Boyd while the others were talking, and noted with great pleasure that the boy was also fabulously dressed. He was, however, much more ostentatious than Steve, relying on sheer blinding colour; brilliant red hues, and a grey-white contrast, with red socks to match. This clothes-consciousness seems to me to be one of the most outstanding contrasts between men on both sides of the Atlantic (with the possible exception of James White, but even he isn't worrying about his appearance so much since he met Steve.)

Diane and myself had to leave fairly early, to get a bus back home, and it was with profound regret that I shook hands with Rory and Steve, and said sorrowful 'goodbyes'.

Steve, I felt, was quiet and reserved, but extremely intelligent, with a subtle sense of humour, and a passion for the G.D.A. I shall always remember him for his immaculate appearance, his sage comments, his cheerful grin, and his revulsion of ghoddminton.

Rory was kind and witty and full of good cheer and eminently alert and, in comparison with people her age in Northern Ireland, thirty or forty years their junior in physical energy and mental approach. A paragon of fannishness.

We promised to see Boyd at Walt's on the morrow.

On Thursday afternoon, Boyd was driven round parts of County Down by Walt; the tour included a visit to Scrabo Tower, of ENCHANTED DUPLICATOR fame...Walt also lectured him on Irish history.

In the evening, I was rather late at arriving at 170 but as soon as I burst through the door I discovered that Boyd must have a vast collection of gaudy-coloured jerkin type garments. The one he wore on this occasion was a vivid scarlet, and combined in rather a blatant way with his tight-fitting black trousers and brown moccasins.

James, Peggy, and George had already arrived, and were busy examining Boyd's armoury. It seems that he has an obsession for collecting lethal weapons. Pride of place in the show was taken by a small pearl-handled handbag-size pistol, capable of discharging blank cartridges with much noise (as it had done during the celebrated G.D.A. vs. Antigoon gun battle at the WorldCon) and ejecting capsules of tear gas. Boyd proudly explained that he had purchased the pistol in Germany. Adjacent to it lay three wicked-looking bone-handled knives. Boyd gave a demonstration with one, and showed that with slight pressure on a spring, the three-inch blade shot out and quivered there in a menacing manner. I don't profess to know why Boyd finds it necessary to carry about with him a pistol and three switch-blade knives...

As the evening progressed, and we all played another lengthy version of 'Chain Reaction', I began to see the real Raeburn. The impression of him I had gained from his tapes was completely wrong. I discovered he has a great sense of humour, and a spontaneous appreciation of anything fan-nishly witty...for example, on a TV programme, a character who specializes in jumbling his words to describe scientific data, described the Earth as being "all tangerine and shapy" and Boyd nearly burst his diaphragm in uncontrolled laughter.

Boyd's manner is exceptionally pleasant...his conversation is fascinating, and he has an uncanny general knowledge, which he demonstrated to good effect in 'Chain Reaction'.

He expressed a desire to see for himself whether it was true about my typer, and other things he had somehow heard about my den, and I invited him up on Saturday 21st September, if he felt prepared to take the risk...

Glad to say, Boyd took the risk. He came to my house Saturday afternoon in Walt's car, with Madeleine and baby Bryan. I took him up to my den, and showed him my typer and all the other paraphernalia that a trufan keeps to make his den a sanctuary of memories. He autographed the pictures of himself on my copies of CRY and POLARITY and the hoax photo of a pseudo-Raeburn in OBlique 7, and I was pleased to explain to Boyd that in all probability, the rumour that he was only sixteen emanated from that source.

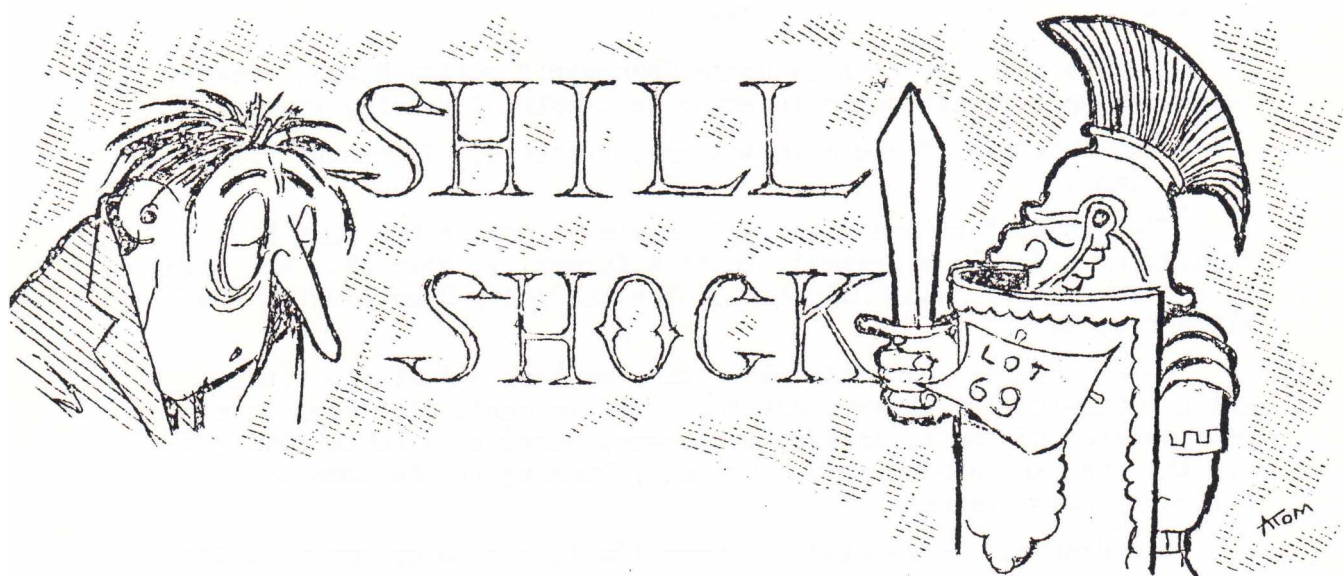
He admired my ATOM illos, smiled tastefully at my technicolor portrait of Diana Dors plastered to the wall, gave a grunt of appreciation at my Quinn original, and enscribed his classic signature on the wall.

Boyd's stay was brief, it amounted to only a farewell, but it provided a suitable climax to the week of new faces...fen whom I had only read about or corresponded with. It provided a much needed salve to ease the regret I felt at being unable to attend the WorldCon.

I have tried here to describe three entirely different types of faaan: Rory Faulkner, aged but young in spirit, which is the most important asset she has; Steve Schultheis, one of the most likeable men I have ever known, with no inhibitions, yet kind and courteous; and Boyd Raeburn, whom I thought I wouldn't like, but who provided me with an object lesson of making decisions about fen before meeting them, for he is the very fannish essence of good humour and wisdom, and a grand fellow to boot.

And when I read this BelfastCon report in the years to come, it will bring back a warm glow to my thinning blood, and make me feel proud to have been a faaan.





Walt wasn't at home when I called at Oblique House recently. I went straight upstairs to the fan-attic, and settled down to browse awhile until his return. Madeleine came up a few moments later, bearing the usual and much-beloved tray, and we drank and chatted.

I commented on the furnishing of the attic.

"I like the look of that marble-topped writing table-cum-sideboard," I said. "The hand-carved cupboards are particularly antique-looking. I wonder Leeh and Larry Shaw didn't make you an offer for it. Is it a family heirloom?"

"No" replied Madeleine, in a rather superior manner, "as a matter of fact, it cost me thirty shillings at an auction some time ago."

I whistled unbelievably.

"And that gilt-edged mirror?"

"Seven and sixpence," replied Madeleine.

"And that plush rocking chair that George sleeps in?"

"Five shillings."

