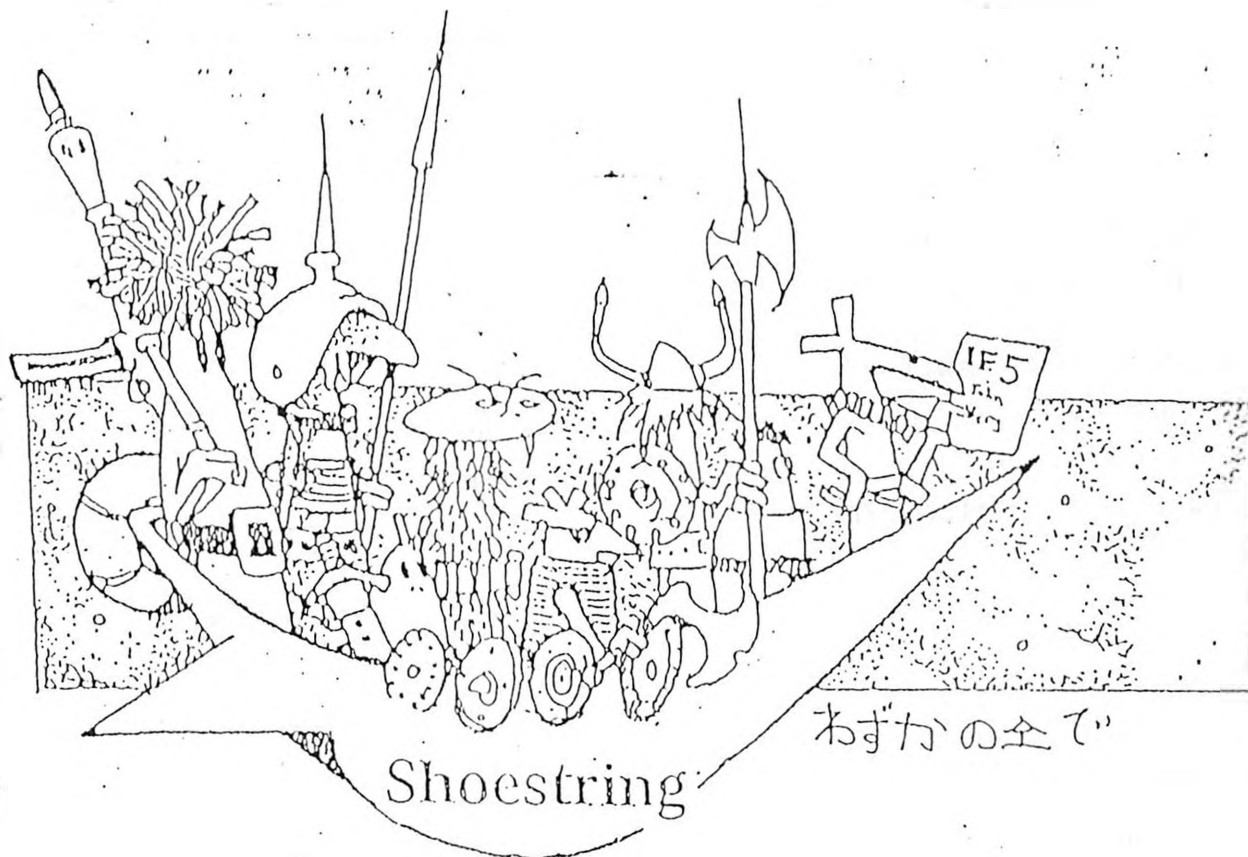


FANDOM DENIED...



ARTHUR THOMSON
1927 ~ 1990

VOL. 5. 1999.



The Author.

John Berry,
4 Chillerns
South Halfied,
Herts.,
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U.K.

THIS IS;-

FANDOM DENIED.

volume 5 of
FABLES OF IRISH FANDOM.

The Printer.

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

These volumes are available mostly by editorial whim, but also for "the usual".

Money and stamps, as a contribution towards our production and postage costs, are very acceptable.

I suggest either \$5 American or £2 British.

Inform me, if you can, of the current addresses of:-

ALAN RISPIN, JHIM LINWOOD, and BRUCE BURN.

(Bruce sent me a Christmas card, but no return address, the great gherkin!!)

Ken - ch

Ken Cheslin

may you enjoy this latest offering.

③

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Chirps off the old Bloch.

I've stated before quite often in my writings that the person who inspired me most in fandom was Bob Bloch. He always said nice things about me in his IMAGINATION column, which caused faneds to write to me asking for material, and it was for this reason, mostly, that I had such a prolific period of producing stories between 1956 and 1959.

I had previously met Bob Bloch in Detroit in 1959, and once again he was most kind to me. To demonstrate his consideration towards me, without telling me, he wrote to my wife in Belfast to say that I was getting on very well at the Convention. I always remembered this, and although Bloch drifted somewhat from fandom because of his pro-committments, he recently came to Great Britain, and attended the WorldCon in London in 1965. And just a couple of days ago, he and his wife flew into Northern Ireland for a short visit, and 'plans were made' for a party at James White's house last night, Saturday 18th September. I was at the party, and after twelve hours of heavy slumber and the rapid application of bags of ice and alka seltza tablets, I feel that whilst all the rapid and clever humour still clings to my mind, I should write it out for posterity, so that fans all over the world can read this and imagine they were there, too. For besides Bob Bloch being in full flow, Walt Willis, Bob Shaw and James White (and their respective wives) were also in attendance, and with such an assembly of razor-sharp brains it was little wonder that my head ached with trying to keep up with the repartee.

I'll tell you as much as I can through the haze...

I was the first to arrive at The White House at number 10, Riverdale Gardens, Belfast...a clean, tidy house, expansively decorated, as befits a pro of his calibre. I chatted to James and Peggy awhile until an agonised screech of brakes outside and a sort of creaking noise as a lamp standard veered over a few degrees denoted that Walt Willis had arrived with, as it turned out, a rather breathless Mr. and Mrs. Bloch who gulped down the first drink offered to them. Bob Bloch and myself settled for ice cold canned Carlings lager. James White said he hadn't got a 'fridge, but that he'd kept the lager cold with liquid oxygen. I chatted awhile to Bob Bloch and at the same time kept my ears peeled for witty remarks which began to flow along too fast for me to comprehend or remember them all.

Walt Willis asked me to kneel on the carpet in front of Bob Bloch and press my head to the carpet. I was most certainly willing to do this, to show my appreciation of Bob Bloch, but Willis, grinning like mad, said it would be a false salaam.

Bob Shaw said he'd seen a newspaper clipping about a ghetto being founded in a Northern Mediterranean town. He observed that 'Many a Jew word is spoken in Trieste.'

Bob Bloch smirked at this, and attempted to start a serious discussion about why vehicles drive on the left side of the road in the British Isles. Various theories were offered to explain this, the most original being by Madeleine Willis who suggested that it was so that a lance could be carried in the right hand to combat an oncoming motorist. It seemed that Bob Bloch had been waiting for an opening like this, and leered at Bob Shaw and announced that 'Many a true word is spoken in joust.'

After an hour of this, and I've only been able to capture so few of the gems, the others commented on the fact that I'd been strangely silent. Truth to tell, I felt that the standard of conversation was so high and incredibly witty that it might be an impertinence for me to intrude. I looked around wildly for something on which to comment, anything at all...it was essential for me to start a conversation...then I spotted a little leather stuffed seat, and although it was a dead stupid thing to say, I enquired as to why it was called a pouffe ?

From then on the conversation got completely out of hand. I caught up at one time, when they had hit upon the word 'hassock.' Willis said no, that was a word which described a fighting Russian horseman from the steppes, Shaw said no, that was a word which described a test used by psychiatrists, showing you patterns of ink blobs in a book. Suddenly Bob Bloch said something. Before I tell you what he said I must point out that it isn't funny. To you it will not be funny. But to me it was sheer genius. I was stunned by it. It is a comment that, taken out of that treasured evening, is meaningless. But to me especially it summed up the brilliant understanding of Robert Bloch.

What he said was :-

"Pouffe is the French for the Ink Spots."

To me, that brief phrase demonstrated that not only was Bob Bloch in complete rapport with these witticisms blasted out at top speed, in, to him, a strange set of accents, but also that he had recognised my embarrassment in saying the idiotic thing about pouffe's, and wished to show that his inclusion of the word in tying up that particular bout of word-play indicated that he thought I had contributed to it.

Peggy White served up a delicious trolley-full of eatables, which we all enthused over, particularly Mrs. Bloch. The only thing slightly wrong was that the lettuce with the salad was a mite floppy, only to be expected at this time of the year. Bob Bloch quizzed James and Peggy about this, and neither of them would admit obtaining it. Bob said that meant it was 'anonymous lettuce.'

Bob Shaw said he was working on a plot about a planet whose atmosphere consisted entirely of cigarette smoke. He wondered how he could include a sea of beer, and still get his facts technically correct. James White suggested sowing the sea bed with hops, but was a little worried about what to use as a fermenting agent. Bob

Bloch suggested the Yeast Wind.

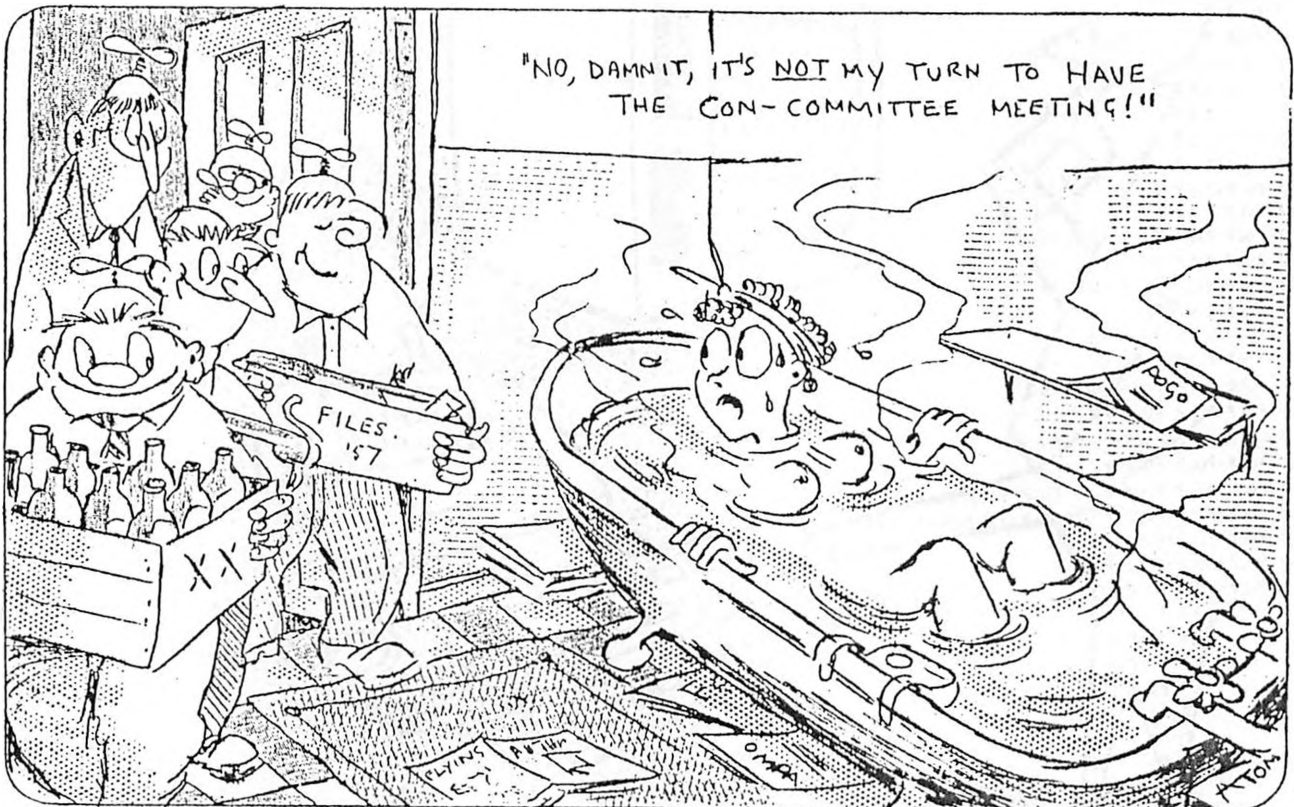
And then Bloch got carried away with enthusiasm about this original idea. He just didn't stop...he spluttered with impatience as he tried to get the words out...bottleships on the horizon...tankards rolling through the waves...and so on. I think Madeleine's comment was the best. She suggested 'carousers down the river.'

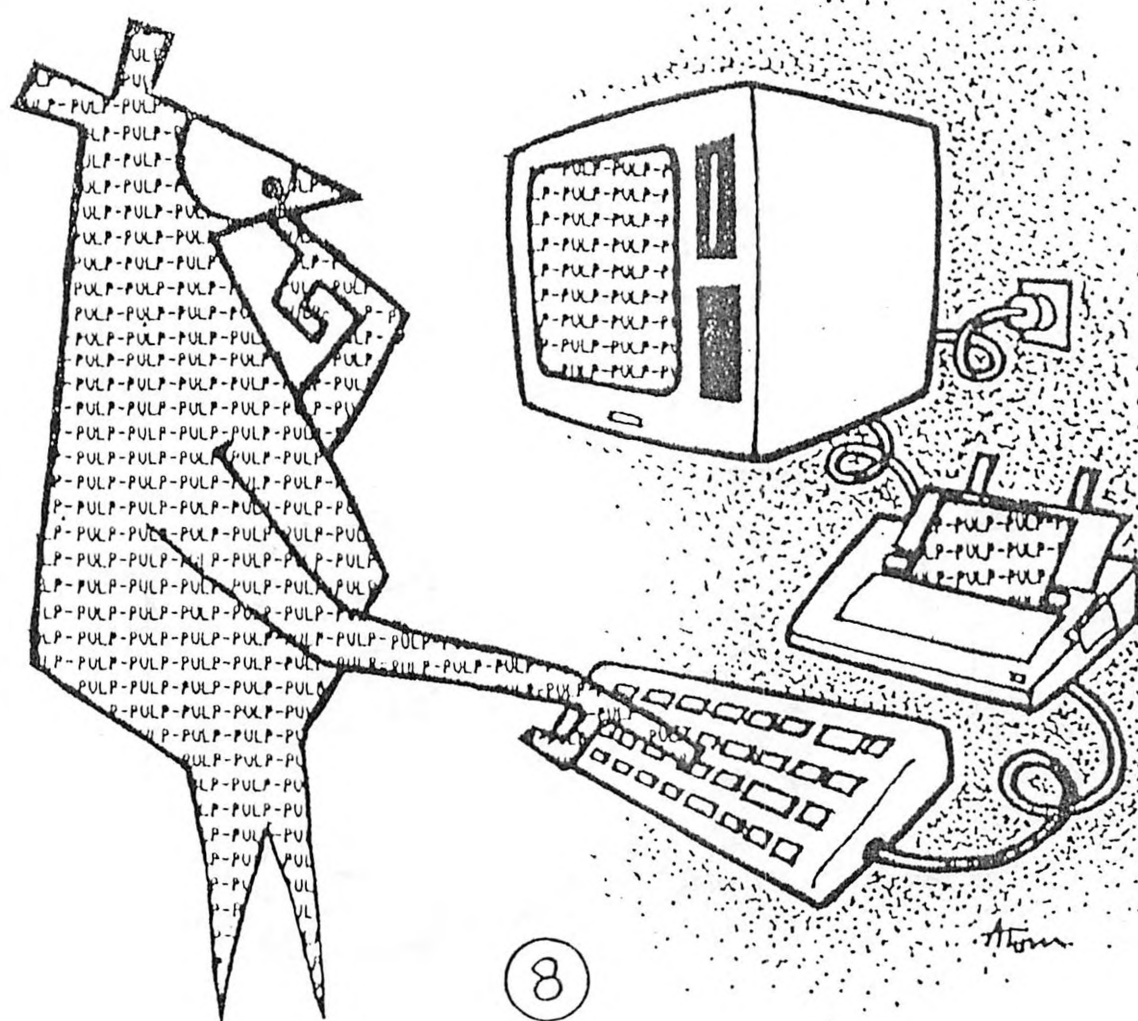
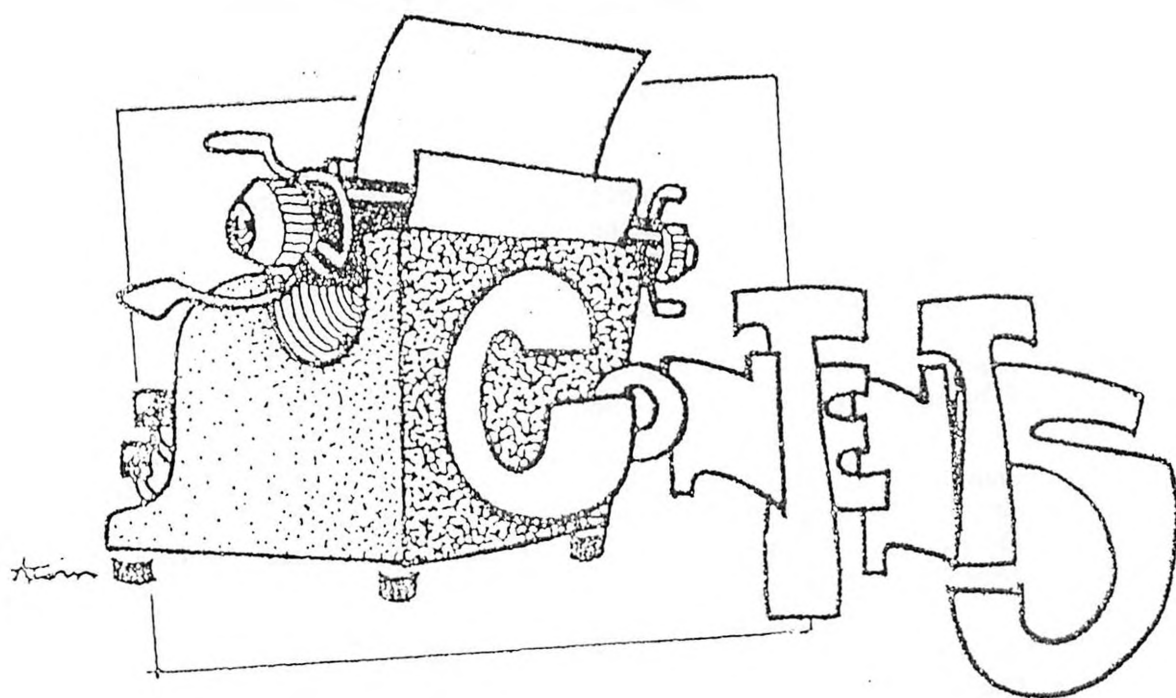
Eleven pm came and went. The Bloch's had a tight schedule for the following day, leaving Belfast by air for London at 9 am, and then flying directly to Chicago, where Bob had to make an hour-long speech the same night.

