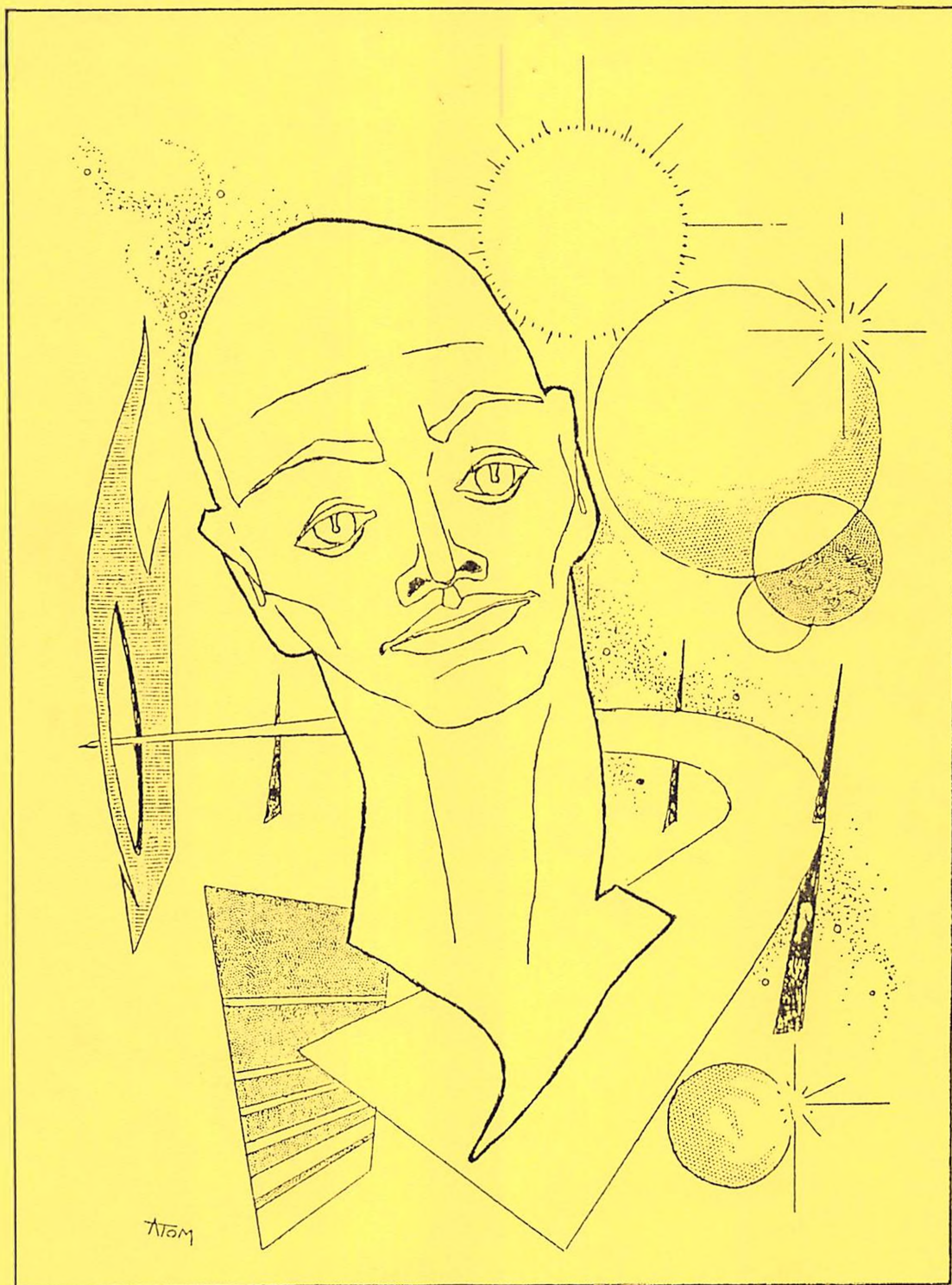
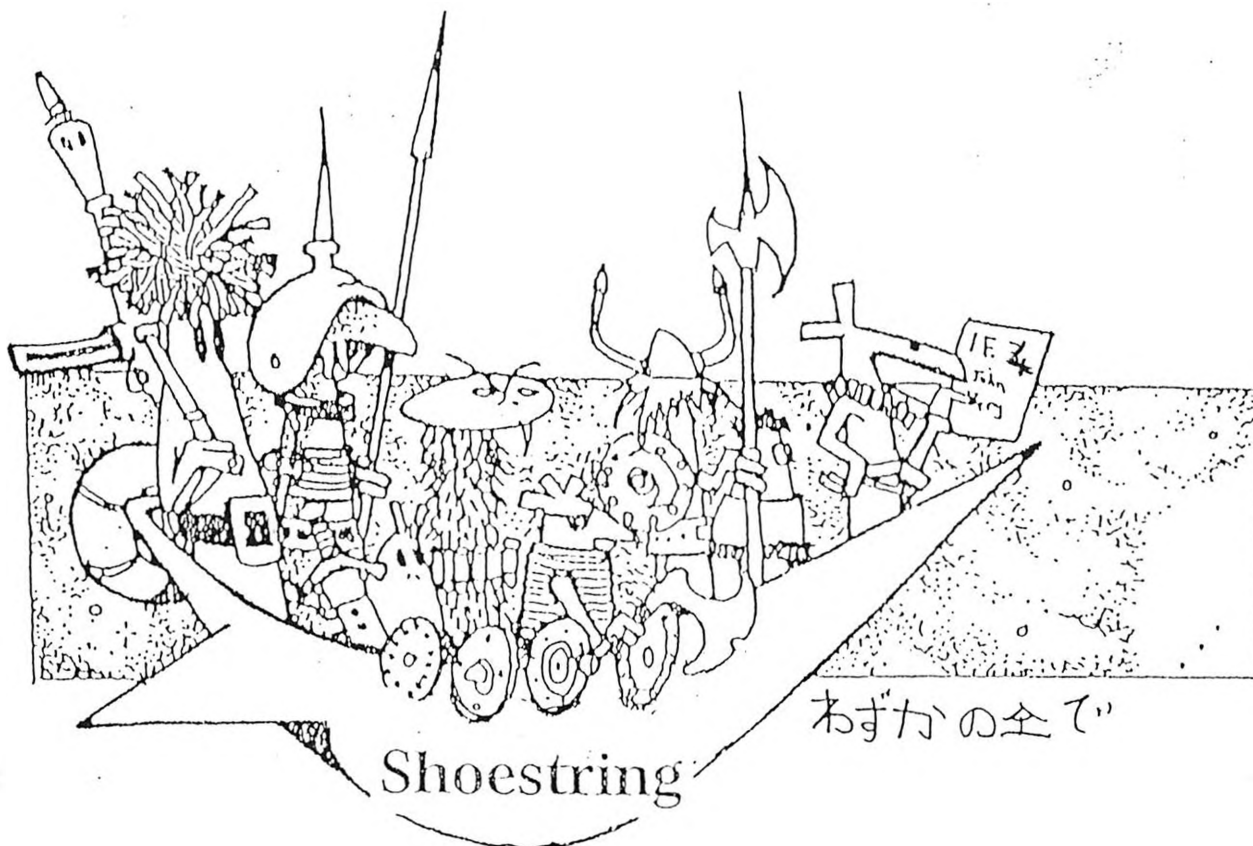


# Each Charter'd Course...



## VOL. 4. 1999.



The Author.

John Berry,  
4 Chilterns  
South Halfied,  
Herts.,  
AL10 8JU.  
U.K.

This is:

EACH CHARTER'D COURSE  
volume 4 of  
FABLES OF IRISH FANDOM.

The Printer.

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

These volumes are available largely by editorial whim.

But also for "the usual", and money, and stamps (unused of course)

I suggest a contribution towards our cost of £2 or \$5.

A few of number 1 and 2 are still available, and also 3.

\*\*\*\*\*John Berry, I recently discovered, collects stamps. I'm sure  
that he'd appreciate any - presumably used - stamps that  
you'd care to send him.\*\*\*\*\*

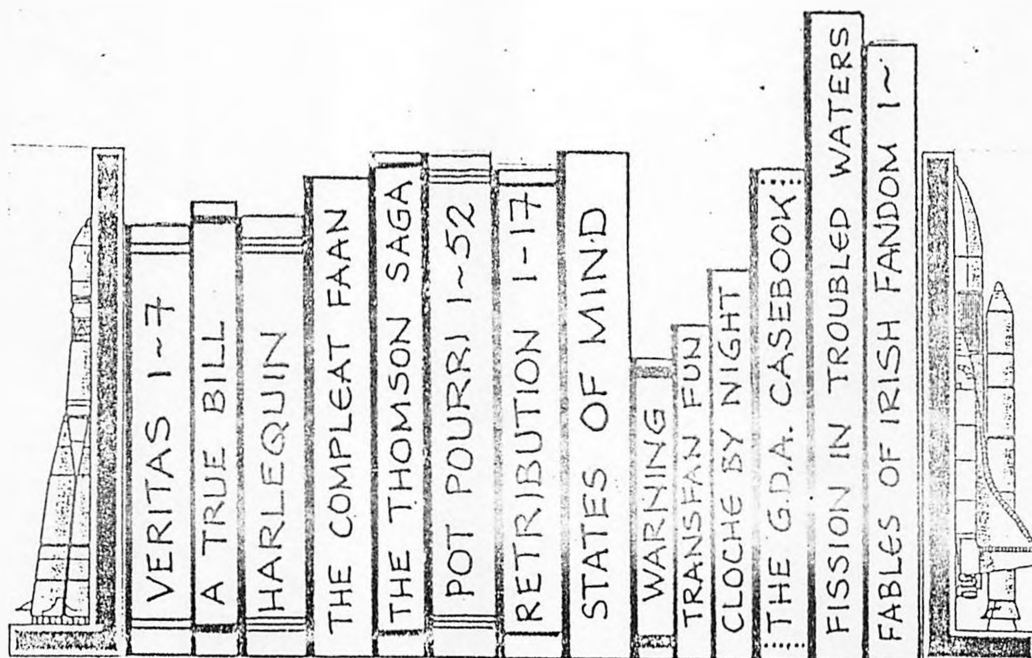
there WILL be a volume 5. JB has it well in hand.

Ken-ch.

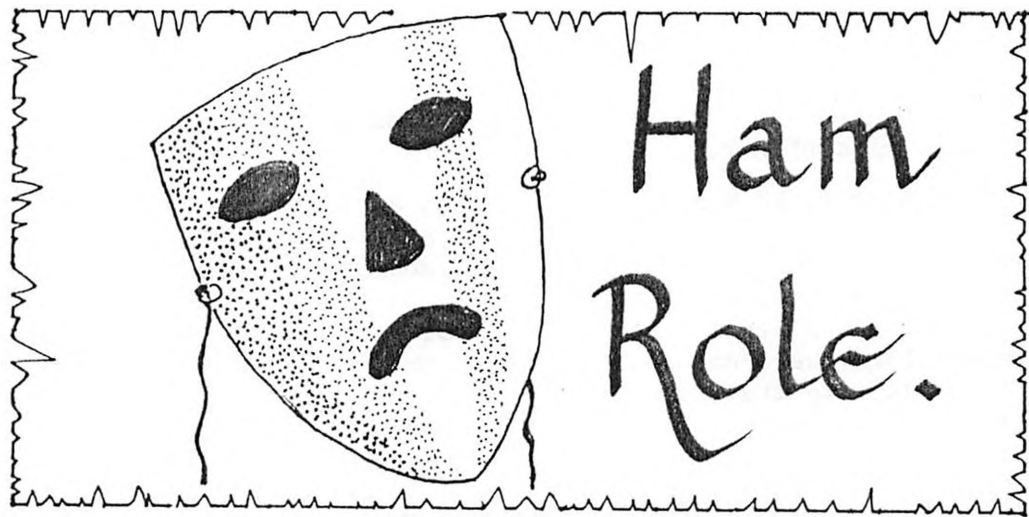
Ken.M.P.Cheslin.



editorial address:- Ken Cheslin, 29 Kestrel Road, Halesowen,  
West Midlands, B63 2PH. United Kingdom.



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The first part of the story I am about to relate is, technically, heresay. Those of you familiar with the Perry Mason TV series will know what that means, as will those amongst you who have graduated from Law School. For those of you who are ignorant of this expression, it means, in concise English, that you are saying what someone else has told you about something they saw or heard and which they describe in lurid detail but which you cannot express an honest opinion about because you weren't there but were told about it. Or something like that. I doubt if Perry Mason could be more explicit, because I pride myself on my knowledge of the law and the learned expressions used therein.

So, as I've told you, this is heresay. But I believe it. James White told me all about it, and you are all no doubt familiar with his reputation as a science fiction writer and sex fiend. Peggy White told me about it, too, but she is delicately reared, and had perforce to contain her narrative to the bare essentials. I have tried to find proof of the deeds referred to herewith, but Ian McAuley ( the Irish fan, not to be confused with the American one ) has had a university education, and one could but expect him to take precautions to hide the truth. It's quite understandable, because Ian is on christian name terms with Kingsley Amis, and it would perchance be prejudicial to his prestige as an intellectual if word got round about his activities with young and innocent girls in Belfast.

However humbly I say this, I have rightly earned a reputation for giving the true unembellished facts in my stories about Irish Fandom, my readers expect nothing less, and this is no time for me to wreck my carefully nurtured position as the Boswell of Irish Fandom, or, as James White once put it, the Chronic Leer of Irish Fandom.

I have collected the facts from James and Peggy White, and must tell you this harrowing story of depredation and vice, regardless of the consequences. Ian is a good friend of mine, but even this fact cannot hide what must be brought to the light of day. You see, I too have a young daughter...

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James and Peggy have two young children, and when they wish to go out for the evening, they get a baby sitter. Peggy describes the girl as being as innocent as a young lamb, and Peggy knows...

Peggy says that this girl, Veronica, is sixteen years old, fresh and charming, with a ' well-stacked ' figure, a demure expression of unknowingness, and the bloom of young girlhood, her pink cheeks blushing.

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They wouldn't even give me her address, so you can tell what they think of her.

Of course, as was bound to happen, a friendship sprang up between the baby sitter and the Whites; a friendship of sterling quality...being, as it were, on his own doorstep, James had to restrain his natural inclinations at the nearness of this delightful creature, and treat her with parental interest. So, even when James and Peggy were not planning to go out, Veronica used to come round and talk to them, to sample the cleverness of the White Wit, and to bask in the company of a well-known author. So he inferred.

Ian McAuley, the new sensation in Irish Fandom, and the driving force of the regular two-monthly HYPHEN, resident in Belfast for some time, also paid visits to The White House, and one night, the evil machinations of fate brought Veronica into the bloodshot eyes of the Man of the World...a bachelor...a man who wrote a thesis on 'Lady Chatterley's Lover' before he left prep school... a man sought by the NEWS OF THE WORLD to serialise his amours... a man well suited to that classic phrase of Confucius..."he was on pleasure bent"...a man whom Errol Flynn is supposed to have mentioned..."who the hell is this Irishman McAuley?" ...and knowing all this, James White, on his own admission, introduced him to Veronica...

James White is reticent when describing the effects of the introduction. He does admit that 'globules of sweat' broke out on McAuley's forehead as he crossed the room and shook hands with Veronica. He states that McAuley took one long lingering glance at the young girl's apparel...tight blue sweater and tight red jeans ...and immediately asked if he could take her home in his car. Veronica, somewhat thrilled at being asked to be escorted by such an intellectual, and reassured by the fact that James White was present and seemed to give his consent, nodded her head, and before she could move, without as much as a 'by your leave', he dragged her to his car, poor thing, with a cup of coffee in one hand and a buttered crumpet in the other.

When asked to describe this fantastic departure, James thought for a moment, and opined that McAuley left in rather an "indecent haste." As you all know, James White is a professional writer, a word artist, a clever manipulator of the English language, and if James said the haste was "indecent", that's good enough for me.

We will never know what went on in that car. It would be interesting to conjecture, and if it wasn't for the fact that I might lose some of my prestige as an accurate reporter, I would be quite prepared to spend the next three pages on what I surmise happened. White admits the car sizzled down the road in fourth gear, in the opposite direction to which Veronica lived, and he's never seen the coffee cup since...

At the next meeting of Irish Fandom, James and Peggy rather naturally informed us of McAuley's behaviour, and we asked McAuley to recount his experiences, but he was strangely silent, pensive, worried almost, and, being men and women of the world, we nodded sagely to ourselves and dismissed the subject...consoling ourselves with the fact that the girl had to learn the realities of life sometime, and why not with a faaan ?

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The final parts of this narrative are factual. You have my

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word for it. I was there.

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You all know my inherent appreciation of kulture...I've written about it many times. I've examined priceless Chinese snuff boxes in the Volunteer Park Museum, Seattle...I've heard Sir Malcolm Sargeant conducting Tchaikovsky's 'Pathetique', and kent time with the orchestra, beat for beat with my hobnail boots until I was evicted from the hall in Liverpool...my classical appreciation is confirmed by the fact that I've read 'Sex Life in Ancient Rome' five times...there is no requirement for me to repeat all this, it is well known in fandom.

And so, one night about two weeks after the McAuley-Veronica affair, I saw in a Belfast evening newspaper that Gilbert and Sullivan's IOLANTHE was being performed in St.Mary's Hall, Belfast, an amateur production, and it mentioned Peggy White as being in the cast. I stood at the head of the queue, waiting for the admission stand to open, and I saw Peggy White walk past. I called her over and she expressed delight at seeing me. She said it would be a superb performance...she had one of the principal roles, and she told me she had previously sung in the prestigious Wexford Festival. I hadn't previously known that Peggy was an artiste, and indeed, to go ahead with my story, she gave a most gifted performance.

But by far the most wonderful performance was given by the person ( I was then unaware of the sex) who played that enigmatic character Strephon, who was half fairy and half mortal. The voice reached the heights of musical ability...if there was a quaver somewhat on the high notes, the person soothed the rising jeers with a most suggestive wriggle of the hips, rather like Elvis Presley after a double dose of hormone treatment.

But by far the most poignant moments in the whole giddy affair was the love scene, played by a certain Veronica Murphy and this half fairy/mortal.

I'm certain that Messrs Gilbert and Sullivan did not feature a chase scene in their classic, but Miss Murphy pursued the fairy/mortal three times round the auditorium before she caught him, and I'm as sure as I can be that the libretto didn't include those immortal word "Holy Chu" uttered with undignified emphasis when escape was impossible.

Peggy White had five curtain calls, and the fairy/mortal sixteen, and so enthusiastic was the gallery that when he made his final curtain call, they threw things at him, anything which came to hand to attract his attention...

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I was at the rear of the queue this time, at the stage door, awaiting the departure of the hit of the show, the superbly gifted fairy/mortal. When he or she came out, the crowd made a rush at him, and to ensure he caught their attention, some of them used their fists...in fact, so enraptured were they that in the heat of the moment that now I recollect that most of them used their fists, and a middle-aged spinster, who should have known better, actually cracked him a fourpenny one with her horse's head umbrella...

But as I was too bewildered at it all to give my egoboo, I put the house brick down. As you've no doubt guessed, the fairy/mortal was Ian McAuley.

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It was a one night stand. The press were unanimous in their

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praise that nothing had been seen like it in Belfast before. CONNOISSEUR of the Belfast News-Letter pointed out that the mezzo-soprano voice of the male lead, a Mr. McAuley, from Dublin, indicated that his pantaloons were a size too small, and NIFTY of the Irish Press was of the opinion that what was Dublin's loss was Belfast's gain ( or it may have been the other way round.)

Everyone was unanimous in praise for the masterly direction of the Producer, Mr. James White... 'well known in local literary circles.'

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The final clues fell into place last night.

(Follow this carefully.)

James White called round and lent me 'Starship Trooper' and several letters were enclosed, obviously where they had been temporarily filed. I raced after James to tell him, but for some reason he didn't hear my frenzied knocking on the 'bus window with my folded handkerchief. So, just by accident, I read the correspondence... it was between James White and Father Brown, who had organised the performance. The Father indicated that although most of the cast was excellent, he didn't approve of the actions of a Mr. Shaw, obviously a professional ballet-dancer who made the others ill at ease with his wonderful entrechants. He said Mr. Shaw would have to go, in order to maintain morale. James said he could get hold of a Mr. Berry who was bound to give a superlative display, deigning ballet shoes for hobnail boots. No one would be jealous of his performance. James asked if the fairy was the top half or the bottom half? The Father said the top half. James stated that Mr. Berry's moustache would make his appearance infra dig.... but he thought he could perhaps procure an intellectual for the role, who would give pathos and feeling in such a delicate role...

Further correspondence elicited the fact that, when confronted, a Mr. McAuley, late of Dublin, a classical scholar, refused point blank to co-operate... nothing would make him cavort on stage like a fairy. James White asked for two days to 'swing the deal.'

Another letter was written to a Veronica Murphy ( the carbon was in the file ) whereby James asked her to come round and baby-sit on Friday night and... 'don't wear lipstick or nail varnish, get the nicotine stains off your fingers, pretend you are sixteen years old. Don't, whatever you do, mention your three divorces...'

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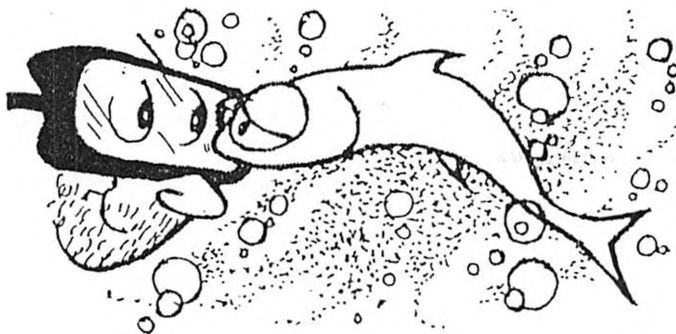
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Whatever you do, though, don't mention this episode to Ian McAuley, or if you do bring the subject up, say you thought it was the New York McAuley.

Ian maintains it was....

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# Muddle East.

The white-hot tropical sun burns down with relentless fury over the vast expanse of shimmering desert sand within my vision. The horizon is a haze of brownish-blue which joins the sand and the sky in union. My lips are cracked, and my light brown khaki drill jacket and shorts are soaked in sweat, as I gaze with aching eyes at my allotted territory...sand...nothing but dry, monotonous sand...

I ponder.

I have nothing else to do.

I keep asking myself exactly how did I get into the desert several miles north west of Aden, leaning against my rifle, with nothing to look forward to but a cup of cold water in seven hours time...

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The door at 170, Upper Newtownards Road was invitingly open, and I whistled cheerfully as I walked inside, as I usually did, draping my trench coat over Bryan's pram in the hallway.

I opened the door to the front room where Walt Willis was putting the finishing touches to his masterpiece 'THE HARP STATESIDE', and strode inside.

A newcomer stood before me. I had no idea who he was. Walt has all sorts of strange visitors, you know, ranging from Methodist clergymen wishing to purchase duplicators to individuals stating they are members of the press and asking for interviews. Once he even had a chap staying with him who had a long pointed beard and long hair and glasses who went about potting people with a plonker gun.

As I said, this new stranger stood before me. Physically, he resembled a rather cultured Rocky Marciano ( the similarity becoming even more obvious at ghoddminton sessions later ) with closely cut hair, bronzed, rugged featured, and as broad as a garage door. He shook my hand; the rough skin of his fingers removing the initials off the gold ring on my right ring finger.

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He spoke with an English accent.

"This," said Walt, "is Don Allen."

"Delighted to meecha," I said, giving his near-blue rigout the once-over.

I looked at him. He was BIG. But we had been visited by big fen before, and speedily brought them down to our level by one simple gambit.

I leered at Don Allen, and winked at Walter and the others.

"Shall we adjourn to the ghoodminton chamber?" I prompted. I was super confident. I had every reason to be. I had just been declared the George Charters Memorial Ghoodminton Trophy Champeen of 1956.

Upstairs, Don Allen folded up his shirt sleeves and opened the top three buttons of his blue shirt. With a rapid 'plink plonk', sounding rather like a harpist showing off, a bunch of thick black hairs burst through.