"All those items from auction sales?"

"All those items from auction sales."

I pondered deeply. I had never been to an auction sale. My famed bad luck would not permit such a luxury. I always get the worst of a bargain. The vacant expression on my face fills sales-people with optimism. Their eyes seem to light up at my innocent visage. In other words, I always get done.

"And, I suppose, conversely," I said to Madeleine pensively, "folks who organise auction sales buy items for a cheap price off people, and sell them to the highest bidder?"

"You're too right," confirmed Madeleine, stacking the cups on the tray and leaving the room to begin the looong journey to the kitchen.

I lay back and pondered again...my mind raced back several years

previously...to a few days after Diane and myself were married and started to organise our household in Edenballycoghill, County Down...

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"Here's a letter from my Uncle Ebenezer," smiled Diane..."says he is coming this afternoon to bring us a belated wedding present."

"Any relative of yours in welcome, Precious," I grinned "er... is he rich?"

"Very rich," beamed Diane. "I shouldn't wonder but that he's bringing us a fabulous present. He is a farmer, is very old, and lives in a place called Ballyslapgoblin, also in County Down, just a few miles from here."

Later that day, a 'clip-clop' made me look out of the window, and a bored-looking donkey, drawing a little cart, clattered to a halt outside my house. An aged gentleman, sporting a bowler hat got off the cart and staggered up our path, bearing in his arms an obviously heavy parcel.

"Afternoon," he cackled, "sorry I'm late with my present. I'm sure you will be pleased."

I flashed my wife's uncle a charming grin, and bowed low at the door as he passed through and retraced his steps to the cart, and trotted away.

With feverish haste, we ripped the wrapping off the parcel, revealing a long wooden box. It was heavy.

"Right enough, silver is very heavy," observed Diane..."this could very easily be a solid silver tea service, or a...a..."

I ripped off the wooden cover, looked agonisingly at the contents, and fetched a tumbler of water for Diane.

"After all, dearheart," I commiserated, "two Roman soldiers three feet high and made of pig iron is certainly an original gift."

"They are absolutely useless," sobbed Diane, "it wouldn't be so bad if they weren't all covered with rust."

"Oh, I don't know," I grimaced, "one of them will definitely come is useful as a door-stop for the shed, and the other one can be used as a scarecrow in the garden."

And indeed they were so utilised.

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The whole dismal scene flitted before me, until I hear Walt Willis shout in my ear..."GHODMINTON."

But I didn't play too well, I'm afraid.

I was calculating...

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Later tha night, much later, when the moon popped behind a big cloud, and the street-lights were dimmed, I pulled on an old pair of ghodminton trousers, picked up my spade, and, keeping to the shadows, trekked to the middle of my garden and dug.

Three feet down I came to the box, and eventually, blinded by perspiration, succeeded in lifting the box onto the grass.

I cursed myself for not leaving the Roman soldiers in the countryside when I had moved to live in Belfast three years previously.

In the rural countryside, it isn't too unorthodox to have a Roman soldier as a door-stop, or a scarecrow, but in the metropolis of Northern Ireland...

Back in the house, I prised the lid off again. The only change in them appeared to be that the original rust was itself covered in rust. With a certain amount of morbid enthusiasm, and after several hours effort, I cleaned them up somewhat, and gazed in frustration at these erstwhile wedding gifts.

One Roman, a centurian, held aloft a short sword, and sported a brief toga. The other horror stuck out its chest proudly and bore above its head a banner bearing an undecipherable inscription. Both faces wore a post-Wetzel expression.

I wrapped them carefully in brown paper, and left them under the stairs for the night. If my luck held, this would be the last night I would be their unhappy possessor.

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I paid off the taxi, pulled up my coat collar, gripped a Roman soldier under each arm, and pushed my way through the imposing portals of :-

McDONNELL AND MURPHY,  
AUCTIONEERS AND VALUERS.

OUR MOTTO:- IF YOU MUST GET  
DONE, GET DONE BY US.

A ferret-faced individual approached me warily, and jabbed a nicotine-stained finger up my left nostril.

"Two shillings and sixpence, take it or leave it," he gritted.

"I'll take it...I'll take it," I yelled.

Oh, bliss. Two lovely big silver shillings and an itty-bitty silver sixpence for two rusted soldiers. I was in the big time.

The auctioneer winced at my uncontrolled enthusiasm, as if he had been too extravagant. I suppose he was impressed with my neat and tidy appearance. (The centurian under my left arm luckily hiding the black finger marks where Willis had gripped my coat as I left Oblique House one night when I hadn't purchased any of his prozines.)

Reluctantly giving me the money, the auctioneer jerked a thumb and a juvenile delinquent appeared and ripped the paper off, revealing my treasures. The poor boy was violently sick, but the auctioneer had drifted away as more and more patrons started to enter.

"The great auction is going to take place in ten minutes," I heard someone announce.

Hmmm.

Madeleine had told me that she had picked up some good bargains at auctions...my luck had been brilliant so far...there might even be a good duper going cheap...

I edged to the back of the crowd, and watched carefully, trying to acquire the correct technique.

The sale progressed for some time, and, gradually, the auctioneer got closer to my late pig-iron soldiery. To bide the time, I watched pityingly as an old man hobbled in. I admired the kindness of a young girl holding his arm. As they came closer I saw it was George Charters being escorted by Peggy White.



GEORGE CHARTERS AND PEGGY WHITE ???

Walt Willis, Madeleine and James White followed them in, chatting amiably.

God. What strange quirk of fate had brought Irish Fandom together in an auctioneer's shop ?

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Tucking the ends of my moustache under my collar, I tiptoed behind them, where they were talking in a huddle.

"...and I am sure John will invite us to his house, and the least we can do is to take a house-warming present when we visit. What do you all think ?" I heard Madeleine say.

Good old Madeleine.

"...definitely get something to suit John's personality," continued Walt, " look, how about those two items the men are staggering in with now ?"

I didn't need to look round. I knew what the next lot was. Even if I had been blindfolded, I would have known."

"...and these superb-looking statuettes," said the crook who had given me half a crown for them, "have a great historical background. Note the green mould in the cracks, and the deeply ingrained rust. These magnificent collector's items have come directly from the museum of a well-known archaeologist who has seen better times. Who offered me thirty shillings each ?"

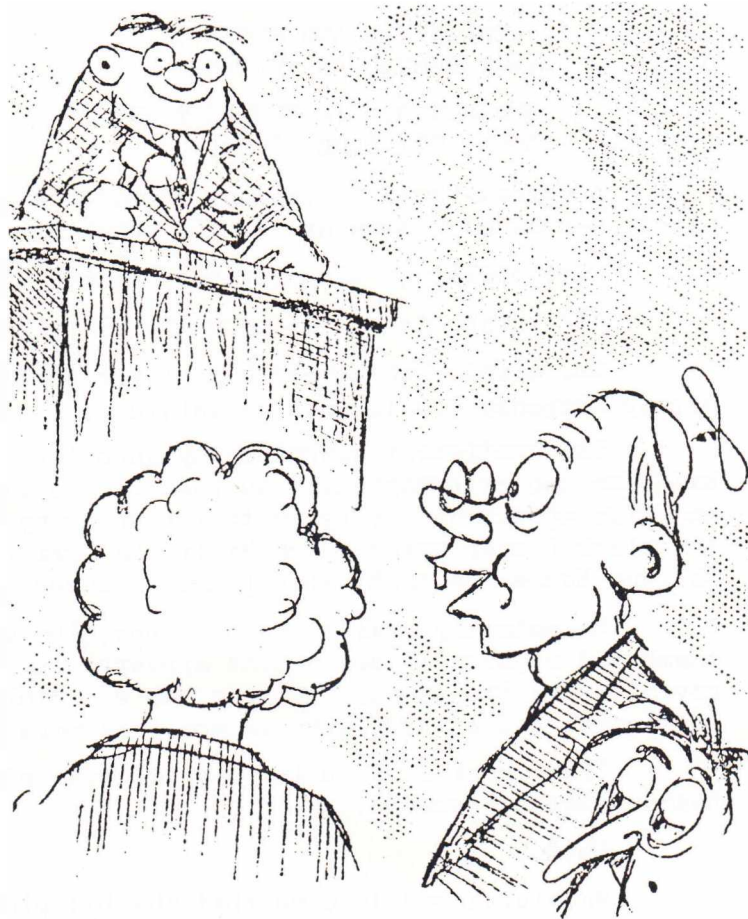
With an air of foreboding I slumped away as Madeleine held up a hand.