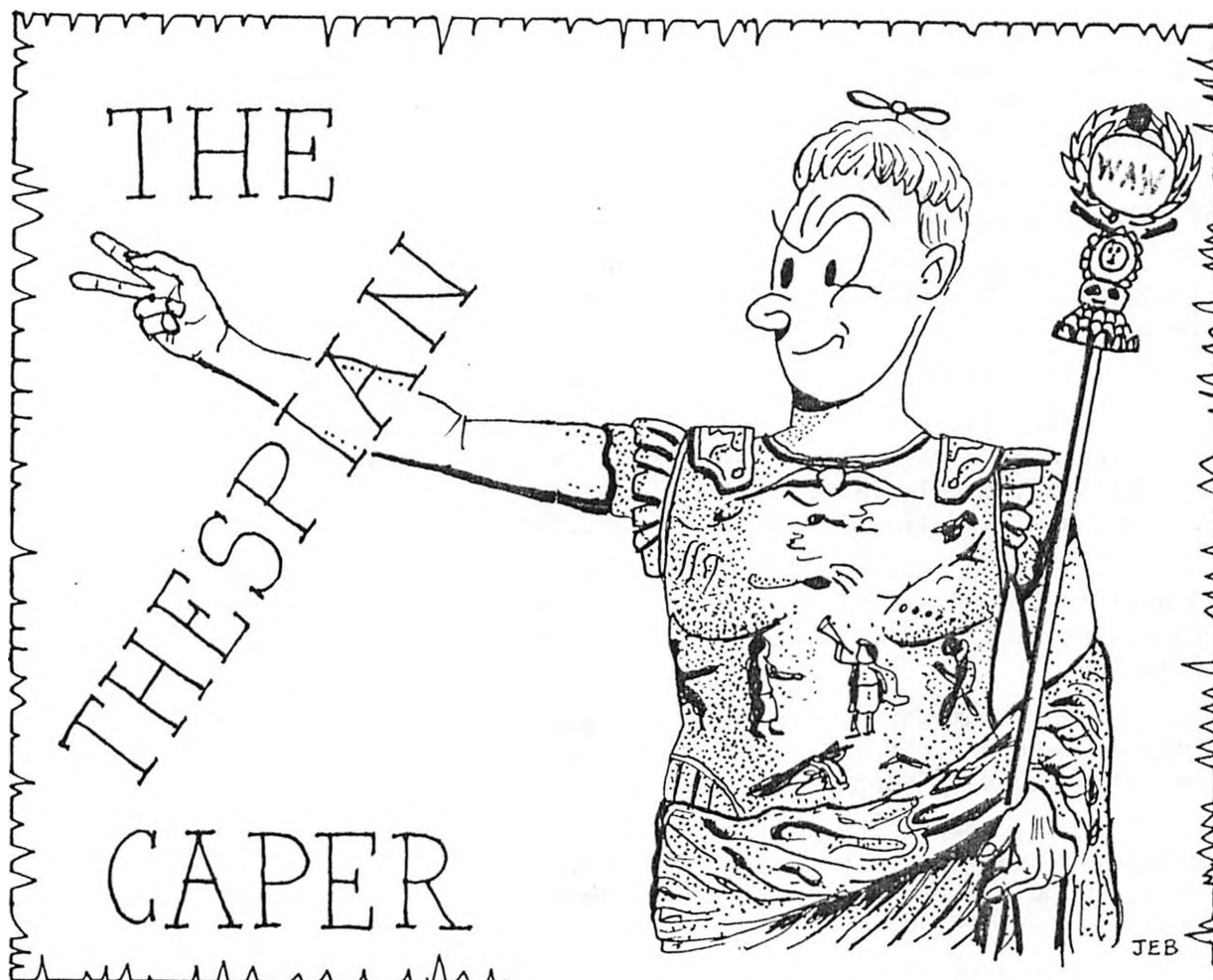
During the last few moments of the party the talk came round round to contraception, which Willis said was a labour-saving device. James handed round a box of chocolates. Someone asked which were the hard ones, and James said the ones with the teeth marks in them. It was that sort of party.

I got a lift in the Willis car, carrying the Bloch's back to Walt's house in Donaghadee. Walt stopped outside my house and I shook hands with Bob and Mrs. Bloch. I said I hoped our paths would cross once more in the years to come.

In this hectic world, where nothing is certain, and incentives have shrunk to mercenary considerations, meeting a gentleman like Bob Bloch again will always be, for me, a shining prospect.







It was not surprising that the short paragraph in the BANGOR AND BALLYGOBLIN WEEKLY GAZETTE caught my eyes. Most people would have missed it, but due to my penetrating scrutiny of newspapers in the Reference Library, in search of newspaper clippings about space travel, I visually tripped over it :-

STRANGE GOINGS-ON IN BANGOR.

'Local police are baffled by a series of petty thefts in Bangor, County Down. So far seventeen dustbin lids are missing, and a local ironmonger reports that a large box outside his store, holding a score of aluminium saucepans has also disappeared. It is also unofficially reported that sixteen garden rakes are missing from the store of a local horticulturalist.'

It is also not surprising that such a mundane item of local gossip quickly slipped from my mind. But the mind is a funny thing. You think you've forgotten something really insignificant, but the memory cells have it tabulated for future reference...

You've all heard about George Charters, Irish Fandom's oldest fan, a likeable sage, completely unselfish, except if he loses his temper, when he's liable to slosh you with his pension book. Probably you've never heard of his fiancée, the Honourable Penelope Murphy. It was a well-kept secret, until Ron Bennett announced the scoop in Skyrack 154. George has always been reticent about his personal life, and as far as I know, I was the only member of Irish Fandom who had a notion about the

relationship, because I noted a luxury automobile parked near Lancaster Avenue some time previously, and the car registration number intimated she was the owner.

It was a considerable shock, then, when George brought her to my house, MON DEBRIS, one night.

"John, er, permit me to present Penelope," he croaked, collapsing on the settee, his eyes clouded beneath crag-like wrinkles.

I bowed and kissed her proffered hand.

"Awfully charmed," she said. Talk about sophistication, she reminded me of a Russian female spy, as depicted in films in the thirties...her cigarette was retained in a long pearl holder...her dress was skin-tight, and her figure...whoosh.

I wiped a band of sweat off the end of my nose as she sat next to George and crossed her legs. I caught a glimpse of frilly lingerie, as did George. A gnarled hand twitched meditatively.

"Say something, darling," she said, looking at me, the delicate sheen of skilfully applied mascara accentuating her blue eyes, pools of passion, no doubt.

"Er, when's the wedding?" I said. Maybe it was unethical to ask such a personal question, but I was thinking of George, as he was obviously undergoing severe physical and mental stress.

Her eyes widened. She turned to George.

"You were correct, dearest," she observed, nibbling his left ear lobe. I could see the sweat glistening on George's forehead. "He's really got a gorgeous voice."

Was she talking about me?

"The point is," drooled George, "do you think he's what we want? I mean, will he be suitable?"

"Oh, without a doubt, Sugar," she answered, her voice a dull throb, like Tallulah Bankhead with laryngitis; she put a hand under George's elbow, and helped him up from the settee.

"We must go now, Mr. Berry," she said formally. "It's well past George's bedtime, you know. But please come to George's house in Bangor tomorrow night."

She supported George out of the room, down the pathway and into his car. She sat in the driver's seat, and just as she put the car into gear, George shouted - "And bring a dustbin lid."

Walt Willis telephoned me at my office next day. He asked if I'd been invited to George's house that night? I confirmed this, and Walt said he'd pick me up on the Upper Newtownards Road. There was a sort of uncontrollable sob in his voice.

I felt terribly conspicuous, standing on this very busy thoroughfare with a burnished dustbin lid in my right hand, like a shield. Many were the curious eyes glancing at me as Walt's automobile scraped along the kerb and shuddered to a halt. I ignored the smell of burning rubber, and obeyed Walt's order

to throw the lid in the boot. I did so, and heard a terrific 'clang' as it hit the assortment of saucepans.

Except for the presence of the Honourable Penelope Murphy, it was actually an extraordinary meeting of Irish Fandom, and I do mean extraordinary. Willis and myself were the last to arrive, and a fantastic scene met our pulsing optics.

Bob Shaw stood in the centre of the room. A dustbin lid was held in his right hand, protectively across the right side of his manly chest. In his left hand he held a rampant garden rake as if it was white hot. One of Sadie's tartan skirts was round his waist, and a cardboard bodice circled his upper body. It bore the legend '24 LARGE PACKETS OF DAZ.' Penelope was fitting a laurel crown amidst his ostentatious wig of tight curls covering his head.

"Good evening, Walt and John", enthused George. "Glad you could make it. You can see that we're in a hurry".

"W-what's going on ?" gasped Walt and myself in unison.

"Didn't Georgie tell you ?" asked Penelope, leaving a blushing Bob and crossing to us. "We've entered the Bangor Dramatic Society Annual Competition..."

"...and we're putting on the Death Scene from JULIUS CAESAR," panted George.

"...and please hurry," gasped Penelope, " we have to perform tomorrow night."

"Sure, that gives us no time for rehearsal," panted James, who was locally notorious for his production of IOLANTHE in Belfast (HAM ROLE). He was trying to get a shine on a dustbin lid which, from its appearance, once adorned a dustbin belonging to a Sanitary Inspector's Dump...a dirty Sanitary Inspector's Dump.

Penelope paused, and took a deep breath, and I thought, I hoped, her brassiere would bust.

"George assured me that Irish Fandom was a cultured and highly intelligent group, with at least one important member having stage experience. The organisers asked me to enter the competition because of a late withdrawal. As Mr. White has observed, I told them that there was insufficient time for rehearsal. But the Patron of Dramatic Society, my uncle, Lord O'Reilly of Strangford, wagered me a case of Champers that I couldn't prepare a cast at short notice. I accepted the challenge because of what George has told me about you."

George turned to us, arms outstretched. It was a pathetic scene. The poor old soul had obviously vaunted our prowess to Penelope, had given us copious egoboo, had emphasised the abundant literary activities of which some of us participated. His eyes, what we could see of them, were full of tears, pleading for us not to let him down.

Willis spoke, his voice strangely resonant in the silence and tension in the room.

"Of course we can do it," he snapped. "Now just tell us our parts, and let's sort out our costumes."

I shivered in the wings of the theatre. The only thing I knew about Julius Caesar was that he died in 66AD, AND I WAS

JULIUS CAESAR. I felt like an idiot in my cardboard costume and sandals, but the laurel crown was a killer, in the rush I'd picked up Bob Shaw's, and he has a bigger head than mine. The crown kept falling round my neck.

Willis, as Mark Anthony, stood beside me looking really noble in his outfit. Being an important official in the government, he'd pulled strings and obtained the loan of a complete Roman Soldier outfit from Belfast Museum.

Bob Shaw was Brutus, Penelope and Sadie Shaw coiled his curls round their fingers and letting them snap back into place.

James White was Casca, he obviously wished he was back home in his attic, pounding his typer.

George was Cassius...a shocking bit of casting, actually. I cannot believe that Shakespeare thought of Cassius as being a venerable chappie crawling about on his hands and knees. The sooner he married Penelope, the better...

And then..the dreaded climax...the curtains were pulled apart, and Penelope, in a tight-fitting evening dress, addressed the audience.

She explained that she supported the Dramatic Society, and had agreed to enter the Death Scene at the last moment...there had unfortunately been a bare minimum of rehearsals, but to such a talented group of travelling actors from Belfast, it was merely a challenge. She bowed proudly to spasmodic applause, someone banged a gong, and as far as I was concerned, more potent still, a well-placed boot planted me firmly on the spot Penelope had just vacated...

At first, I could remember my lines.

"The Ides of March are come," I panted.

Cassius (George Charters), followed by Brutus (Bob Shaw) staggered onto the stage. BoSh actually cartwheeled into the spotlight, suggesting that the person who had booted me on was still hyper-active.

Penelope was prompting like mad, frowning at the audience who, although supposed to be watching a tragedy, were in a highly exited state. The Adjudicator was led off, foaming at the mouth, and we had only just started. I carried on just as best as I could, being totally inexperienced...

"Are we all ready ? What is now amiss
That Caesar and his Senate must undress ?"

I dimly heard Metellus (Sadie Shaw, a rather unique casting choice, I thought) giving me the cue for what I knew was about ten lines long, but I'd only read it a couple of times. I was, in fact, a prompter's nightmare, and in the end, Penelope, in a assumed bass voice that made me ponder over her need for an operation, took over for me, and I mimed as best I could, one sentence behind.

Then I heard Cassius ad-libbing freely:-

"Poddon Caesar; Caesar poddon,
As low as to thy foot doss Cassiuth fall
To Beg enfranchisement for a pubic climber."

This, I knew, was the lead to Caesar's famous speech before

the fatal stabbing. I'd read this a very few times, so I had a bash at it :-

"I could well be moved, if I were as you
If I could pray to move, prayers would move me.
But I am constant as the Northern Lights
Of whose true-fixed and resting quality
There is no yellow in the armament.
The skies are painted with outnumbered specks
They are all right, and every moth does shine
But there's but one in all must hold his peace
So in the world - 'tis furbished well with jam
Yet in the rumba I do know but one
That unassailable holds on his wick
Shaking of motion - and that he am I.
Let me show it, even in this
That I was plastered, timber should be varnished
And Constance McKenzie do keep him so."

(This is copied from a tape...the unruly background noise nevertheless has enabled me to decipher my words. The only redeeming feature of my fracturing Shakespeare was that I kept going with this garbled nonsense - no long pauses spoiled my delivery.)

The stabbing of the noble Caesar (me) seemed rather realistic. Brutus and Cassius were hitting me like mad, more I thought, than the action demanded. The audience were shouting encouragement, and one or two of them, carried away by the spirit of the thing, commenced to climb on the stage, faces strangely contorted, waving their fists angrily. A little set-to Willis had with an elderly woman with a rolled umbrella brought spontaneous applause, which, considering the brave way Willis was standing over my prostrate form, seemed to encourage the woman.

"Ah chew," I cried with my last breath.

"No, et tu," hissed the distraught Penelope.