This bhoy was tough. He flexed his right arm, and his bicep split his upper shirt sleeve. I felt momentarily nervous, but suddenly recalled a similar incident a couple of years previously when a similar blonde giant, by name Mal Ashworth, had also seemed to be invincible. I chuckled as I recalled how we finally carried him downstairs. So I ignored this superb physical speciman ... a swift back-hand flip across the Adams Apple would soon obliterate him. I wondered about the corpsule count of his blood, concluded I'd soon find out.

Fifteen moments later, Don Allen carried me downstairs and lowered me gently onto the settee. I counted my arms and legs, and, satisfied, resumed the energetic massage of my right wrist, which I hoped wasn't broken, although I didn't like the way it hung vertically downwards from my horizontal forearm.

But the following Sunday I gloated. I had telephoned Walt a couple of days earlier and asked him to arrange a tea-drinking contest on our next meeting, this particular Sunday afternoon.

I don't want to boast, but, weeell, I am the Fannish World Tea-Drinking Champeen...um, I mean to say, I was.

Walt Willis has written up a harrowing account of this contest (RETRIBUTION 6) but I must confess for the record that my bladder surrendered after I had consumed twenty three cups of tea, and Don sipped another to make his total twenty four, and thus create a new fannish world record.

I pondered deeply over the astounding physical ability of this super-faan.

I mentioned it to Walt.

"Didn't you know?" said Walt in rather a surprised manner. "Don Allen belongs to a new regiment of fandom, organised in England. It is known as the Royal Anglo Fandom Regiment."

"This is news to me," I confessed. "Isn't it possible to join the organisation over here in Northern Ireland?"

"Oh, certainly," said Walt, rubbing his fingers together.

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"Just you go to 42, Clifton Street, Belfast, and tell them that I sent you."

So I went along. If the Royal Anglo Fandom Regiment could produce such a magnificent specimen as Don Allen, I felt that it could do the same for me.

The chappie was quite nice. He wore a blue rigout somewhat similar to that worn by Don Allen, except he had three stripes on each sleeve. He asked me quite a lot of personal questions, which I was pleased to answer, including, strangely, my next of kin. He asked me who sent me, and when I told him, he scribbled a cheque and told me to give it to Mr. Willis. The chap told me that I would be hearing about my application very soon, which would be treated with urgency.

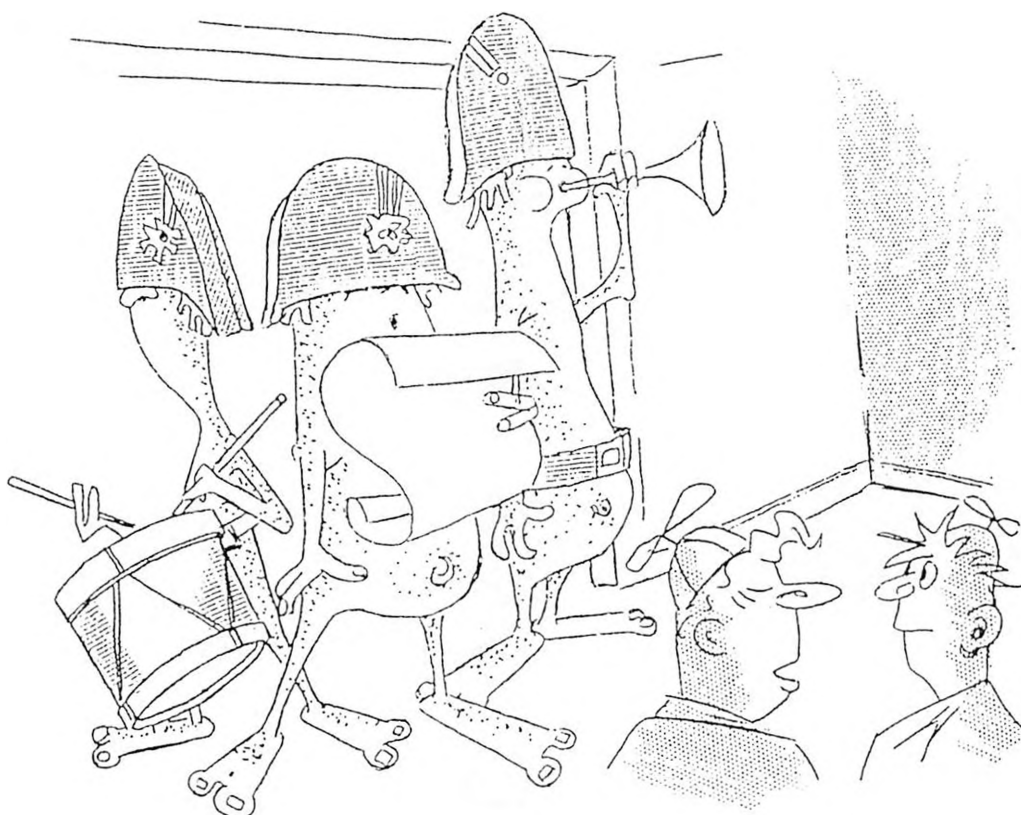
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Yep, I've got another two years, nine months and twenty three days left to serve before I leave Aden. I guess I went to the wrong place in Belfast, or perhaps Walt got the address mixed up. In fact, there really was a total mix-up. Walt was under the impression that R.A.F. meant Royal Anglo Fandom, but I have since been told that it refers to the Royal Air Force Regiment. I must let Don Allen know, too, before it's too late...he had R.A.F.R. on the upper sleeve of his rigout...

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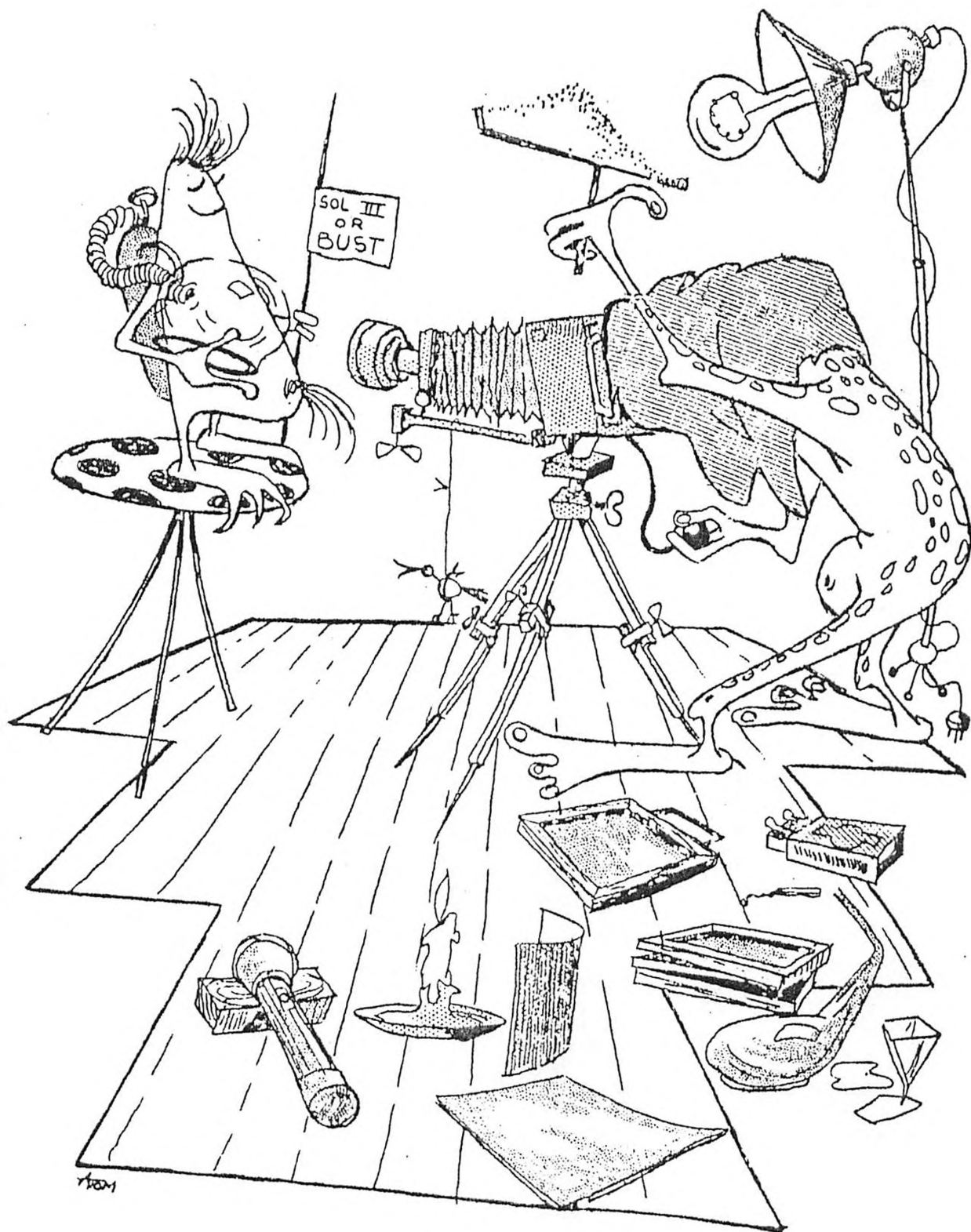


"Trust Bickerstaff to find a novel way of announcing his new fauzine."

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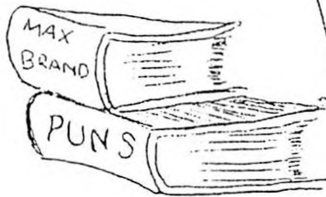


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# BELFASTERS

FOUR.



George Charters.

XAM



In this age of expressive adjectives such as supersonic, dynamic, and ultramodern, used freely in modern prose and conversation, we must sometimes spare a thought for the venerable...for the aged amongst us who were brought up in the staid and placid atmosphere of the early Victorian era...hansom cabs, cobbled roadways and cravats, and all that sort of thing. We of Irish Fandom have our own representative of this age...old he may be, but to us, he is proof of the solid reliability of the ancients. Wrinkled and gnarled, yes, but trusty, forthright and honest, a pillar of respectability, a staunch upholder of the fannish faith. Yes, friends, allow me to present to you:

GEORGE L. CHARTERS

## THE SAGE

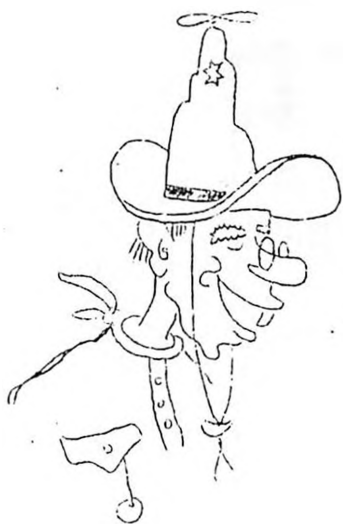
Hunched up in his rocking chair in the corner of our fan-attic, George spends quite a percentage of his fanac ruminating happily to himself, maybe occasionally puffing on his clay pipe. But his senses still function, and even though sometimes we are prone to forget about him, he is apt to suddenly interrupt the conversation with a telling remark, revealing sublimely that his second childhood is not far away. To give you an example, last week, only, we were discussing ladies' underwear. I mentioned to the assembled fen that I had once seen a pair of panties (in a shop window, natch) with the words, 'No, no, a thousand times, no' embroidered on the hem.

"Er, heh-heh," cackled George, "I presume it was in Braille?"

## THE PUNSTER

As with the rest of the male members of Irish Fandom, excluding myself,

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George is an inveterate punster. His puns, delivered like rapier thrusts, leave one defenceless...a fact which supports my contention that the term 'brainwashing' was coined by a suffering victim after having the misfortune to hear several of George's puns in rapid succession.

A few examples of his dreaded prowess will serve as a warning. First of all, a spontaneous snatch of conversation I happened to overhear at James White's house this last Christmas:

Peggy White: Look at those lovely anemones in my garden.

George: Heh-heh, I had one of those in the hospital.

James: What do you think of the symmetry of my pathway?

George: Very nice, but where are the headstones?

If you can stand more, here are a couple of Charters phrases:

The reservoir that suffered the tortures of the damned.

I can't find out whether a Spanish spaceship is automatic or Manuel controlled.

Lastly, I can do no better than quote what James White has to say about George:

I think George invented Christmas to get rid of some of his old jokes.

# THE POET

Having nearly a century of accumulated knowledge behind him, it comes as no surprise to discover that Mr. Charters is extremely fond of poetry, and both avidly reads and writes it. Some men of learning who have scrutinised his works give the opinion that George is a second Ogden Nash...George himself being of the opinion that Ogden Nash is a second Charters. As a great scoop for Grue, here is a pome by George, specially comissioned by me to present to Dean as a token of my appreciation. I will gladly offer him the copyright.

THIS THE TALE of Walter Willis,  
Walter Hiawatha Willis,  
How he won the Charters Trophy,  
Won in spite of opposition  
Strong enough to daunt a champion!

In the finals of the contest,  
"Choodminton!" cried Walter Willis,  
Walter Alexander Willis,  
"We will show them how we do it  
In the Walter Willis attic,  
In the Willis fambly attic!"

From the pile of bats he picked one,  
Tested it for imperfections,  
Tried its balance, weighed it deftly,  
Swung it round his head and shoulders  
With the sure hand of the master;  
Found it answered his requirements;  
Sought and found the well-known trade-mark,  
Showing it was made by Charters,  
Master craftsman, master batman,  
In his lonely little workshop  
By the shores of Gitchee Goomee,  
By the shining Big Sea Water.



To his side there sprang John Berry,  
Vigorous, alert John Berry,  
Shouting out his fierce war-cries.  
Till the walls and ceiling trembled,  
Till the floors and windows rattled,  
With the noise reverberating  
Round the Willis fambly attic.

James and Bob were their opponents:  
James a crafty skillfull fighter,  
Veteran of many battles,  
Many vicious, hard-fought battles,



With his forehead shining wetly,  
 Cheeks, nose, ears chin shining wetly,  
 With excitement for the battle.  
 Bob stood calm, serene, untroubled,  
 Nerves for him were non-existent,  
 Nonchalant he stood and waited.

Spectators sat and watched and trembled  
 At the meeting of the titans,  
 Madeleine could hardly bear it,  
 Leaned her head on George's shoulder,  
 George was in the same condition,  
 Leaned his head on Sadie's shoulder,  
 Sadie couldn't bear the tension,  
 Leaned her head on Peggy Martin.  
 (Sorry, but her maiden name is  
 Just the right length for this metre.)  
 Thus they sat, like four old palm trees,  
 Leaning with the sunset breezes.

How to tell of that grim conflict,  
 How they battled, how they struggled,  
 Flashing eyes and heaving bodies,  
 Shouting "Face" and screaming "Ceiling,"  
 Till the neighbours must have thought there  
 Were some murders being committed.  
 Flying bats and bleeding knuckles,  
 Fingers numb and glasses broken,  
 Shirt-tails flying, hair tossed wildly,  
 "Bloody hell," and "Fruit," and "Dammit."  
 Till the floor was wet and sticky  
 With the blood and perspiration,  
 With the bloody perspiration.

But in spite of Walter's rallies,  
 Forehand drives and deft back-handers,  
 Lightning serves, amazing catches,  
 Fast and furious smashing volleys,  
 They were losing, slow but steady,  
 Till the score stood fifteen-twenty.  
 Bob and James had luck on their side  
 Till the pace made James so nervous  
 Five serves running hit the ceiling,  
 Made the score exactly level.

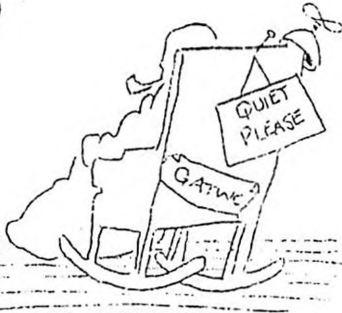
Now the game became more deadly,  
 Made the previous play seem tepid.  
 Spectators wilted even further  
 Till they looked like corn in spring-time  
 Beaten down by lashing rain-storms.

Came the last shot of the fracas:  
 Walter's van, and Bob was serving,  
 Served so fast no eye could follow,  
 Took Walt's ear off in its flight and  
 Sank two inches in the plaster.

Thus did Walter win the trophy,  
 But he did not wait for plaudits,  
 Dashed downstairs, came back with brandy,  
 To revive the poor spectators.

-CATWC-





THE PHILOSOPHER Sometimes, Confucious-like, George allows us to sit round the rocking chair, whilst he regales us with stories and mythologies, which, with his poignant vernacular, reveal to us the fundamental secrets of the inner mind of mankind. One fable, in particular, I would like to relate:

And Charters, he sayeth, " .....one day, a lady of high repute was attempting to board a trolley bus, attired as she was in a very tight garment, namely a new Paris model skirt. Discovering that the tightness of her skirt restricted her endeavours, she reached behind her, and nimbly open-

ed the bottom button of the skirt, thus allowing a little extra freedom for her shapely nether limbs. Once more she tried to mount the platform, and again discovered her legs would not part sufficiently to let her board the vehicle. Her dextrous fingers thus opened the next button, yet again she found the degree of manoeuvreability insufficient for her requirements. Finally, as she was about to repeat the performance for the third time, strong arms gripped her, and lo, deposited her on the platform of the trolley bus, much to her gratification.

"Thank you, sir," she smiled primly to the gentleman who had assisted her, "thank you so much."

"That's O.K., lady," replied the gentleman, with unmitigated chagrin, "it's just that you were undoing my trousers."

Thus concluding his parable, George draws his shawl tighter around his shoulders, curls up in his rocking chair, and slowly goes to sleep, leaving us to sigh in wonder at his profound store of knowledge.

HARD COVER MERCHANT This nick-name is universally linked with George Charters, and I feel it may be of interest, especially to neo-fen, to tell once more how this interesting phrase originated.

That George is a keen Max Brand enthusiast can be evinced from his address:-- George L. Charters, "Bar 20," 3 Lancaster Avenue, Bangor, Northern Ireland.

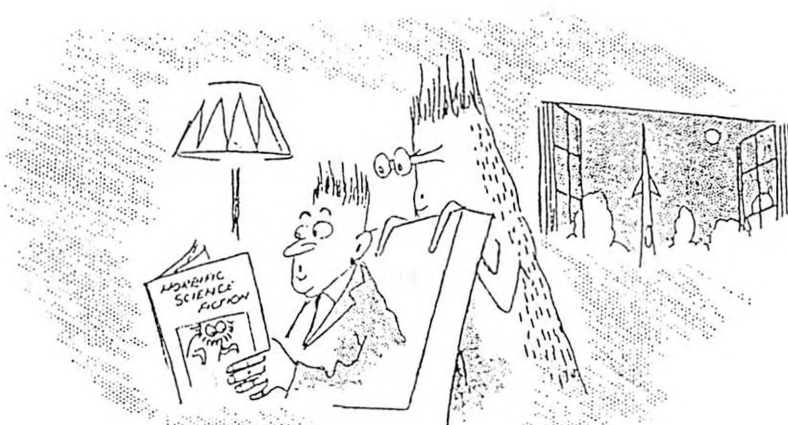
Anyway, an anthology of Max Brand stories was published a few years ago, and George gave the compiler much material help from his vast collection, which was acknowledged in cold print when the hard cover edition was published.

Thus, because of this, George is happy to consider his literary career has reached the ultimate, and who are we to disillusion him.

THE GENTLEMAN Finally, now you all know the truth about George, it would be fitting to pay tribute, through the columns of Grue, to this fine old gentleman.

To say sincerely how happy we are to know him, how much we look forward to hearing the joyful sound of his heavy breathing as he staggers up the stairs. Our children love him, and so do we. We hope he will be long spared to sit rocking gently in the corner of our room at 170, where we regard him as standing for all that is good and respectable and true in Fandom.

\* \* \* \* \*



# TEE HEE.

A few days ago, a car horn hooted outside my house. This told me several important things...item...the horn pusher had a very high intellect, because it plainly showed that he or she was not prepared to negotiate the path to my front door. I'd tried to make the mud holes up the front path look artistic and practical by placing large rocks in the middle of them for prospective visitors to hop over, but the person in the car obviously didn't want to drown. Item...the person was also selfish, because it meant he or she had the utter temerity to expect me to negotiate my own front path, which wasn't at all sporting.

Nothing ventured, as they say, so I took my shoes and socks off and paddled down the path, hoping fervently that the drought would continue, because I didn't fancy my chances having to go to and from the house if it rained unduly.

I should have known. Sitting in the vehicle was the beaming visage of Walt Willis, next to the driver, Dr. Ian McAuley late of Dublin. Madeleine Willis sat in the back seat.

"Fancy a game of golf with us ?" grinned Willis.

This request from such a BNF was little less than a direct command. Besides which, I was faunching for fannish company and the resultant repartee, so I shouted for my wife to bring my camera. In a few moments she staggered down the path with her skirt held high, muttering about insipid husbands who put sport before housework. I was about to gently chide her for discussing our personal relationships, but she seemed to slip, and the camera in its case at the end of the strap described a vicious arc towards me, and I only ducked in the nick of time to save its delicate mechanism.

I sat in the back seat next to Madeleine. Walt was obviously in good form, because normally he wouldn't run the risk of permitting this intimacy.

We drove through the delightful countryside of County Down. McAuley, with considerable finesse, added to the utter comraderie of the conversation by bluntly informing me that he'd given me a sub for CRY OF THE NAMELESS, for which I am British agent, and yet no issues had arrived ? I tore my eyes from Madeleine's niblick, and informed him that I had performed the necessary administration. This seemed to temporarily satisfy him, and after the offer of a carte blanche inspection of my prozine collection, he climbed off my chest and we continued the journey.

"We'll call and see old George," said Willis, and after



considerable divergence of opinion between Walt and Madeleine regarding whereabouts George actually lived...we came across it by accident. McAuley had turned left instead of right, as he had been directed, and as a result of his blunder we saw George at the window of a nice house, looking at us. I had not been to George's house before, and I must say that compared to MON DEBRIS, it was most tastefully decorated.

From the tender questions Willis asked this venerable sage, it seemed that George was not well, but he offered to show us his SF and Wild West collections, and led us upstairs...it took some time to reach the landing.

His little library was in a small room, but stacked all round the walls were brown paper parcelled magazines. Willis and McAuley, both being connoisseurs, visibly palpitated at this show of wealth. George permitted us to reverently pull down the parcels and examine them...to sniff at the slightly musty odour of early ASTOUNDINGS, etc. Without prompting, George opened a hard cover Max Brand anthology and showed us the page where the author had acknowledged the great help he had received from George Charters. He told us that his collection was worth £200.

I also found a bunch of WEEKEND NEWS, which featured coloured shots of girls in bikinis...George assured me that these were not part of his collection, but he used the pages for wrapping up duplicate issues, and he also intended to tear them in halves and use them as slip-sheets once he got off the FAPA waiting list, because the paper was very absorbent. No matter what the extent of my pleas he stood firm, so I had to banish all thoughts of having the pages for my slip-sheeting.

We said 'bye bye' to George, because he said he was expecting mundane visitors, but I made up my mind to visit George in the near future...

When McAuley had selected the correct gear, we jerked off downhill and turned left to the golf course. Carnalea Golf Course was the name of the place, and I doubt if anywhere in the world a more beautiful course exists. It is on the coast of the Irish Sea and the ground rolls upwards in green folds from the shore. The eighteen holes are advantageously placed so that if you miff a shot you can at least look round at the magnificent scenery and realise that things could be worse. And believe me, in the match that followed, I admired plenty of choice scenery.

Walt and Madeleine checked in at the course office, and emerged in golfing garb. Madeleine delightfully kitted out in dun brown shortie trousers. Things were complicated for me from the start, because I had never played golf, but Walt assured me that I would find it 'quite simple, really.'

Walt explained rather kindly that he was well known at the club and would therefore regard it as a great personal favour if I didn't drive off until we were away from the golfers who had gathered round. My theory for their attention was that in a weak moment (which didn't fit in well with his man-about-town mystique as a professional fertiliser consultant) Ian had picked up two golf club bags but could not raise them above knee height. He looked like a gopher with paralysis. I took one off him, and we both crawled after Walt and Madeleine, who skipped over the first and second holes and didn't stop until we crested a hill which hid us from the view of other golfers.