There was a pause. No one else had troubled to bid, in fact, at the sight of the Romans, half the crowd crept away.

"Forty shillings each," I heard a gruff voice shout over my shoulder.

An electric atmosphere settled over the room. The auctioneer breathed harder at this unexpected competition. So did I.

The other members of Irish Fandom had a discussion...I was careful to remain hidden from them.



"Fifty shillings " shouted Madeleine defiantly.

The gruff-voiced chap behind me was silent.

Heck.

I tiptoed up to him.

"They're worth at least sixty shillings," I mouthed encouragingly.



He seemed to consider, fumigating me with his bheer-sodden breath the while.

"Sixty shillings each," he said eventually.

Irish Fandom huddled together again and buzzed for a few seconds.

"Seventy shillings each," croaked a desperate Madeleine.

My man hesitated.

The auctioneer didn't.

"Who'll make it eighty shillings each?" challenged the

auctioneer significantly.

I looked at my man.

He looked at me.

"You've got a black mark on your forehead," he breathed.

Instinctively I reached up to remove it.

"Sold to the gentleman with the bewildered expression putting his hand in the air," announced the auctioneer, banging his gavel triumphantly as I looked up at my hand waving about like a periscope.

It just couldn't be true.

But it was.

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Later on, when I had supervised the reloading into the taxi I saw the bheer-baited chap with the gruff voice go up to the auctioneer, and a few coins of the realm changed hands. Madeleine hadn't mentioned to me that prompters were distributed into the crowd to encourage bidding. I had learned the fact the hard way...

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I sat miserably in my den and surveyed the Romans.

What to do with them ?

To even bury them in my garden again was still technically admitting ownership. It was difficult to know what exactly to do ?

"John," whispered Diane round the door. (I specify 'whispered' ...I think she was a little worried about my nervous state.) "Walt Willis and the others are here with a present for our new home."

Friendship is the proudest of all human emotions. And the esprit de corps amongst us of Irish Fandom is a pure and precious thing. It shines triumphantly over every other aspect of our association. As I trod the stairs to meet my comrades, I felt a surge of sentiment overpower me.

I opened the living room door shyly, and looked expectantly at their radiant faces. Walt looked down coyly, and George bleated happily as Madeleine unwrapped the parcel.

"I'd just like to say a few words," said Walt happily. "Madeleine has spent the last twenty-four hours flitting from auction room to auction room looking for something that is YOU. A chap looking something like you, except for the gaunt expression, pipped Madeleine at the post for two beautiful statuettes. However, as you know, Madeleine, although I say it myself, is particularly unrelenting; going without food, and making extreme physical and mental sacrifices, she...has...obtained...these...four...glorious...examples...of..the..sculptors...art...one from each of us."

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Excuse me for a moment whilst I stoke up the furnace. I think four shovelfuls of coke should build up a pretty big temperature. After all, I am a novice in this business...me and extreme forms of manual labour coming under the categories of extreme strangers.

Seriously, though, I got to thinking about it. Having six rusty Roman soldiers made of pig iron is frustrating. Dammit, three more of the things and I've have a platoon, and the way things were shaping, it was quite possible that fate would steer the remainder of the legion in my direction.

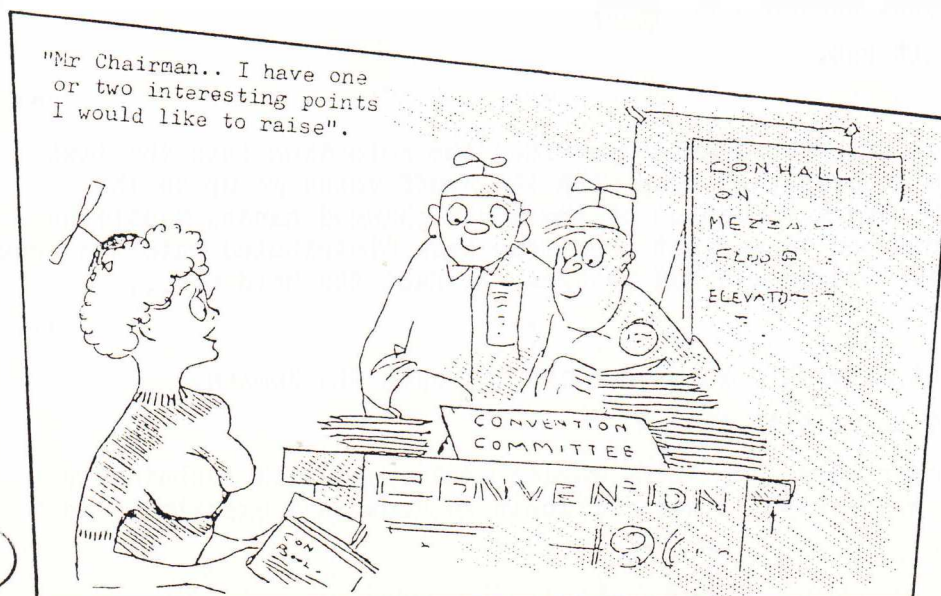
I had to make a decision.

Setting up a blast furnace in one's back garden seems to be a precedent, but I've got to use my initiative.

After all, trying to dispose of six pig iron militants covered in rust would seem an impossible task....but it should be easy to dispose of iron ingots.