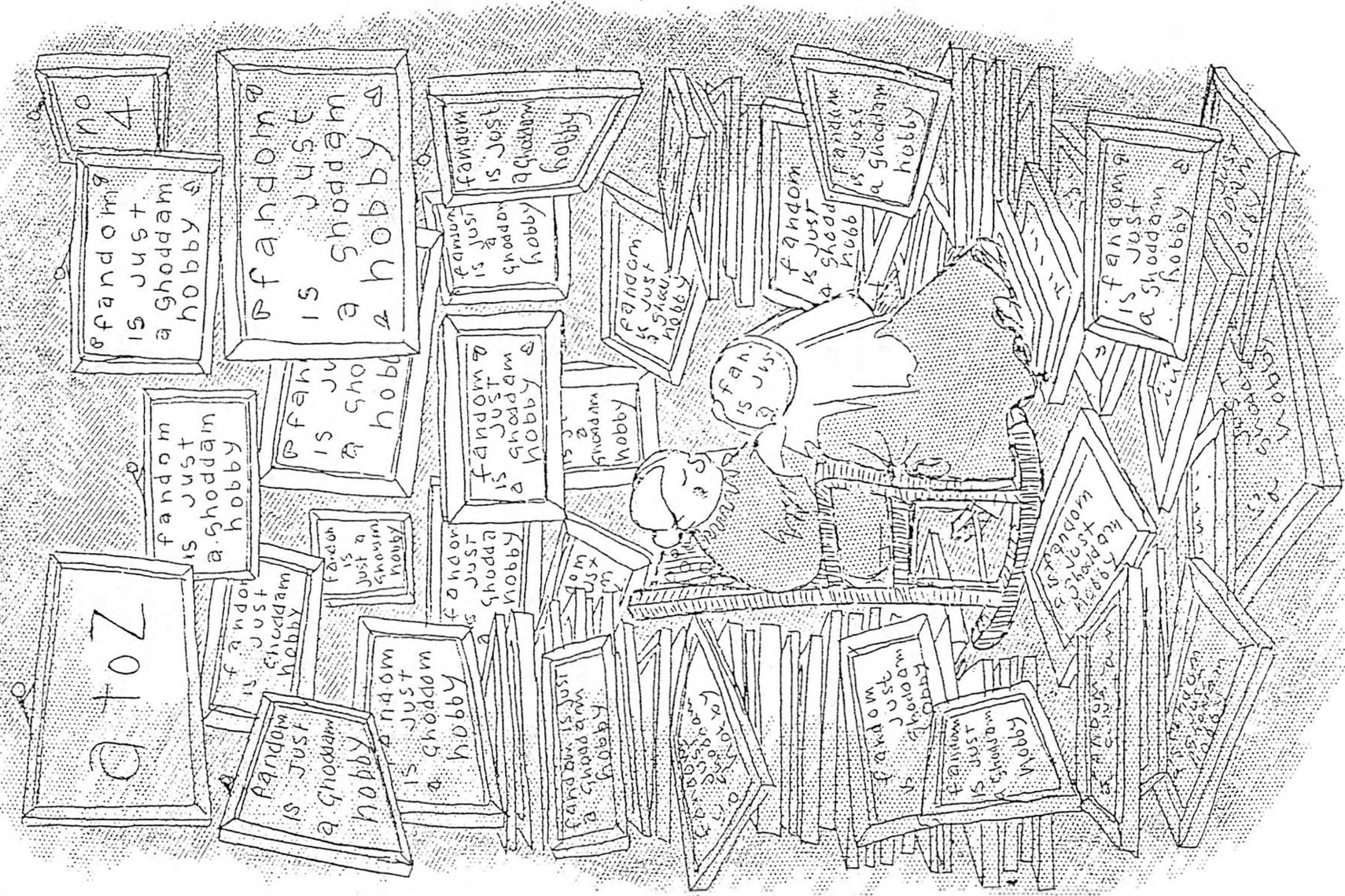
"Gesundheit," roared Willis.

This seemed to be the last straw. En masse, the audience invaded the stage. It was a case of every fan for himself. The situation was so shocking that Charters even managed to stand up, and, supporting himself on his shield, valiantly fought with a vanguard of Shakespeare scholars who were utilising any weapons available, handbags, walking sticks, ear trumpets and umbrellas.

Gradually, we were forced back to the dressing rooms, where we later made most undignified departures via the LADIES toilet window.

We don't talk about it very much. Willis is now reading Hank Jensen, and was wittily heard to say that he'd 'bard' Madeleine from reading Shakespeare.

The Honourable Penelope broke off the engagement to George, who is left with his memories.



BELFASTERS

FIVE~

WHOLLY BERRY

by
Bob Shaw



After reading his series, BELFASTERS, the readers of GRUE must surely be consumed with curiosity about John Berry. His smoothness of narrative, his vast insight into fannish nature, his humour, his sympathetic handling of human weakness, his beautiful imagery; all hint at a fine, noble personality behind that prolific typewriter. I like to think that I know John Berry better than most - better, even, than the man from the finance company - so here are some inadequate reflections upon a person too great to be captured by pen alone. Yes, many who wrote about him have been heard to say that they thought Berry had escaped from the pen.

APPEARANCE. The first time I saw John Berry striding up the Willis garden path I thought he had forgotten to duck at the gate and had carried the top off the arched hedge. When he got closer I realised he was sporting a moustache which made Stalin's look like a few extra-long nostril hairs. Infrared photographs have shown that behind his moustache is a pleasant, cheerful face and John is a neat dresser, as is shown by the tidy way he wraps his shoe laces round the bottom of his hobnail boots to keep the soles from flapping. He has an athletic build and looks the picture of a strong, fast, all-round Ghoddminton player. He has bendy hair on his head.

THE HORTICULTURALIST. At the back of John's house is a plot of ground known in the district as Garden of Knockeden. To assist him in his various feuds with neighbours John decided to build a sort of rampart all round it. He began with a bottom course of old perambulators and covered these with so much soil that his garden is several feet higher than all the others. The whole surface of

of the garden is covered with tangled grass, orange peel, old spades and rakes, tin cans and torn newspapers. Why then, you ask, have I called him a horticulturalist? Well you see, John is so proud of his garden's fannish disorder that I suspect it is cleverly made on a rolled carpet system. I think that when fans go home he rolls the whole thing up, exposing a crewcut lawn and geometrical flower beds.

THE GUARDIAN OF THE LAW. In his chosen work John is gravitating further and further along the ladder of success. Several years ago he was stationed in a little place called Waringstown. He remained in obscurity for a while, then, in a hectic chase across the turf piles he apprehended a notorious international rear-lamp offender. This got him promoted to work in Belfast - from bounding the peat to pounding the beat. Once established in Belfast he busted a local gang who were buying chocolate on their mother's charge accounts and selling it on the black market. This got him posted to the fingerprint department. He is doing well there, too. A short time ago he told me confidentially that he had uncovered a huge nest of known criminals hiding in a big grey building on the Crumlin Road. Due to the fact that the windows were so heavily barred and the doors armoured he was unable to get in to make an arrest, but he is working on it. I confidentially predict he will be in there some day.



THE GHODMINTON TACTICIAN. In spite of the fact that he is the most energetic member of Irish Fandom John prefers to win his games by craft and stealth. His favourite ploy is based on the GALAXY story about the natives whose method of war was to dash up to the enemy and cut their own throats. When you serve or

return the shuttlecock to John he shouts unintelligible phrases at the top of his voice, bounds into the air, collides with something and skins his elbow, lands flat on his back, hits his head on the floor, trips his partner, scrabbles for the shuttlecock, loses his bat, heads the shuttlecock across the net and looks at you trustingly. If you hit it back you know you will start the whole performance over again. After a while you just let the shuttlecock fall at your feet. It's easier.

He is always inventing new kinds of bats. Once he turned up with one which had a photograph of Marilyn Monroe on it. John held it in opponent's faces at crucial moments but he lost more points than he gained. He kept falling into trances at the wrong times, and several times he lost points because his eyeballs were bulging in the wrong court.

FANWRITER. John's widespread writings will speak for themselves more eloquently and at greater length than I possibly could. Suffice

to say that his ability to faithfully portray the minute details of life put him in the same class as historians like Pliny the Elder, Gibbon, Munchausen and Grimm.

HOBBYIST. Into his hobbies John pours the same energy with which he applies himself to writing and ghoddminton. One time he was interested in model aeroplanes and he made so many that his house looks as though it had been hit with a swarm of robot locusts. Some of the rooms are so full of models hung from the ceiling that it is hard to see from one side to the other.

Even this was not enough to absorb his enthusiasm. Down through the years, emitting phrases like 'Brilliant'... 'Suffering Catfish' and 'Crikey' he has ardently pursued such varied interests as raising poultry, judo, budgerigars and shove ha'penny. John is a

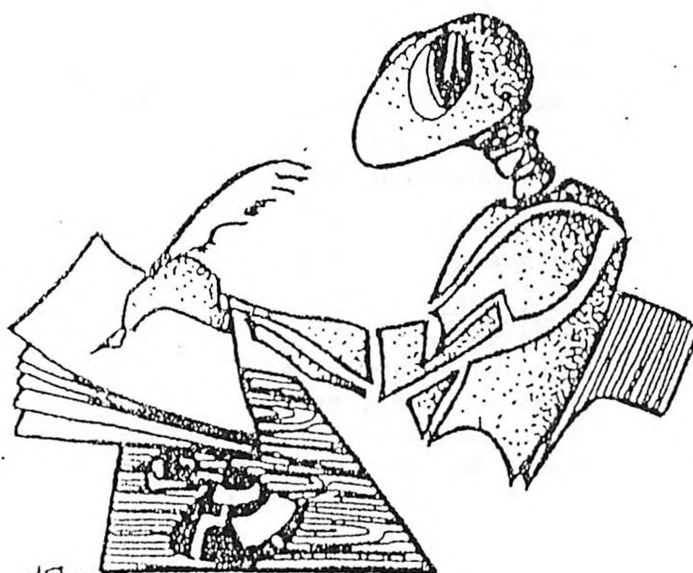
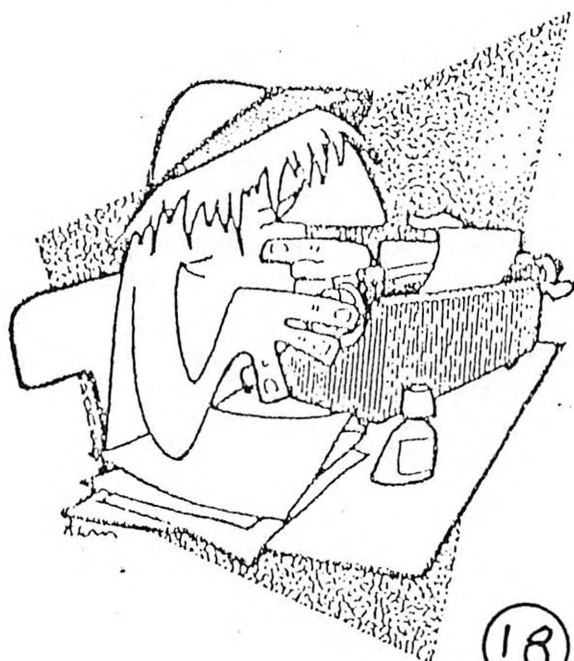
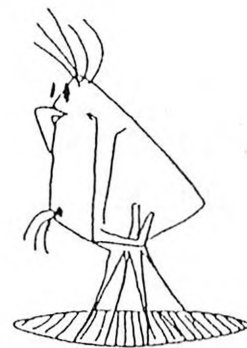


keen student of strange folk customs, being fascinated in such things as Greenland hospitality, bundling, syneisaktism and hand-fasting. He also adores Marilyn Monroe !

He has even invented pusuits of his own like diving off wardrobes onto his bed and exploring the wilds of Carryduff.

In spite of all this he is very modest about his boundless enthusiasm and drive - he attributes it all to home-grown watercress.

IN GENERAL. John, I should have mentioned before, has a beautiful wife and a little boy and an even littler little girl. They are a very nice family and John is as friendly a chap as you would ever meet. In fact, no less a person than the Governor of Crumlin Road Goal has described him as the person he would most like to number among his acquaintances.



The last meeting of Irish Fandom.

Monday, 26th April 1965 started, for me, just like any other working day. I was busily engaged in the fingerprint office, trying to get 29 across, when the 'phone rang. It was Walt Willis. He was so bewildered he didn't recognise my voice. He asked if he could speak to Mr. Berry. I knew from that that something serious was afoot. I didn't realise how serious. Maybe I should have guessed...

I was busy one night, a couple of weeks previously, when my wife interrupted me.

"This looks like Walt's house," muttered my wife. She was scanning the local evening paper. She passed it over to me. Sure enough, there was a photograph of Oblique House, and it even quoted the number, 170 Upper Newtownards Road, stating the residence was 'Up For Sale.' I breathlessly read the blurb, and it stated that there was hot and cold running water, garage at the rear, cultivated garden, etc, 'all in good condition'. I told my wife it was definitely a mistake. That did not describe Walt's house. The wrong photograph must have been juxtaposed. And I promptly forgot all about it.

Until Walt spoke to me on the 'phone that memorable morning.

I had not recently been a frequent visitor to Irish Fandom meetings. Well, way back in the fifties I'd been there almost every day, but for the last few years I'd led a more restricted fanac.

"We want you to come round to Oblique House tonight, John," said Walt, in his softly-spoken Civil Service accent, "it's the last meeting of Irish Fandom at 170."

"You mean...?"

"Yes. We're leaving. I have purchased a large house in Donaghadee, County Down."

I whistled as I put the 'phone down, after saying that I would attend. This was Big Time. Donaghadee, about fifteen miles south east of Belfast, was the residence of rich, retired people.

I sensed that the forthcoming meeting would be a very sentimental affair. For once, I didn't exaggerate.

The silence in the front room was poignant. No one really said anything at all. Willis was surrepticiously sniffing the sleeve of his duper ink-stained cardigan, the rest of us, James White, George Charters, Bob and Sadie Shaw and Madeleine sat looking at each other, fingers tapping cryptic messages on slightly trembling knees, our own, I hasten to add !

Only once did Willis try to be his old self. For a second a smile flirted with his lips and then gave up.

"Did...er...did you think of a pun, Walter ?" asked James White.

Walt nodded guiltily.

"A little thing," he murmured, wiping an eye, "I just thought that when we leave 170 on Tuesday night, we shall all be promoted."

"Why ?" we asked, leaning forward excitedly; was this to be the climax of his career as a top punster ?

"We shall all be left-tenants" he answered, with, it must be admitted, none of his customary zest.

Only nine-year-old Bryan applauded...the rest of us sank back, thunder struck. Had the departure from 170 unsettled Willis as much as this...this...this mockery of a pun.

Madeleine coughed to break the tension, and said she was going to bring in the tea.

The array of food was the finest I'd seen. But it was just too much. No one could do more than nibble, and yet no one had the nerve to bring the undeniable fact into the open...we would never meet again at this shrine of fanac. I tried to divert our minds off the dreaded truth by making a little model rocket from the silver paper wrapper off a chocolate biscuit. It was just a little thing I thought up one day in the office canteen when I wanted to attract the attention of a person across the room. You merely smooth the silver paper out flat, roll it into a spill, open out one end and press out little fins, and chew the other end into a heavy gooey mass. The final touch is to gently curl the tailfins just so...when launched by a quick flick of the right hand, the effect is like the rifling in a gun barrel, the rocket skimmed across the canteen remarkably accurately, spinning the while.

My rocket performed perfectly, landing on Walt's chest. Willis, caught in the spirit of the thing, threw it back in my direction, and maybe wishing to make its trajectory a little more dynamic, he attached a heavy ash tray to it. Unfortunately, Walt Willis, who appeared to know very little about ballistics, hadn't taken too much trouble to adhere the rocket to the ash tray as effectively as he should have done, and only the ash tray hit me a glancing blow on the side of my head. James White plucked the rocket from Walt's chest and asked me if he, as an unpaid-up member of the British Inter-planetary Society, could carry out a minor alteration ?

He took out his manicuring scissors, and sliced little cut-outs at the bottom of the fins. He became quite obsessed with what he was doing, and in a moment or two managed to make the rocket stand vertically. Who knows what technical improvements he might

have made had not Willis leapt to his feet and announced he was going to bury the time capsule.

We trooped upstairs to the fanac den, where my drops of blood could still be seen mottling the low ceiling. Yes, I pondered, as I looked upwards, I certainly was a vigorous ghoominton player in the old days. I looked round me, and each of us was silent with our own particular memories...Walt Willis seemed to be particularly moved ...he was supposed to be sorting out stuff for the time capsule...his fingers seemed to lack synchronisation as they groped amongst the jetsam which had accumulated over the years.

In a broken voice, Willis eventually got us organised, and asked us to select what we'd each like to include in the time capsule. Well, time capsule is perhaps rather an exotic word to describe the large empty pickle jar which Willis had decided was to bear its reminders of Irish Fandom for several thousand years. Herewith is the unexpurgated list of the contents, together with comments as necessary:-

Autographed cards. (Whenever a fan of note visited the fanac den at 170, he or she signed small square cards which were then pinned to the wall in prominent places. All cards thus signed were encapsulated.)