(15)

Walt gazed at me hopefully, but I solemnly spoke of my intention of playing, regardless of the perils involved. Walt said that as I wasn't a member of the golf club, he would permit me to use his clubs as long as we were out of sight of the club house. Ian, sizing up the situation in one swift devastating glance, announced that he did not intend to play golf at all, but was going to content himself with walking round after us, perchance looking for lost balls, and breathing in the invigorating sea air. As we walked along, suddenly the basis of a magnificent pun prinkled my brain. I had to guide the conversation in the required direction.

"Lovely place to bring a girl here for a quiet walk in the countryside, " I suggested to McAuley.

"Er, yes, I recently escorted a young lady somewhere around here...we were looking for wild flowers," he admitted, somewhat red-faced.

"I suppose you used your notorious charms on her," pressed Walt Willis, and I suddenly realised that he had thought of the self-same pun as myself...before Ian could answer, I roughly interrupted....

"....and was she Carnalea-known?" I hissed in triumph.

"I really should opuntia on the nose for that suggestion," grinned McAuley.

Willis removed a large divot, swinging his club wildly in annoyance...."bloody hell" he evinced.

It was wonderful to see Willis, this proud and noble figure, addressing the ball. He placed it on the tee as if he was intent upon smashing it back into its primordial state. It was rather menacing the way he stood over the ball, and raised the club (one of those with a big lump of hard wood at the end of it), poised to show us his elegant stance, then swished down like a descending arc of sheer slashing power. The force was such that I swear the club coiled itself like a scarf around Walt's neck as he finished the shot.

"Half a sec, Walt," I breathed, and to save him the trouble of bending forward, I picked up the golf ball and put it back on the pin.

Red of face, Willis frightened the ball several times before he finally sent it skimming over the horizon.

Madeleine, who was taking part in a Ladies Competition a few days later, asked us to assess her technique. She hit the ball a pretty good thwack, but, as I told her, the whole effect was spoiled by the fact that the ball travelled behind her and over the main road.

I dabbled with my club for a few moments before I hit the ball, and by some inborne instinct which can only be put down to pure good luck, the ball went at right angles and landed at the feet of a young and very pretty girl who was playing on the adjoining green but in the opposite direction.

"Er, I'll fetch it for you," panted McAuley, straightening his bow tie, but I rushed past him to the girl.

"Good afternoon," I said with a seductive leer, making my moustache ends rise vertically.

(15)

She smiled coyly and picked up the golf ball.

"Good afternoon," said McAuley, charm dripping off him like honey. We both stood looking at her, our lower jaws resting on our sternums. I was particularly engrossed in the wonderful stitch which was incorporated into the light duck-egg blue jumper she was straining.

After about ten minutes of sight-seeing, we both bid our reluctant 'good-byes'. McAuley opined that she was a beautiful County Down girl, almost as pretty as the gals in Dublin. Then I heard the girl shout at me..."Hey, you with the moustache."

I sprinted back to her, and she said I'd forgotten the ball !

We caught up with Willis. He was looking very pleased with himself because he'd beaten Madeleine by one stroke. But at the next hole, she got her revenge. Then it was Walt's turn. When he finally settled down, he played some mean golf. One shot I remember vividly went off at an angle of 45 degrees, hit a tree trunk, cannoned off the roof of a passing car, was angrily caught by the driver, who threw it back, and it landed one and a half inches from the hole. McAuley complimented Willis on the brilliant angles he chose. Willis explained disgustedly the reason he hadn't holed in one...he had initially thought the car was a Morris Oxford 1000 in the distance, but he saw too late it was actually an Austin A 40, and he hadn't allowed for the extra three inches of roof height.

I was rather pleased with my series of bashes ( for want of a better word) which secured me a ten at one hole - the record for it was only three !

It all finished much too quickly. Madeleine seemed in prime physical condition, and carried the golf bags.

McAuley drove us home, seeming to be rather perplexed. Then he snapped his fingers together as we were negotiating a rather sharp bend. "Ah," he said, " that girl's jumper incorporated the Cable Stitch." I refuted this, saying it was definitely the Moss Stitch. Walt said it was just a plain stitch. He was forty yards away, must have had good eyesight.

Walt invited us in for tea, and whilst Madeleine was brewing up, he and McAuley played a complicated game called SCRABBLE, sort of like a stereophonic crossword. There is a black and white checkered board, and a bag of letters, and you make up words no one has heard before but, allegedly, are in a dictionary.

I offered my services as an assistant to whosoever required my services, and when Willis was stuck I came up with a word which quite entranced him. "That's 'it'" I said. Willis very kindly remarked that he didn't know what he would have done without my valuable assistance !

He said the same thing after I'd cleared the table of every crumb.

Ian drove me home. He browsed through my SF collection, only to discover he had read all of them.

I got out one of my wife's knitting books, which confirmed it was the Cable Stitch. That made him very happy....

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# ⑪ THE WAR OF THE WORDS.

Illinois fan Rog Ebert, on a flying visit to Irish Fandom, was due to be at Oblique House round 8 pm on Sunday 3rd September 1961. We weren't sure of the exact time of his arrival, because he had arranged to go for the day to the Giant's Causeway, a unique rock formation on the north Antrim coast, about ninety miles from Belfast.

Ian McAuley, Madeleine and Walt Willis and myself were in attendance, awaiting the appearance of Rog, and I suggested it would give me great pleasure to actually watch a game of SCRABBLE, one of the major sporting activities at Oblique House these days, and well advertised as being a gigantic battles of wits, having such high I.Q. personalities participating.

Ian McAuley produced a massive chart and a thick scorebook, denoting the closeness of the scores to date in 1961, and as the game was only an exhibition match, he and Willis agreed that it should not count in the contest, which Willis was winning by 18 points.

I don't know if you are conversant with SCRABBLE ? It is played on a large board, divided into 225 small squares. A bag of letters, (seemingly with a scarcity of vowels ) is hung nearby, and the participants dive trembling hands into the thin neck of the bag, and select several letters with which, in rotation, they attempt to form words using their letters and trying to add them onto the letters of words already formed by their opponents.

Willis gave me the dictionary to hold. It was about six inches thick. He said it was the 'bible.' He said that if a dubious word arose, I was to look it up in the dictionary. If the word was in, it was O.K; if not, kaput.

This dictionary interested me. Willis, I noted, was a shrewd manipulator of two-letter words, which served to prevent the other players from having much to build their words on. With reckless abandon, Willis used BA, KA, TI, PU, XI, OE, MI, etc, to which Ian McAuley strongly objected. Willis told me to look up the words if I wanted to, but he would guarantee that such words were in the dictionary.

"PU" he said with disdain. "That word is used by the ancient Etruscans to give vent to a strange smell in the immediate proximity, look it up, John."

It was as Willis said. And bear in mind that McAuley is an intellectual, and would be expected to be conversant with such unusual words.

Yes, that dictionary was interesting.

The first thing that struck me was that the print used was reminiscent of the old SLANT, which you all know was produced by a printing machine. In fact, I would go so far as to say that it was the exact SLANT type-face.

Secondly, I looked in a huge reference library dictionary one lunchtime, and none of the two-letter words were included.



Thirdly, and most significant of all, about a year ago, just after Ian McAuley had introduced the game, Willis was off work for three months, and was rarely seen out of the fanac den in which the SLANT printing machine is sited.

It doesn't need Parry Mason to put those three clues together...I insist that Willis PRODUCED AND PUBLISHED HIS OWN DICTIONARY.

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Fifteen minutes after the start of the contest, Rog Ebert arrived. He sat down next to me and evinced considerable interest in the gigantic struggle. He looked at the letters Ian McAuley had to work with :- Y Y T O K.

Ebert nudged me, and I paled with horror. Even admitting McAuley's intellect, what could he possibly do with such a terrible selection of letters ? He seemed to be somewhat of the same opinion. He sank back, a beaten man. It was his turn, Willis was ahead, and Madeleine was just a few points behind. He was prepared to take a risk to gain important points, but just what could the poor man do with Y Y T O K ?

After twenty minutes, in which he hypnotised himself into immobility, McAuley admitted he could not make a word; it was just impossible, an observation which caused Walt and Madeleine sublime happiness.

He had a point. The middle of the SCRABBLE board looked like this :-

T H E L  
E O  
A L L O W  
L

He lit a cigarette.

Ebert tried to bring some joy into the party. He said he liked puns, and he understood we were authorities, the acknowledged experts. Had we heard about the man who fell into molten glass and made a spectacle of himself ?

Willis turned ashen and left the room without bothering to open the door. Madeleine made an excuse about putting the kettle on for tea, and McAuley said that when he was stuck with Y Y T O K he thought things couldn't get worse...but he was WRONG.

I told Rog it was quite funny, really, and I tried to put him on the right lines by quoting a Bob Shaw pun...about the time I was always using the words 'cry of frustration', and I came home one night and my wife was frying prawns in a pan, and my sudden entrance caused her to drop the pan, and she yelled out. I asked her was that a cry of frustration ? 'No,' she said, quoted Bob, 'it was a fry of crustacean.'

Rog beamed in awe, and suddenly Ian McAuley's eyes grew wide. He shook me by the hand. He patted Rog on the back.

"Superb," he shouted. "Wonderful...magnificent."

He was jumping up and down in his seat, impatiently awaiting the return of Madeleine and Walt, who returned shortly afterwards, Willis sniffing at a benzedrine inhaler.

"Do you capitulate, Ian ?" he asked.

McAuley smirked at his moment of triumph. He picked up his five letters Y Y T O K, and arranged them as Y T O K Y, and put them at the end of THEL...making THELYTOKY.

"Seventy seven points, I think," he beamed.

"Incredible," said Willis. "I thought of it, of course, but..."

"John gave me the idea," explained McAuley, "he was swapping puns with Rog, and he gave me the clue."

Of course, I had to give a spirited guffaw, which I hoped suggested that I'd thought of the word, too, and didn't want to actually tell McAuley, but just to suggest it...I secretly think they weren't really convinced.

It took me a while of dictionary bashing to trace what McAuley was gabbling about...I went from 'crustacean' to 'parthogenetic' to 'virgin births' to THELYTOKY...sexy things, dictionaries...

The game continued.

Then Madeleine, on my left, was really up the proverbial paddleless creek. She had these letters :- L R I R S.

The top left of the board was thusly:-

F T  
 L A T O T A  
 H A I O W O N  
 L L E A N S  
 O E D  
 W O R D

I swear the poorgirl was going to sob. Willis and McAuley smiled confidently, as if they knew what to put, but Madeleine was completely baffled, as were Rog and myself.

Another deathly pause, and to pass the time I conversed with Rog about the different costs of living in the U.S.A. and Northern Ireland.

"Heck, it's desperate, " I told him. "Look at all these bills I've got to pay."

I showed him a wallet full...I asked him about the price of electricity in America, displaying a long wide Electricity Account for four pounds...and Madeleine almost went beserk. She winked at me, giving me the impression that I'd done her a favour.

She sorted out her letters:- I R S R L, and she added them to L A T O T A to make L A T I R O S T R A L.

biting his lips. "Never thought you'd get it," murmured Willis,

"What's a pelican got to do with Berry's Electricity Account ?" scowled McAuley.

"It's a long bill," sneered Rog, quoting verbatim from the dictionary, which I'd hurriedly opened to LATIROSTRAL.

"Actually, folks, " I lied," I was thinking of a cormorant."

Still didn't seem impressed, though.

However, I never thought I would live to see

the day that Willis was stumped by such a mundane thing as a few miserable letters.

True, he had a mean selection:-

H H I I I

The right hand bottom of the board looked like this :-

P T R A S A  
E E L S E L E N T  
A V A A X E T  
M L A  
I I  
T N  
Y

It was embarrassing, really. Willis could see that his prestige was sinking lower and lower in front of an American fan, and the Willis trip to Chicago was just a few dollars away.

The minutes passed slowly by, and McAuley announced that if Willis didn't get a score soon, he (McAuley) and Madeleine would tie for first place.

Walt drummed a tattoo on the table-top with his lean sensitive fingers. I felt for him. I was going to suggest he made up the ALE to ALEHIHI...the illegitimate daughter of Nerfititi, but he said he remembered the name, it couldn't be used, though, as it was a proper name.

Rog was bewildered by the apparent complete annihilation of the Master.

"He's not doing very well, is he ?" Rog confided to me in a stage whisper.

"No," I breathed, " he definitely isn't up to scratch."

Willis's face cracked into a wide smile.

He shrieked hysterically in triumph.

He sorted his letters to make P T R A S A into:-

P H T H I R I A S I A.

Willis had thus won the game and Madeleine brought in the tea.

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I had to leave early, and Willis came to the door with me.

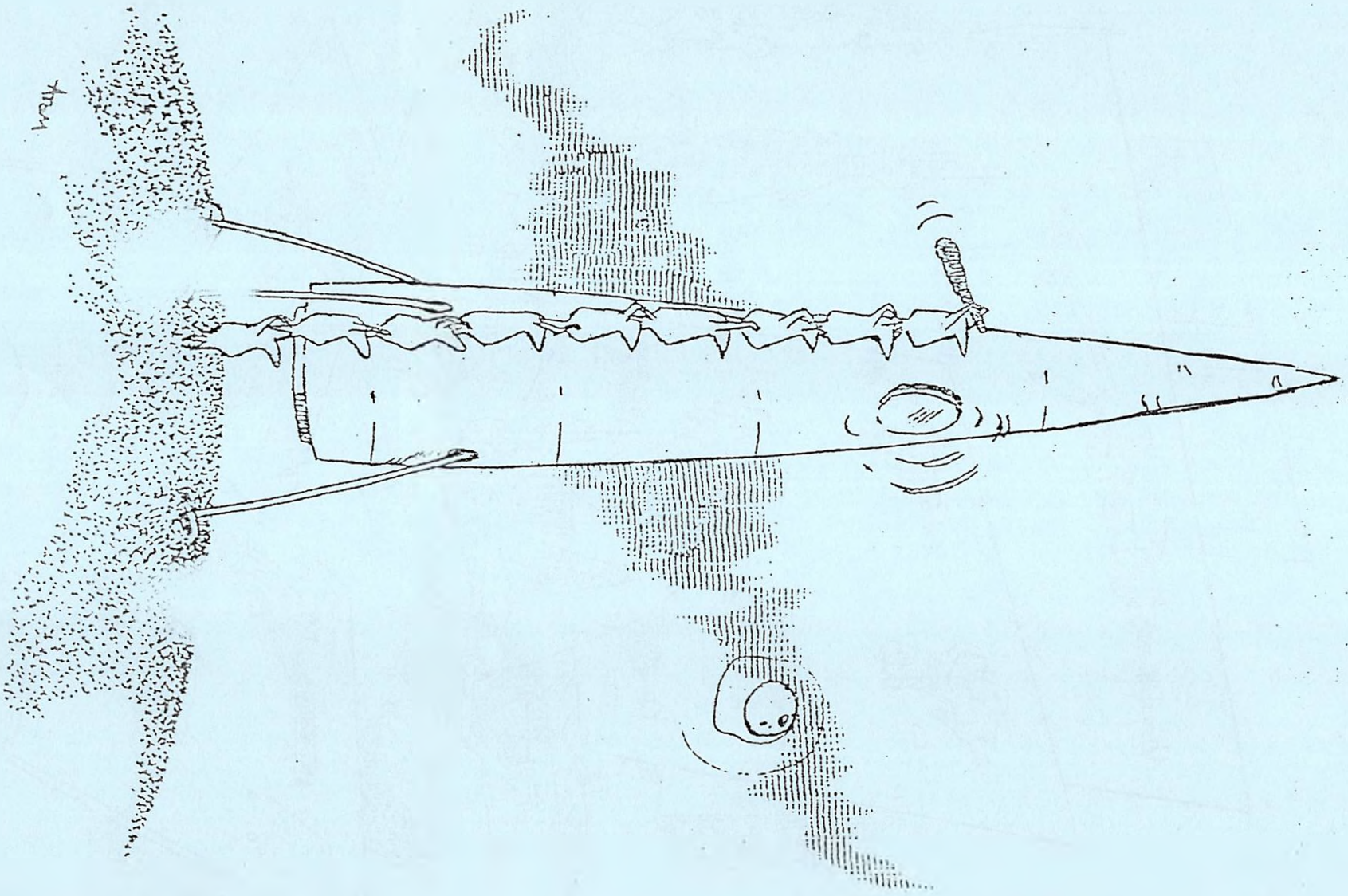
"Thanks for the help, John," he whispered.

"It was nothing, Walt, " I cringed. "I'm glad you picked up my clue."

I uncrossed my eyes and held my breath.

"Oh yes, as soon as you mentioned 'scratch' I remembered that Phthiriasia means to be infested with lice. You know, we all agree that with your acumen and subtlety, you certainly deserve to be in our elite SCRABBLE group...we've decided to average our scores so that you can start next week on an even footing. Very well done, it is surely a pleasurable surprise to discover your latent intellectual prowess."

I told him it was because I had perused his home-made dictionary, and could I borrow it ?











# RED LETTER DAY.

By Walter A. Willis G.C, published  
on 17th March 1966 by Inchmery  
Publications Limited, London S.E.14.  
Price...12/6d.

( I rate RED LETTER DAY as the greatest example of fan fiction  
ever written...Ebenezer Friggitt, Literary Critic, Bootle  
Evening Post.)

This fantastic book has already sold over ten thousand copies, and it has only been in the book-shops for three days. It's popularity is the result of, firstly, its superb literary qualities, and, secondly, the amazing sequence of events it portrays. It is quite possible that this illustrated 298 page book will be one of the final eliminators for the BOOK OF THE YEAR award, and indeed, from the egoboo it was given by the aforementioned reviewer, I would hazard the guess that it will get the accolade without any opposition.

Mr.Friggitt states quite frankly that he was 'amazed how superbly Mr.Willis described the harrowing scene as he attempted to put out a oneshot in Siberia', and what is good enough for Mr. Friggitt is good enough for me, and, I would say, for the rest of fandom and the entire British reading public.

I do not want to spoil the story by dissecting its diverse chapters full of exciting and suspenseful reading, but in order to do full justice to my critique, I must of necessity reprint short passages from it, with, of course, the author's express permission.

Of course, the whole world knows of the mysterious disappearance of Walt Willis in 1962. He started out as usual from 170, Upper Newtownards Road, Belfast, on his rusty green Vespa. He was seen racing past the red traffic lights at the junction of North Road and the Upper Newtownards Road at 9.25 am. His haste was understandable under the circumstances, as the Minister of Home had an appointment with him at 9.15 am. Willis did not turn up for the appointment, and, later that day, his Vespa was found lying on its side on the driveway up to Stormont, the Northern Ireland Houses of Parliament. As a matter of interest, I was involved in the investigation myself, but the only thing I found wrong was that the Road Fund Tax was two years out of date.

Mrs. Willis could offer no explanation for her husband's disappearance, she said that he had no financial troubles, except that an account for 50 reams of duplicating paper was outstanding.

Rumours were rife as to his whereabouts. The DAILY EXPRESS printed a report that he was gun-running, with a base in Tangiers, and the influential County Fermanagh Reporter printed on the back page the revelation that he was the leader of the White Slave Traffic in Rio de Janeiro. Various fanzines published strange theories, and FANAC773 suggested that he was on a one-man expedition in Alaska looking for Big Foot. SKYRACK merely contented itself by reporting that 'HYPHEN is long overdue.'

The months passed by, and then, in April 1963, almost every well-known fan in most parts of the world received the first issue of RED STAR. The envelopes all bore a Moscow postmark, and under the PRINTED MATTER notice was, in small print, the plaintive 'If not delivered, please return to the Moscow State Fandom Corporation.'

The lead article, under the byline Ronbenny Tailius, was three pages long, and explained to a bewildered world, both fannish and mundane, that Willis had defected to behind the Iron Curtain, that Russian Fandom was great, and that duplicating paper was only a quarter of the price in Belfast.

The direct and indirect results of this defection were far-reaching...all the world's primary investigative teams scoured the world for clues, many fans were questioned.

In three short months, the second issue of RED STAR appeared, with a long letter-col, giving many BNF's names and addresses, each saying how superb RED STAR was, although most of the alleged writers denied all knowledge of sending such missives. No one could deny, however, that the fanzine was superb. The illustrations were in technicolour, the articles and stories were incredibly witty, and the illos were technically faultless. In an editorial, however, Walt Willis stated that he wished ATOM was there with him in Moscow to illo RED STAR, and that is thought to be one of the reasons why ATOM emigrated to Peru.

Mr. Willis writes some of his finest prose as he described his fan meetings in Moscow:-

'I am what is known as a BNF. I told them (writes Mr. Willis) that if they wanted to be true fans it was no use using the state-owned duplicators. I told them that the only true path was to obtain a battered duplicator, and ink that was too thick, and paper that was too thin. I told them that if they'd let me return to Belfast, I'd come back with all my kit.'

Unfortunately for Mr. Willis, spies in the fan group reported this observation, and the projected visit, which Willis explained to the Commissar was a form of TAFF, did not happen.

RED STAR 3 was an absolute classic. Three Nobel Prize Winners appeared on the CONTENTS page, which also included an abridged version of THE ENCHANTED DUPLICATOR, Shaw's CHANCE OF A GHOST, Dean Grennell's first article, a reprint of Blish's A CASE OF CONSCIENCE, chapter 3 of THE HARP STATESIDE, and an eleven-page editorial by Willis entitled A MESSAGE FOR GREGORY, which said even more emphatically that Russian Fandom was the Greatest !

We who had been privileged to know Willis were disturbed by this Communist propaganda, presumably emanating from his pen. In fact,

there was no presumption about it at all. Willis wrote every word.

Mr. Willis attempted to bring IF-type wit and humour into the Russian fannish amalgams. In Chapter Five, he writes:-

'In Vladivostok, I was Guest of Honour at the local science fiction circle. One of the fans, Vladimir Rakoff, produced a long article on spacial geometry which he wanted me to feature in RED STAR. He pestered me all evening, and at last, I took a neofan to one side and told him to go up the Vladimir in my presence, and say..."Crikey, that's difficult...those equations...whoosh...I've only just got to the stage of understanding what twenty-two over seven means." The neofan did as I told him; he was word perfect, and I raised my hand for silence as I said, as loudly as I could, in faultless Russian..."Oh, it's as easy as pie." But no one laughed. I buried my head in my hands, and....'

Mr. Willis describes in great detail his journeys to fans all over Russia. He was in Siberia, and he tried to interest the workers at a salt mine in publishing their own fanzine, but, as he put it so plaintively, "...the pore critturs hadn't got the strength the work the mimeo crank."

The last third of the book is taken up with a magnificent account of Mr. Willis's escape from Russia. By various subterfuges, which are enthralling in their devious complications, Mr. Willis got himself promoted to PRINCIPAL ADVISER TO THE RUSSIAN GOVERNMENT at the PRINTED MATTER RATES meeting in Budapest. It was in Budapest that Mr. Willis managed to elude his security guards, and after a number of adventures, which included living in a nunnery for three months, Mr. Willis eventually reached London disguised as Maria Callas.