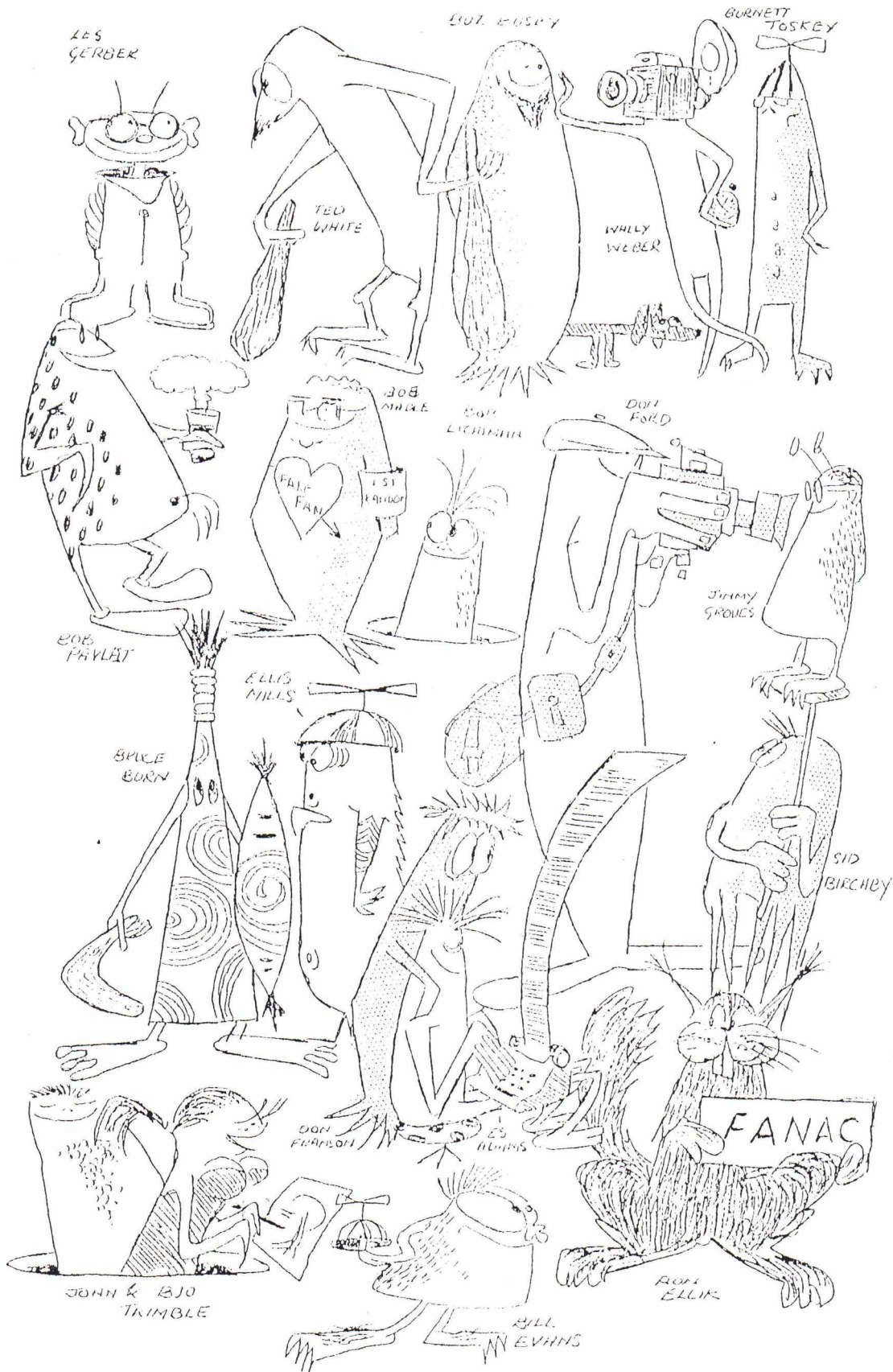
Shouldn't it ???

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# ROBIN HOODLUMS.

The party was scheduled for my house 'MON DEBRIS', and at least two hours before anyone was due, James White turned up, looking his usual sartorial self, resplendent in broad-shouldered raincoat, spats and typewriter. He settled himself in a corner, refused the offer of nourishment, and resolutely clattered away another few hundred words for his latest sf novel. Exactly at 6 pm the panels of the front door resisted the vigorously applied boot, but allowed a few decibels of portent to reach my ears.

I opened the door, saw Walt and Madeleine Willis, Peggy White, and Ken and Pamela Bulmer standing there.

I gestured pleasure at their arrival, and barely noticed the blur of movement from Walt's and Ken's hands, but felt two plops on my forehead, one above each eye. It was raining at the time, and suspecting that a few vagrant raindrops had splashed on my face, I ignored the cold pressure applied thereon, and ushered my guests inside.

I followed them.

Diane, my wife, screamed.

"I knew I shouldn't have drunk that cider at Christmas," she sobbed.

"What's wrong, dearheart?" I cringed.

"I've got the D.T's" she blurted out, putting her head on Madeleine's shoulder. "My husband has finally changed into the Devil Incarnate."

"Silly girl," said Walt, "those horns are only our plonkers."

So saying, he and Ken strode over to me, reached clutching hands to my brow and pulled vigorously. Two plops asserted themselves.

Willis and Bulmer each proudly held up a six-inch-long sliver of wood with a rubber sucker at the end, and they each whipped out of their pockets a short-barrelled metal gun.

"This is the new fannish weapon which will speedily replace the water-pistol, or zap," announced Willis. "Note the accuracy we have already displayed."

At that moment, the John Wayne epic movie 'STAGE-COACH' was showing on my tv screen. The exciting chase was in full cry, and John Wayne, lying astride the top of the stage coach, was aligning his rifle sights on the redskins.

Walt jerked his right hand, another blur of sheer slashing action. There was yet another plop, and a redskin bit the dust, closely followed by my wife, who had expected puns, but not an assault on her tv screen.

"Stand aside," growled Bulmer. He gritted his teeth, sensing that Walt had gained too much plonker egoboo.

John Wayne was still cutting down the followers of Geronimo, and I like to presume that Ken's intention was to



emulate him. It was unfortunate that a quarter of an hour should strike, and innocently, as it had done thousands of times before, the little cookoo sprang out of its little door and gave its plaintive rendition of the bird's song. Its last 'cookoo' was rather hurried as the plonker followed it through its door. A muffled jumble of sound ensued from the little six-inch square chalet, which ultimately concluded with the pendulum swinging round 360 degrees before departing on its journey across the room and through the door from whence it came.

It was almost on my lips to mutter something about a dumb cluck, but with such a galaxy of punsters present under my roof, I felt it prudent to keep my silence, urged on, I might add, by the itchy trigger finger of Walt Willis, who knew my standard of punning and rightly feared the worst.

Bulmer, slightly embarrassed, took a deep breath, exhaled sharply, and hid himself ostrich-like inside the cloud of long black hair which blew up around his head and shoulders.

Then James White stepped forward, his gleam of realisation indicative of a really ardent future plonkerer. His typer-worn fingers, experienced with firearms, having handled the lot, ranging from the zap, the .177 air gun, and my service .45, curled lovingly round the butt of Walt's acquisition. James reached forward and also grabbed Bulmer's gun. Both were fully loaded, plonkers rampant.

At the sight of this phenomenon, a short-sighted White fully armed and rarin' to go, there was a sudden surge of movement towards the exits, and, as in any panic, the narrow doorways of 'MON DEBRIS' became congested. Bulmer, the intelligent pro, wisely chose the protection of my red plush settee, which he leapt over in a most vigorous manner, nearly breaking my back as he landed.

We both peered cautiously over the top of the settee. James was trying to orientate himself. He wanted to adjust his glasses, and at the same time, like the monkey with his hands full of nuts in a narrow-necked bottle, he wouldn't let go of the guns.

Suddenly he hunched forward, peering blindly into space, waving the two guns. Two plonkers soared across the room. Bulmer and I looked at each other, unicorn to unicorn.

We guided James back to his typer, and queued up for turns with the plonkers.

It was soon obvious that Walt Willis was the most accurate shot. There was something awe-inspiring at the sight of this genius, his intellectual forehead held high, his sensual lips turned downwards in a triumphant sneer as he willed the plonkers unerringly to their targets. Nothing was too small, too insignificant for his attention. He speedily reduced the reproductive hopes of my budgerigar, Joey, who now converses in a high-pitched falsetto voice.

Walt even volunteered to shoot the ash of a lighted cigarette held in my mouth, and my protests that I didn't smoke were of no avail. And I have to report that, honestly, he knocked the ash of the cigarettes twice in succession from ten paces. Rating my eyesight as a number one priority, I took the precaution of utilising my wife's twelve inch cigarette holder, a present from her sister in Canada, and made of mother-of-pearl.

James White, anxious to bolster his prestige after noting Walt's magnificent prowess, announced he was going to

perform the same feat, but he would shoot with his back to me, using a mirror to coordinate his aim.

When the others were safely barricaded behind my furniture, I fitted on my issue steel helmet and gas mask, and nervously waited, the cigarette holder and charge stuck with cellotape to my gas mask.

I must give credit to James White for knocking off the ash, even though it was only by the physical process of convection. By the way, if you know anyone who possesses a jeweller's eye-glass, a set of surgeon's forceps, professes an interest in occupational therapy, and has a wife who smokes, ask him to contact me, where he will hear something to his advantage.