One copy of THE ENCHANTED DUPLICATOR.

One battered shuttlecock. (Obviously symbolic of ghoominton.)

Several battered fonts. (Used a decade previously in the production of SLANT.)

Several SLANT covers.

One bow tie.

One Irish Fandom christmas card.

One chewed tablet. (The sort taken to keep one awake at a convention.)

One low value U.S.coin. (An old HYPHEN sub.)

The remainder of a tube of duplicating ink was then squeezed over these items, which were jammed tight in the pickle jar. Willis ran a finger of vaseline around the inside of the lid, so that it wouldn't rust, then screwed the lid on really tight. He peered through the thick glass, muttering to himself, asking if anyone could see the bow tie? I'd handled the pickle jar last and assured Walt that it was in the capsule. Once again Willis was touched with a blast of sentiment. He told me I could have any of his books which I fancied; as I felt this was very nice of Walt, I thanked him enthusiastically, and instead of selecting some from the bookshelves, I replaced a few of the choicer items I'd already stuffed inside my jacket.

"We will now bury the capsule," announced Walt.

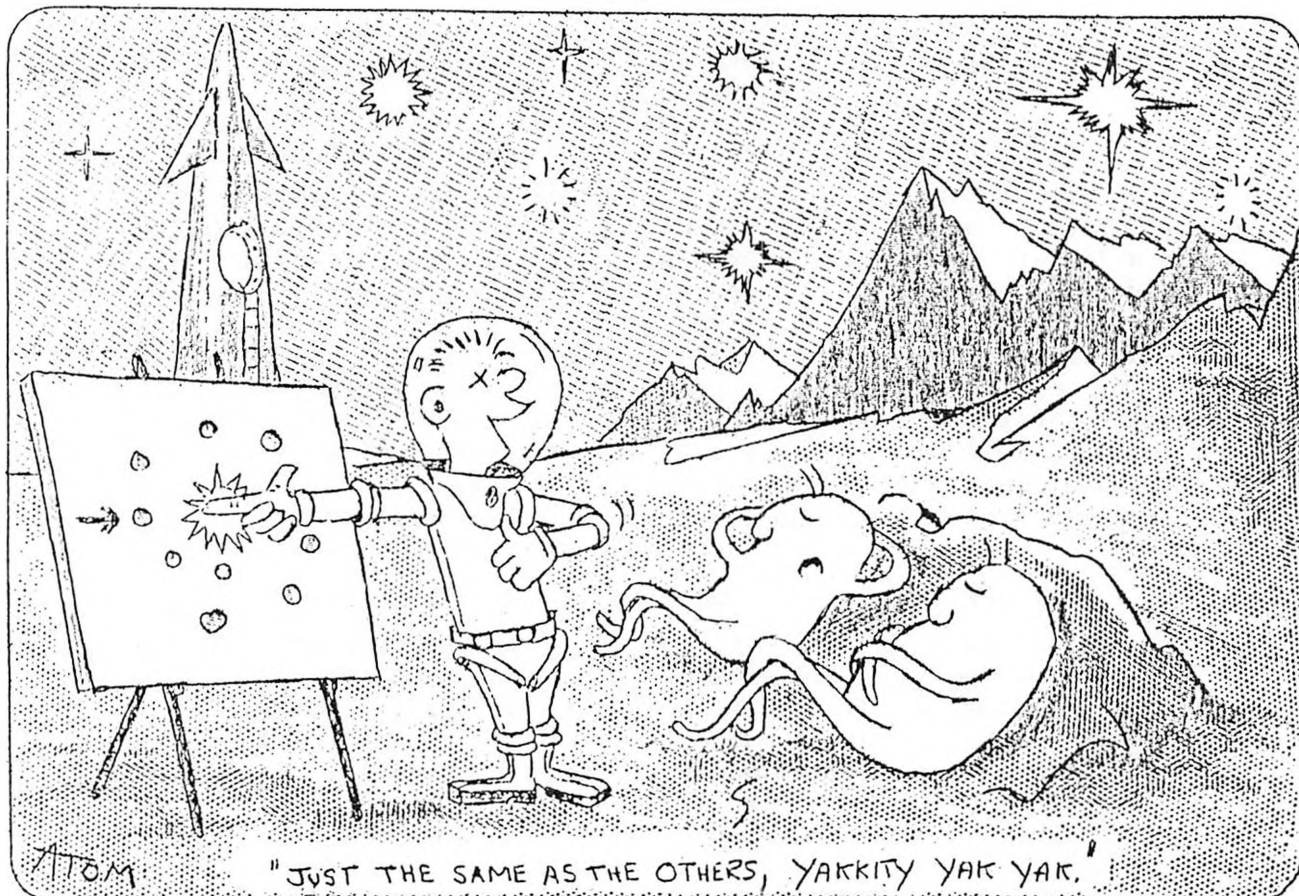
For the last time we tramped down the four flights of stairs ...slowly, meditating, rather like following a High Priest (Walt Willis) bearing aloft a golden urn (a pickle jar). Through the hallway and into the front garden, where, fortunately, it was dusk. Walt had made sure a spade was available, and as no one else seemed inclined to demonstrate their skill with it, he attacked a secluded area of his brown/green lawn. We huddled in a group, aware

of the inquisitive stares of passengers from the upper seats of the trolley buses. When the hole was about two feet deep, Willis groped around until he found the capsule, and muttering something under his breath, deposited the pickle jar in its resting place. I looked up into the dark sky, stating that it would really be wonderful if a satellite would cruise over just at that moment. No such luck. We all trampled on the replaced divots, then returned to the front room, where we sat looking at each other, wondering what to say. I made one or two senseless observations, to try and get conversation flowing, but Willis declared my observations were trite, and Bob suggested I should produce a one-shot of this trivia and call it BERRY'S UNLIKELYPEDIA.

Eleven pm...and I've never before or since experienced the tension that grew in that room. Probably never again would Irish Fandom hold regular meetings. A trip to the Willis's new house in Donaghadee is planned, but at this time, on the first occasion ever, no one said anything witty, no one manoeuvred puns into someone else's mouth, no one brought forth a new plot for discussion, or slaughtered a published one...it was, quite frankly, uncomfortable. I couldn't stand the tension any longer. I was the junior member of Irish Fandom, joining in 1954, so at last I stood up, muttered 'goodbye' to everyone, and departed.

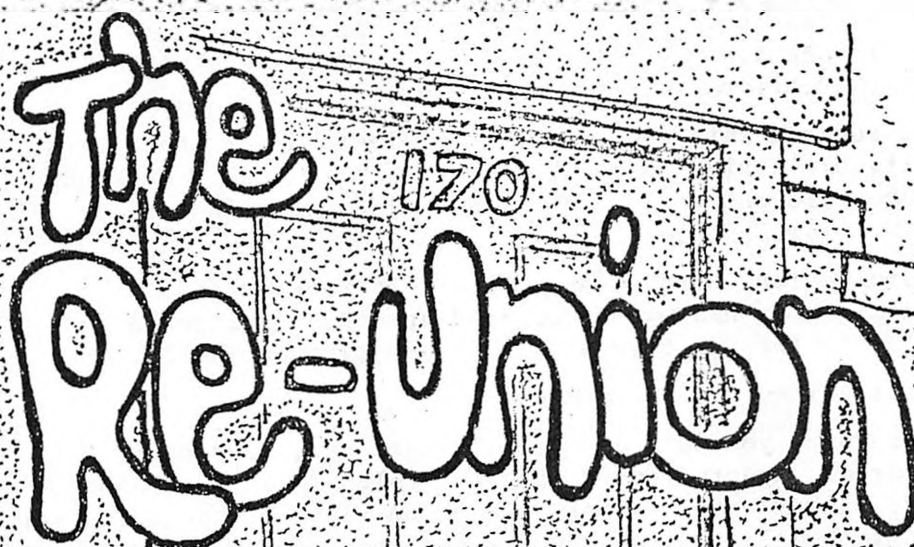
I walked home clutching my books. As I turned the corner of Campbell Park Avenue, my eyes were drawn upwards, and I saw a satellite moving quite plainly across the black velvet sky, from north to south. I stood for about ten minutes looking at it, until it vanished. I think it was probably ECHO II, which I have seen many times.

I'm glad I saw it at this time. It was like a full stop after the last word on the last page of a priceless, a unique book...



"JUST THE SAME AS THE OTHERS, YAKKITY YAK YAK."

The 170 Re-Union



The card from Walt Willis, bearing a 'Donaghadee' postmark, informed me that on Sunday night, 1st February 1987, between 8pm and 9pm, a meeting would be held at 170 Upper Newtownards Road, Belfast, to celebrate the fortieth anniversary of the founding of Irish Fandom, and I was cordially invited. R.S.V.P ?

I wrote by return, confirming that I would be pleased to attend. The last meeting of Irish Fandom had been on 26th April 1965...twenty two years since we had trod the scuffed linoleum, worn out by years of ghoddminton...I wondered who lived there now, and how Walt Willis had managed to persuade them to permit this brief commemoration ?

My daughter, Kathleen, lives in Bangor, County Down, half a dozen miles from Donaghadee. I telephoned her, because I knew she was a member of The Bangor Players. I had this wonderfully nostalgic idea, you see. Dear old George Charters, who used to live in Bangor, had expired in the interim, and I felt it would be a superb ploy to hire a professional actor to impersonate him at the meeting. Yes, Kathleen thought that Percy Delaney, an experienced character actor in the troupe, would probably be delighted to attend 170 and pretend to be George. She returned my call almost at once. Yes, for a fee of £20 Delaney would accept the job; he would call at her house at noon on 1st February for a briefing.

I smiled to myself in triumph...I knew that Walt, James White and Bob Shaw would be impressed with my forethought and initiative.

The Boeing 737 of British Airways swooped silently onto the runway at Aldergrove Airport, in County Antrim. We were disgorged...I collected my suitcase and was greeted by Kathleen and my two grandchildren, Steven and Peter.

We reached Kathleen's home. I apologised for the literally flying visit, explaining that I had to return to London on Monday morning...she said she would drive me to Aldergrove in time to catch the 10.30 am Shuttle flight.

Percy Delaney proved to be over fifty years old. I sensed he was gay by his mannerisms and speech. I whispered to Kathleen to tell the two boys to go out and play football.

I explained his commission.

"Disguise yourself as a middle-aged man, grey hair, somewhat sparse...spectacles, a cheerful false-teeth filled smile ...pullover, jacket with leather patches on sleeves, baggy trousers, boots...and talk all the time about being in hard covers and about Max Brand...make a few puns."

I handed him a photograph of George taken many years ago. He smiled, but refused the proffered fee.

"Give it me tonight," he leered.

Kathleen drove me to 170 in her Talbot Horizon. She said she would collect me at 9 pm sharp.

I walked up the path, as I had done so many times before since the very first time in 1954. How would the other members of Irish Fandom look after all these years ? And what would they think of my George Charters idea ?

I knocked. Walt Willis opened the door...we shook hands, muttered conventionalities. Our minds accepted the visages confronting us, searched in dormant recesses for our mental photokits to absorb the new data, make allowances, confirm the sightings. He looked much the same...same grey hair, a little more worried-looking ...might have something to do with the absence of the familiar handful of prozines for sale in the doorway.

I followed him into the lounge at the front of the house, once blasted by unpremediated display of fireworks by George Charters. Bob Shaw and James White were instantly recognisable, though James's intellectual forehead was possibly even higher than before. He was still thin, blinking benevolently behind thick-lensed spectacles, various expressions flitting across his face as if each succeeding speed-of-light thought was more exciting and stimulating than the one it replaced. The colourful stories about Bob having put on weight were obviously pigments of the imagination, and the voice which now convulsed conventions all over the world was the same hesitant and diffident one which had for so long done the same for us privileged few. The youthful joie de vivre of the fifties ghoddminton days was now mixed with the confident smile of the successful author, and a slight twitch of the left corner of the lips indicated constant contemplation of a new letter of the alphabet for the names of his heroines.

The room was thickly carpeted, furnished with Victorian exaggeration...inlaid furniture, highly polished to camouflage surface cracks; water colours of flowers, turning brown at the edges of the frames; an imposing acoustic gramophone of incredible antiquity; thick purple curtains, mothholes anxiously repaired with red embroidery silk which now looked like little rosebuds...the scenery exactly suited the melancholy aspect of the reunion. We were much older, wiser, matured by the ravages of life and weighed down by the burden of its responsibilities. I was glad I had not brought my grandson's water pistol.

We had a mere hour to encompass the thoughts of forty years. I began to ask a question..."Why?"

As so often before, we knew each other's thoughts.

"The Over-Seventies Ballyhackamore Classical Evening" explained Walt. " starts at 9 pm. I am not a member, I hasten to add, although I do like the Beach Boys. But Mrs. Finley has very kindly allowed us this precious hour to meet and talk and philosophise. But only for an hour."

I sneaked a look at my watch. Delaney...er, George Charters...was due at 8.15 pm. I decided to attempt one of the lightning pun exchanges of our old days.

"Presumably," I offered in quiet triumph, " our chorister hostess was fearful of her recital being ruined ?"

"Yes," said Walt, " it was a clear case of Pre-Minstrel Tension."

James White and Bob Shaw nodded sagely at this, but whereas thirty years ago word play would have continued like sparks from a busy anvil, we all sat quietly as if holding our breaths...waiting. Waiting for what ?

"I heard," I gabbled, losing my composure, "from Jean Linard that since he moved to Provence he has had to construct a reinforced wing to his house to keep out the wind blowing down the Rhone Valley."

"I have heard such things," agreed Walt. "I think it is called a Pre-Mistral Extension."

But again the conversation expired. Desperately I went on. Would Willis hit the hat trick ?

"Previously " I said, " his wife used to writhe in agony with sinus trouble, which could only be relieved by an inhalant."

"Ah yes, Pre-Menthol Torsion," said Willis after some delay, his face showing the strain of unaccustomed mental activity.

Fortunately there was a knock at the front door. I hastened to open it.

Great Ghu. Delaney was absolutely superb. He looked exactly as I remembered George Charters the last time I had seen him where he used to call at MON DEBRIS, where I lived in Belfast, for material for THE SCARR.

"Good evening," he said to me, "George Charters to see Mr. Willis and company."

"Brilliant, Percy," I hissed. "Here's your fee."

I pressed the £20 note into his right hand. Shakespeare appeared to wink at me from the bank note as it disappeared into his trouser pocket.

I felt magnificent as I opened the lounge door.

"Gentlemen, George Charters."

He stumbled in, face wreathed in a huge smile.

"I am George Charters, fan, known as George All The Way. My best pun is 'Earwig, Oh, Again! I sold it to Berry in '66, and have appeared in hard covers..."

He continued his delivery exactly as I had instructed him.

The effect on the other three stalwarts of Irish Fandom was incredible to behold. In each instance, pairs of hands clutched like claws at the ends of their chair arms. Their bodies half rose from their chairs, their lower jaws hitting their sternums in utter bewilderment. I was just so terribly pleased. I had made their evening complete, if only in a symbolic way.



Unexpectedly there was another knock on the door. Oh crikey, Kathleen was half an hour early.

I opened the door to remonstrate, and there was George Charters.

"Mr. Berry, I'll take my twenty pounds first and then I'm all yours."

It was Percy Delaney; I could tell by the lisp, the moue, the overall camp approach as he gripped my arm. I gave him a £20 note.

This was definitely my George Charters. Could it be ...of course it couldn't...was the other George some kind of mass mind-controlled phenomenon.

"Hurry up, it's cold out here, Ducky," he said.

I held the door open again. Inside, the other George Charters was lecturing on his experiences in the Short and Harland aircraft factory in the Sixties.

"Gentlemen," I said, "er, permit me to present the real pseudo George Charters."

Delaney swept in, and quickly handed each of us a card:-

Percy Limpwrist' Delaney
Impersonator and Artiste
Bachelor Parties a Speciality.

"I am George L. for Leather Charters," he commenced, "Famed in fandom for my vast store of local knowledge and my impromptu firework displays. My best pun was 'I am a Bangorlore Torpedo.'"

I was in a parlous mental state with the speed of the action, and the members of Irish Fandom appeared more amazed than I had seen them in thirty three years. Save perhaps for James White, who permitted a smirk to cross his face when I heard the other George Charters whisper to him..."No, the man with the moustache paid me."

"I'm really George Charters."

"No, I'm George Charters...see my cowboy shirt with the coloured patch pockets."

"Bitch". (That remark was made by my George Charters.)

I though the situation had eased a little as far as I was concerned, but I welcomed another knock at the front door. Kathleen had arrived to save me from further humiliation. I dashed to open the door.

Another George Charters ?

"Come in" I panted. I pushed open the lounge door.

"A third George Charters, chaps."