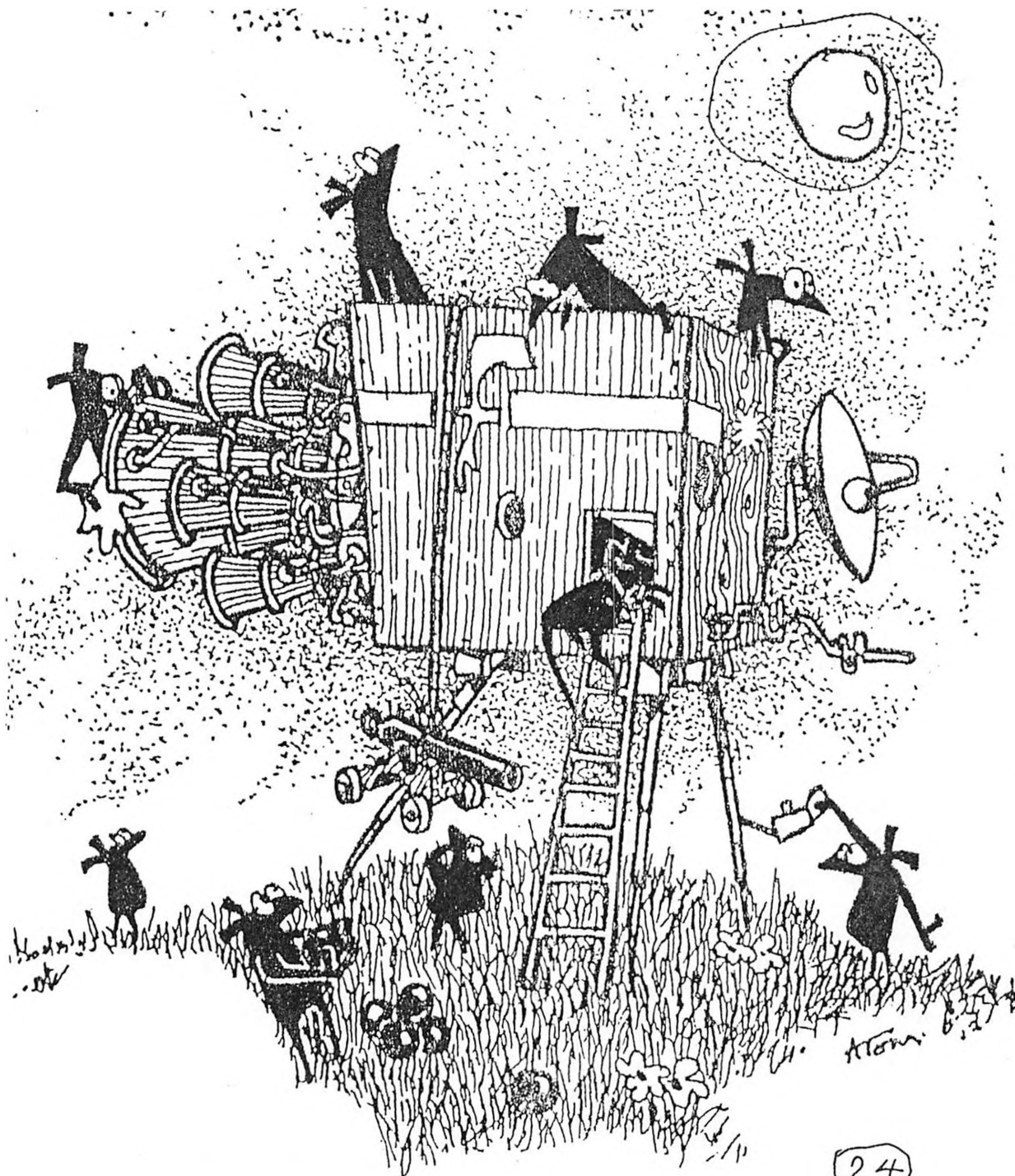
The final chapter contains some of the most telling prose I have ever read. Whilst incarcerated in the Tower of London, awaiting trial for Treason, Mr. Willis had ample time to prepare his defence, which he conducted himself. It is history now that after his Opening Speech, the Judge ordered his immediate release. This address, quoted in THE LAW WEEKLY as being 'one of the cleverest forensic examples of shrewd presentation of indisputable data,' is worthy of immortalisation. The Crime Reporter of the NEWS OF THE WORLD wrote :- '...with his fine noble features furrowed in thought, Walt Willis laid his facts with consummate skill.'

"I admit I edited RED STAR," he explained to the Court so eloquently, "but I did it for a purpose. I presumed that someone would have had the intelligence to see through my cleverly prepared clues. I tried so hard to tell you what happened to me. I hoped that someone would spot the connection between Ron Bennett aliases and Phoenix. I was incarcerated in the Japanese ship OTORI which sailed from Belfast two days after I was kidnapped. Surely it is obvious that OTORI is the Japanese for Phoenix. In my editorial, A MESSAGE FOR GREGORY, I vainly hoped that everyone would realise that although I had expressed my appreciation of Russian Fandom in glowing terms, the title completely demonstrated that in actual fact my article was nonsense, non-appreciative of the Russian Way of Life. In the name of humanity, someone should have realised that A MESSAGE FOR GREGORY referred to Gregg Calkins, who was in the United States Marines. In other words, I expected it to be noticed that the heading should have been read as 'Tell it to the Marines', a well-known term denoting disbelief. In the eighteen issues of RED STAR I presented clue after clue, but not one fan deciphered my references. I must say I was terribly disappointed with the G.D.A...."

The front cover of this magnificent volume shows Mr. Willis being presented with the George Cross by the Duke of Edinburgh. I appeal to all of you to purchase this book, this poignant human drama, this almost unbelievable story. No library is complete without it - I possess an autographed copy, and I wouldn't sell it for anything. There is much in this fine work of literary excellence, it will hold you, thrill you, grip you...make you realise that this fan was sent to us for a good reason...

And don't miss the upcoming movie. Mr. Willis is portrayed by Sir John Gielgud, and Vladimir Rakoff by Wee Willie Harris. A must in your diary.

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# IRISH FANDOM RUN DOWN.

It is history by now that, as a hairy-faced young neofan, I first stumbled over the potholes of 170 Upper Newtownards Road, Belfast, in 1954.

Seven years and five hundred stories later, I find it rather stimulating to look back and see some of the changes that have taken place in the interim.

First of all, let's take transport.

In 1954, Walt Willis, Bob Shaw and I possessed pedal cycles, in varying degrees of efficiency. One day, when three of them were propping up the fence at the side of Oblique House, it occurred to me that if a frightfully clever mechanic had the time and inspiration to work on the project, he could have made a really workable bicycle, utilising the most efficient parts of the three of them. Willis and myself had one brake apiece, Bob Shaw had the only good saddle ( I didn't have one in those days, figuring that the sharp metal tubing sort of spurred me on ) and with a little hammer-tapping; I'm sure that two of the six wheels could have been made completely circular. Of course, to complete the job, the mythical mechanic would have had to have purchased a bell and a set of mudguards, but even our most avid critic couldn't accuse any of us of being static. We were able to move around. I sometimes feel sorry for Walt Willis. He worked at Stormont, which is a most magnificent building, with a three-quarter-mile tree-lined avenue leading to it, and in order that the Prime Minister wouldn't feel that his Rolls Royce was being made an object of ridicule, Willis had to park his bike in a wood and walk purposely past the Rolls Royce, and I have it on good authority that such was the technique employed by Willis whilst passing the Roller that most of the officials at Stormont thought it actually belonged to Willis, though I certainly wouldn't agree to the fact that Willis started the rumour that the Prime Minister parked his pedal cycle in the wood.

Being sort of proud, I always gave my bicycle a good oiling, and it was certainly gratifying to cycle down the Ormeau Road and see Bob Shaw sitting on the edge of the pavement trying to weave his cycle spokes back into the rim again. Some people have no feeling at all for inanimate machinery.

Bob Shaw then left us, to go to Canada for a couple of years, and Walt Willis and I rose up the social scale in no uncertain manner. Many thousands of words have been slaughtered in attempting to describe my motor-assisted pedal cycle, but no one has previously heard of the trials and tribulations Willis had to undergo with his Vespa.

Yes, you all no doubt know what a Vespa is...Willis noted that I had a motor to power my pedal cycle, and he was so jealous that he went one better. I still had to pedal to get my machine started, but once it was in gear I could whizz along at fifteen miles an hour quite happily. Willis purchased a seventh-hand Vespa because he didn't want to pedal at all. Just a flick of the gears and away he went in a cloud of green smoke.

In Irish Fandom, in some things, there is a sort of mental block. We are very good at some things. Excellent at others. Even quite brilliant at one or two. But when it comes to a piston



and a sparking plug and a quarter of a pint of petrol, things go haywire. My machine met its Waterloo one horrible day when a garage attendant misunderstood my order, somewhat distracted by the appearance of the machine, and put in 90% of oil and 10% of petrol, instead of the other way round.

Willis, however, had much more frustrating things to worry about. My own opinion, for what it's worth ( and I admit I'm no expert ) is that the pipe which took the petrol to the engine had a short circuit...possibly in the close proximity of a small fan. I do not know whether a fan is a component part of the engine of a Vespa, but I cannot recall ever having seen such a minute spray of petrol and black stuff when Willis put his machine in gear for the first time. Willis looked like a black man with a poker-dot shirt. Willis took the machine to a garage, and as far as I know they are still blasting away to try and get a peep of the engine.

So, in a very short time, Walt Willis and I were back on pedal cycles again, quieter and much wiser.

Then Bob Shaw came back from Canada, and drew up outside Oblique House one night in a grey Triumph Mayflower, which is some car.

This was a subtle ploy.

George Charters made the first counter-ploy by purchasing a brand new pedal cycle, with mudguards, wheels and a bell, as well as front and rear lights, an innovation unheard of in Irish Fandom

Willis's masterstroke was to purchase a green Morris Minor. It's sheer poetry to be driven about by Walt Willis. When he's driving you about town, you don't have to worry about such trivialities as him driving on the wrong side of the road, or mounting the pavement, or playing tag with 'buses. Oh, he does all these things, and more, but you don't have to worry about them, as I said. All you've got to do is to sit there with one hand on the handle of the opened door and keep your eyes closed and wait for the muttered 'bloody hell'. Then you jump.

Ian McAuley, that rising Southern Ireland fan, who is at present living with us in Belfast, also has a nice car, and it is quite inspiring to go to a meeting of Irish Fandom and see the bevy of automobiles parked outside 170. I don't feel I'm letting them down by parking my pedal cycle close to them. I've got a saddle on it now...

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Let's consider sport.

Way back in the mid fifties, Ghoddminton was all the rage. This might be hard to believe, but I wrote twenty seven articles about it way back, so I don't want to re-hash it all, save to say it's rather like indoor Badminton, except there are no rules, it is accepted as a Blood Sport, and it is a satisfying way of getting rid of frustrations by breaking furniture and bones, mostly in that order.

But now all the brutality has gone, and all is culture.

SCRABBLE is the new buzz-word.

Willis and McAuley play it all the time. It's like a three-dimensional crossword puzzle, and you require a superb intellect and a whacking thick dictionary to play it.

It fills me with wonder to listen to these great minds

(27)

having a SCRABBLE session. One night I took notes...here they are, verbatim:-

"Er, swiffoo."

"SWIFFOO ??? No such word."

"Like to bet ?

"Course I'd like to bet. Pass me that dictionary."

"Bet you a cigarette there isn't such a word."

"O.K."

"O.K."

"Here we go...SWIFFOO...a type of back-scratcher used by Papuan virgins during pre-puberty rites during a monsoon, discovered and reported by Bert Perkins, a sailor of fortune, who..."

"O.K."

"Your move."

"Kimpa."

"KIMPA ???"

"Yes. Something to do with parasites which attack beetle's knees. Studied it once. Absorbing. I recall...hey...there's no such word as ZXFFGY."

"Bet you there is."

"Oh, for crying out loud...pass the dictionary."

It's nice to know that such wonderful intellects are guiding us minor fannish brains on the Proper Road to Trufandom.

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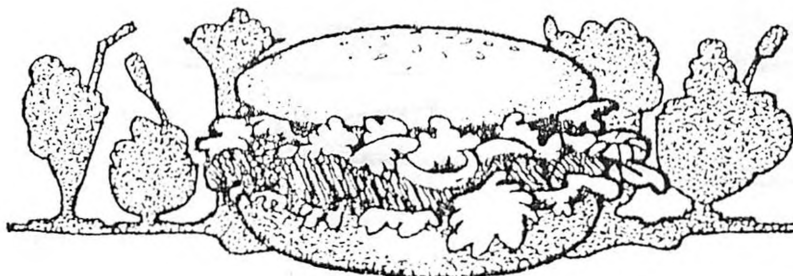
I mentioned culture back there somewhere. Suddenly in Irish Fandom, we have all become lovers of classical music.

Walt Willis, Ian McAuley, Bob Shaw and myself all have record players, and it is now the done thing that whenever we meet at each others houses, the strains of a classical performance echos in the background. Last night, even, Ian McAuley called, and at 1 am this morning we were enthralled with the superb experience of Beethoven's Fifth.

But the production of HYPHEN still holds us together, although the dynamic Ian McAuley tries to hurry us and produce the fanzine on a more frequent basis...all he tells us now is deadlines...more corflu, have the ATOM illo 's arrived, "knock me up a quick article about wardrobes, John, and its dramatic effect on your love life."

Now, if only I could get them all interested in THAT.

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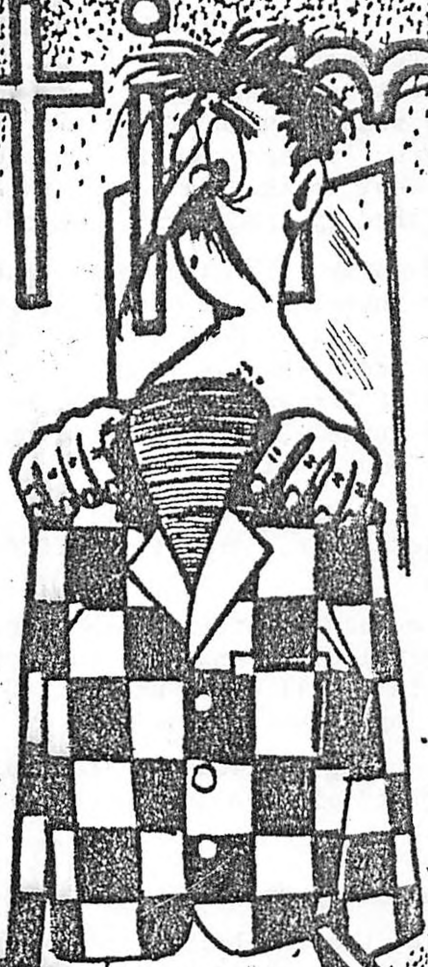
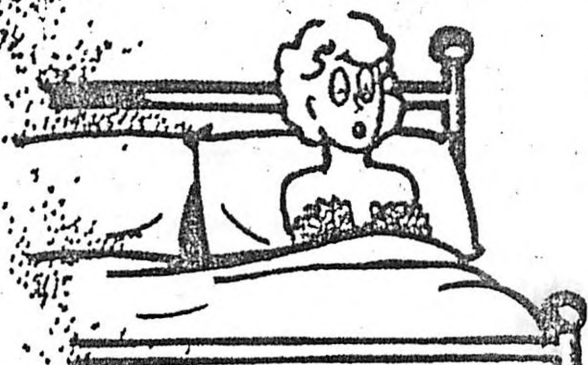
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# bedtime Story



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The fanzine publishing this story, besides having a most commendable appreciation of the more intellectual type of literary contribution, is being in the fortunate position of featuring a world scientific scoop.

To us of this esoteric microcosm the mundane must of necessity create a want. Facts are all right in their place, but what I have always felt we have shown is a particular affinity for the facts behind the facts. The mundane world accepts data on its face value, but we of fandom do not. The NEW YORK HERALD-TRIBUNE could, for example, publish the bald statement that Robert Heinlein was seen coming out of a Pittsburg hotel with his shirt soaking wet. So okay. The readership is contented...there is perhaps an element of doubt as to how his shirt was soaked, but the fact that it was wet is what is significant. We know that in point of fact he was just previously engrossed in a zap battle with Les Gerber and Chuck Devine, but to the lay press, this would seem invidious. (That word is published by kind permission of Walt Willis.)

And to my telling point. In the January 1962 issue of the NEW SCIENTIST there will be a several-page feature by 'Our Correspondent.' It will deal with a revolutionary new collection of scientific facts which will astound even such acknowledged intellectuals of Professor Kimble of Peanut University fame, and Lord Bertrand Russell, who once appeared in a publication which also featured James White.

As I said, the facts will be laid bare, but the facts behind the facts...ah...that is a different kettle of tiddlers altogether...

Of necessity, then, this version of the secret experiment will appear garbled. I can only speak of my own innocent participation, and this I will do in unscientific jargon, principally because I don't know any scientific jargon.

A warning. Because of the adult theme, I strongly suggest that only married of 'Men and Women of the World' read this...

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I have been married for twelve years.

This, besides being a statement of fact which I can prove beyond doubt ( the day the Curate of St. Peter's entered the Mental Hospital is encribed on the church records) is pertinent to the narrative, as far as I can take it. I mean, we all have our moments, but after twelve years you can take it from me that upon entering my bed chamber ( which of course I share with my beloved) at night, my thoughts are divided between a desire to sleep and the urge to finish chapter three of THE DEAD SEA SCROLLS. I know my prestige will suffer in America because of this admission, but as I said...twelve years...

Now on Sunday 11th of June 1961, at 2 am, a very funny thing happened in my bedroom.

I presumed my wife was asleep.

I was not.

I was reflecting on some minor points of a thesis I had been studying regarding the effects of the Ming Dynasty on the current political situation in Astrakhan. I was lying on my back with my hands clasped behind my head, and I really was concentrating, when the bed collapsed.



Just like that.

My wife, muttering something unintelligible, but which definitely included the words..."don't tell my mother"...switched on the light, and we surveyed the debris.

To put it briefly, the cast iron fitting on the bottom of the bed ( on my wife's side) onto which the bed rail is screwed had broken at the joint. It was impossible to fix, and we had to sort out the remains of the bed, and fix a make-shift resting place for the rest of the night.

Beyond sending a letter of complaint to the ACME BED SPRING COMPANY (I've never had any trouble with their wardrobes ) all I did about the incident was to make the fundamental error of mentioning the fact to the members of Irish Pandom. They thought it was quite humorous, actually, and Sadie Shaw and Madeleine Willis looked at me with pride in their eyes all night long. They didn't seem to believe the bit about my Ming Dynasty meditations, they sort of intimated that cast iron, is, weeeell, cast iron...

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Towards the end of July 1961, a letter came from the aforementioned ACME BED SPRING COMPANY...a letter enclosed in a parcel which held the smartest pair of men's pyjamas you ever did see...a new style, the letter explained...black and white squares, about three inches square each...most becoming, even fetching, my wife considered. Also enclosed in the parcel was a new set of four cast iron mouldings. The covering letter was versed most politely, explaining that the Company took great pride in its manufactured articles, and even though the bed had functioned for over a decade, such was their standing that they felt impelled to replace the mouldings, and as a sort of gesture they had taken the liberty of including the pyjamas, which they hoped I would deem worthy of wearing when I went to bed, safe in the knowledge that their iron castings were supporting me.

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From then on, things began to take a decidedly sinister aspect, although in my sublime innocence I made the wrong interpretation.

We all know that Ian McAuley comes under the category of a 'Man of the World'. It is not for me to write in detail about the chorus girls he has taken home in his car (although I must state that if you are interested in McAuley's sex life, I strongly recommend you read HAM ROLE in this publication), but even James White has attested to the enviable fact that when Ian McAuley gets a young girl in his car he assumes (Quote..."indecent haste... Unquote).

It is also well known that Ian McAuley is a man with considerable education and intelligence, and it surprised me, therefore, that after a week's trip to London ( he often makes such trips, but then it didn't seem significant) which he made in August, our intellectaul discussions were oft interrupted by such telling questions as..."On which side of the bed do you sleep ?" ...and..."Do your bed springs give any high decibel frequency ?"

One incident, which even now I do not profess to understand, happened in early September.

We were playing SCRABBLE in my house, and at 10 pm, Ian asked for a drink of milk. This was significant in itself, as he usually drinks lager, but Diane gave him a glass of milk.

He went upstairs on a mundane pretext, and then went home.

In bed that night, I looked under the bed for my volume of THE HIGHER ETHICS OF UNCONSCIOUS THOUGHT, and saw a strange contraption...the glass of milk was under the bed, and suspended above it was a length of cord from which hung a wooden stick about six inches long...the bottom of the stick just skimmed the top of the milk. Well, McAuley is a scientist, and I presumed this to be one of his madly scientific experiments.

I didn't have time to look under the bed in the morning, because I was late for the office, but that night Diane told me Ian had called for the glass of milk, and appeared most bewildered when she gave him a glass of butter.

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On the evening of the Irish Fandom party at my house, McAuley's behaviour was remarkable in its bewildering complexities.

When he thought no one was looking, he put the clocks forward three hours.

We chatted and discoursed, until 3 am (although it was obviously only twelve midnight) and Ian suggested that if I didn't mind maybe they could all stop the night, because the sound of their cars starting up would waken and annoy the neighbours...

I was host, and although the sleeping accommodation was limited, I acceded to his request, and Ian McAuley, who was scheduled to sleep on the settee downstairs, seemed to be throbbing with excitement when he said 'goodnight' to us...

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Now I've given you the background facts.

They are for you to interpret as you deem necessary.

But in order to assist you in what will be a gigantic mental exercise, I can but reprint (without permission) some lengthy data from the transcript of 'OUR CORRESPONDENT' who is, of course, Ian McAuley. The mss isn't due for publication yet, next January, in fact, and I must plead that my readership will not get McAuley or myself into legal trouble by revealing publicly that you have been privileged to see how a Great Mind works when given an apparently unsolvable problem...

You are in a unique position.

I may be able to swing a similar deal again...

So keep it to yourself, huh?

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#### REPRINT :-

'...and in view of the fact that little is known of the behaviour of metal bed castings when under stress it was decided to initiate some preliminary research on this topic.

A firm of manufacturers of bed castings approached the writer with a sample of casting which had collapsed under what was claimed to be normal usage.

Spectroscopic examination of the fractured article indicated that failure had occurred as a result of large amplitude vibrations at moderately high frequencies.

The manufacturers were able to supply the name and

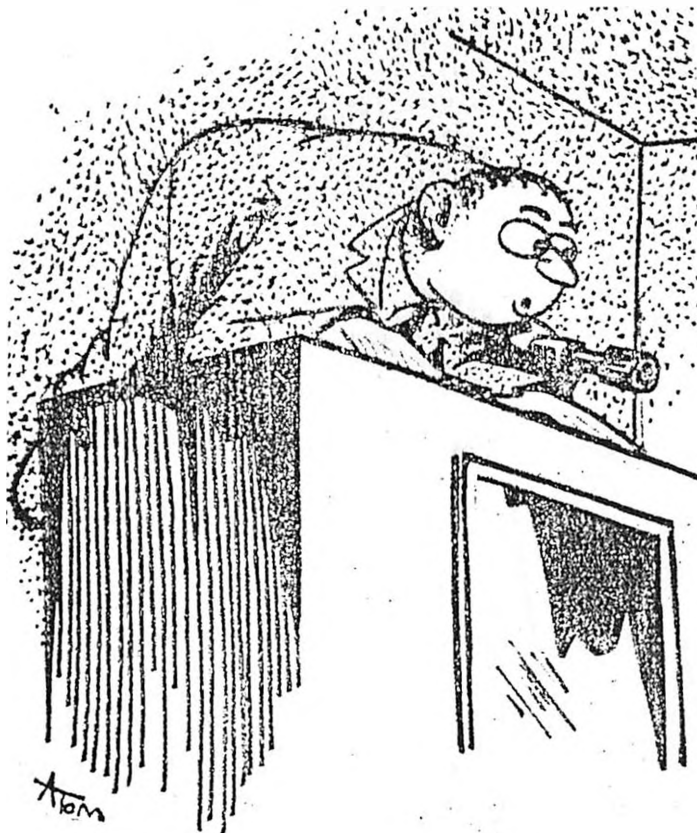
address of the user of the fractured casting, who resided at 31, Campbell Park Avenue, Belfast, which was conveniently placed for the taking of experimental observations.

Accordingly it was necessary to devise a scheme whereby readings could be obtained of the frequency to which the casting was subjected under conditions of normal use in this household.

The writer was able to obtain access to the bedroom of the user for long enough to conceal an infra-red stroboscope and automatically operated camera on the wardrobe.

After the couple under observation had retired for the night it was necessary to enter the sleeping quarters in a stealthy fashion in order to make adjustments to the experimental arrangement, which was successfully done.

In a position of observation on top of the much-worn wardrobe, the initiation of the high frequency vibrations was audibly apparent.