One of the technical aspects of this plonkering is the necessity to decorate the suction end of the missive with saliva. I find it somewhat ostentatious to see the little pink tongues of Peggy, Madeleine, Pamela and Diane tickling the edges of the circular lumps of rubber for their itchy trigger-fingered husbands.

James, further interrupted from his typer vigil by a plonker centred on the TAB KEY by Walt, suggested having plonker fights. He made airy proposals, suggesting we utilise the furniture barricade at both ends of the room. We divided into two teams, pros versus the rest.

Someone pointed out that there were only two plonkers available, but James said there was water, wasn't there? We could use zaps, and someone said there weren't any zaps. James said there were buckets and jugs, weren't there? I pointed out that there were more facilities at James' house, and we were going there on the morrow. James and Peggy went away in a fast taxi...

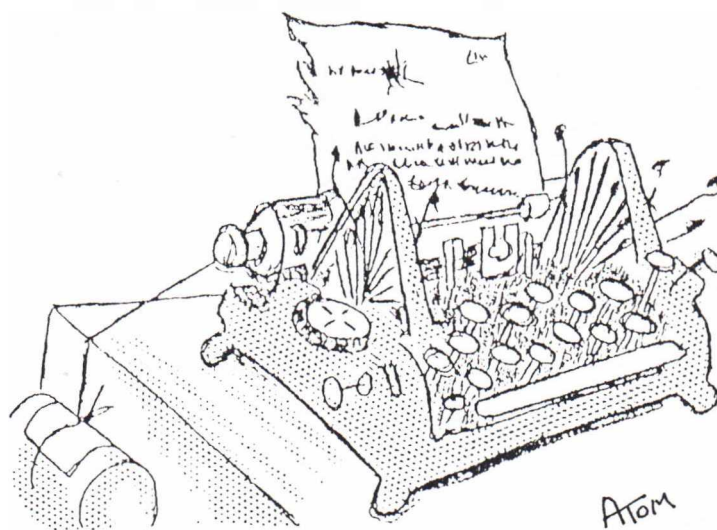
After the others had departed, and Diane cleared up the debris, I paused to reflect.

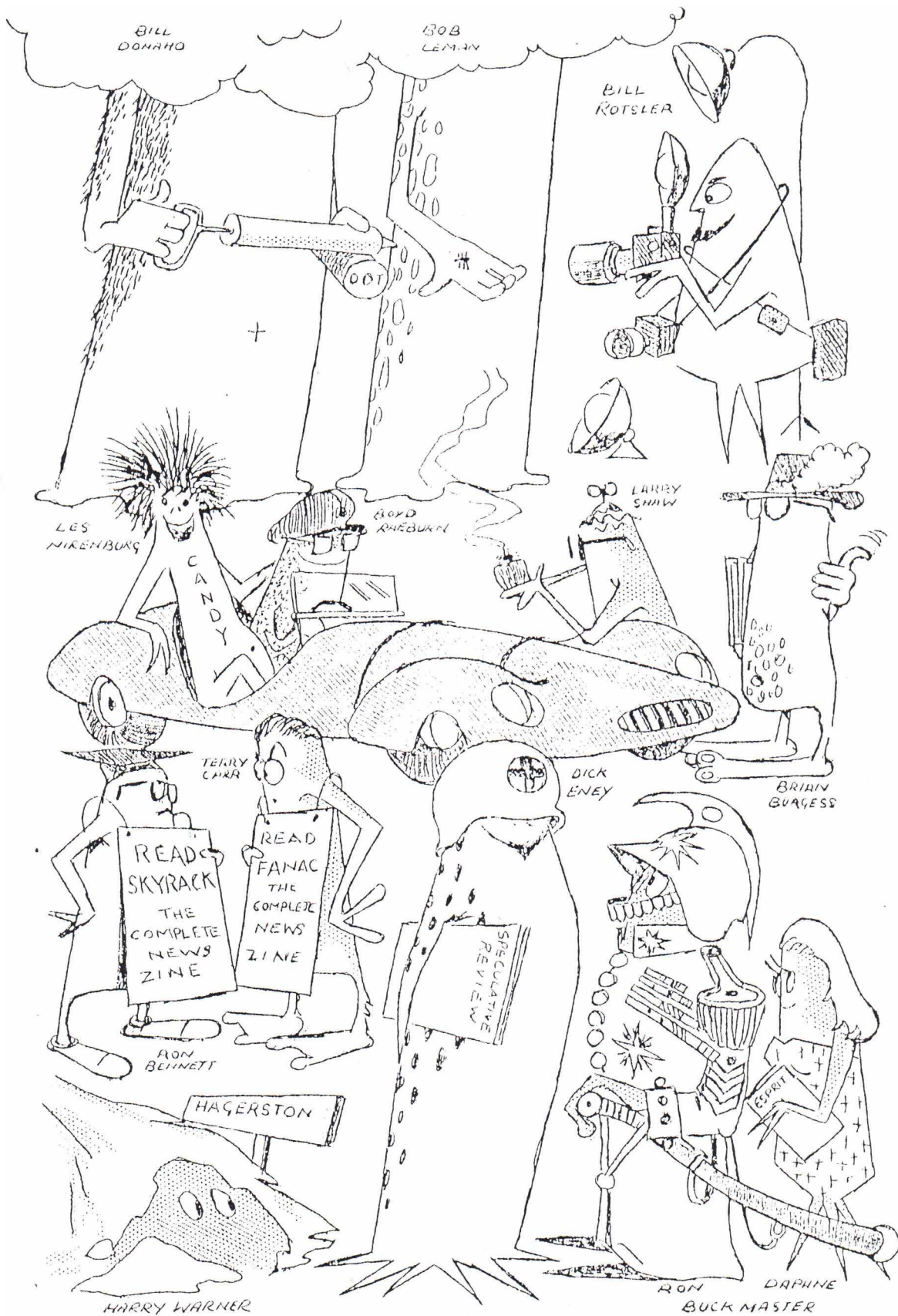
Listen. If the Bulmer or Willises come to your house and produce their plonkers, as they will, I have a suggestion to make.

Prepare a dozen small saucers, fill them with water, and scatter them in strategic places round the rooms. Into each saucer drop a small pellet of coloured dyes, whichever shades you prefer.