Walt, Bob, James and I eased our chairs backwards as the three George Charters took the centre of the stage.

"I'm a better George Charters than you are any day."

"You don't look a bit like him. He wore boots, not suede shoes. "

"But I am wearing spurs on them. And where's your ear trumpet ?"

"That's all you know. That ear trumpet was a myth."

"You're both butch." (That last comment was made by my George Charters.)

"I thought I heard the front door being knocked again, John," breathed Bob Shaw. "You're nearest, would you see who it is ?"

By now I had a helluva good idea who it was.

Bingo, I grabbed him by the front of his shawl and pushed him into the lounge.

"Bloody hell," swore Willis. "Yet another George."

The fourth George Charters commenced:-

"I lived for many years at 3, Lancaster Avenue, Bangor, inhabiting half the houses on that side of the street, and..."

"Oh no you didn't, I lived there, with my fabulous collection of brown paper parcels."

"You're nothing like George, you've just a poof."

"It takes all sorts." (That observation was made by my George Charters.)

"I'm the only one with a Buntline Special."

"Max Brand used a Colt."

"ENOUGH IS ENOUGH," roared Willis.

The silence cut through the atmosphere like a pneumatic drill. The four George Charters looked open-mouthed at Willis. The scene was utterly bizarre, incredible, dreamlike.

"Please leave, gentlemen," said Walt. "You've all performed admirably, but it has all been a terrible mistake. Mr. Berry will see you all out and pay you."

It was all so confusing. It was three minutes to 9 pm. I could hear Kathleen's car drawing up outside 170 and pipping her horn...Hell...easy come, easy go. I could easily work another fifty four hours overtime to make up the total fees. I mean, I didn't know who was who and I had no time to question them.

I waved to Kathleen and indicated she should wait, and I returned to the lounge.

"Members of Irish Fandom," said Walt. "What can I say ? It seems that we all had the same inspirational notion...a facsimile of George Charters to complete the gathering. If only we had discussed it beforehand...but then, we are all famed for our spontaneity aren't we. How much did it cost you, John ?"

I saw a spark in his eyes...the flash of sheer genius I'd seen so often in the past...what did it mean ?

"Er, um, it's a worry. I'm beginning to feel a mite feverish. I'm not really solvent, you know "

Willis leapt to his feet, his right hand formed into a fist as he tried to punch the ceiling.

"PRE MENSTRUM TERTION," he screamed at the top of his voice.

And then...a strange look crept across those firm features. He sat down, waved for us all to do the same.

Suddenly something like an electric shock ran up my legs, up my spine. My hair stood rampant; tears sprang to my eyes. The other three also sat transfixed, mouths open wide. There was a sudden chill in the air, followed instantly by a warmth that somehow seemed relaxing...happy...familiar ? We looked at each other, eyes blinking in astonishment. The sudden realisation made our foreheads wrinkle.

"Gentlemen," said Walt, his voice under firm control, "we are complete."

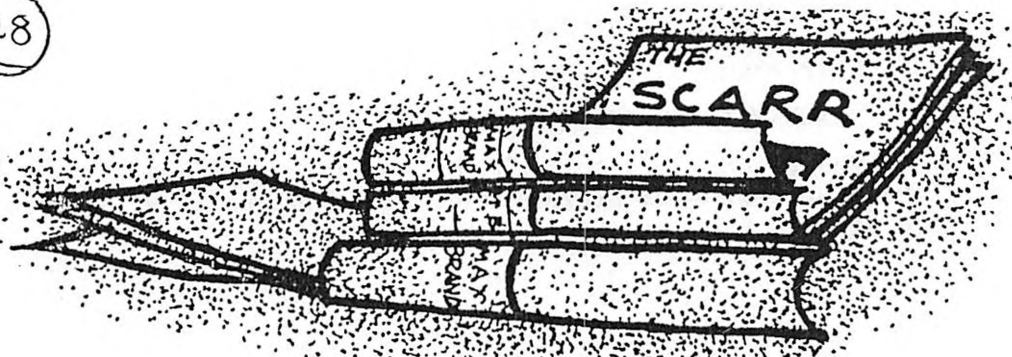
Kathleen stopped the car at the Ballyhackamore traffic lights, a hundred yards north of Oblique House. Red...amber...green...out of focus...seeming to fill the windscreen. She drove on towards Bangor.

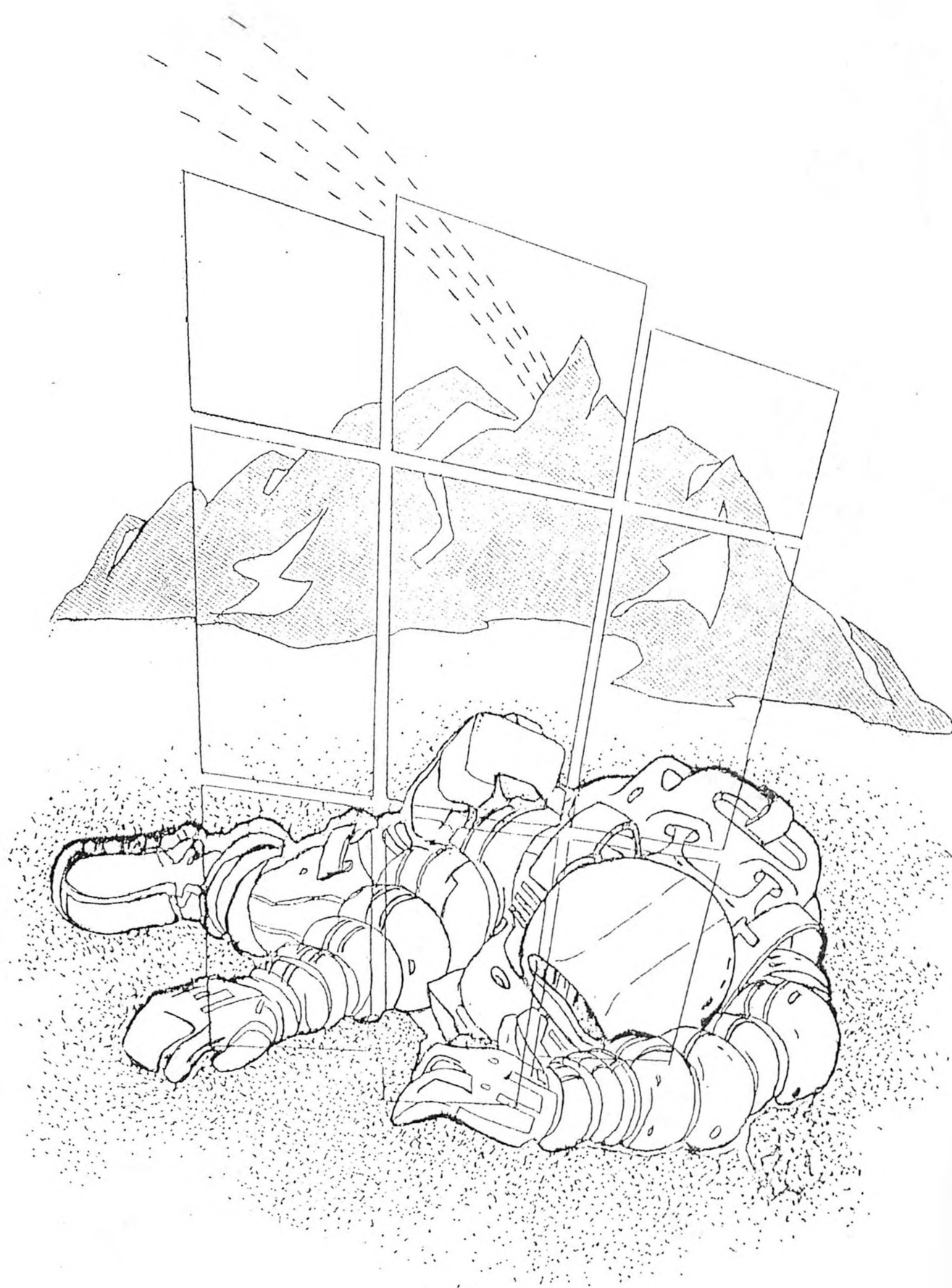
"Did Percy perform his role to your satisfaction ?" she queried.

"Quite nicely, thank you."

"You're very quiet, daddy...was everyone there ?"

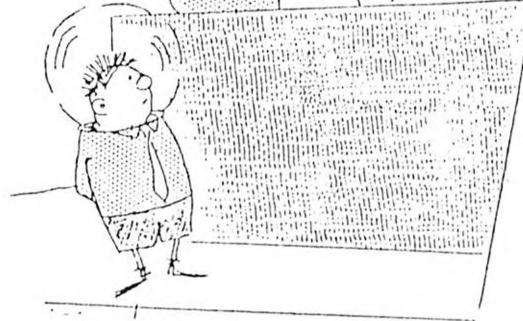
"Oh yes," I replied. "They were all there."







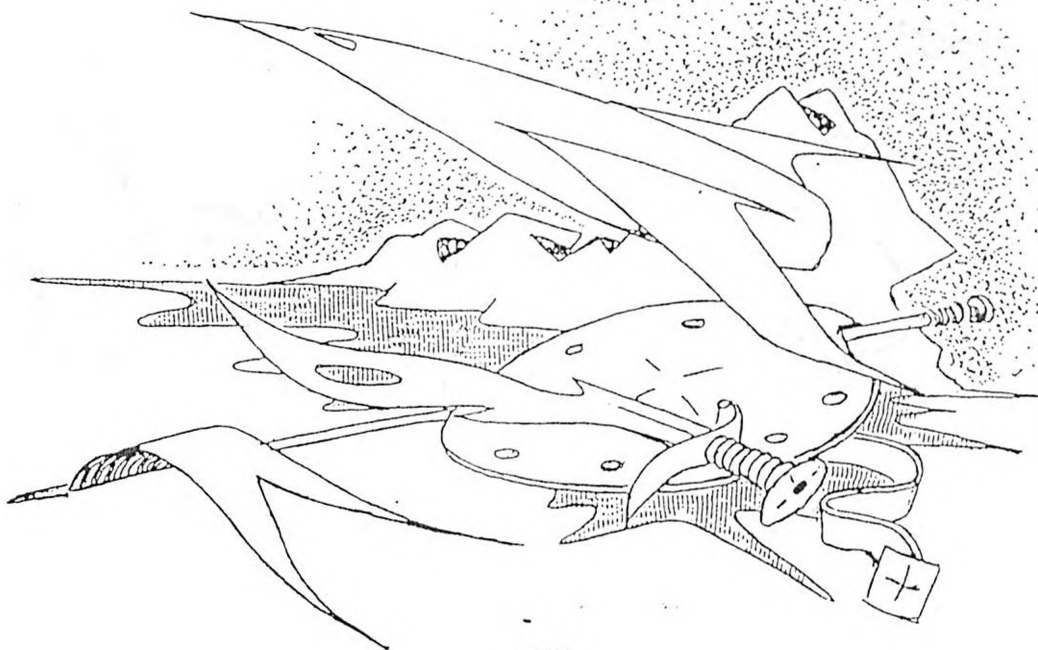
"Wantn to change
his name to
Jets larsen"



Atom



"And the lady's name sir..for FANAC".



Irish Fandom
entertains
four American
visitors:~
Ron Ellick,
George Scithers,
Wally Weber,
Burnett Toskey.

ELIXIR.



Date...29th April 1962.

Time...8 pm.

Door kicked...

I rushed into the hall, opened the door and saw Bob and Sadie Shaw.

"Come on in," I panted, " my favourite programme on tv."

She was one of those uninhibited young dancers who was still under the impression that it was her dancing which was getting her into the high spot of Sunday evening tv shows. She wore skin-tight tights drawn up at the outside of each thigh because she thought it made her dancing easier. She...

"Ron Ellik has some slides of girlies with less clothes than that girl is wearing," observed Bob Shaw.

"No sign of him yet," I panted when I'd returned to the room. "When is he coming ?"

Shaw had me in raptures with his descriptions, when someone else kicked the door. This time it was a really hard kick, so I knew it was Walt Willis.

Walt, Madeleine, Ian McAuley and Ron Ellik stood in the doorway.

"Got the girlie colour slides, Ron ?" I panted. "Oh, evenin', Walt, Madeleine, Ian..."

"Evenin' "

Ellik stood there, his mouth open...he reached out a trembling hand, which I shook, and when he stuttered that he'd forgotten to bring the slides, I dragged him and Ian back to Ian's car, gave 'em a close up of my tongue, and they blasted away down Campbell Park Avenue....

"Thought you were never coming," I said irritably to them three moments later...

At the time, I thought that it was not exactly host-like of me to sit leching in a corner with a small transparency viewer in my sweaty hands, putting small squares of cardboard into the viewer and squinting through it at the girlies. But Ian, Walt and Bob Shaw sat back, almost asleep, their eyes mere red slits. I knew that they had driven over one hundred miles, to the north of County Antrim and return, that very day, to show Ron Ellik some of the Northern Ireland countryside, and I rather naturally attributed their tiredness to this. As Diane was talking to Madeleine and Sadie, I didn't really feel too badly about this.

In between Ellik's pauses for breath (he was giving me a girlie running commentary, you see, and I wanted all the details, like, how come I didn't meet 'em when I was in America ?) I suggested that maybe the other three males would like another peep.

Madeleine, with rather a wary glance at Willis, stated that Ron had run through the photo's three times the previous night. Sadie looked a mite apprehensively at Bob, and opined that she thought he had seen enough of them. Madeleine asked Diane if watching girlie shots didn't, er, inspire me ? Diane modestly inclined her head downwards, and in case I should lose egoboo by this, I attested to the fact that even at my advanced marital status (I mean, I have been married for nigh on fourteen years) I was sometimes wont to pursue Diane around the house.

"She sounds rather chaste," muttered Willis, giving us a typical example of his superb repartee...

As an interesting side-light, I'd like to make a few critical comments on the colour slides, which were all taken, I'm given to understand, by Al Lewis. I stressed girlie shots were there, but the majority of the slides were of U.S. fans...actually, mostly L.A. fans. What intruiged me was the vast difference in definition and balance between ones taken seven years previously, and the latest slides. Not that there was anything wrong with the older ones, but by comparison they paled into insignificance (literally and metaphorically) with the 1962 classics. I'm interested in photography, although I don't know much more than they layman, and it was of importance to me to be able to see technique and skill as it developed from the sometimes off-balanced and slightly fuzzy circa 1955 slides to the superbly defined and superbly balanced post 1960 shots.