At this juncture, the stroboscope flash frequency was adjusted until the agent producing the vibrations appeared stationary in the infra-red viewer. (This was made easier by the fact that the dominant subject was attired in black and white squared pyjamas). This frequency was noted as 1,900 cycles per second, plus or minus one percent.

The equipment in use did not have sufficiently large range to record the amplitudes reached, but the period for which the frequency

was applied was slightly in excess of 44.5 minutes.

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Laboratory tests were carried out on a similar casting obtained from the same manufacturer. This indicated that complete metal fatigue of the casting in question could be expected after 6,740 hours, plus or minus 20 hours.

The normal life time of a casting of this sort might be expected to be in excess of twenty five years and it might be considered that one recorded failure occurred as the result of gross overloading at a critical frequency.

As a result of this investigation it may be firmly stated that there is no cause for alarm amongst normal users of metal castings of this type, but further research into the

amplitude vibrations occurring in a small number of cases similar to that described in this paper should be initiated.

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In conclusion, the writer would like to thank the ACME BED SPRING COMPANY for sponsoring this research and providing financial assistance, etc...

END OF REPRINT.

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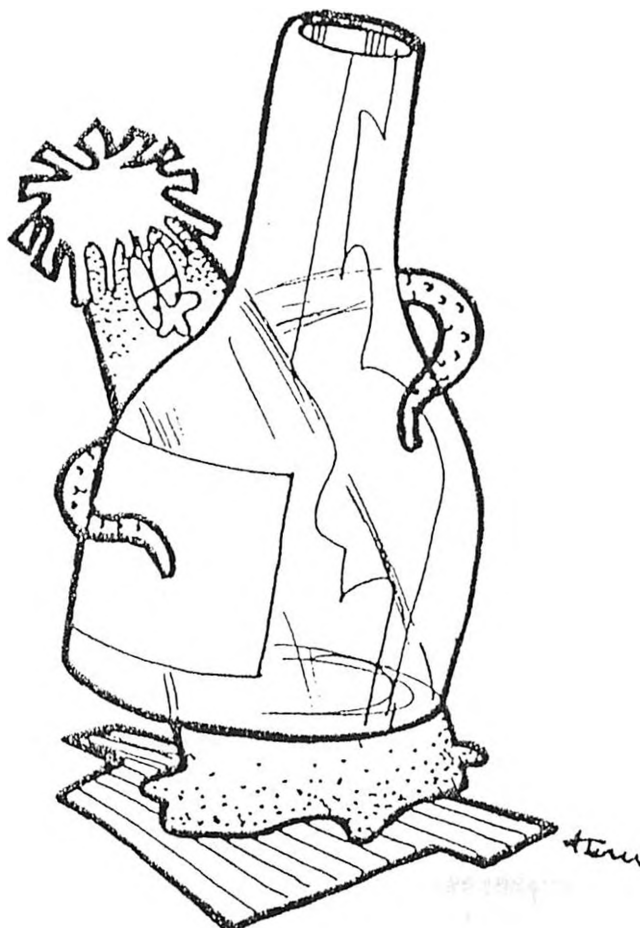
That's the end of the amazing story, folks.

One other minor matter springs to mind, though.

Remember I said that Ian McAuley suggested that they should all stop the night at MON DEBRIS...as host, I naturally gave our bedroom to the Willises...Walt told me next morning that he though those black and white squared pyjamas were very contemporary...

(The author would like to thank Dr.Ian McAuley, B.A, Ph.D, for technical assistance.)

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# Egoboo Brummell



The advent of wealth into Irish Fandom was a gradual affair. I sometimes consider I was rather slack in not noticing it earlier, but what with trying to work out puns and trying to keep up with the conversation, my mind was too occupied to notice the mounting details. But when I scraped the mudwing of James White's Rolls Royce with a rusted spoke of my pedal cycle, I did begin to notice things. A gold watch hanging from Peggy White's heavily braceleted wrist...Walt lighting a Balkan Sobrani with a dirty ten shilling note...Madeleine sporting a tiara... thick plush carpets at 170, to say nothing of servants and gardeners. It became embarrassing to arrive at Olique House, what with a Rolls Royce ( James), a chauffeur-driven Bentley (George Charters) and a Chrysler ( Walt Willis), parked at the kerb. I eventually arrived at the subterfuge of leaving my bike outside the dentist's surgery next door, although one day, by force of habit, I went up the nearest pathway. I needed a few fillings, anyway.

But I made a few astute observations and arrived at a startling series of facts. For some time, James had been writing film scripts and also had five book-length novels published. He had also recently been promoted to Sartorial Consultant in Excelsis for the Ulster branch of a well-known firm of gentlemen's outfitters.

Walt Willis had been promoted to Chief Secretary to the Minister of Finance at a salary of over two thousand pound per annum. Finally, George Charters, what with his old age pension, his Boer War, World War I and World War II post-war credits, plus the interest of many score years of investment, had become one of the richest men in Bangor - a locality noted for the wealth of its inhabitants.

The three of them and their dependants oozed money and they demonstrated quite clearly that they knew how to spend it. Their clothing portrayed their move from middle to upper class...morning suits, spats, polished shoes, evening dresses, jewellery....

Sad to state, I alone of the members of IF had not been smitten by the doodle-bug and continued to eke out my existence and maintain my family on a barely sufficient wage. All the same, I did not really envy them their wealth and was content that they should remain friends with me.

But one day I pointed out to Walt the discrepancy in our appearances.

"Mr.Willis," I said, "this isn't Irish Fandom any more. I alone am maintaining the traditions that you so nobly introduced

in the early fifties. Look at me...doesn't it make you feel nostalgic?" I pointed to my duplicating ink-stained trousers, torn shirt, odd socks, untidy hair, dirty fingernails and two-day growth of stubble. "This was you, sir," I pleaded, "until this filthy lucre affected you. We can't have this gulf between us." I turned beseechingly to each of them in turn. "Walt...James... George, can't you hear my plea?"

George signalled to his chauffeur to cross his legs for him.

Walt spoke. "Berry has a point," he observed, fondling the solid gold switch on his tape recorder. "I vote that we arrange a new ritual to take us back to Berry's level...for old time's sake... Yeeeee. This is what we'll do..."

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The genius of Walt Willis triumphed and once more Irish Pandom reverted back to the good old days. His ploy to affect this change was brilliant in the extreme; it altered their radical appearance without allowing their prestige amongst the local populace outside to wane because they changed to a new outfit before...hold on, let me go into detail...

Walt's new stratagem was the construction of a FANAC REVERSION ROOM on the second floor. As before, the automobiles were parked outside the house and the resplendent fen strolled up to the portals of 170. But instead of turning right into the drawing room ( out of bounds to me ) they stepped onto the escalator and were carried to the second floor, to the FANAC REVERSION ROOM, soon termed the F.R.R. Here they took it in turns to enter the door marked IN. Imagine for a moment that James White was the first client for reversion. He would stand pompously outside IN. He would be dressed in silk top hat, morning suit, cravat, spats, umbrella and gilt typer. He would knock and enter. Inside, the DUPLICATING INK PROCESSOR, a fully trained employee of the Gestetner company, would expertly spew judicious dribblets of black ink over James's apparel. With a polite bow the inker would indicate the next operator, the UNTIDY HAIR MANIPULATOR, who would whisk off the top hat and turn on three hair dryers, shoving the hot-air-ejecting nozzles onto the White scalp. Shortly, James's hair would be hanging over his face. Satisfied with their craftsmanship, the dryer would push James to the final of the trio, the MISCELLANEOUS REVISOR. This chap sported a comprehensive kit of instruments. He would look at James professionally, and, noting flaws in the apparition, would do his level best to adjust them. He might, for example, slash a few jagged tears in the clothing, maybe pry open a shoe to expose the toes, or even append an 'I'VE NO CHANGE' badge on the remains of a coat lapel, a reminder of the days when Willis used to try and flog us prozines.

The OUT door would open and James White would stagger out, the James White of yore, the sartorial horror, fully geared for another IF session.

The others ( excluding myself ) went through more or less the same ritual, and we really felt happy again, playing with our plonker guns, or having enthusiastic games of ghoddminton, maybe even running off an odd issue of HYPHEN on the old duper as a change from Walt's new fanzine, BOODLE, published by Temple Press, Ltd, London.

One would maybe consider it a trifle extravagant for the others to waste a complete rigout of clothing per fannish session,



but with the money they had it would have appeared bourgeois to have in their possession a special suit of old clothes. So they were fixed up every time, James White making sure that when the meeting concluded a new change of clothing would be ready, which was part of his contract.

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Naturally, the fame of IF's wealth spread all over the fannish world. At conventions, the other members of IF hired an entire floor at an hotel for themselves and their servants, whilst I kipped down at the local doss house. It came as no surprise, therefore, that in the numerous polls appearing in fanzines, a new category was added - 'The Best Dressed Fan Group'.

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We were seated in the fan-attic, the rest of them disgustedly sipping tea, when Walt brushed the hair from his eyes and addressed the group.

"Ladies and gentlemen and, oh, er, well, he can't help it. As you know, for the third year in succession we have been unanimously voted the best dressed fan group, and so the Willis Trophy becomes our own property. Glad I ordered a gold one. Mr. Edward Carnell, of London, is coming over to Belfast to present the prize next Sunday, so let's all be here to see him."

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It was obvious that Ted Carnell was wealthy, too, but he wasn't in the same financial class as the others. Just the same, I could see why he had been chosen to present us with the trophy. He was ostentatiously dapper. His glasses were jewel-tinted, his small moustache clipped just so, his morning suit fitted him like a Marilyn Monroe dress ( though not quite so seductively ) and a pink carnation leered from his buttonhole. After cocktails he suggested we move to the fan room for the presentation.

By now the F.R.R. was purely instinctive to the rest of them and as I didn't have to go through it I waited, as usual, in the fan room, for them to assemble after the treatment. Ted Carnell seemed to be rather perplexed when he eventually staggered amongst us. His REVERSION had been complete, even down to the shredded carnation. His eyes, wide with bewilderment, scrutinised us from beneath his frizzy hair. He gulped.

"I - I have been asked to present the WILLIS TROPHY to you because, for the third year in succession, fandom has voted you the Best Dressed Fan Group. If I may say so, I find it rather... oh well, it was a unanimous vote and it's too late now to protest. Therefore it gives me much chagrin to present Walt, on behalf of you all, the WILLIS TROPHY."

He sank to his knees and we congratulated each other. Actually, I was the only person who spoke...

Then Ted continued in a horribly strained voice.

"For a reason I do not fully comprehend, a grant has been made from the over-subscribed TAFF Fund and this other cup, henceforth known as the TAFF TROPHY, made of solid pewter, is hereby presented to...to..."

He looked at us, one by one; at the great blobs of ink generously splattered over us, at the ripped clothes, untidy hair, gaping shoes...

"To, oh no, I can't go on."

Ted broke into pitiful sobs of remorse. I have never seen a man in such a neurotic condition. Finally we slapped him back to reality and he surveyed us again through bloodshot eyes.

"I was asked to make the final decision, and I see no alternative but to present this TAFF TROPHY to..." more uncontrolled sobs..." to John Perry as the Best Dressed Fan of the Best Dressed Fan Group."

I stepped over their prostrate bodies and picked up my award, thankful that, for once, I had combed my hair. It must have been a close decision.

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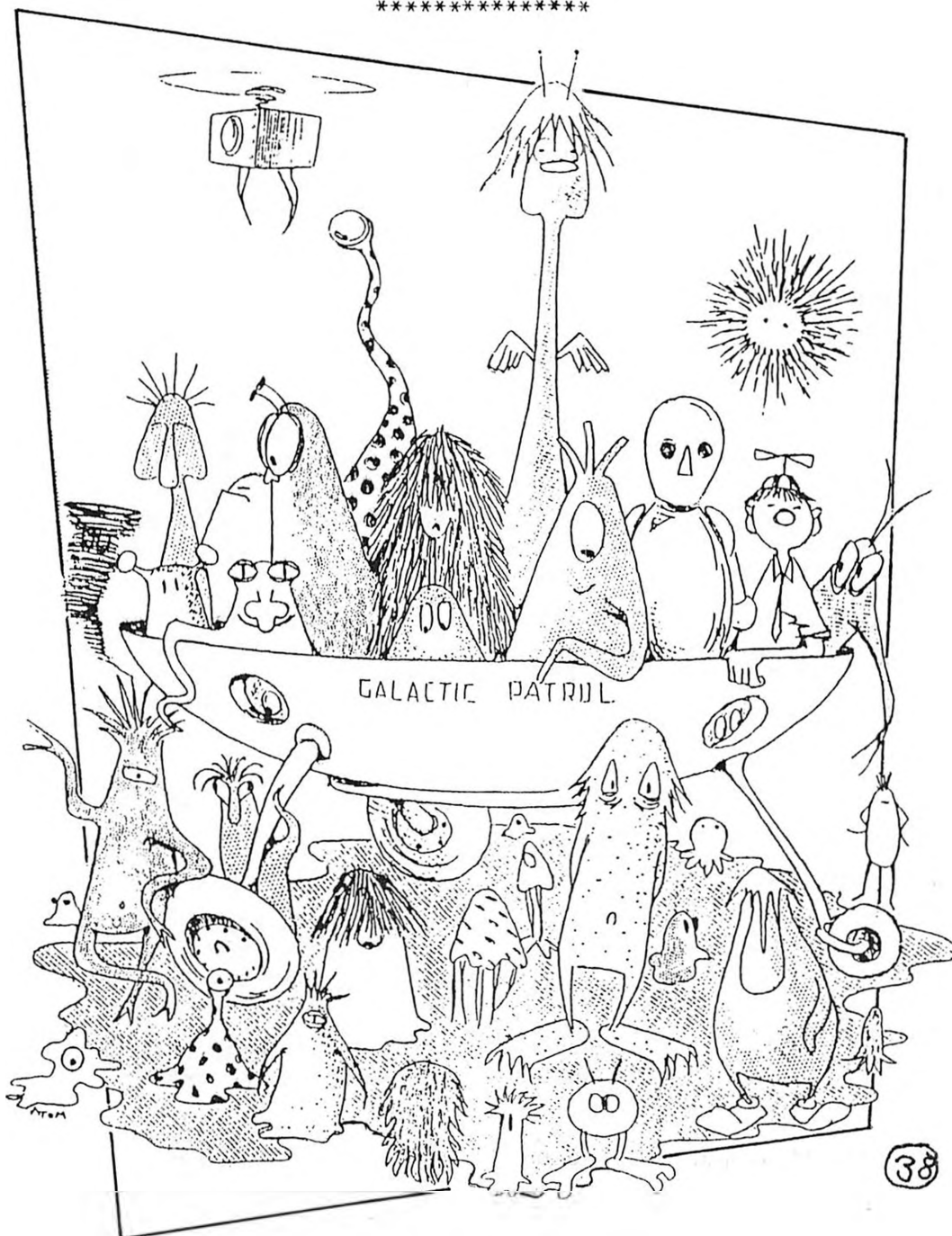
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I look a mite stupid in a top hat, and I feel like a penguin in this long-tailed morning coat, but if I wish to remain a member of IF - and I do - I've got to wear it. It makes me feel more at ease amongst them, you know, and I have my newly-found prestige to think of and in five year's time I will have finished paying for it.

James White is very considerate...

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# a family affair...



Other than seeing George Charters at fan meetings at 170, we never met socially...insofar as his personal domain was concerned, he was as reticent as Harry Warner Jnr. A group of us did call at his house (TEE HEE), and I found it so fascinating, with all his fanzines, prozines and Wild West books on display, that I decided to make a surprise call on him, rather as Dick Eney and I did in Hagerstown in '59.

3, Lancaster Avenue, Bangor, County Down, does not attract attention...in passing, you wouldn't even notice the house, which is presumably the reason for the writhing privit hedge. Once I forced open the front gate, the pathway (purposely unkempt to stall the unwelcome visitor) doesn't provide too much of an obstacle provided you've done a Commando Obstacle Course.

Actually, I did the army course in 1944, so the barbed wire and ditch didn't provide more than temporary respite. Eventually I got to the front door...I pushed the bell, and deep down in the bowels of the earth, where I judged a cellar to be, I heard the resultant 'boing'.

Eventually George appeared...he had two .45's, one on each hip.

"Oh, er, John," he said, "glad to, er, see you."

"I had nothing to do this Sunday, George," I explained, "so I thought it would give me material for an article if I wrote an article about your house. Can I come in?"

"Oh, er, most certainly...COME IN", he shouted. I fancied I saw him making mystic movements with his right hand - the one almost behind the door.

He gave me a chair in the lounge. He sat opposite me ...giving me the beady eye. The shawl, the pattern round the hem depicting a lot of stags at bay, hung loosely over his shoulders.

"Well," he said, as though he was in a hurry.

"George," I said, craning forward. He had a red mark on one cheek. "Er, you have correctine on your face."

"Correctine on my face?" he thundered. For a moment I thought he was going to do a fairly fast draw, but the itching fingers only served to pull a tartan blanket further round his knees as he reached for a heavy silver hand-mirror which lay on a hand-carved sideboard. He blinked at what he saw, then, with a deft movement of a gnarled hand, he wiped off the mark in one swipe...

"I was cutting stencils," he muttered.

"I like the decor, George," I confessed. I did, too. Above the marble fireplace was a painting of a shaggy Highland bull, horns rampant, looking at a cow a couple of hills away. The gilt frame was worn and chipped, but it had obviously been in the Charters family for decades. On the other side of the fireplace were almost life-size statues of Roman maidens ('Vestal Virgins,' George confided, with the emphasis on 'Vestal') clothed in nothing except bunches of grapes. George told me that they reminded him of his studies of the Roman Classics.

On the far wall was an enlarged Goya, and strangely enough, on other walls, were paintings of gals in artistic poses.

The furniture was Victorian but tasteful...and near the fireplace (a homely touch, this) was a rough wooden structure on which clothing was hanging, the better to get warmed by the heat from the crackling logs. The clothing was what you'd expect from a confirmed bachelor...a red woollen vest, three pairs of khaki socks with newly-mended holes in them, two pairs of long underpants, several large handkerchieves, a brassiere, a thick scarf, a....

A brassiere ?

"Er - where's your, er, sister, George ?" I asked. "Is she preparing tea ?" I hinted.

"Sister...sister ? What nonsense " he remonstrated...then his rheumy eyes flickered for a second or two towards the clothes-drier...

"Did I tell you I was taking up the Flamenco ?" he suddenly asked.

Before I could reply he leapt to his feet, only his gritted teeth betraying the extreme physical action with the movement. He swirled the tartan blanket round his shoulders, spun it once more like a matador with a sudden urge of exhibitionism, and in doing so it flashed across the clothes-drier; and then George sat down again, breathless. I stole a look at the clothing, the bra was missing, and whilst he was shuffling with his bag of humbugs, I swear I saw something shiny and black being eased into his cardigan pocket.

"I'd like to see again your celebrated Max Brand Collection, and your Science Fiction Prozone Collection," I said, when I noted that my subtle hint about having tea hadn't taken effect.

George seemed to ponder over that one. Then he shouted, literally shouted, "Oh, my books...we're going to the library." Then he tapped his walking stick sharply against the ceiling. "It's that room above us," he told me; and then he shouted really loudly, "WE'RE GOING UP TO THE LIBRARY."

I was inclined to tell him that I wasn't deaf, as his shouting reverberated round the room, but he was still toting the .45's, and, let's face it, I was really anxious to thoroughly examine his famous collections.

He stepped remarkably quickly ahead of me, up the wide staircase, with deep plush blue carpet, and into the room, filled from floor to ceiling with all the prozines you've ever heard of...ASTOUNDINGS, IFs...AMAZINGS...F&SFs...all the British reprints. And then his Max Brand books...old ones...new ones...hard covers...soft covers...a proverbial goldmine of Western literature.

He was looking proudly at them, glasses pushed back onto his wrinkled forehead, when I heard a noise next door, from where I judged his bedroom to be - I mean, it had GEORGE'S BUNKHOUSE burned on it.

"Burglars," I panted, trying to race past him and perform my constabulary duty and apprehend the criminal.

"I'll catch the pesky varmit," yelled George, and drew the .45's. He went into his room and slammed the door after him. I heard voices...his, and a delicate female voice. Then silence. A few moments passed...then a couple of sighs were heard, and he returned to the library, .45's pouched.

"No one there," he said with finality.

"Er, George," I panted, "you've got correctine on your face again."

He wiped it off with a blue-spotted handkerchief, staggered down the stairs, and I followed him.

"I'd love you to stop for tea," he mouthed, pushing me out of the front door, "but I've got a lot of work to do on my next Max Brand anthology...please come again, one day..."

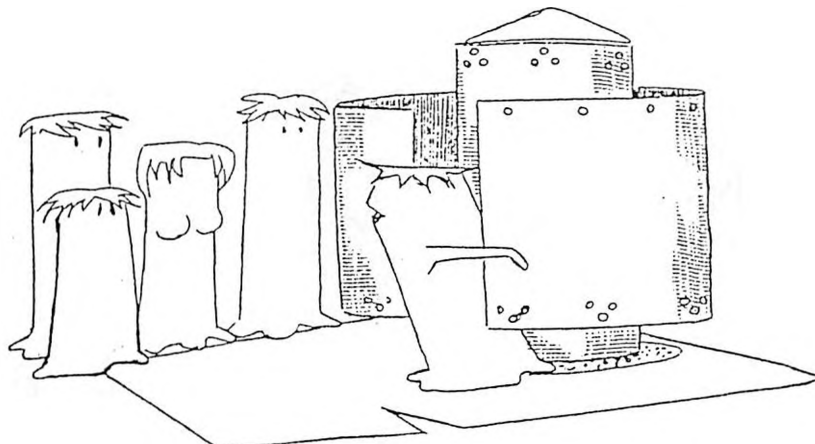
I fought my way to Lancaster Avenue again, and when I reached the safety of it, I just had to lean on the gate of Number 3 and take one more lingering glance at the house.

(I saw a highly-polished Bentley parked at the end of Lancaster Avenue, with a bored-looking chauffeur grimacing out of the window. I memorised the index number of the automobile, and when I turned the corner, I jotted it down. Later, I was able to use my constabulary references to find the name of the owner... The Honourable Penelope Murphy...noooooo... it couldn't be.)

Yes, there's no doubt about it, George sure has a damn fine collection of books, and now that he has started his very own fanzine, THE SCARR, it should be a notable literary landmark, one that will be remembered for years to come. Maybe it will even win a HUGO, who knows?

But if perchance his schedule appears to flag somewhat, don't hold it against him. He'll be doing his best...but we all have our little diversions, don't we?

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"CHEAP THOUGH IT IS, I DOUBT IT  
WILL BE SUITABLE FOR A CLUB ROOM."



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# THE HISTORY OF IRISH FANDOM, PART V.

When Walt Willis asked me to write this chapter, he little expected me to stagger up the hallowed steps of 170 Upper Newtownards Road with four inches of closely-typed manuscript. You see, I have so far only typed a few lines, but I know that my account of the goings-on of Irish Fandom since 1954 will just go on and on. I mean, you have only to cast your minds back to the 1955/57 era to recall that my Irish Fandom stories appeared in many, many fanzines. And although I freely admit there was a wealth of fable, the facts so described were only a fragment of the fascinating things which took place. The easy way for me to write about my experiences in Irish Fandom would be to place all those stories in chronological order and reprint snippets of them, in the form of an omnibus edition. But I know for a fact that, of necessity, my stories are read in much more inconspicuous places than public transport, so that project fails by the wayside. I know exactly what I am going to do. I am going to allow my fingers to wander over the keys of this typewriter as they will. I am going to think back to that fabulous day when I read the name 'Walt Willis'...I am going to force myself into an abstract trance and write exactly what comes into my head. I have discovered after writing thousands of words in fandom that the more spontaneous phrases are always the most effective and realistic and truthful. You'll see...

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For a goodly number of years I had been an avid science fiction reader, and in those days fanzine review columns were a feature of most of the prozines. It soon came to my notice that a person in Belfast by the name of Walt Willis published a fanzine which was always getting rave notices...and, what's more, it seemed that he was a prolific writer of the highest grade. I knew nothing of fanzines, save that they were synonymous with science fiction, and as this exalted personality actually only lived about three miles from my home I was prompted to inquire further. Willis, of course, was canny. I sent him a postal order for a sub for HYPHEN, and it was three weeks before he replied. On his invitation I went to Oblique House, and it all started from there.