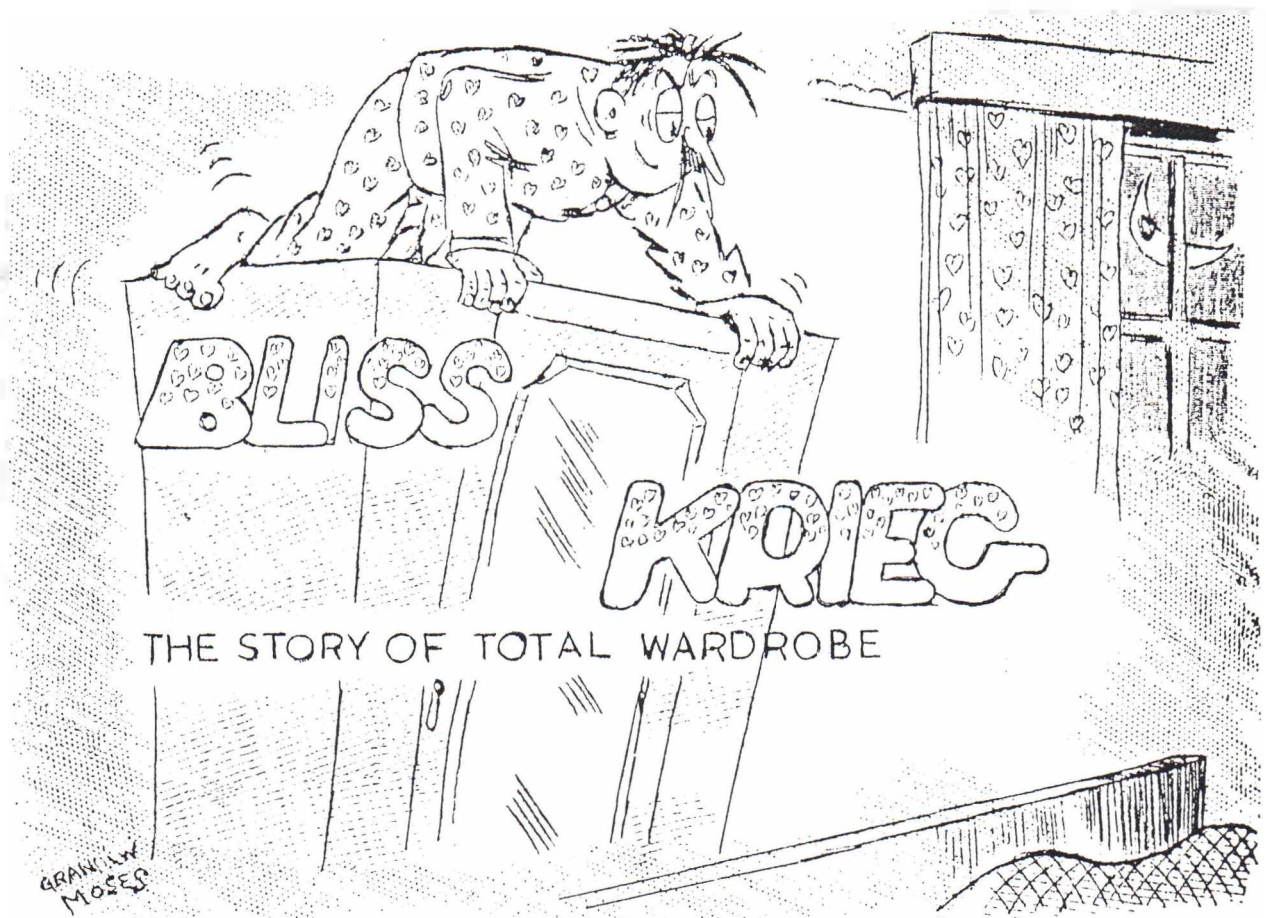
Madeleine and Pamela will appreciate this, as they can moisten their plonker ends without using their tongues.

And the resultant covering of small circles all over your walls, ceiling and furniture will look much more aesthetic in technicolour.









(AUTHOR'S NOTE :- I don't want HYPHEN readers to think I am resorting to pornography. Purposely, to avoid any suggestion of this, I am asking the HYPHEN editorial staff to refrain from submitting this mss to ATOM. The boy packs atmosphere and meaning into his illustrations as it is, and I don't want to be the fan to entice ATOM into illoing pornographic literature. For one thing, he'd be in even greater demand than he presently is. No. I just want to place on record a rather novel fannish idea. I need hardly add that this article caters solely for the married fan, and others contemplating marriage in the near future. To fen such as Bentcliffe and Harris, unmarried thought they are, this will probably be most elementary. But, as I say, to the normal married fan who regards S\*X openly and without licentiousness, this article is dedicated.

Honest, it's smashing ! )

In this modern age of hydrogen bombs, guided missiles, television and BIPED, there seems something obsolete in the basic primary ritual carried on in the marital chamber. For generations now, man and woman have tripped hopefully up the stairs, undressed hurriedly and dived into the bed in a flurry of sheets and blankets. This, to my way of thinking, seems so ancient, so uninspired...something is lacking...there is no sense of originality displayed by the average couple.

After giving the problem much thought, and, incidentally, after carrying out numerous experiments of my own, I have evolved a new technique which, besides being truly fannish in spirit, also succeeds in awakening the shy, dormant spirit of the female partner.

Allow me to create a picture in your mind. Let us take a typical pair of married fen. The young, pretty wife is lying in bed, glancing

impatiently at a copy of MASQUE. Her husband, attired in a set of bilious-coloured pyjamas, cleans his teeth, and opens and closes his toes. He then gets into bed.

This, you will all agree, is humdrum, boring, monotonous --- enough to dampen the ardour of most delectable young femme.

But I have solved the problem.

Once more, if you please, to the bed.

The young wife is still reading MASQUE. The husband has just cleaned his teeth and opened and closed his toes. BUT, following the Berry Doctrine, he now does a seemingly strange thing. His wife looks up, a new sparkle appears in her eyes, she gasps delightedly as she sees her lover's NEW approach.

(Before I detail the exact technique, I would suggest to fannish wives that they stop here and turn to the Letter Column...what I am going to describe is much more effective if it comes as a complete surprise.)

Now then, Men.

Do not approach the bed. Turn seductively in the opposite direction and CLIMB ON TOP OF THE WARDROBE.

(Technical note:- If your wardrobe is not equipped with castors, or small wheels, it is essential that these are fitted before following my teachings. Nothing is more frustrating than having to turn round and clamber down the wardrobe. Besides being sheepishly insipid, one's wife is liable to be somewhat frustrated and bewildered. This actually happened to me on a preliminary experiment.)

Right. Now assuming you are on top of your wardrobe, lie prostrate across it, and place your feet firmly against the wall behind you.

Now we come to the skilful aspect of the technique. With a well-judged shove from both feet, propel the wardrobe towards the bed. Your wife will drop her hands with pleasure at this novel action, and, if you have made the necessary calculations, your vehicle will reach maximum momentum AS IT SMACKS AGAINST THE BOTTOM OF THE BED.

With a superb feeling of elation, you fly through the air and land besides your spouse with a suggestive thump.

This approach is NEW, entirely FANNISH and absolutely BREATHTAKING.

I find it unnecessary to make any remark upon landing. "Here I am," or "I'd better oil those springs tomorrow" seems somewhat superfluous. The woman will be breathless but FASCINATED. (Unless she studies psychiatry.)

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Before starting active service wardrobe jumping, a few items should be checked and corrections made if necessary. A survey of the floorboards with the possibility of reinforcement, for example. For the older fan, coming in the Charters category, we would not advise this technique. You are probably past it, anyway. However, should the urge strike you, it may be helpful to consider a pair of steps or a ladder to assist you in reaching the top of the wardrobe.

Remember, a seven-foot high wardrobe with freely oiled castors can provide months of marital bliss.

Walt Willis was one of my earliest converts. His bedroom is much larger than mine, and I was able to suggest a refinement that I

have not been able to try myself. I advised Walt to measure the overall distance from the farthest wall to the end of the bed. This was 28 feet...I instructed him to purchase 18 feet of strong wire and affix one end to the wall, and the other end to the front of the wardrobe. With a controlled shove-off, Willis informs me that the abrupt halt when the wardrobe reaches the end of the wire, is sufficient for him to glide the remaining distance to the bed. On numerous occasions, when feeling frivolous, Walt has even turned a double somersault en route. At first, he experienced a little difficulty in finding a wardrobe strong enough to withstand the sudden strain, but after his seventh wardrobe, he settled on a Victorian type, with a rigid and robust construction. Anyone who wishes to emulate Walt, and who suffers from the same trouble, should not hesitate to contact him...he now gets his wardrobes at wholesale prices...

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The only really dangerous hazard in wardrobe jumping ( presuming one has a fairly nimble spouse ), is the highly-sprung bed. It is considered somewhat infra dig to sport a crash helmet, and yet a full-blooded leap from a well-oiled wardrobe can result in severe bruising to the back of the head. Landing on one's wife sometimes permits an easy landing, but she may feel put upon.