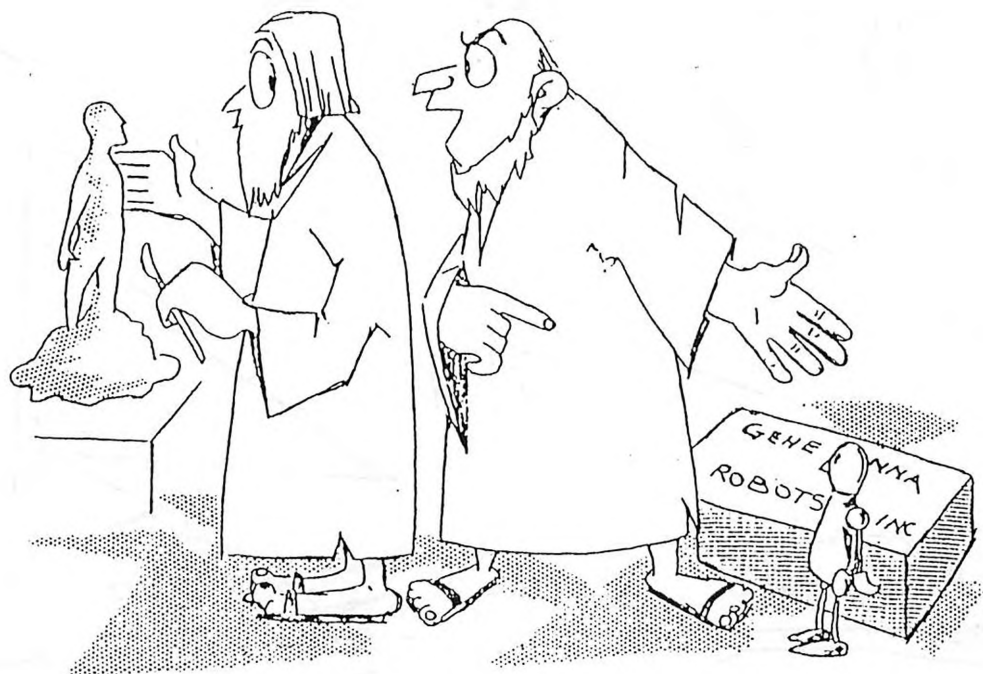
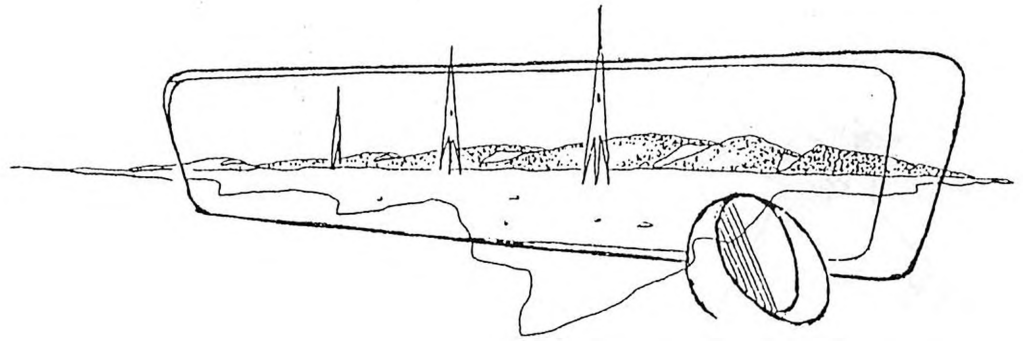
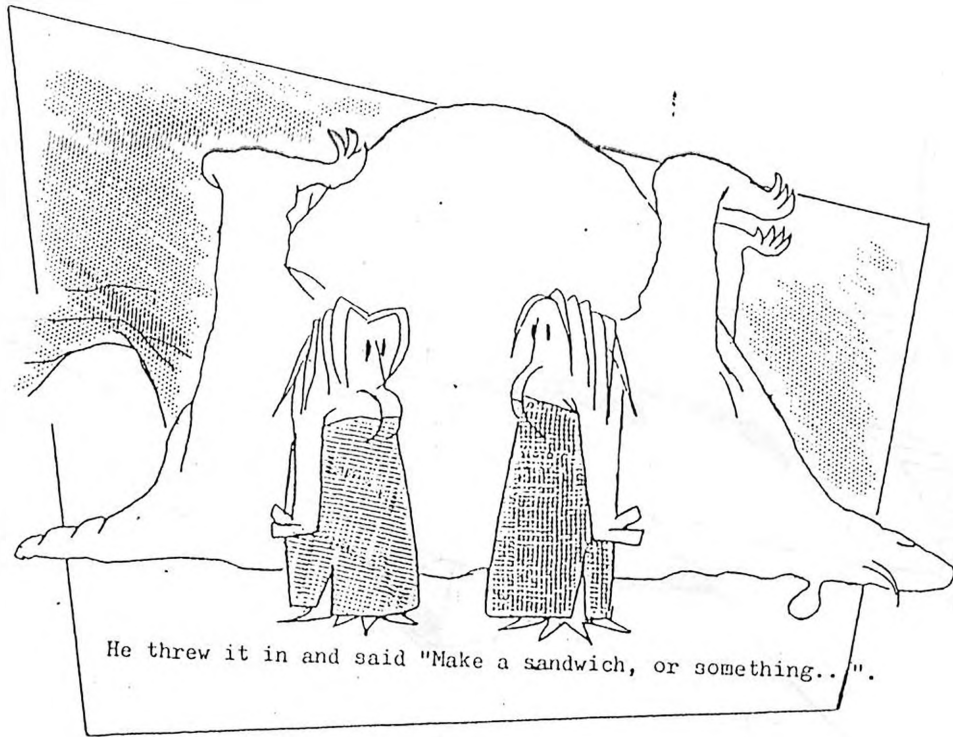
After supper, I took Ron Ellik upstairs to my den to show him my fanzine collection...ones which included my own writings. The Compleat Berry Works (including publications featuring my non-fannish articles, police publications, etc) took up a five foot length of bookcase.

Ron admired this, although we had a difference of opinion regarding my total of almost six hundred fannish appearances. He questioned me closely about THE GOON GOES WEST (since re-titled STATES OF MIND). Using each chapter in CRY OF THE NAMELESS as a separate appearance, plus the 170 pages of the Seattle Group's book, plus translations, plus the fifteen separate chapters in the German publication SOL, came to twenty seven appearances. Ron stated quite firmly that in his opinion this should count only as one appearance. We agreed to differ.

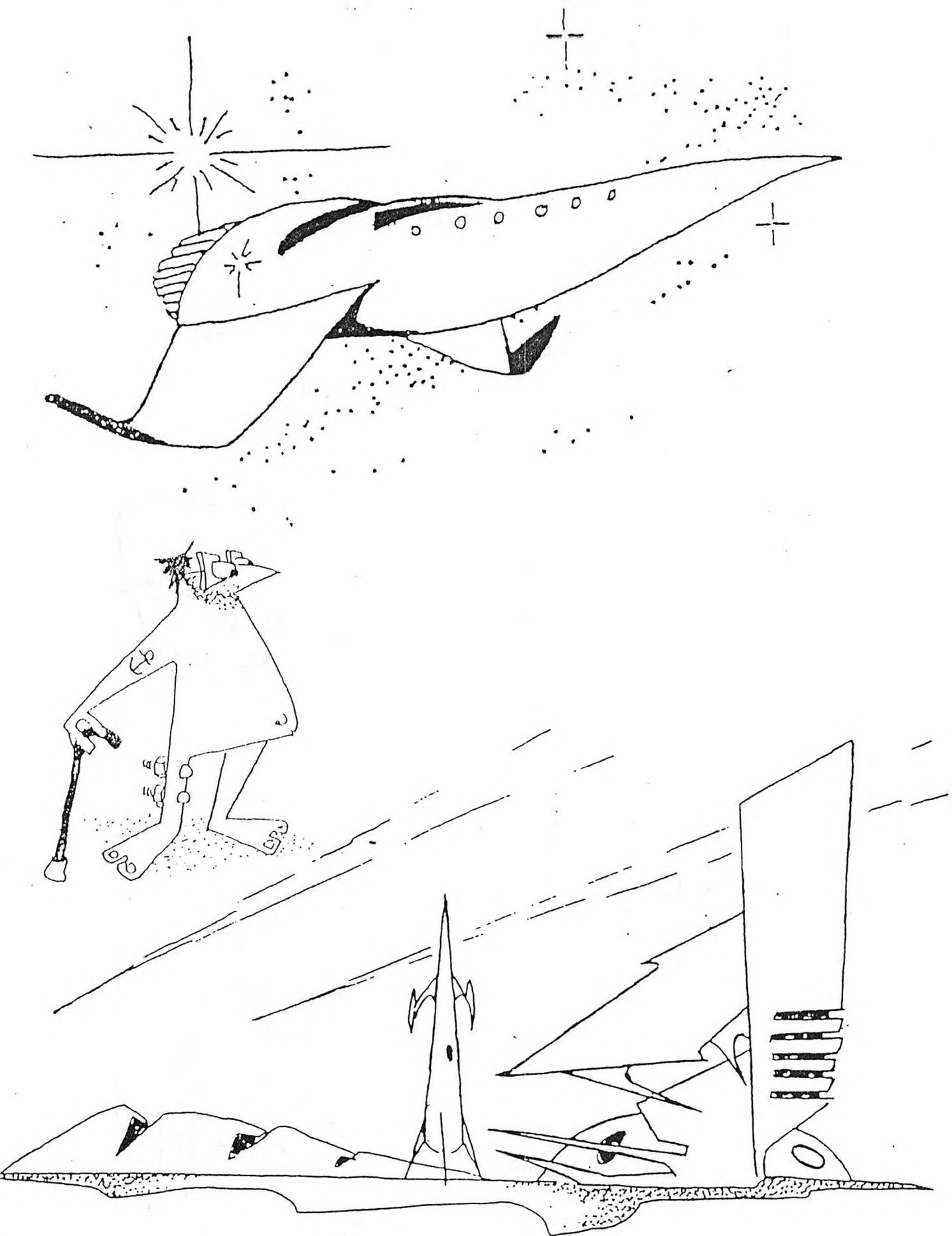
After supper, we played an extremely complicated word-game called GHOSTS, which Ellik assured us was widely played in America. It seemed to be rather like oral Scrabble, but I cannot play that, anyway...

To end this short resume of Ron Ellik's visit to my house, I must say a few nice words about him, because we were all tremendously impressed with his demeanour, personality and sheer fannishness. To meet a character like Ellik gives one faith in TAFF, when there are so many things about it which have the adverse effect. There is a personal reason for saying that Diane and myself will never forget his visit, and if he obtained as much enjoyment on his trip to Britain as he gave, his memories will be pleasureable ones.





"Here's just what you want...trouble free running...
built in ten commandments".



THE QUAY MESSAGE.

Having been the victim of fannish hoaxes in the past, I was rather wary of a postcard which arrived on the morning of 6th January 1964.

Aside from the fact that I was sleeping blissfully in bed when son Colin brought it to me, several things about the postcard were, to say the least, peculiar.

For one thing, the stamp on the postcard was not franked. There were criss-cross ball-point lines all over it, possibly the work of a very keen postal official who didn't want virgin stamps to maybe be re-circulated. But this made me think it was a hoax. The message indicated that the editor of the Fort Mudge Railway Gazette was going to be in Belfast for one hour, between 8 pm and 9 pm on 6th January. The message continued, averring that as the aforementioned editor could not make the trip to my house, he would be obliged if I would be at the quayside, and to be on time because the editor had to catch the 9pm boat to Glasgow... he would be attired in trench-coat and blue scarf.

Naturally, I associated the postcard with George Scithers with the clues provided...I must add that the hastily scrawled signature looked nothing like 'George Scithers.'

But look at it from my point of view.

The postcard stamp was unfranked...the message was, er, unusual...I hadn't heard that George Scithers was in Europe...how could anyone be in Northern Ireland for just one hour?

A hoax I mentioned earlier?

Well, my interest in aviation had centred the previous week on the first flight of the massive Short Belfast, a new heavy transport 'plane which had been due to make its first flight at any time. Bob Shaw, of budgie and rusted-typer fame, was closely connected with the publicity side of this prototype flight, and I had been in telephone communication with him what seemed like every hour of the day, asking for take-off time. This would permit me to cycle down to the airport from my office and see the first flight. I sensed that Bob was getting rather fed up with my calls, he passed close to my house on the way to his office, what would be

easier than to drop this mystic postcard through my front door and keep my mind occupied for a few peaceful hours.

So, well, it was cowardly of me, but I dismissed the tryst from my mind. George Scithers couldn't possibly be in Belfast, could he...?

At 8.15 pm, someone kicked my front door. (Must get that knocker fixed.) I was watching tv, so, with my head craned backwards looking at the screen, I felt my way to the front door and opened it.

Walt Willis stood there with this big, broad hunk of manhood.

George Scithers.

Heck.

I had made a major miscalculation.

I ushered Walt and George into the front room. I didn't know what the hell I could say. It was almost 8.30 pm, George had to catch the 9 pm boat, and because I had apparently rudely refused to meet him, he had had to come to MON DEBRIS.

He told me, kindly enough, to get offa my knees.

To make matters worse, I hadn't shaved for three days. I had leave from the office, and when I'm at home typing and duplicating, I like to be scruffily dressed and unshaven; it sort of moulds me into the fannish environment, such as I first learned at 170. I could see that Walt approved of my appearance, but in the few moments at my disposal it seemed a waste of precious time to explain just why I was so scruffy.

I congratulated George on the superb illos in AMRA... particularly the double-page spreads he'd recently featured. He told me all about his printing machine, and how, to make the colours come through evenly, he had to turn the roller three times before letting a sheet of paper go through. In a second, this technical discussion brought us together as three keen faaans, although George, in his FBI-type trench-coat, looking anything but a faaan. I asked him why his visit had been so short...it seemed that his duties as a physicist took him to Frankfurt, and he was on a flying visit to the British Isles. He had just met Ian McAuley in his laboratory in Dublin; he'd also been to Bristol, and walked in on Archie Mercer without any warning at all. The boat which left for Glasgow in 27 minutes time (and the quay was four miles away) was to take him to visit physicists in Edinburgh, then he was due to fly back to Frankfurt.

Diane brought in light refreshments; there was so little time left. George gulped his tea, took time only to write down his Frankfurt address on a blank sheet of music paper...Willis cracked a superb pun which I couldn't note because George looked at his watch, gulped again, and rushed to the front door.

We shook hands warmly, and he forgave me for not being at the quay. He admitted he appreciated how bewildered I must have been. Willis wanted me to go to the quay and see George off, but I felt my stubble, and reasoned that it would perhaps be embarrassing for George to be seen in the company of a scruff.

I had a final promise from George that he'd soon be over again

on a longer vacation, and, with rain pouring down outside, he skilfully hopped down my path, avoiding all the puddles except the last one. He leapt into the car, Willis hit middle gear by chance, and the car kangaroo'd down Campbell Park Avenue.

It has always seemed to me that one of the more exciting facets of fandom is the sudden surprise visits...the strange ways these sometimes come about...and at the same time the rapid way in which initial hesitation is lost to a fannish exuberance which mundane people would find it hard to explain...

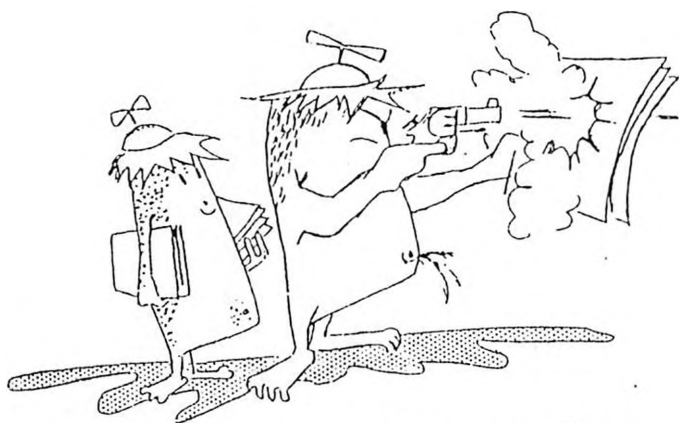




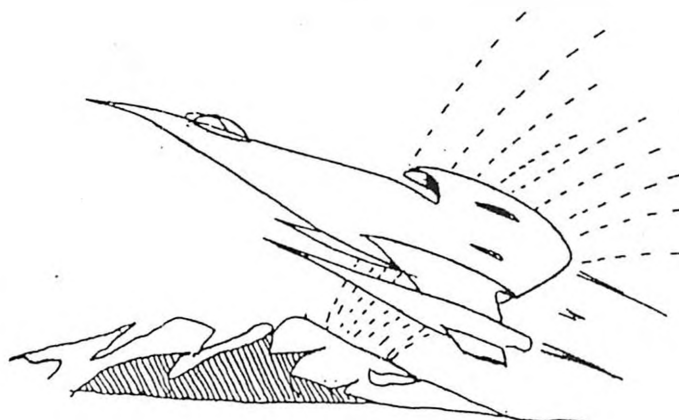
"See if you can find one of the committee... He says it's an A-Bomb, and that he intends to set it off during the Banquet if the food is lousy".



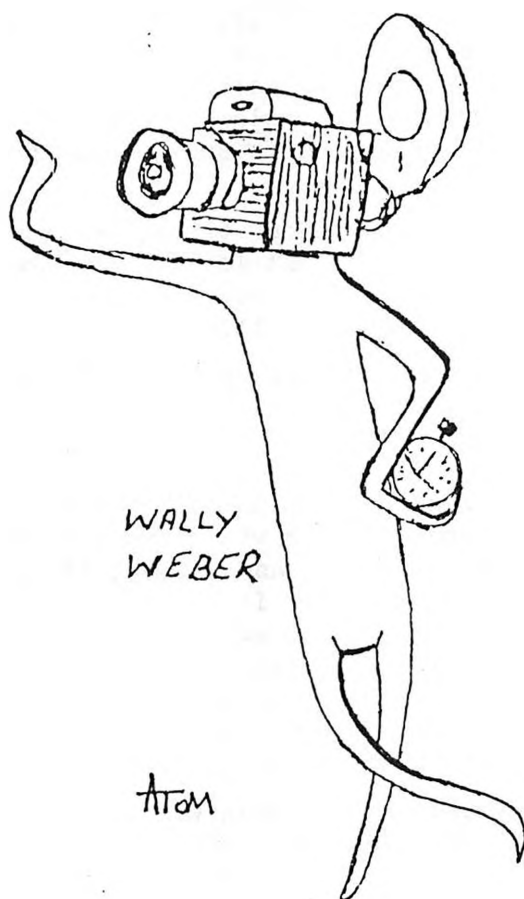
"Ron Ellick", I said "you are just a crazy, squirrel type, news gathering fool".



"Doncha like it?".



The Cruel Mud.



It was just after 10 pm on Sunday 22nd March 1964 when Wally Weber arrived at MON DEBRIS. He had been driven from the airport in County Antrim, thence through County Armagh and finally back through County Down by Walt and Madeleine Willis.