Walt lent me a batch of prozines and fanzines, and I spent a fortnight reading them...a fortnight in which I pondered deeply if this way of life was for me.

One Sunday in late August 1954 I made the fateful decision. I pumped up the tyres of my pedal cycle and pushed my way over to Oblique House, and during the next four hours I saw exactly all that Irish Fandom stood for.

Bob Shaw, a young man with a whimsical expression permanently transfixing his Grecian features, had a fantastic appetite. James White, of the studious expression and sartorial elegance, on the other hand, only nibbled thin plain biscuits. Madeleine Willis seemed to spend most of her time staggering up

and down three flights of stairs with a fifteen gallon teapot. Walt Willis seemed, by common consent, to be the nucleus round which they all circled, and he had a crafty grin on his face, and seemed to keep his mind at a permanent razor's edge in order to be able to twist a perfectly innocent verbal expression into a potent pun. George Charters, a nice old man, sat in a chair and purveyed bags of sweets, seeming to make a ritual of keeping 'the purple ones' for Sadie. Sadie was Bob's girl friend in those days, and endeared herself to me by sportingly playing ghoddminton and being quite prepared to divest herself of superficial attire should the tempo of the game require it !

Ah....ghoddminton...

This was the outlet for our sporting instincts, and I became an addict. I fear I was so keen to play that it may have appeared that I pushed myself forward out of turn. I could not resist some dormant primitive urge to batter the shuttlecock. For this game brought out the best and the worst in all of us. Rules were non-existent...as long as the shuttlecock could be made to hit the floor on the opponent's side, it didn't matter at all how it got there. This was a perfect set-up for aggression and brute force, but the way we played it said a great deal for the delicacy of our upbringing and appreciation of the basic rules of sportsmanship. Admittedly, the game was the direct cause of considerable damage to the house and its furnishings, but broken windows and powdered plaster and matchwood chairs were proof positive that we played the game for all it was worth. No personal animosity asserted itself, strange as it may seem, because we were such a convivial group that none existed. The fact that my blood was strewn all over the fan attic after every game wasn't because I had wronged any of them, just fannish exuberance. You see, I went out of my way to win. I brought all the subtlety of my mental and physical make-up into a vicious vendetta against the shuttlecock and whoever was precipitating it. We all had our ploys. Bob Shaw, who I've asserted before should have been a ballet dancer, preferred to dance about like a sylph, so that for a second we would take our eyes off the missile, whilst he battered it at supersonic speed past our ears and onto the floorboards. James White, normally placid, hacked and fought with gritted teeth. Madeleine Willis, an amazingly athletic specimen of wonderful womanhood, let it be known immediately that just because she was a female she didn't expect preferential treatment. Even when her wrist was sprained and her left thumb knocked out of orbit, she didn't complain. George Charters, older by far than the rest of us, insisted upon playing, too, and denied our suggestion that he could remain seated during the tourney. His nickname (dubbed by James White) of 'The Dribbling Terror' conveys better than any words of mine what a potent force he was. He had the Appointment to supply the bats, and whilst others workers at his factory were hard at work, George was surrepticiously shaping squares of cardboard which he smuggled out of the factory in his flat cap. The Managing Director of the factory, making his annual speech to the shareholders in 1955, was quoted as saying..."and, gentlemen, besides manufacturing 87 Canberra twin-jet attack bombers and building the prototype of the Short Seamew, on full Government subsidy, I am sorry to announce a most discouraging drop in shares. If only we could cut down on our use of cardboard packing cases..."

After ghoddminton, Madeleine always came up to the fan attic with a huge teapot, as I've already said. She also supplied home-made delicacies, foremost amongst them being the celebrated

'Coffee Kisses'. During and after this repast the conversation became magnificently fresh and uninhibited. No particular subject was chosen; we just followed our flights of fancy and created allusion upon allusion, to the merriment of all. In my early days I didn't take part in the conversation very much, because my mind hadn't been geared to the ultimate revs.per minutes. However, a veritable battle of wits usually ensued between Bob, James, Madeleine and Walt...conversation dripping with puns and wordplay. I noticed one day I had become somewhat attuned to their technique... when one of them made a particular remark, probably something quite innocuous, they all laughed...and it gradually dawned on me that their minds were so pliable, so used to each other, so brilliant, that they all, without a word being spoken, recognised the same unspoken play on words. If you like, I'll go so far as to say that their reactions displayed some degree of perception which cannot be put down to mere intellectual cohabitation. There was something else, an understanding I've never come across before or since. I know whereof I speak, because within a year or two, I was firmly entrenched in this phenomenon. When a visitor arrived, and said something quite natural, but which, to our ever-prying minds, indicated word-play, we looked at each other for a second, or in some cases without even a look or glance, we each knew that the others had noted what we had noted.

Perhaps a visitor would make a pun; possibly, on rare occasions, a good one...that was, to our standard. We all duly laughed, and the visitor assumed our hilarity had been directed at the original pun. This was untrue. Our minds had, in unison,



accepted the pun in a split second, had torn it to pieces and had worked out several other complicated puns, each one a play on the previous one. On occasions, if one of us thought we had hit a particularly original play on words regarding a remark, we would utter a word connected with our discovery, and from the nods and laughs by the Irish Fandom clique, it was obvious that the others had thought of it also, sampled it, and approved it.

The amazing thing to me was that these thoughts raced through our minds in split seconds. It was rather like someone looking out of

the window of an aeroplane and seeing everywhere and everything, from horizon to horizon at the same time, whilst persons on the ground could only appreciate their own visual range. I wish it was possible to give an example, just one. Unfortunately, although many thousands of brilliant puns, quips and merry jests passed between us during the last five years, I just cannot recall any classic examples.

It was wonderful the way we used to dissect ideas. One of us would come up with something unconventional, and, after tea, we would all sit round and imagine all sorts of fannishly wonderful ploys on the original theme.

For instance, there was my wardrobe affair !

The wardrobe biz was fully detailed in BLISSKRIEG

(The story of total wardrobe)...titled by Willis, in HYPHEN, and included in this publication. It concerned my theories that the prelude to marital bliss in the privacy of the boudoir should be a death-defying leap by the male from the top of the wardrobe onto the bed.

I wrote the article and took it to an Irish Fandom meeting for them to read, and they all thoroughly enjoyed the idea; it was, to use a mundane expression, right up their street. And they commenced to embroider the basic theme.

I think it was Bob Shaw who suggested that if my idea caught on, we should form a limited company and corner a wardrobe monopoly.

Suggestions flew thick and fast...some rejected...some animatedly developed. Someone said that in years to come, they envisaged young couples heading towards a secluded part of a park, towing a wardrobe behind them.

Walt coined the classic phrase to be associated with the celebrated sex-fiend, Chuch Harris...HAVE WARDROBE, WILL TRAVEL.

James White thought that the wardrobe idea would be a sensation in the Middle East. He reasoned that a potentate would not gain prestige from the number of his concubines, as of yore, but from the number, design and strength of his wardrobes. A series of tall wardrobes, showing that a terrific leap was necessary, would prove to his minions that the potentate was gifted with fantastic virility. I remember James saying..."one couldn't expect a potentate to cause possible injury to himself by personally participating in the preliminary wardrobe jump. A new category of male would be recruited into the harem, to join the eunuchs. These would be superb physical specimens, whose sole activity was to accompany the potentate and his current choice to the bedchamber. The man would sit on top of the wardrobe, and at a signal from the potentate that all was ready, would leap onto the bed, perchance, if the senario was highly-charged, he would perform a couple of somersaults en route. He would then sneak furtively away, leaving the scene, but within shouting distance should his services be required again".

For older married couples we invented the jet-assisted take-off equipment for installation on top of the wardrobe. We thought of having the wardrobe on little railways lines, with a little engine fitted, so that the male could shunt around the bed, keeping the female in suspenseful agony. We thought of a miniature glider so that the male could actually fly over the bed, and thus bail out at the psychological moment.

And so on...you know, I've just sketched some of the allusions. Luckily, this was one of the rare occasions when I kept notes.

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A word or two about the lady members of Irish Fandom.

Madeleine is the acknowledged First Lady of Irish Fandom, and has played a big part in the functions of the group, both from a fannish point of view, and from a social aspect. The amount of cakes and biscuits and gallons of tea she has supplied must be astronomical, and, if you'll excuse the expression, gastronomical !

I've mentioned before her prowess at ghoominton, but

she shines in all directions, mentally and physically, and I've never met a shrewder Canasta player. I only hope she never suggests playing for money.

Peggy White was a very frequent visitor to Irish Fandom meetings for some time, before and after she married James White, but with the advent of a couple of White Minors, she obviously has less time for ghoodminton and suchlike.

Sadie Shaw, as I've mentioned before, is a sportswoman... well, she was, anyway. In my early days at Irish Fandom meetings she was most enthusiastic about ghoodminton, and once she even wrote an article. We were without the Shaws for over two years...they went to Canada...although it is gratifying to be able to relate that they kept in touch with us, so much so that when they returned, we speedily forgot they'd ever been away.

I've tried to show, as briefly as possible, all the varying aspects of fan activity which Irish Fandom has participated in during my sojourn. The combined list of fanzines, apazines, stories, articles, letters of comment, professional science fiction stories, columns, one-shots, etc, which all of us of Irish Fandom have produced in the last five years must be staggering. Members of Irish Fandom have appeared at or near the top of most of the polls conducted during the period, and I recall that in 1956, in one poll, members of IF (including Honorary Member Arthur Thomson ...ATOM), topped eight out of twelve categories. I know I shouldn't boast about our triumphs like this, but you all know that I am famous for providing factual data, and it is up to me to carry on this fine and noble tradition in this chapter of our history.

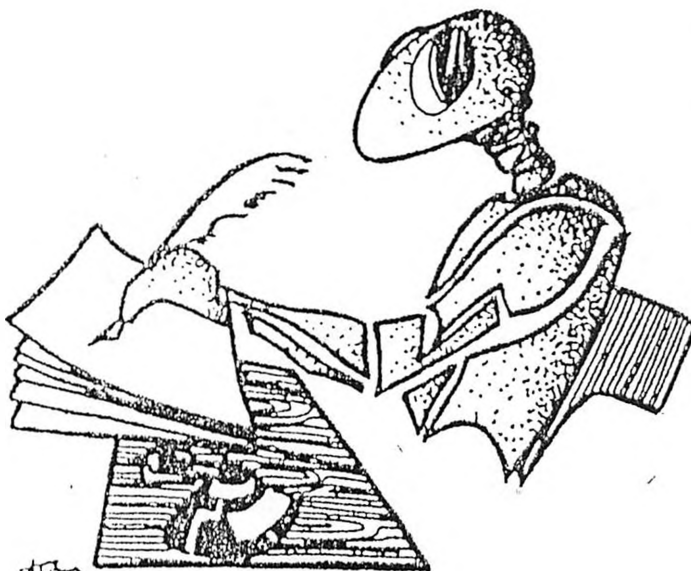
It is interesting to conjecture what will happen to Irish Fandom in the next decade. I have brought the history up to date...up to the end of 1959...and I wonder what fate hold for us... who will be writing the history of Irish Fandom so as to bring the record up to date in 1969 ?

Walt and Co. were blossoming in 1949, and in the past ten years, Irish Fandom has grown into a group of devoted fans, with the furtherance of fandom as the principle objective.

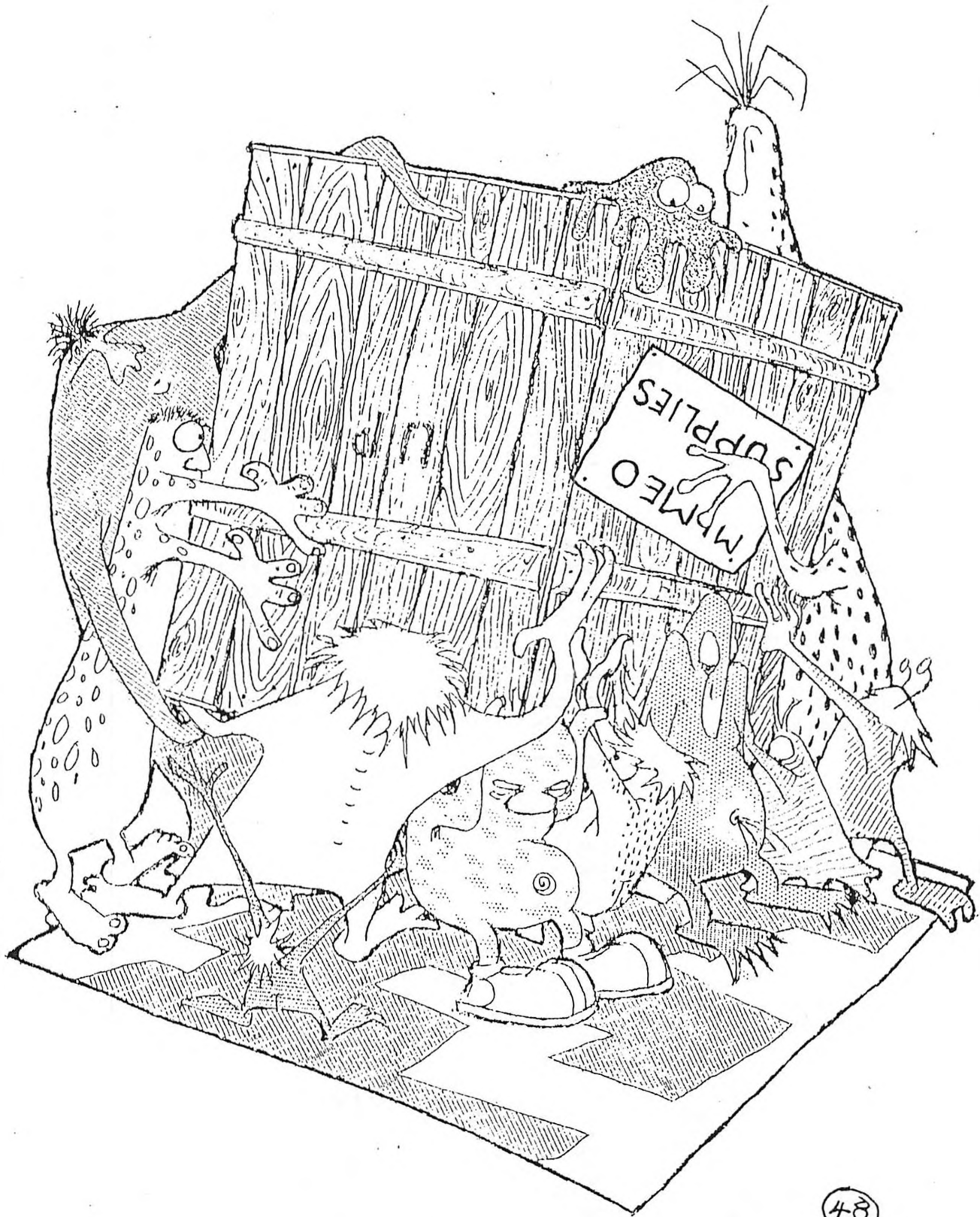
Where will it go from here ?

One thing you may all be assured of. Even though Walt and Madeleine may leave 170 Upper Newtownards Road, a new Oblique House will carry on the magnificent tradition...and I am confident you all consider that fandom will continue to be the better for it...

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# Wheel take the high road.

Irish Fandom, at least, insofar as I was concerned, had attended fan meetings at everyone's house except Bob and Sadie's after their return from Canada. We had all met at my house MON DEBRIS, at the James White abode THE WHITE HOUSE, at Walt Willis's of course, OBLIQUE HOUSE, and at EVENTIDE, George Charters house in Bangor, County Down. I must hasten to add that Bob and Sadie had only purchased a house at the south of Belfast just before Christmas 1960, and had in fact had several meetings there, although I hadn't been able to attend.

So yesterday morning Walt Willis telephoned me, told me that he was going to Bob's that night and would I care for a lift? I thanked him, and he came round to MON DEBRIS at 8 pm in his green Morris Minor. Madeleine and George were also in the car - I sat in the rear next to George.

I have written many thousands of words regarding the superb driving ability evinced by Mr. Willis - but somehow I feel that even with so much authority behind my words, even yet I have not properly conveyed the utter dexterity of The Master. What I find particularly fascinating is his magnificent prowess and split-second reaction when danger looms ahead.

We had just travelled down Campbell Park Avenue - Willis mounted the pavement twice, but explained that the avenue was in a bad state of repair. We turned right along the Wandsworth Road, Willis, the undeniable genius, brought the front bumper of the car within one ten thousandth of an inch from a red post box. Some unprincipled passengers would have said that he actually hit it, and indeed, I got out to look, but Willis explained to the crowd that the circular recess in the middle of the front bumper was to facilitate parking the car in his garage - a troublesome concrete support was at the far gable end of the structure. I admired the aplomb demonstrated by The Master as he sorted through nine pockets (including mine) found an unpaid electricity account in a buff envelope (mine) and with a beam at the crowd, dropped it in the letter box.

Willis backed away from the post box, and after turning three complete circles to prove the compact turning circle of the Morris Minor, changed from reverse to fourth gear and continued en route to the BoSh residence.

Those of you deeply engrossed in the administrative side of the WILLIS '62 FUND will be pleased and enchanted to hear that the thought of the forthcoming Stateside Trip is forever uppermost in his mind - indeed, so engrained is this thought that Willis insisted upon driving on the right hand side of the road, instead of on the left. We were not anxious to spoil this subconscious reverie, but a fifteen ton truck was bearing down upon us like a charging rhino.

Madeleine, with wifely tact which was touching to see, hit her husband on the ankle with a new Italian-style Winkle-Picker shoe, and with a whispered 'Bloody Hell', he performed a most astonishing manoeuvre which normally would have defied description - luckily for fandom, I was there (although my arms were over my face most of the time), and you may take my words as Gospel.

A normal driver, confronted with such a contingency, would probably have panicked, but not Willis. Without a second's hesitation he swung the driving wheel hard right and with a foot to spare avoided the truck, mounted the footpath, drove through a privet hedge and entered the local Vicarage Rose Garden. Demonstrating his affection for these colourful flowers, Willis careered round it twice before heading due east through a vegetable garden and returning to the Wandsworth Road via the Tradesmen's Entrance.

We all spontaneously applauded Walt Willis, and he seemed pleased with the egoboo, so much so that, as an encore, he went round a traffic island the wrong way.

Willis settled down after this superb series of clever demonstrations of razor-fine finger-tip steering-wheel manipulations. We reached the road which led to the BoSh Household without further incident...

Willis swung left through a blackthorn hedge ("They must have moved the blasted drive ten feet to the right."), and onto a drive which led directly to Beechgrove Gardens.

Whilst I would be the first to admit a new housing estate must have certain priorities when sorting out the amenities, I would have thought that the driveway to the said estate would have figured fairly high. I mean, I actually would have thought that this would have been done first.

Unfortunately, the contractors thought otherwise, and although the Beechgrove Estate is superbly set out, all the inhabitants were working vigorously on their gardens (except Bob Shaw). The road resembled a stretch of autobahn I remember just outside Cologne which had just received urgent attention from several squadrons of Flying Fortresses. The craters on this Beechgrove driveway were almost three feet deep in places, and in order to show us the excellence of his car's independently suspended wheels, Willis purposely hit each crater dead centre, and he was in fourth gear going up a 45 degree gradient at the time. So anxious was Walt to show his driving prowess that he deigned even to hold the steering wheel. When we arrived at Bob Shaw's house, George was on my knees, and I was on Walt's...Madeleine had a trousered foot in each of the two rear passenger seat hand straps, and Walt was sitting on her head.

I'll say this for Willis - he doesn't show off his genius very often (actually he is very modest) but when he decides the time is ripe for a mite of exhibitionism, there are no half-measures.

We crawled out of the car with great care (we had to - Walt, as a final gesture of his fantastic driving technique had brought the vehicle to a standstill exactly balanced on the low red-bricked wall at the front of the Shaw Residence,) and I surveyed the house.

It commands an exciting view over the Belfast Basin, and the hills of County Antrim with two high television aerials rampant are seen to advantage to the north. Behind the house, the green County Down grass is very high, with sturdy oak trees dotted here and there. At the rear of the house, where the long grass starts, is a large

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notice BEWARE ARROWS, proof positive that the fact that Bob Shaw was named 'Archer of the Year' in Northern Ireland in 1960 was only because of the time and space he had available for practice - which was rather unfair considering that the only other archer in the Northern Ireland team lives in a ninth floor flat in the north of Belfast.

We walked up the steps, and Bob and Sadie came to the door to greet us.

Bob's eyes widened with relief when he saw the Morris Minor swaying slightly in the breeze on the wall, its front wheels just scraping the top of the Creeping Convulvulus which covered the front garden with a rather aesthetic appearance, rather like an illo from The Fall of the House of Usher.

"Thanks for the consideration, Walt," said Bob, hero-worship shining in his eyes.

"How do you mean, Bob?" I asked.

"Last week he tried to drive into the front window," said Bob, pointing to the powdered brickwork at the base of the bay window - and once again we all looked at each other in awe whilst Walt gazed modestly downwards, a slight flush creeping over those noble features.

"Welcome to our new house, John", said Sadie, and she thanked me profusely as I gave her a large bunch of sweet-smelling McCredy's Wonder, a new purple-streaked rose which won first prize in Rome in 1959.

"Oh, thank you, George," Sadie laughed gaily as, cackling happily on his zimmer frame, George gave her a large vegetable marrow.

"That's too kind of you, Madeleine," Sadie cooed as she was handed five cucumbers by The First Lady of Irish Fandom.

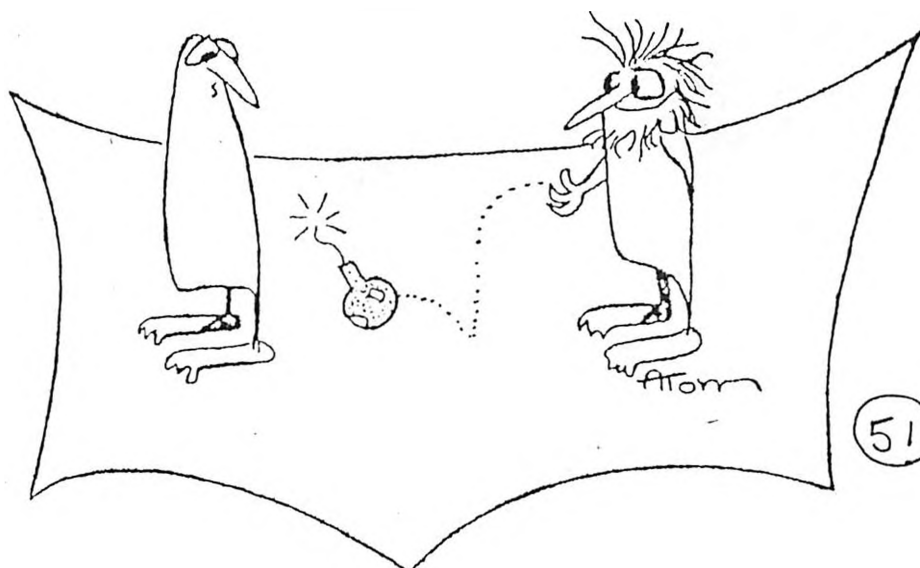
For a moment, Walt looked bewildered, and then that phenomenal high I.Q. rating asserted itself - he waltzed down to the car, and pulled away the dozen or so lettuce which decorated the remains of the front bumper.