Another important point...make sure that the back of the bed is placed against the wall. I still shudder when I think of the ATOM episode.

I was staying with Arthur and his attractive wife Olive, and, for a small fee, initiated them into this New Way of Life.

The weather was rather warm and Arthur had opened all the windows and, presumably to get what little fresh air there was about, he had moved the bed under the window. This, in itself, wasn't so bad, but it should be remembered that BROCKHAM HOUSE is actually a large block of flats, and although the Thomson's are only on the second floor, that's plenty high enough when you're flying through the air in pyjamas after having been catapulted forward from a self-propelled wardrobe.

Fortunately it was quite dark and Arthur, with superb timing, landed on the main road below...en route he had grabbed a curtain after soaring over the disappointed Olive. After being asked the way to the nearest mosque by a coloured gentleman, he re-entered the flat eager and willing to try again.

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In conclusion, I suggest sand-papering the top of the wardrobe. This will not only assist take-off. Practically speaking, the top of the wardrobe is not as well polished as the front and sides, and a splinter may be easily contracted - giving rise to the dreaded venereal disease. (Medical term courtesy of WAW.)

James White, a veteran of many jumps, predicts that in years to come, it will be a common sight to see courting couples wending parkwards, the male towing along a sturdy wardrobe. Finally, I would like to suggest an as yet untried development for the fan who wishes to keep his wife in suspense for those few extra vital seconds. This entails fitting guide rails, enabling the wardrobe to be shunted round the bed, until suddenly taking off with-nerve-chilling exuberance.

The strange, almost hypnotic effect of continual wardrobe jumping is sometimes found to have a strange effect on the female, and in time she may wish to take the place of the dominant male on top of the wardrobe. Don't forget that Freud had something to say about this....



JAMES  
WHITE

547 DON  
GELDART

TED  
TUBB

HARLAN  
ELLISON

GIOVANNI  
SCOGNIMILLO

WTD

LEE  
HOFFMAN

ART  
WILSON

RANDY  
GARRETT

KARSHAK ESBACH & EVANS

IRENE  
POTIER

EMIL  
GREENLEAF

TRINA  
CASTILLO

APA  
WAITING LISTERS

THE SECRET SIX OF THE N3F

# STAR STRUCK

It was forcibly brought home to me just the other day that I was sadly lacking in one of the fundamental facets of a true science fiction fan. Prior to this I had considered myself pretty well indoctrinated in all the basic necessities...nurtured on THE ENCHANTED DUPLICATOR...a concentrated course of QUANDRY, OOPSIA and SLANT...followed by high pressure appreciation of GRUE...reading ASTOUNDING, GALAXY, etc...mad about the pro's ...STURGEON, BLISH, BRADBURY, WHITE and SHAW, etc...the publication of my own fanzine...the acquisition of a Gestetner...and so on...

And then, sorrowfully, I overheard a conversation between James White and Walt Willis. I recall I was comfortably ensconced in an armchair at 170, idly perusing the photographic technique employed in the illustrations in LA VIE PARISIENNE, when strange words from White made me stop and listen:-

James. 'I see that Capella and our sun belong to the same spectral group.'

Walt. 'Yes. The original Fraunhofer Classification of the dark lines in the sun's spectrum paved the way for...'

James. 'Exactly. I was thinking of a plot for a new story, whereby the Guishbuds, who control three quarters of our galaxy, use an energy ray which appears to reflect type G spectra from Betelgeuse, like Capella, whereas Betelgeuse reflects type M. This causes...'

Walt. 'You mean that...'

James. 'Yes, and then...'

Walt. 'Oh...'

James. 'Oh...'

This extract from the conversation is short, not only because I cannot remember any more, but I don't want to cut down the future circulation of NEW WORLDS should James ever write the story. But it did serve to show a great flaw in my knowledge - a study of astronomy - and it appeared that I wouldn't be a complete fan until the situation was remedied.

So I applied myself vigorously to the task of improving my knowledge of the stars.

I discovered a fascinating new field of exploration. I didn't aim as high as James or Walt. I ignored cosines and spectra and things, and concentrated more on homely stuff such as Sir Harold Spencer Jones's LIFE ON OTHER PLANETS (the U.S.A.



edition), and the 'Toddler's First Steps in Astronomy', I had previously purchased to interest son Colin in heavenly bodies.

I began to spend hours every night looking out of my bedroom window. I could soon recognise some of the major constellations ...the Pliades...Perseus...the Square of Pegasus. I could even find Capella on a moonlit night...south west of Perseus, just above the block of flats on the other side of the road, exactly above the blonde's bedroom at 1.35 am on 23rd February 1957. I took this hobby very seriously d'you see ?

And it was only a few short days before the full impact of astronomy struck me. I had to get a telescope.

I spent all my lunch hours in Belfast, going from one junk shop to another, until eventually, perseverance triumphed...I spotted a long brass telescope, about four feet long.

The chap behind the counter sized me up, and skilfully removing the price tag showing 23/7d, sold it to me for a tenner.

I raced home, smuggled it upstairs to my den, polished it up somewhat, and waited impatiently for a Moon-less night, hoping the sky wouldn't be too obscured by racing clouds.

At around 11.30 pm, just after the blonde retired, I elevated the telescope and scanned the night sky.

Wooosh...

The works.

I scanned the sky, almost winding the eyepiece into my eye socket, and then - I saw something really strange.

A sort of brilliant red arch across the velvet blackness of the sky. The telescope was moving at the time, so I stopped it, and slowly edged it back again...I waited for several moments, then it appeared again...a red iridescent arc, visible for just a split second.

I sat back and concentrated. I pondered over my recently acquired knowledge...I knew there were a lot of strange things in the sky, but nothing remotely resembling my discovery, except maybe comets. But no known comet was due to pass across the sky for a long time to come. I thought about that. No known comet.

Dammit, if a rock and roll exponent could get a comet named after him, so could I! I got a pencil and notebooks, and for the next four hours waited impatiently for the re-appearance of the Berry Comet.

It did in fact appear several times, and I discovered a significant thing.

BERRY'S COMET WAS STATIONARY.

Other stars and planets moved across the sky as I viewed, but my newly-observed comet was absolutely static. This seemed to defy all known physical laws, as far as I knew. I felt that if I could get confirmation of its existance, I would surely make my mark in astronomy in a big way.

I was undecided as to what to do ?

It would have been inviting disaster to announce my discovery to the world without even one independant witness. I didn't have an astronomical camera, and the sketches I had made during my observations were, of course, useless as evidence.



Next morning, I scanned the newspapers for an announcement relating to a new comet discovery, but nothing was in print. I didn't know whether to be pleased about that, or not. But after all, I had seen it, therefore it existed. Perhaps fate had decreed that I should be the first to make the announcement.

Finally, I decided to reveal my secret to Walt and James. I felt they should be the first to know of Berry's Stationary Comet !

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It was well after 1 am when I took Walt and James up to my den. Fortunately, it was a good viewing night, and I focused my telescope on the approximate area...and waited...and waited...and then...

"There it is," I shouted, "in exactly the same place as last night."

Walt pushed me out of the way, breathing heavily. I do believe that he and James might have suspected a hoax, but I think that Walt could tell by my excited voice that I wasn't fooling.

"You may have to wait a few moments," I prompted.

Ten minutes later, Walt shouted out loudly.

"My Ghod, it's TRUE."

James crawled over to us in the darkened room, and took Walt's place...another short pause, and an astonished White gasped for breath.

"It's cannot be true," he said in awe. "It's against all accepted astronomical precepts. But I've seen it. Exactly as John said...a brilliant red glow, an arc, then it disappears. This is incredible."