Wally looked exactly the same as when I waved goodbye to him at Seattle Airport back in '59...tall, bespectacled, fresh and engaging. He sat down, dumped his case, beamed...we watched a tv show and then the Willis's departed.

Diane made supper, and Wally asked for a glass of milk. We chatted, but I could see that Wally was very tired after his travels, and I said I would take him to his room. I felt rather uneasy about that bedroom. It was my daughter's, Kathleen's room. She was almost ten years old. At such an age these days girls can twist and appreciate the mystic power of The Beatles. Girls are also rather selective about the furnishings of their bedrooms. A month or so previously, she had pleaded with me to give her bedroom the full teen-age treatment...this involved radically overhauling the bed. I had perforce to saw bits off here and there, and re-shape it with hard-board. I was rather pleased with the plush velvet red roses on a white background which I've fixed to the head of the bed. But it wasn't a bed a man would like to boast that he'd slept in. Trouble was, it was the only bed I could offer to Wally. This in itself wasn't really so bad...the crushing blow had occurred that afternoon, when Kathleen,

upstairs, pasting some pictures of The Beatles on the walls, accidentally spilled a bottle of over-powering scent which she herself had manufactured out of rose petals and cabbage leaves (the latter being my suggestion, in a moment of jocularly, to give it 'body') and which she had been leaving to ferment on a shelf. I would be lying if I didn't confess that it was a helluva smell, but I can console those of you about to throw up by stating that there were considerably more rose petals than cabbage leaves ! Trouble was, the odour refused to sneak away, and it was cold and wet outside so that I couldn't leave the windows open. Before opening the door and revealing to Wally the pink motif of the bedroom, I explained that I hoped his personality would not suffer any ill effects from spending a couple of nights in such close proximity to female fripperies.

He blinked his eyes a couple of times, and paled somewhat when he saw where he had to sleep. At least the mattress was comfortable and he would be assured of a good sleep once he succumbed to the tiredness he obviously felt.

When I left him, he was swaying on his feet, looking furtively at The Beatles art gallery.

The following afternoon I took Wally to Stormont. We walked to it, a most invigorating exercise. This visit was important for two reasons...one...Walt Willis works there, and...two...it is the Parliament Building for Northern Ireland. It is an imposing building, a vast place, with a mile-long tree-lined avenue leading to it. We walked on the grass, the wind blowing coldly in our faces. We reached the building, up rows of concrete steps to the portals. We turned, and I showed Wally the superb scenery. He took out his camera and said he'd like a couple of shots of the gasometer.

We leaned on the balustrade, which was supported by black lions. I explained to Wally that Walt Willis was most probably in his office, but it wouldn't be protocol to call and see him during office hours, I pondered. Which was Walt's car ? I knew it was green, and was a Morris Minor. I'd forgotten the registration number. Actually, that didn't matter, because the number plates were obscured, anyway. It was even difficult to see the car colours, because it was dull, and the cars were some distance below and away from us. We walked towards it.

"It's that one", said Wally, pointing, when I explained my problem. I was amazed. Wally had been in the car just once, on the previous day, but I had been in it many times...yet I couldn't recognise it.

"I must congratulate you, Wally, on your profound powers of observation I said.

"It was nothing," shrugged Wally modestly. "I base my identification of Walt's car by its cat's paws."

"By its cat's paws ?" I said, amazed.

"Yeah," said Wally. "I was in the car yesterday, and when I got out I noticed this pattern of cat's paws all over the hood and bonnet. I thought it was some sort of Willisian gimmick, or maybe he wanted me to ask about it so that he could slip in an unpremeditated pun...let's paws for effect, that sort of thing. Shall we go over and check to see if I'm right ?"

It was Walt's car alright. I noted the dent on the rear off-side mudguard where a fire hydrant had hit it. Sure enough, muddy cat's paws were dotted everywhere...

Very contemporary...

Another day I decided to take Wally to the magnificent Carrickfergus Castle. We caught a green ULSTERBUS coach, and travelled through South Antrim, via Greencastle, Whitehouse and Whiteabbey, the road eventually joined the coast at Belfast Lough. This is where I wanted to explain to Wally a joke cracked by James White several years previously, but again things didn't work out. At the time of James's quip, the book and film by Nicholas Monserrat were all the rage...THE CRUEL SEA. Well, as James passed this way, he gazed down at the coastline, littered with debris such as tin cans, bits of wood, sewer pipes, etc...and he made the classic comment..."Ah, The Cruel Mud." I'd got Wally excited at the pending comment by James, and the tide was in and there wasn't any cruel mud to be seen.

We decoached at Carrickfergus, and although the weather was unkind, it didn't actually rain. The magnificent castle stood there in all its glory. Wally was really thrilled, because he had never previously seen such an edifice, and he raced to the entrance. Carrickfergus Castle (featured on the half crown British postage stamp) was built circa 1180 AD by an Anglo-Norman knight, and is in a remarkable state of preservation.

We were the only visitors, and we had the entire castle to ourselves. Wally was interested in the huge cannon, their rifled barrels pointing towards the middle of Belfast Lough. They weren't so old, manufactured in 1854, but they looked impressive. Wally took lots of photographs of them. Actually, he took three rolls of film in the castle. The large square keep in the centre of the castle is a museum, showing old swords, cannon balls, large rusted padlocks and keys, and a collection of fossils. We climbed to the top of the tower, via a circular staircase, a total of 95 steps. When we stood on top of the tower, looking through stone arrow-slits, we were actually at cloud base. It was drizzling, but some moments later, when we reached the ground, it had ceased.

Wally called at the pay desk for a souvenir book. The attendant escorted us outside, then he looked at Wally, and almost bit his lip. I could see something was on his mind.

"Tell me, sir," he said to Wally, " do you come from America ?"

"Yeah," answered Wally.

The man perked up.

"Do you," he breathed, " do you come from Pennsylvania ?"

"No, Seattle," said Wally.

The man shrank back, disappointed.

"Not from Pennsylvania," he said sadly.

"What's so special about Pennsylvania ?" asked Wally.

"See that church spire over there," said the man, pointing to the north. "The father of William Penn, who founded Pennsylvania, is buried there." But he spoke half-heartedly. I imagine that he'd

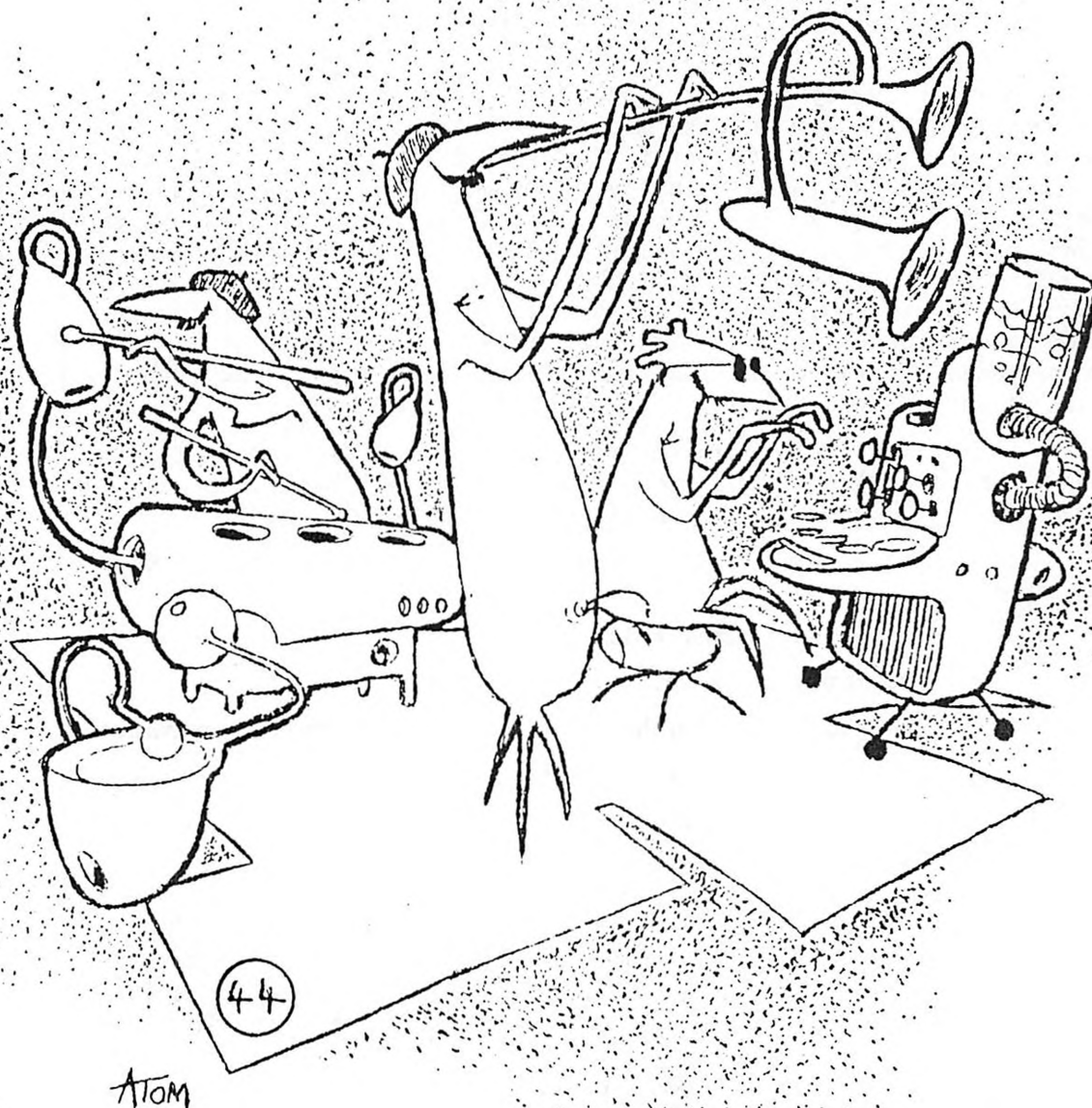
been there for maybe twenty or thirty years, asked ever American visitor, just waiting for one to admit he comes from PA...

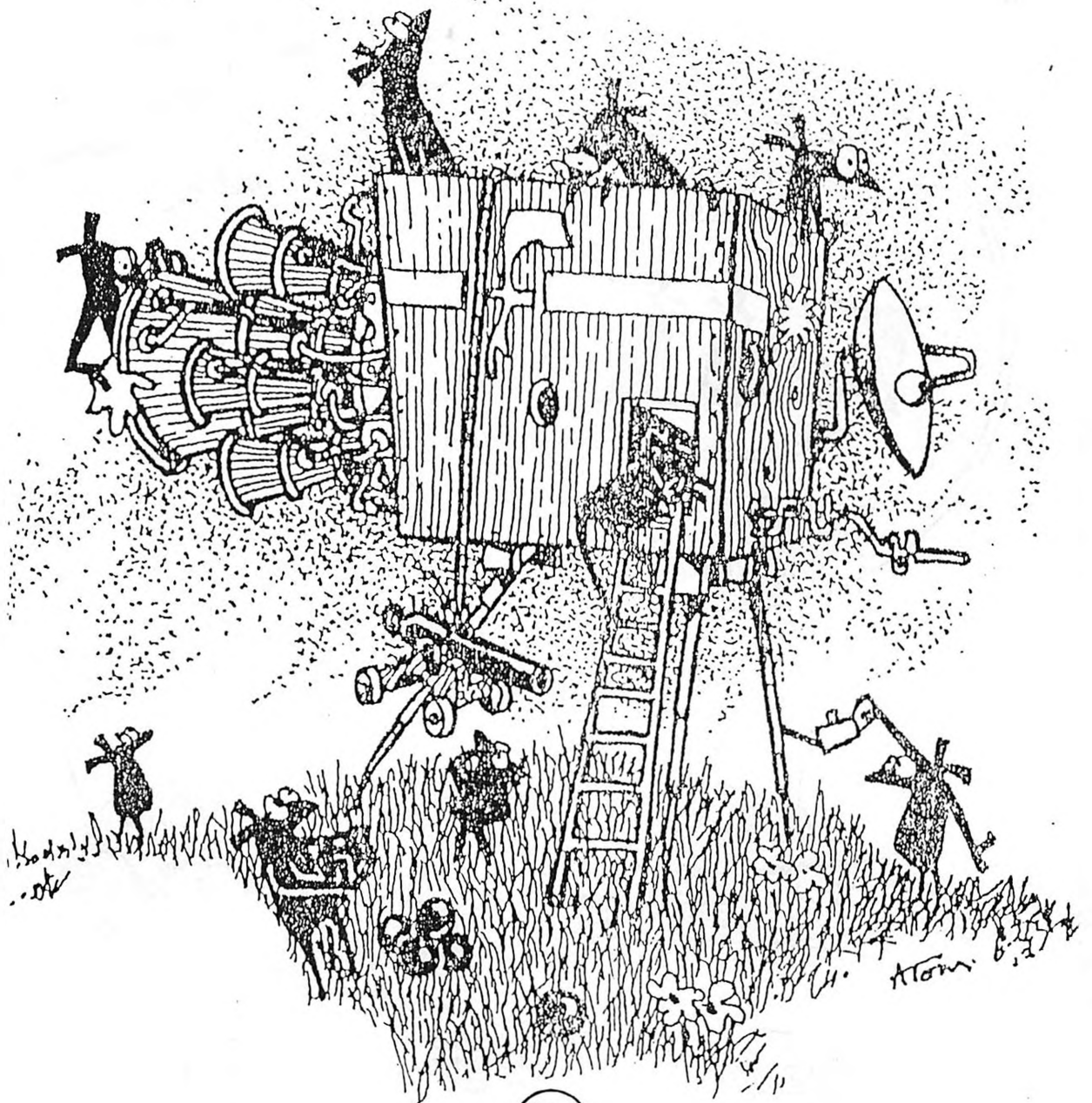
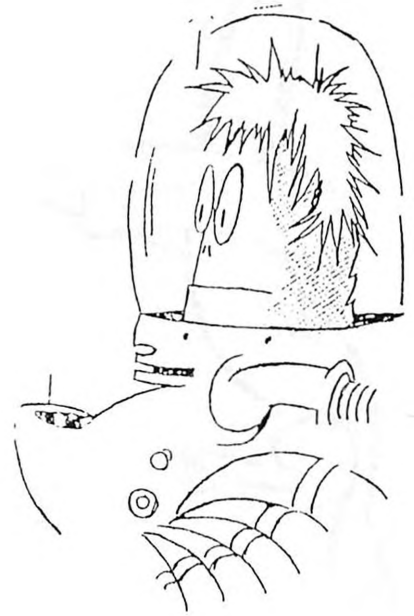
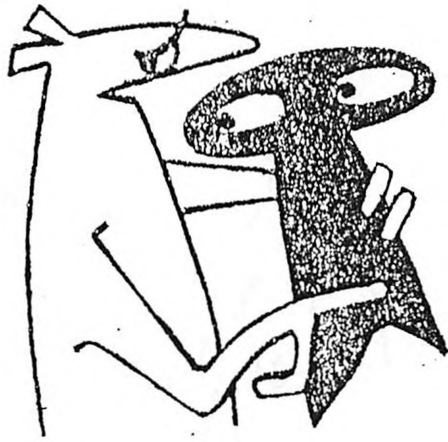
On the return journey we sat in the upstairs front seat. It was so warm that I dozed off. I awoke quickly when Wally tugged at my arm.