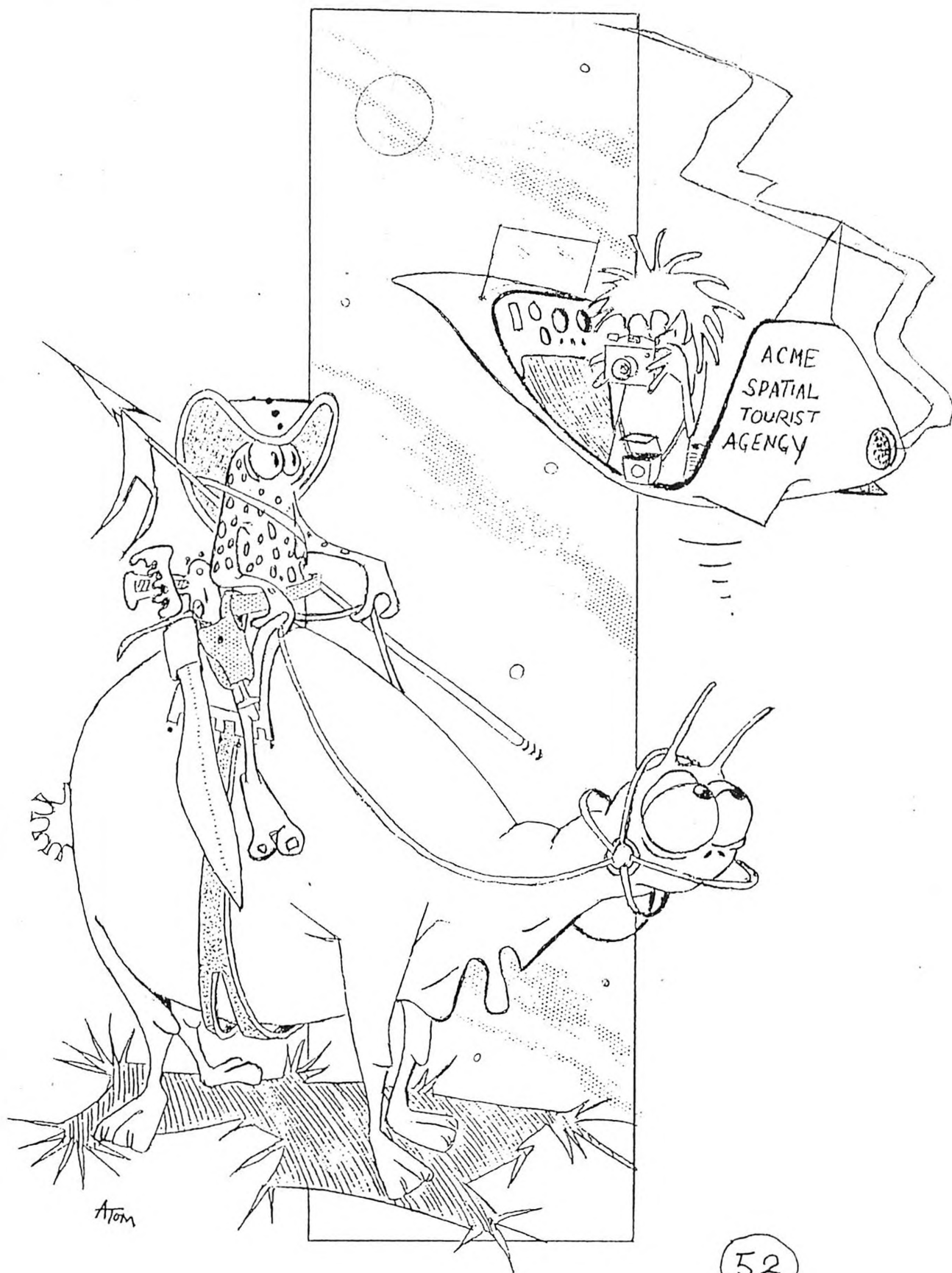
With a rather ostentatious bow, he handed them to Sadie...

"It's terribly kind of you," she said simply...

"Think nothing of it," said Willis with dignity, "we don't like to come empty handed...."

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# Flight of Fancy.

"I just cannot get used to the stylo," said George. He handed me a stencil which resembled a Tibetan prayer-flag, the sort of thing carried on a long pole...a rather tattered prayer-flag.

"It seems to me, George," I replied, "that either you are using too much pressure, or you need the knife and fork sharpened."

He gave me a rather rigid grin. I offered to do the stencil headings for him, and as I worked on them, George sat back in a reflective pose.

"Wouldn't it be wonderful," he said quietly, almost as if he was talking to himself, "if I had sufficient cash to get THE SCARR published professionally, with a technicolour front page by Gerard Quinn, and all the articles printed by MacMillan's of London?"

I didn't reply. I didn't want to spoil his reverie. I'd often had the same sort of thoughts myself. George crossed over to my bookcase, and flipped through my books...thick ones, I'd bound myself, mostly newspaper cuttings about space flights, spy scandals, aviation, fossils, photographs of Marilyn Monroe..I was happy to see he had found something to interest him...as I looked up I saw him sucking his clay pipe, making copious notes.

At last I finished cutting the stencils for his fanzine. George was usually rather liberal with praise for my artistic efforts for him, but now he merely nodded and folded the stencils.

"By the way John," he said, his creased eyes half closed behind his spectacles, "how much do you want for your old rusted pedal cycle?"

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Walt Willis first made me think deeply about George. He'd called round to borrow my SAPS Mailing.

"Er, John," he asked, "what is George doing with these old pedal cycles?"

Ah ha. So my secret was out. Willis had sold me the cycle a year previously for ten shillings. I'd charged George thirty shillings for it. I'd hoped that Walt wouldn't find out.

"Well, the fact is, Walt," I explained, "seeing that my office has moved and is now only ten minutes walk away, I decided

that a pound profit showed my appreciation of the value I really placed on it, and also demonstrated my profound business acumen."

Willis closed his eyes, shook his head.

"I'll start again," he said, gritting his teeth, "Madeleine was at an auction sale in Belfast yesterday, and she saw George bid and purchase Lot 33...ten rusty pedal cycles. Is he starting a cycling club for the inmates of 'Eventide' in Bangor?"

"I don't know, Walt," I said. I saw my opportunity. "He even made me an offer for that splendid bike you sold me, but I told him that as you'd sold it to me in the first place it would be very mercenary of me to sell it to him, seeing as how..."

Walt screwed up the SAPS mailing.

"Just thought I'd mention it."

He walked down the path, got into his car, got the correct gear first time, and drove away without even hitting the lamp post. That showed what state he was in. He was so amazed at what George could be doing with ten pedal cycles (eleven, at least) that his usual flamboyant crash of gears and ostentatious revving was forgotten. Instinct had at last asserted itself, whilst the busy mind was grappling with a new phenomenon.

As I closed the door, I pondered, too. What the heck was George up to?

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Several weeks passed by, and the mystery of George and the pedal cycles faded into insignificance. But one day, whilst I was researching in Belfast Reference Library, I spotted George industriously pouring all his interest and enthusiasm into a very thick tome, obviously very ancient. George hadn't seen me...his pince-nez were for close-up work, but I didn't contact him, but hid myself behind a large atlas. Finally he stood up, staggered across to the desk and handed the tome back to the assistant. But as he pushed the book across the counter a small slip of paper fell to the floor. It couldn't have fallen from between the pages; possibly it was in George's hand and the effort in manipulating the tome had made him forget about it.

After George had left I crossed quickly to the desk, handed in my atlas and dropped my pencil. As I picked it up, I snaffled the slip of paper.

Outside the library, I quickly opened it. All that was written down was the cryptic riddle - 'What happened to Hangegleiter?'

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It has no doubt occurred to you that a person with my intelligence would have immediately returned to the library and asked for the book George had borrowed, and so discover what or who 'Hangegleiter' was, and, possibly, what connection it had with my old pedal cycle. Truth to tell, it was ten days before this idea struck me. I returned to the library, but when I described the book the assistant told me that an 'venerable gentleman' had obtained a permit to have the book on temporary loan. The title of the book was EARLY AVIATION PIONEERS.

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Three months later the invitation card arrived. It stated:-

'You are cordially invited to attend the first flight of the world's largest man-powered aircraft. This will take place at Ballysnottery Bog, near Bangor, Co.Down, at 2.30 pm on 27th June 1963.

Yours, etc,  
George A.T.W.Charters,  
Gentleman.

P.S. Please bring your cycle clips.'

Before I'd had the chance to re-read this fantastic missive, Walt Willis arrived at my house. When I opened the door, I saw his Morris Minor perched precariously half way across my privit hedge. Walt was obviously in a hurry.

"Have you got one of these ?" he panted, showing me an invitation card. I supported him into the lounge and draped him across my new plush settee, and I gave him a sniff of an empty gin bottle. He sat up.

"Yes, I've got one," I confirmed. "Exciting, isn't it ?"

He nodded.

"Always thought George was the flighty type," he quipped. He was still obviously not himself.

"That explains what the pedal cycles were for, Walt," I said. "It all becomes all too clear to me, now. One day, months ago, George was muttering how nice it would be if he had a lot of money and could get THE SCARR published professionally. Then he ferreted through my books. I noticed that one in particular took all his attention...and from his strange actions culminating with this card, I know which book it was."

"Which book, for Ghu's Sake ?" hissed Willis.

"One of my current aviation periodicals," I explained. "You see, a man in England is offering five thousand pounds for the first successful man-powered flight. Actually, there have been several short flights in England this year. One man flew for half a mile at a height of ten feet. But there is a proviso. The flight must be over one mile, and the craft must do minor turns to show that there is a primary degree of control. I might add that the only way it appears that this can be done is with a mechanism involving furious pedalling, thus turning a large propellor."

Realisation dawned on Willis's intellectual brow.

"Can you lend me any cycle clips ?" he screamed.

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Willis had telephoned George, accepting the invitation for all of us...Walt, myself, Madeleine, Bob Shaw and James White. George had told Walt that his aircraft was parked in a large barn, and had given Walt the map reference. We all went in Walt's car, and after leaving the main road south of Bangor, and negotiating several long rutted lanes, we reached the barn.

George was staggering outside it. He wore a leather fur-collared ankle-length coat and thick woolly-edged goggles.

"Have you all got cycle clips ?" he asked.

We nodded.

"Is your aircraft in there ?" asked Willis kindly. He pointed to a large barn with a fairly small door.

George nodded.

"Before I show it to you, I must explain that I've been a student of man-powered aircraft since the turn of the century. I realised that pedalling and turning a propellor was the only way. But in those days I had a penny-farthing bike, and the forward drive was too unwieldy. I have also studied the exploits of German aviator Otto Lilienthal, especially his Hangegleiter, but although he actually glided with wings strapped to his arms and back, it could in no way be called flying. I have, however, utilised the wing formation he designed, although this has been amended to facilitate five pedal cycles fixed underneath."

"You mean you actually want us to fly this thing ?" gasped Willis, pushing his cycle clips into his pocket.

"Yes and no," said George importantly. "Yes because I want you to provide the motive power...no, because I'm actually controlling the craft from a cockpit on top of the wing surface."

Bob spoke up. He works for a large aeronautical concern in Belfast, and knows a lot about aircraft, perhaps almost as much as myself.

"Have you worked out the ratio between the combined weight of the cyclists and yourself, and the combined thrust of the five propellers, bearing in mind the required angle of incidence, the take-off weight, the drag, wind resistance and this muddy ground ?"

"Eh ?".

George took off his goggles, shook his head as if trying to clear it, and he just didn't answer, but opened the barn door and ushered us inside.

We all gazed in awe at the monstrosity before us. The wing, with a span of about forty feet, was shaped in plan form roughly like that of a bird, fully extended. Along the wing plan were five squares cut out of the wing...and underneath these squares, five pedal cycles were fitted. From the axles, the driving cog wheel chain connected to another large cog wheel driving five large-bladed propellers. On top of the wing, in front of the middle cut out square, was a seat with several rather crude looking levers extended.

"Take your places, lady and gentlemen," ordered George. "Madeleine, as a member of the weaker, er, sex, perhaps you'd take the middle drive."

"George," asked Walt, "what's this all about ?"

"I'm after the five thousand pounds for the first man-powered craft to fly one mile," said George.

"But that has to be flown on a measured course in England," I told him.

"I know," replied George. He pointed to a large bag in his cockpit. "We're flying over to England now. I've told the organisers we'll be there tonight. That bag is full of sandwiches and tea."

We all looked at him, open mouthed; so finally he had flipped his lid. We were all aghast at this arrant nonsense. But, really, we had to humour George...he'd obviously spent a great deal of his pension to get the machine constructed. He wouldn't ever be

able to say we had denied him, had frustrated his dream without actually trying to see if the craft would take off.

With tears in his eyes, Walt bent down and fitted his cycle clips. We all did the same. I swear Bob was trying to hide a barely audible snuffle. We helped Madeleine into the middle propellor drive.

"One thing," muttered James, who had been strangely silent, "how are you going to get the craft out of the barn?"

I'd wondered about this, too.

"John," ordered George, as he crawled up the framework of the craft into his seat, "just pull that lever by the doors, will you?"

As the others took their places, I did as was bid. The barn roof creaked open into two halves, revealing a rather cloudy sky. George coughed loudly. Oh well, I took my seat between Madeleine and James White.

"Hold tightly onto your handlebars," ordered George, a sound of authority in his voice that we had never heard before. He pulled a lever. We all slowly turned ninety degrees downwards. The propellers just fitted into the square holes, protruding through them.

"Vertical take-off," screamed George. "and when I say three, pedal like mad."

We looked at each other from the most unusual angle...our faces were red with...er...was it embarrassment...was it pity for George...was it the blood rushing to our heads as our noses barely scraped the manure covered floor of the barn?

"One".

We all gripped our handlebars.

"Two."

We felt the air of tension. Had George actually done it? The world's first man (and woman) powered aircraft? Would it just possibly fly?

"Three."

We all pedalled like mad.

And then, miraculously, we rose...oh, so slowly...the floor moved away from us, and then a blast of cold air hit us, and we were level with the roof.

"I'm now going to switch to forward drive," shouted George, his voice throbbing with triumph.

We swivelled through ninety degrees.

"We are hovering," screamed George. "Which way is it to England?"

"Haven't you got a compass?" shouted Willis. His legs, unused to pedalling, were slowing down. Madeleine had stopped altogether; I think James had fainted. I didn't have the nerve to glance at BoSh.

"Course I have," screamed George. "D'you think I'm daft? Trouble is, there's so much metal about that the needle is whizzing round like I wish these propellers were."

The pedallers seemed to lose interest at the thought of crossing the Irish Sea without a working compass. Leastwise, that's



that's what we shouted en masse as we sank into the barn, George pushing and pulling levers like mad.

We climbed down. There was a mad race for the car. Willis didn't bother to go into reverse. He swivelled round, and with the remnants of a five-barred gate decorating the bonnet, we headed as fast as possible for the main road to Belfast.

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George sat down and handed me a square of paper.

"Are you publishing POT POURRI soon?" he asked, his eyes downcast.

"I'm working on an issue now," I said.

"Would you put this advertisement in for me, please?" he asked diffidently.

I looked at it :- 'If anyone is interested in acquiring a collection of rusty pedal cycle parts, please contact George Charters and hear something to your advantage.'

"Of course I will, George," I soothed. "Really, it was a superb attempt. If you'd advertised for five racing cyclists, and not been so ambitious, you might easily have flown a mile."

"Well, it's too late. The bikes have all been broken up. Actually, at the moment, I'm working on a project to put a fan into orbit. I've purchased five thousand firework rockets...the display was cancelled because of inclement weather...I've mounted them on the bottom of a dustbin. All I need is a volunteer..."

I gently led George to the front door, shaking my head.

"Try Walt Willis," I said.

A tear came into George's rheumy eyes.

"He told me to try you," he said.

"Try James White," I suggested.

"He told me to try Walt Willis."

"Try Bob Shaw."

"He told me to try James White."

"Tell you what, George," I offered. "I'll advertise in POT POURRI. Maybe one of the new younger breed of fans would like to try...George Willick, or even D.B.Berry."

I felt a pang of pity as George staggered down the path to his car.

I hoped...I sincerely hoped he wouldn't try it himself...

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"There should be something in the rules about ties in the TAFF election."

# Love All.

As the Willis Fund is in the vogue at the moment, I am spending many pages writing about This Wonderful Fan, and spreading the Gospel amongst current fanzines. I have written about his superb driving technique in WRR, and I took up a few pages in another fanzine to describe Walt's astounding prowess at golf.

In this eminent fanzine, I have decided to let the fannish world know about his tennis technique...

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I called round to Oblique House recently, and Willis was watching the Wimbledon Ladies Tennis Singles match on tv.

"I didn't know you liked tennis, Walt?" I said, and he immediately challenged me to a game at the local courts on the following afternoon.

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It was a sunny afternoon, and Willis looked quite nice in his white shorts, the famous Willis knees rubbing against each other affectionately. He was limbering up with the club pro when he espied me. I don't quite know what he had told the pro, but that worthy reached for his hip flask after we had been introduced.

Willis frowned.

"Red corduroy trousers are not worn whilst playing tennis," observed Willis.

"Shucks, Walt," I said. "Although I've never played tennis in my life, I sure ain't going to wear my best navy blue suit. I don't mind if these trousers get torn. I only use them for cleaning my bike."

"The red and green-striped polo-necked jersey isn't quite the garb, either, Berry," he observed irritably.

I kicked a tennis ball away with my hobnail boots to show my nonchalance.

"My theory is, Walt," I told him frankly, "that it isn't what you wear, it's the way you play."

Swearing to himself, but seeing my point, he walked across the court.

He served what is called an 'Ace'.

"That isn't fair, Walt," I said. "I cannot see where that blasted ball is going with that net in the way. Take it down this minute."

He beat the ground with his racket.

"It's supposed to be there," he replied, "so that you can serve properly. If it hits the net, you know it's a bad serve."

"But if the net wasn't there, it wouldn't hit it," I said logically, "and therefore it couldn't be a bad serve."

This shook Willis, as was evinced by the way he picked up an innocent tennis ball and hit it as hard as he could over the roof of the club house. His racket prescribed the same arc.

"Control yourself, Walt," I pressed. "Good job I brought a spare racket with me."

I gave it to him.

"Wh - what's this supposed to be?"

"Heck, it's only a friendly game, isn't it? No need to get so hot and bothered. I couldn't afford to get these rackets restrung, so I reckon plywood is a good alternative. Makes a smashin' noise."

To demonstrate, I picked up a tennis ball, and hit it as hard as I could. The ball travelled about a dozen feet and hit the ground and ran along, under the net, and finished up at Willis's feet.

"Fifteen - love" I said proudly.

I'd never seen Walt Willis go beserk before. After he'd jumped the net seven times, he gathered himself. Muttering under his breath, he walked into the club house, and I heard an animated conversation ensue. Willis came out ten minutes later, rather red in the face, with two proper rackets.

Somehow, he looked different, like as though he was wearing diver's boots. He didn't exactly stagger; it was more like a hypnotic stupor, which made him walk bent forward at an angle of forty-five degrees.

"My serve," he snapped. His pupils looked like burning coals.

He tapped the ball gently over the net. The ball moved so slowly towards me, and suddenly, a strange inborn fury gripped me. The ball was at my mercy, and I'd seen Lew Hoad do the 'smash' dozens of times on tv - I felt that if I never hit a tennis ball again I wouldn't care as long as I hit this one.

I had time to spit on the palms of my hands. I gripped the handle of my racket, and as the ball seemed to hang motionless, I hit it with all the power of my 140 lbs behind the stroke.

"Never seen that before," muttered Willis, in an academic way, ignoring my scream of "thirty - love."

He wasn't looking at the ball. Right enough, it was rather uncanny. It had left my catgut like a bullet, had gone right through Walt's racket, and had impinged itself into the half-inch wire mesh and had expanded again. The ball had turned itself into a shape reminiscent of a minute pair of water wings.

Willis stalked back to the club house, and I heard loud shouts of annoyance.

Willis came out, turned, shouted... 'And the same to you'... and meandered back to the court with another racket.

Now he was studious...even crafty. His eyes narrowed, and a smile flitted across those handsome but still somewhat puzzled face.

He threw the ball up, and as he hit it, he seemed to turn the face of the racket to an angle of 27.3 degrees. It was wonderful to behold. The ball itself was not quite sure which way it was supposed to go. Finally, like a gyroscope, it settled on an even keel, and lazily spun over the net and away from me. I flung myself to my left, but it was no use. I was well beaten by a swerve shot of immaculate length and pace.

Then the miracle happened. The ball landed on my parcel of cheese and walnut sandwiches, and as it flew past me I gave it a crafty deflection over the net. The stroke was even more miraculous when you realise that the handle of my racket was stuffed up my trouser leg, and I was lying on my back at the time.

Willis was not to be outdone.

With superb self-control, he waited for the ball to re-bound off the club room door, and with a triumphant snarl, he did what I think, in technical jargon, is a 'lob'. This was devilishly cunning, because at that time I was draped over the net trying to get my moustache disentangled out of my bootlaces.

Thing about a lob...it takes time to soar into the air and come down again, and because of the height it has dropped from, it rebounds up in the air again almost as high as originally.

I mean, I sized up the situation in a flash.

Three things became abundantly clear to me:-

- 1) I couldn't get my moustache disentangled in the limited time at my disposal;
- 2) I had no intention of jerking my head loose and losing my valuable hairs:
- 3) The net was loosely fixed to the two posts.

I gripped the net, pulled it, wrapped it around me, hobbled like a ruptured hermit crab on the line, waited for the ball to come down, and with another delicate flick, knocked the ball towards Willis again.

I wouldn't exactly express the unbiased opinion that Walt Willis was hypnotized by my demeanour, but his mouth was hanging wide open in unadulterated bewilderment...and like a homing pigeon the ball landed firmly between his upper and lower teeth.

"Forty - love," I screamed.

In less than a moment, Willis had made the score 'deuce'. It wasn't so much that his serves were unplayable, it was just that I was curled up in the net, and trying to sort myself out. Finally I did it. I wouldn't blame Willis for bad sportsmanship, because he just wasn't himself. He'd succeeded in getting the ball out of his mouth, and the action of serving to my prostrate body was purely mechanical. In his state then he would have served had he been alone in the middle of the Sahara; or alone on an icecap drifting towards a warmer climate.

But the effect of my leaping towards him, racket upraised, sobered him.

I reminded him the score was 'deuce' and he said quietly...too quietly, "Ch, is it ?"

And he served again.

It was a good serve; Pancho Gonzales might have served better half a dozen times in his life.

The ball hummed like a hornet, and if the net had been there it would have burned its way through it before it got there with the crushed wall of compressed red-hot air in front of it.

Now some people say I have a big nose.

Of course, it all depends upon how you proportion my face and head...I mean, if I have a big head, then, proportionately, my nose isn't big.

But it is now !

The tennis ball cushioned vertically upwards off it, and was lost to sight in a low cloud. It dropped back in Willis's side of the court, but he was in the club house having a glass of water at the time. There was no need for me to have to try and persuade him that it was my advantage, there was a star-like crack in the sun-baked surface of the court.

But then, in some undefinable way, Willis lost interest. I appealed to the throng of spectators, who looked quite thrilled with watching the game, and they started a steady chant of "We want Willis", and then, one final phenomenon, Willis appeared rather hurriedly out of the front door of the club-house, and was in turn hotly chased by the club pro. As Willis, sweating and breathless, passed me for the third time, I requested a conclusion to the game, at which I was at advantage, but he ducked as a racket whipped over his head like a boomerang, and he told me he'd see me next week.

Several keen tennis enthusiasts asked me to join the club. They explained that their bedroom windows overlooked the court, and tv was getting such a bore, but I explained to them that Mr. Willis was the best player in the club, and as I'd beaten him fair and square, what was the use ?

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# The Ulster Moth.

One day I received a letter posted from France...it was from fem-fan Ruth Berman from the U.S.A.

She was touring Europe with her family, and said she would be in Belfast on Friday 3rd August, and she'd like to meet the Willis's and myself.

I wrote to her accomodation address in London and said to surely come round.

So I arranged a day's leave from the office for Friday, but when I got home on Thursday evening she was at MON DEBRIS, watching ROBIN HOOD on tv with my daughter Kathleen.

She was a day early. She was staying at an hotel in Belfast, I enquired about her family. I had assumed the whole Berman family were travelling to Ireland. But no, they had gone to America via the sea, and Ruth was to meet them when their ship docked in New York.