"How are you going to announce my discovery to the world, Walt ?" I panted.

Walt's proud voice boomed in the darkness.

"By good fortune, I have R.J.Richardson, of the Mount Wilson Observatory coming to stay with me, this morning. You know, the chap who writes for ASTOUNDING. I think he'll know what to do - probably arrange for a special issue of ASTOUNDING to celebrate the scoop. Insofar as I know, John, you are the first fan to discover a celestial body."

I preened myself in the darkness.

"If you say so, Walt," I ventured.

"It's getting late, or early as the case may be," observed James, " and if I hurry home now I'll just have time enough to bash out another chapter for Carnell before Peggy wakes up.."

I saw them to the door, then retraced my steps to the den. I was tempted to wake Diane and tell her the good news, but I resisted the temptation...she'd need all her strength later on.

I sat back on the tea chest and contemplated.

I concluded that at the very least I could expect a letter from Arthur C.Clarke, an accolade from the British Interplanetary Society, and an Honorary Membership of the Irish Astronomical Society, who previously wouldn't let me join. I was in the Big Time...

I lounged for some considerable time, glorifying in my

potential fame. Gradually, the dawn asserted itself, and at around 7.30 am I moved over to the telescope...the blonde usually had a shower at 7.35 am. As I moved to the telescope, I recalled that it had not been moved from its temporary frame since the sighting ...I took a quick peek through it, to see exactly where it was pointing, for future reference.

I squinted through the eyepiece.

SUFFERING CATFISH.

I took a couple of benzedrine tablets, swabbed the sweat off my brow, leapt onto my bike and pedalled like fury to 170 Upper Newtownards Road.

I collapsed on the doorstep, and rapped the door with my nose.

Madeleine Willis opened the door.

"Quick, where's Walt ?" I panted.

Madeleine looked skywards - a proud figure.

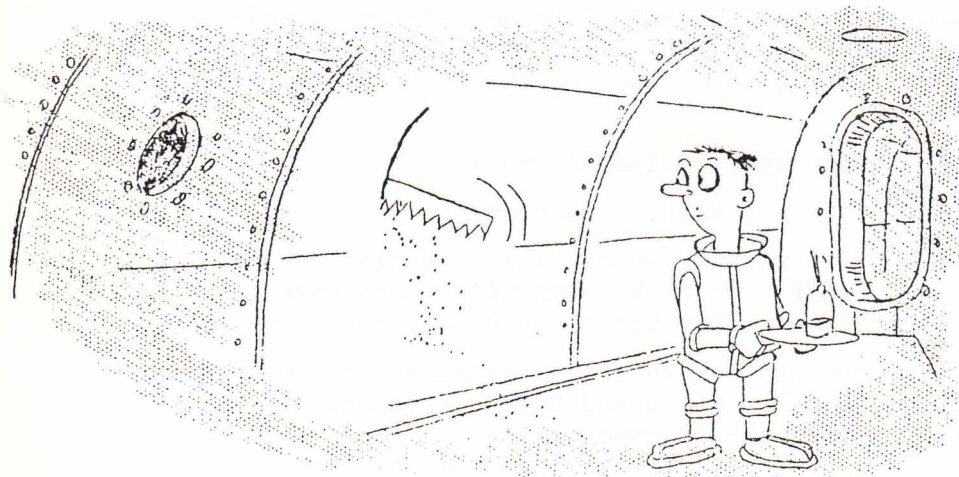
"He's flown to the States with Mr. Richardson," she said, "something about a special edition of ASTOUNDING."

I staggered down the path, and free-wheeled downhill to the nearest post office. I gabbled nonsensically to the assistant, telling her that I wanted a telegram form. I hadn't much money with me, and the message was so urgent it couldn't wait any longer. I framed the message as tersely as possible and addressed it to Mr. Richardson :-

BERRY'S STATIONARY COMET IS BLONDE SMOKING IN BED.

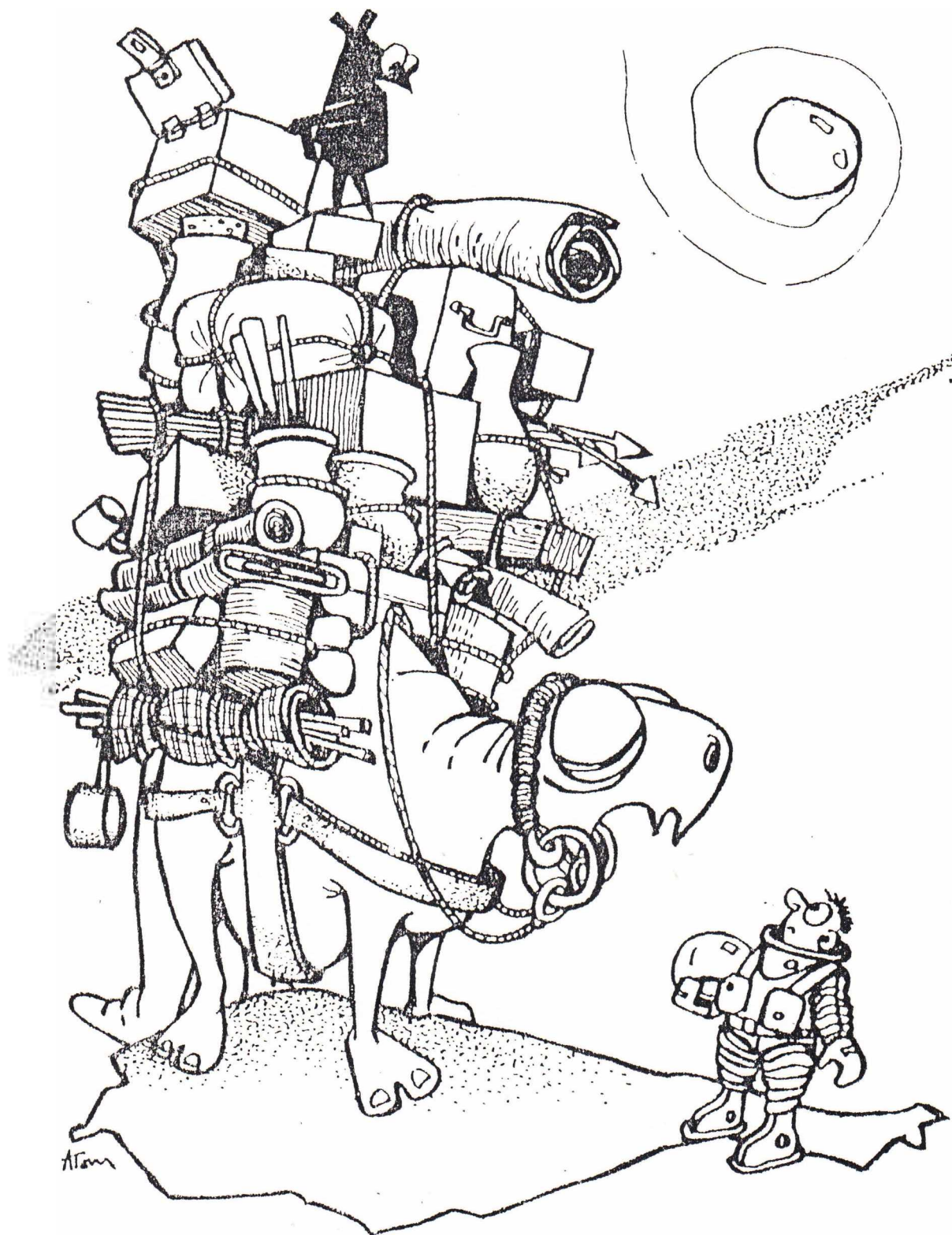
I hope he gets the message in time.

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"NOPE.....WE'RE OUT OF COKE "

12/78