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After tea, I nipped round to Oblique House to see Walt Willis. He was very pleased that Ruth had come to Belfast, and was sorry that she had to leave so soon. He asked me to park my pedal cycle at the gable of his house, and offered to drive me back to MON DEBRIS, pick up Ruth and bring her back to 170. He said that Bob Shaw would probably be round later. Hoping that he didn't see my face turn pale, I sat next to him in the car, with the door very slightly open in case of a hurried exit; we reached my house without mishap.

I dragged them both in my back garden to take photographs, and I know it's hard to believe, but I actually got both of them to play football with my children. Then back to Walt's house.

Some things happen which, to me, seem perfectly ordinary. But I often wonder what the effect is on other people? I recall that when ATOM and Olive came over to Belfast in 1957, I wrote various stories about the holiday. When he returned to London and read my accounts of the happenings, he said that every word was true, nevertheless he just couldn't believe it all really happened!

Like the first incident at Walt's house.

I'd just made a paper aeroplane for Bryan Willis...I was



alone in the room with Ruth, suddenly a sparrow flew into the room, hotly pursued by Carol Willis, who is now a quite attractive fourteen year old schoolgirl.

Ruth's eyes bulged like goose eggs.

"Catch it," screamed Carol.

Obediently, Ruth and I cornered it under the sofa. I could see Ruth's mind working feverishly. What to do when a sparrow flew into the lounge? What was the protocol? Was this actually happening? I made a flippant remark that it was actually an Ulster moth...I did catch it for a few seconds, but in the excitement of transferring it to Carol's hand it escaped again. Ruth had her prestige to think about, and not to be daunted she raced round the room again, diving here and there, until the bird escaped through an open doorway and into the garden, where it managed to flutter over a hedge to asylum.

Frankly, even I was mystified, not by the sudden emergence of the sparrow, but why was Carol chasing it?

Walt came in again, and we watched the last episode of a so-called science fiction serial ANDROMEDA BREAKTHROUGH. It concluded much as a funeral finishes. In fact, a funeral would have been much more cheerful. Then I noticed that Ruth's right little finger was bleeding.

What a stoic that girl was.

She'd caught her finger in the door of Walt's car, and ripped the nail, but she just sat there, probably in pain, rather than seek attention. Walt whipped on a first aid bandage, and then Bob Shaw came in.

Now I knew that James and Peggy White had just been presented with a baby. I knew that Bob and Sadie Shaw had had one a couple of months previously. Therefore, when Bob suddenly pulled a very small white dress from his pocket and held it in front of him, like a serviette at dinner, I knew that he was going to take it to the White's, so that they wouldn't have to purchase a christening robe for their baby for the christening ceremony.

But what did Ruth think. A well-known fan and vile pro dancing around the lounge at Oblique House with a christening robe dangling under his chin? Should she take it off him and perform the same sort of dance. Her bulging eyes led me into her bewildered mind.

What was the Fannish Christening Robe Under Chin protocol?

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By the way, there is something to be said for publishing foto-sheets in fanzines. Ruth took a taxi to my house, and gave my address, but the house numbering in Campbell Park Avenue was bizarre. Postmen went sick when transferred to the area for postal duty. The driver took her to Campbell Park Avenue, but could not find number 31. They saw a boy and stopped to ask him if he knew where number 31 was? Ruth was amazed to find that she recognised the boy...my own son Colin... shown in a foto-sheet in my SAPSine POT POURRI. This supports my theory that an unknown force is at work to ensure that fannish paths are destined to cross, at one time or another...

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In March 1958, I received an ultimatum from my wife. She said meaningfully that our little daughter Kathleen was growing up, and it was time she had a bedroom to herself. My den, she explained with a leer of triumph, was just what she had in mind. I protested, saying that we couldn't afford to spend money on wallpaper and paste and stuff like that just now, and she leered again and dumped a bulging bag in front of me. I had to admit defeat. My fannish den is no more. I am in fact writing this, cowering in the attic to focus my eyes on this horrible machine by the light of a candle...

As my thoughts flicker back to my marvellous den, and whilst it is so fresh in my memory, I feel that the following description of my little private kingdom will be something more than just a guided tour. It will be a sort of memorial ...I hope to read this in the distant years to come, and thus to wonder, ponder, and generally take myself back to those happy days, so, deah reader, just imagine that you visited me a few days ago, and asked to be shown round my...

# Den of Propinquity.

"Oh, so you want to see my den ? Well now, just follow me up the stairs. Mind that fifth stair, the carpet has worn just a little, and...oops...never mind...I've got a First Aid book upstairs, so I think I'll be able to push that thumb into place again. Now, here we are on the landing, and that's the door of my den, just over...STEADY. I say, I didn't know you were an acrobat...that cartwheel was superb. Oh, sorry. Let me wrench it off your boot. Ah ha. That's one of my son's roller skates. Pity it was in that dark shadow at the top of the stairs. Just because I wouldn't let him play with my zap this morning. I don't know what kids are coming to these days. Oh, don't worry about that rip in your jacket, my wife is quite good at repairing torn clothing, although you'll probably have to make do with scarlet cotton, I don't honestly think she's got any light grey ! And this is MY DEN. You'll find a little box just inside the door with a slit along the top of it, but that's just for my relations to show their appreciation...oh, I say, you shouldn't...er, sorry I haven't any change. There now. Just gaze at this Paradise. Shall we start on the left, and work round to...WATCH OUT...oh, For Ghu's Sake, you've knocked over last week's correspondence file. Hey ? Yes, I admit it was a stupid place to put it, but at least I knew where it was, and I didn't trip over it. Honestly, I'm trying my hardest to keep some sort of system operating, and you barge in a stick your clumpy big boots all over it. Of course you should have seen it. OH? Oh, I see. You were looking at that nude photograph. Come here

and shake hands. I did the same thing last week. Yes, I'm rather proud of that photograph. You'd never believe it, but that nude was sent to me as a quote card. Honest. You should see who signed it before it came to me. Chuch Harris had it for three years, and I still maintain he slipped it in the envelope by mistake. Well, I've had it since, let me see, circa 1955. I don't think I'll pass it on. I mean, I'm a sort of authority on that pose, note the way she's bending over to unbuckle her left high-heeled shoe. Isn't it a wonderful camera angle ? NO, YOU MOST CERTAINLY CANNOT HAVE IT ! Rumour says it's his wife. GREAT GHU ! IT'S YOUR WIFE !

Oh dear me. Look, please let me have it. I'll dust it every morning, and I promise sincerely never to send it to anyone else. I mean, I can always swap you with this. Over here. Tucker sent this to me, you know. It was in PLAYBOY. Here's the 3D glasses. It's Diana Dors. Hey, you've been at least fifteen minutes looking at it. I don't want you to break my record. Just move over to the painting next to it. That, deah boy, is a QUINN ORIGINAL. It was featured on the cover of an AUTHENTIC a few years ago. Isn't it really beautiful, the black velvet of the sky, sprinkled liberally with stars...notice how the bottom half gradually turns blue, then light blue, then merges with a cloudy horizon. Yes, that's the Thames below, and I must tell you, me being a sort of authority on aviation and such, that Gerard was almost prophetic with that depiction of a stratosphere airliner coming in to circle over London. They're designing one just like that in England at the moment. Seriously, I'm terribly proud of it. Indeed, as I am with this selection of ATOM illo's. Yes, that's me, and that one is Walt Willis, and that is Ken Bulmer. Arthur Thomson is really a genius...his type of artwork slides smoothly into place in our particular sphere of interest, doesn't it ? I mean, look at the crafty look in the eyes of that BEM. No, stupid that's Bulmer, more to the left. ATOM does colour illos like this. Pretty good, eh ? I thought so. Wipe that saliva offa your lips and stop cringing. You ain't having it, no sir. Christ. How can one fan be so awkward ? You've put your blasted boot right on top of that tube of duplicating ink. It was full, too. I know it was on the floor, I put it there, didn't I ? That's where I always file it...one foot to the left of that mouse hole. I tell you, man, I have a system. It never fails me, that is, until big ignorant louts like you come in and, oh, I say, that is a big bicep. Sure it isn't your shirt sleeve rolled up ? Crikey, that fist looks like a leg of lamb. Lovely gold ring, too. I say, you're BIG. Jeeze, you're now standing on my only-remaining ream of off-puce duplicating paper. Look heah, I know you're bigger than me, but watch where you're putting that boot. No, not there, I'll get ink on my trousers. Temper...TEMPER. Calm down. Look, I may not look like one, and you may not believe I'm one, but I am a police constable. Honest. No, I was only telling you so that you can put down that mimeo crank without any loss of prestige. Yeah, I know you're a BNF, and your fanzine is most excellent. Of course I've filed all the copies you've sent me. I keep 'em in this box. Let me open it. Suffering Catfish. I told her I didn't have anything to light the fire with. I don't know what to say, I'm sure. Wimmin'.

Don't feel too hard about it, though. I mean, you've spare copies at home, haven't you ? Wait, here's a Collector's Item. Ever seen one before ? It's actually a curio of some distinction. Nothing less, mark you, than a hunk of engraved metal off an ancient Persian breastplate, which was actually purchased by Leeh Shaw from an antique dealer in a rough quarter of Belfast

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during her visit here in 1956. Confidentially, there was something very strange in the way Leeh used to dress up completely in ancient Persian armour, waving a curved sword and lurking in remote corners of Oblique House. I honestly believe she was carried away by the aura of that warlike period. I reckon, and don't quote me in your next column, but I reckon that gal has a split personality. I consider she thought she was a Persian soldier. And how did I get that bit of metal off her armour, you ask ? I caught her a lovely swipe with my spear. It's over here in the corner. I was dressed up as a Zulu at the time, attired in one of Walt's bath towels. I'm telling you, bhoy, those were the days. We did have fun. James White was dressed as a Crusader, and Larry Shaw, of INFINITY fame, on his honeymoon with Leeh...and this has never been revealed before... in case his circulation went down...I'm telling you that Larry was dressed as NERO. Yep. Leeh and Larry spent scores of dollars on ancient armour and swords and things...so we felt it would make them feel at home if we also dressed up. There was something really bombastic about Willis's appearance as Attila the Hun. I'm telling you, that's what we called fanac. Yes, I wish to confirm that that bit of metal is one of my most treasured items. And now we move to more treasured possessions. These two...WHAT ? That, my deah sir, is sheer impudence. If I want to have two tins of baked beans hanging on the wall, I'll just let 'em hang. I don't go around your den making snide comments on what you've got hanging up as trophies. Don't look so complacent. I know all about that pair of black panties you have suspended over your copy of THE IMMORTAL STORM...from the WorldCon in London in '57, weren't they ? Huh. And you sneer at these two tins of beans. I know it appears stupid, but those two tins of beans represent the climax of my mechanical career. You've heard about the typer I purchased from Bob Shaw ? Well, the roller wouldn't move, and by suspending these two particular tins over the edge of my desk, and attached to the roller by wire enabled me to type 215 articles and stories for fanzines in four years. I wouldn't sacrifice those beans for anything...that is, er, unless you plan to stay the night ? I mean, I don't want to have to open them, because they represent my triumph over adversity...I mean, you're not staying, are you ? I mean, like, I do sometimes entertain, but these beans have inspired me all this time, and if you stayed at the Grand Central Hotel, you'd get better fare than beans. After all...SUFFERING CATFISH. PUT THAT BACK. I SAW YOU. Do you know that Bruce Burn could get seven years Hard Labour if the authorities in New Zealand knew he took that photograph. I know she's wearing a grass skirt, but its the look on her face and the angle of her knees that gets me ! Yeah, he went to Fiji especially to take that photograph for me. You think that's his hand on the left, straightening the rug ? I don't think so; although when the other forty nine shots arrive I may be able to fix you up. Now then, watch how you handle that bit of equipment. I paid fifteen shillings for that from a man who came to the front door. That, my deah sir, is a genuine war-surplus U.S. Army Haze Screen for Aerial Observations. Note its made by Kodak in the U.S. Note the beautifully shaped wooden handle, and the different coloured smoke sheets of glass ? It was originally designed in the forties for spotting Japanese fighters coming out of the sun. What have I got it for ? You do ask some daft questions. I know a bargain when I see one. Didn't you know that there is going to be a total

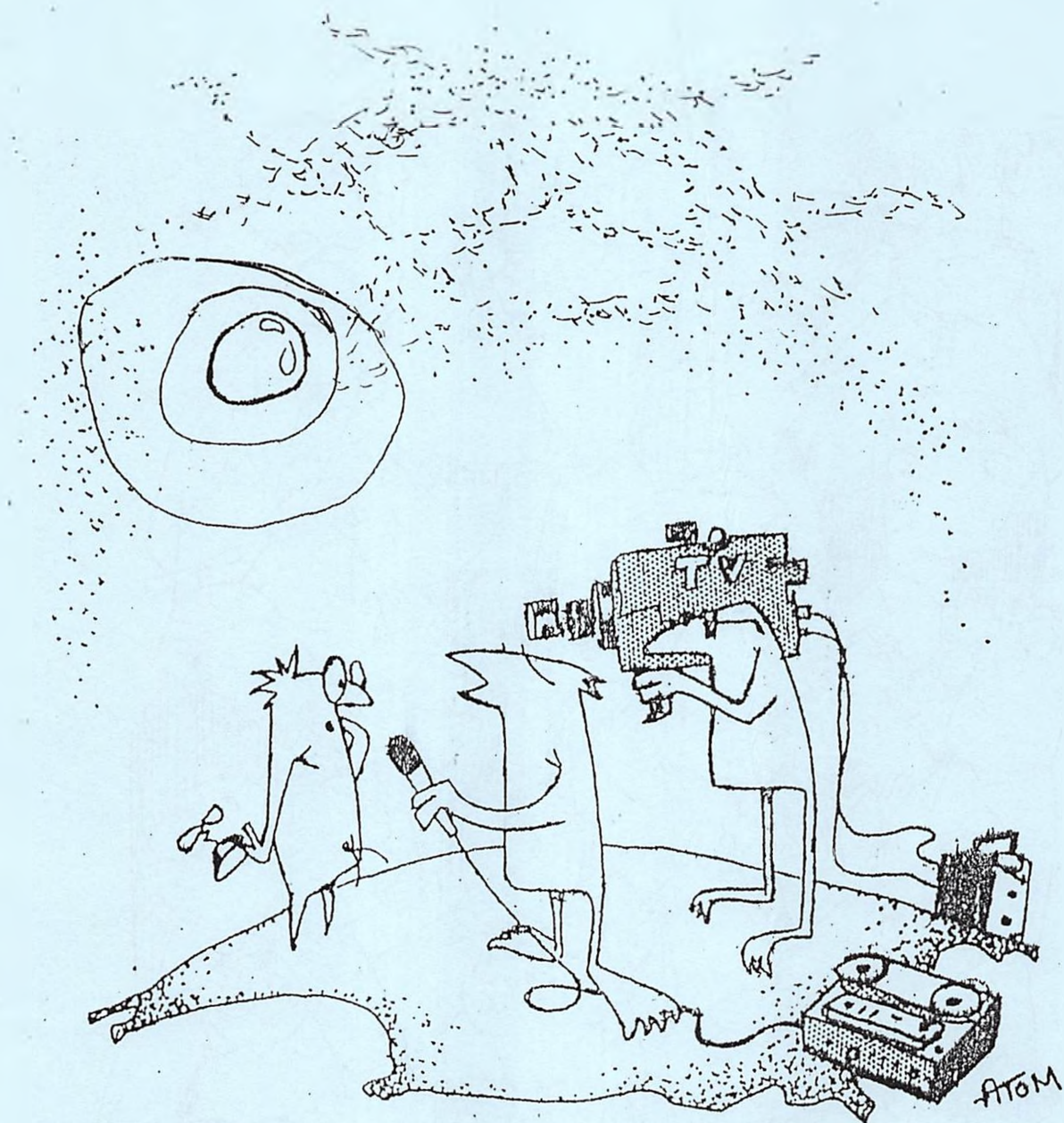
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eclipse of the sun in the British Isles in 1999...this item will inhibit any requirement for me to start smoking a piece of glass when the eclipse commences, I'll just whip out this Haze Screen. DON'T SIT THERE. Oh Jesus. You're the most awkward character I've ever had in my den. I've had the really Big Names in here...Boyd Reaburn, Rory Faulkner, Steve Schultheis, Chuch Harris, the Bulmers, etc, and they all knew not to sit on that orange crate. That's my son's pet duck you're sitting on, if you don't mind. No need to fret so much, a petrol-based cleaning agent is pretty good for getting dirty marks out of new clothing...'though I don't know what my son will say, those eggs were due to hatch next week. Come over to the bookcase and look at some of my rare first editions. Starting from the left we have the unexpurgated volumes of The Decameron of Boccaccio, then the three volumes of Sex Life in Ancient Rome, then the Victorian stunner, Hints for Young Girls, next the Trials of Oscar Wilde, then Forever Amber, then the Best from Esquire 1937 - 1957. On the second shelf, starting from the left, we have...oh, you've read all of them? You filthy beast. No wonder some outsiders get the impression that sf fandom is full of sex fiends. Your sort get our microcosm a bad name. You might at least admit there is at least one you haven't read. My Ghod. You must do nothing else except read books like those. Smashin', isn't it? And that's just about all. That long bookcase is full of all the fanzines I've garnered since 1954, That pile on the left, with the spotlight shining on them, are all the fanzines which have featured my stories and things. A one hundred per cent record of my fannish career to date. That pile of prozines to the right have revos of my stuff in them. Over there, framed above the door, is a letter I received last year from Bob Bloch. What's that you said? What's in those tea-chests? Listen, I've been patient with you. You've done nothing but flounder in here like a stranded whale. Your erotic notions have disgusted me, doing nothing but talk about nudes and panties and pornography and such. You've squashed a tube of duplicating ink, you've kicked over my filing systems, and now...AND NOW...YOU ASK ME WHAT'S IN THOSE TEA CHESTS? Can't you use your imagination? That, mister, is my desk. Well, I do admit I've always meant to paint out that legend PRODUCE OF CHITTAGONG on the left chest. With that rotted plank suspended between the two chests, I've got a really efficient desk. Utility to a degree, but the Roman's used to do all sorts of things on their knees, didn't they? And what's good enough for the Romans is good enough for me! I expect you are one of those swanky fans like John Champion of Joe Sanders, who've sent me foto's of their fan dens which makes the 20th Century Fox office in Hollywood look something like this. I maintain a fan's den should be representative of his personality, and...Hell...now he's fainted. Diane...DIANE...bring up a glass of water, please. That's the third one this week. Some fans must lead a very sheltered life, that's what I think. It makes you want to spit. What is fandom coming to, I ask myself? Just what is fandom coming to...?

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"Tell me Sir, how does it feel to be one of the very few characters to be cut with a steel stylus, by hand, onto a mimeo stencil to illustrate the front cover of a 'fanzine', instead of being 'Electrostencilled' as is more usual thesedays?"

"Proud... an' kinda humble....."

Atom's own 1971 comment on the change from cutting by stylus to electronics.





# Days of Whine and Rosé.

I have been asked yet again to write an article about ghoddminton, and 'was it dangerous and obsessive?' It is true, as you have read ad infinitum, that much blood was spilled playing ghoddminton at Oblique House, Belfast, in the mid and late fifties, and, as Walt Willis once observed, the injudiciously-placed red corpuscles were mostly my own.

When eventually I enter The Portals, an angel with black fingers will guide me towards the nearest Gestetner, and an acolyte will murmur, "Jesus, that Berry was extremely enthusiastic." Yes, I will cast false modesty aside and assert that if I become really interested in a subject, I will blatter the bejeepers out of it to become an authority on all aspects. Take fingerprints, for instance ...I learned that one hundred years ago, a certain Miss Inez Whipple decided to fingerprint a chimpanzee to confirm that it had human-type ridge detail on its entire hand and feet surfaces. Under my aegis, fingerprint experts in Hertfordshire, in 1979, decided to examine the fingerprints and footprints of every species of primate, about two hundred of the crafty little bastards. Most of the specimens we examined were lying with crossed glass eyes and stuffed with straw in an inner sanctum of the National History Museum. This seemed scholarly but much too easy for a man who once cracked the venerable George Charters on his bald pate with a metal-edged ghoddminton bat and then disappeared through an upper-storey'd window at the same time, a window later protected by a berricade.

"Let's go to London Zoo and fingerprint Guy the Gorilla," I shouted enthusiastically.

One friend, Martin, said he would accompany me, The Zoo kindly gave permission, and accompanied by a cautious keeper, we approached Guy's cage. He rattled the bars in a very aggressive manner, and he really was huge. I looked up at his bloodshot eyes and they seemed bereft of any degree of appreciation of how he was going to benefit my research. His fingers looked like bunches of bananas...and then I had a brilliant notion. I suggested to Martin that he should posture in front of Guy, sticking out his tongue and shouting 'yahoo', and as Guy reached for him, I would dab wide cello tape, wrapped round my hand and try and grab Guy's grasping fingers.

Martin agreed that this was an exceptionally good idea, except that I would posture and he would dab. I mean, this was a damned serious scientific approach to a dangerous obsessive problem.

Well, we certainly did obtain a couple of Guy's fingerprints on the cello tape, true, but this was at the expense of one



sleeve ripped off Martin's brand new pink corduroy jacket recently purchased, expensively, at Carnaby Street...the keeper got a hernia trying to disentangle Martin from Guy...and I learned quickly but not quickly enough that a gorilla can also show its distaste for a given situation by turning round, extending its buttocks and rather accurately ejecting the contents of its bowels, accompanied by an almost human guffaw.

But I was terribly enthusiastic...I succeeded in obtaining a few fingerprints from a real live livid gorilla, a feat never previously accomplished.

Where was I ? I am almost seventy three years of age remember, and prone to ramble...er...ah, yeah, ghoddminton.

A special performance was presented on my first visit to Oblique House in 1954, and a quick glass of red wine eliminated any inhibitions I might have felt entering this new sphere of self-expression.

The fanac room was dissected by a net, and two players on each side held squares of cardboard...the shuttlecock was served in an upwards trajectory into the opposing half, and then a free-for-all developed as the players endeavoured by any means, fair or mostly foul, to deposit the battered shuttlecock into the enemy's court. But you know all that...

I honestly felt it was rather an effete performance...the players were far too sporting and did not demonstrate 'a vicious killer instinct' (to quote from a letter Walt Willis wrote to Chuck Harris regarding my activities during my first game.)

To give an example, they wore normal footwear, but, as always, I wore my size 12 hobnail boots, provided by the local constabulary. The ladies, Madeleine and Sadie Shaw, were treated far too courteously, Bob Shaw even muttering..."so sorry, darling" as he swiped at a shuttlecock balanced precariously on Sadie's, er, chest. As I explained to them, George Charters had a definite advantage being permitted to play whilst esconced in his bath chair...the heavy-duty blanket area frequently stopped the shuttle from landing on the floor...I felt that my savage swipe that shattered his pince nez was quite a legitimate counter-plot !

Whilst in the army, before joining the constabulary, I had been a drill instructor, and besides having a very loud and racous voice, I also had a crisp, authoritative edge to my delivery.

When I shouted "DROP IT" when they had successfully stopped the shuttlecock from hitting the floor, their eyes blinked in terror and they invariably did 'drop it'.

You see, once again my ultra-enthusiasm was triumphant...yes, I admit it, I was obsessed with winning at ghoddminton...I applied myself to the task...I mean, why play if you don't want to win at any cost ?

Of course, as was to be expected from a group of highly-intelligent fans, they attempted to frustrate my play in the most underhand manner. George Charters once again, now wearing his World War 1 steel helmet, instead of cowering when I delivered a hack of considerable gravitational thrust, turned his bat round to reveal a photograph of my heroine, Marilyn Monroe in a topless pose...his partner, James White, then thwacked my tongue quite brutally.

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Fans have confided in me that they wish to include ghoddminton in their fitness regime, and provided their circle of friends are like the members of Irish Fandom as I originally found them they will obtain pleasure from the pursuit of the flying shuttlecock, and the release of pent-up aggression is quite satisfying as you blatter it to the floor to gain a precious point. But please, you must all remember that ghoddminton can become obsessional, and the inner recesses of the human mind can release forces of evil in pursuance of demanded victory...

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