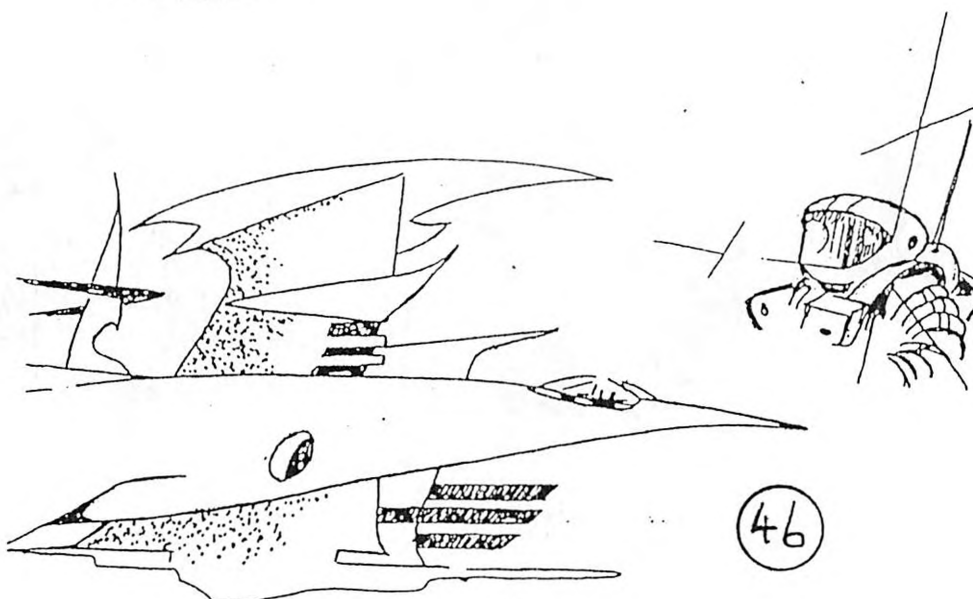
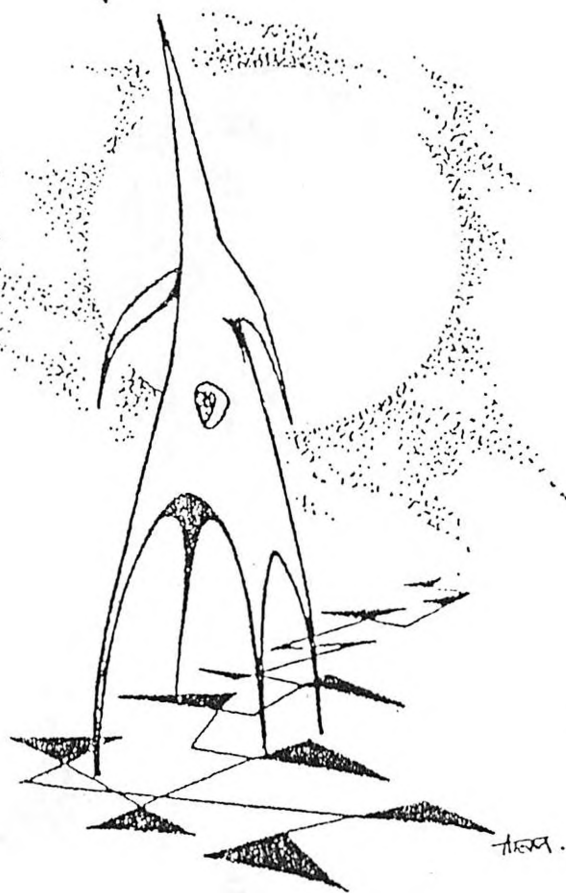
"The Cruel Mud," he hissed. What a great moment. The sea had sidled out, revealing the filthy grey mud, with here and there a rusty pram frame poking up like a skeleton in the desert. The cruel mud, indeed.

Wally's brief stay at MON DEBRIS passed by...it seemed to us that Wally had been with us for ages. He had his own chair, his own place at the table. It would seem strange not to see him there on the morrow. There was a party at 170 at 8 pm, and it was almost that time. My family said 'goodbye' to him, and we both walked to Walt's house.

As I said in STATES OF MIND, Wally is very pleasant, cultured, witty, and able to fit into any company...a fitting TAFP representative, and a gentleman to boot.







Burnett at both ends.

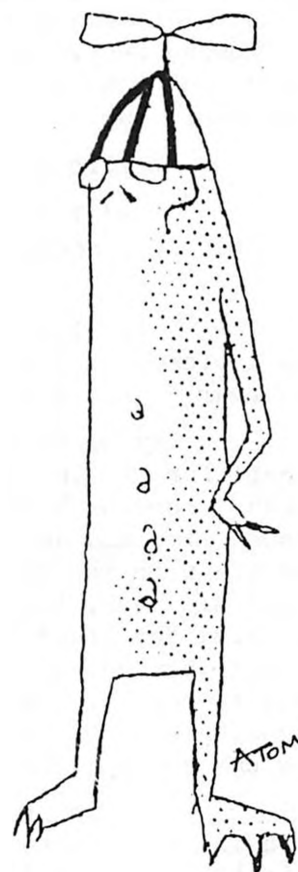
BURNETT
TOSKEY.

Ten years ago, a meeting of Irish Fandom was really little more than an exercise of pedal-cycle parking. James White, Bob Shaw and the venerable George Charters, to say nothing of myself, could be seen free-wheeling down the Upper Newtownards Road, towards number 170, brakes throwing out sparks as the blockless metal strips bit into the wheel rims. Willis, not wishing his front garden turned into a scrap yard, moved not only ours but his pedal cycle next door.

A decade passed by...ten years in which the financial status of Irish Fandom members has risen considerably. James White, with forty five professional sales to his credit has a foreign car. Willis, being in a High Position in the Northern Ireland Civil Service has an MG. Bob Shaw, recently returned from Canada owns a Bentley, replete with walnut dashboard, and George Charters possesses a black Morris Minor.

As I cycled to Beechgrove Gardens, south Belfast, these cars could be seen sunning themselves outside the house, whilst the faces of the fans looked through the window as I pedalled up the pavement and stopped by wrapping my arms round a telegraph pole and kicking free of the bike. BoSh looked particularly indignant, the locale has a somewhat high-class aura, and to be seen receiving a guest on a pedal cycle isn't quite done. Perchance a normal pedal cycle, but not mine.

(I must point out in my defence that I was also a fairly high earner, and could have purchased a motor vehicle, but my family resolutely declined to be my passengers. I only lived ten minutes walk from my office, and really did not require 'wheels'.



Besides which, I only used my pedal cycle to visit the houses of the Belfast fans to retain my amateur status !)

I went into the front room and met all the fans. U.S. fan Burnett Toskey was there, I'd seen him the day before. We sat round hearing Bob Shaw boasting about his beer-brewing outfit. He'd purchased it for 6/6d...a large bag of hops, some bubbling material and a thick polythene bucket. He brought it to show us... a yellow mass frothed in the twitching bucket. It was such a revolting sight I had no alternative but to ask him if he'd shown us the right bucket ? He ignored this, and gave it a bit of a shake, peering into the horrible gooey mess. Then Walt Willis who had been silently sitting there with pursed lips, gave out with a superb pun, the like of which has never been heard before or since.

"Bob" he said quietly, " is playing carboys and enzymes."

BoSh crawled away with the bucket, muttering to himself, and then his attractive wife Sadie came in, crossed to the window, and almost fainted. She pointed to my bike just behind Bob's Bentley. She turned and looked at me mutely.

It was no use my taking the bike round to the back of the house, people would automatically have thought that it was owned by Bob. I knew if I put it in front of the house next door they would sue.

Willis came up with the solution, as we knew he would.

"We'll put the bike in the boot of my MG," he announced, and stood up, accepting the egoboo graciously at this unselfish gesture.

All along the road I saw curtains moving slightly as Walt and I picked up the two wheels and the frame, and carried them to the rear of his large MG.

My wrestling with the frame brought no tangible result except for two long parallel scratches along the rear mudguard, which I hope he hasn't yet discovered. I breathed on 'em and rubbed like mad and they sort of temporarily faded away. Willis had trouble with the wheels, part of an inner tube had wrapped itself round his neck, the jugular vein of which was throbbing like mad. We tried for about ten minutes, and eventually Willis sort of just jammed the boot door down as hard as he could, and I was only able to move my head from underneath it by a fraction of a second. I could see that he realised his genius had let him down at last. The one consolation was that it was getting dark...

Back in the lounge Sadie handed round goodies, baked by herself, and Toskey told his enthralled audience about a car trip he had taken that afternoon around County Down with Walt Willis.

Burnett said he had been intrigued with the high brick walls which surrounded quite a number of large private estates scattered around the countryside. He admitted that he had seen nothing like this in the States.

"In America," he said, " you never see places walled-off like that."

I happened to glance at Walt Willis. A smirk appeared across his thin lips, forming itself into almost a sneer of sheer triumph.

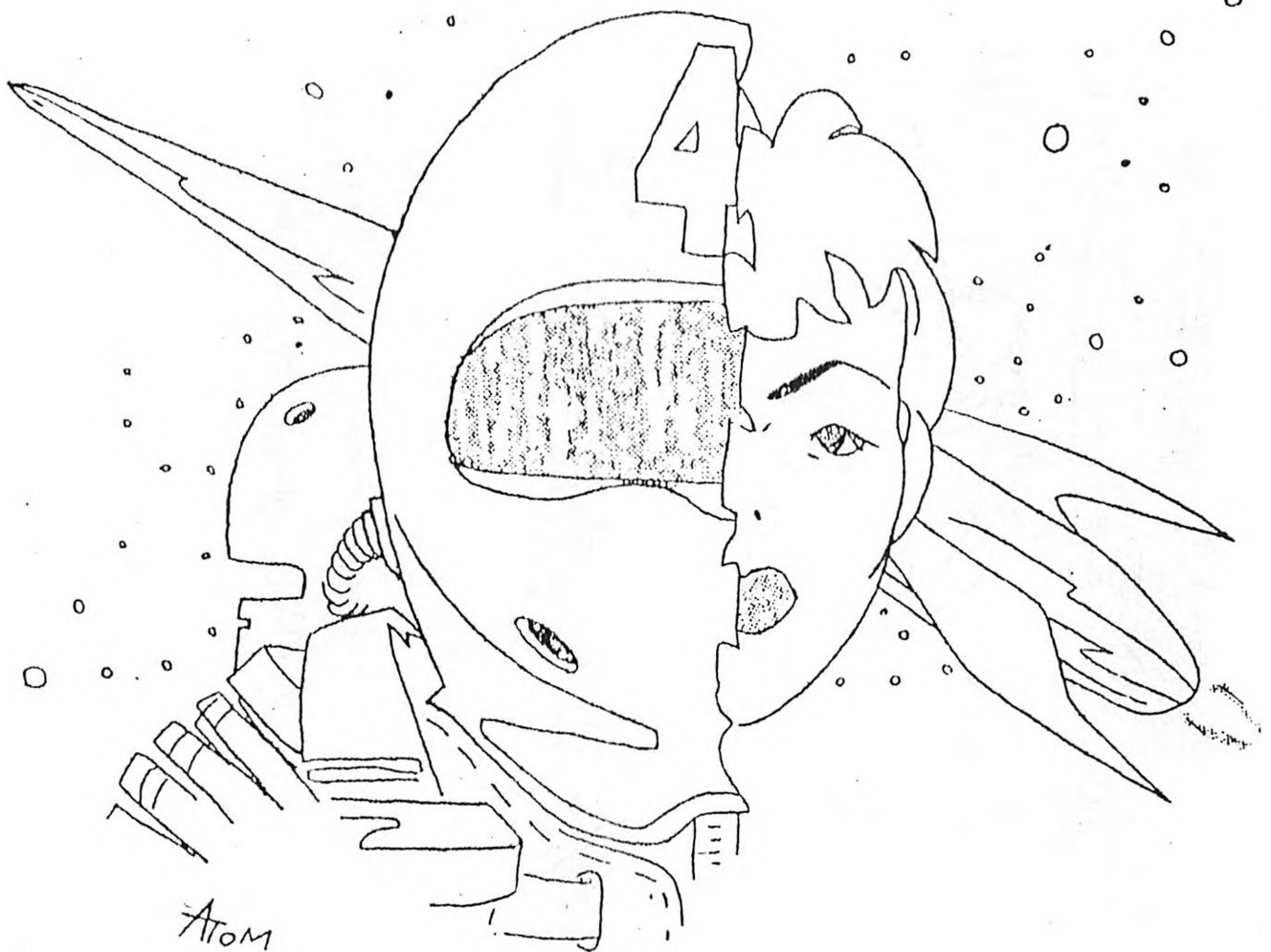
He coughed, and we fell silent.

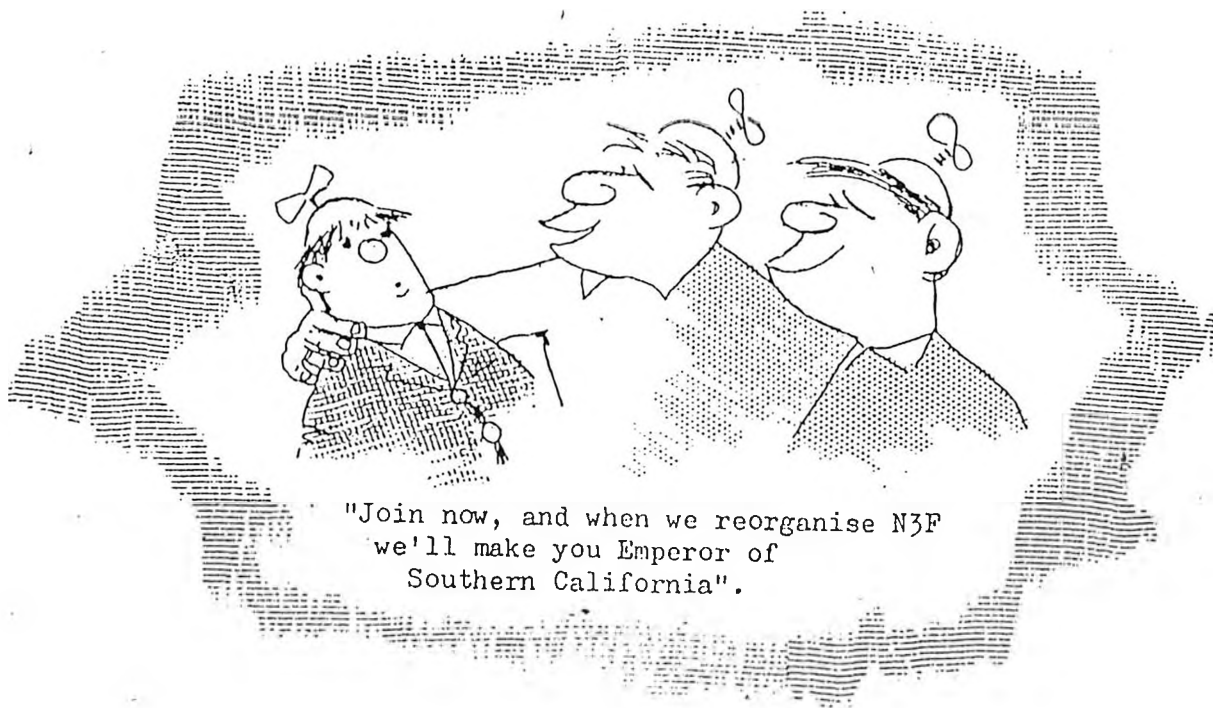
"How about the Waldorf Astoria ?" he asked.

I took my turn in the queue to shake hands with him. Did I suggest that the carboy and enzyme pun was his greatest triumph ? No, I must say in all sincerity that the 'Walled-off Astoria' is the climax of his career as a punster. He thinks so, too.

I had to leave shortly afterwards...it was twilight, and I had to assemble my pedal cycle for the three-mile ride home. I was sorry to leave the meeting, Willis had taken the centre of conversation, he was punning like mad, and said something incredibly witty which sounded like 'ASTOUNDING has the feet of Clayton'.

It was all too esoteric for me...





"Join now, and when we reorganise N3F
we'll make you Emperor of
Southern California".

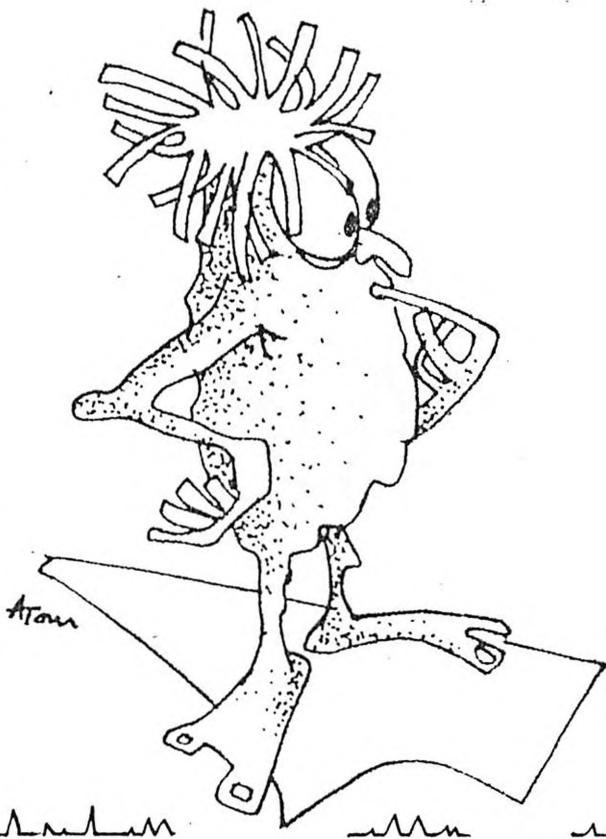


"It says that this new fan group will have no bickering and a friendly atmosphere.....the rest is obscured by bloodstains."

IN MEMORIAM



Arthur Thomson,
George Charters,
Bob Shaw.



Fandom Denied ~ my tribute to ATOM.

Arthur Thomson (1927 - 1990) was truly a genius, a frequently-applied cliché, but in my mind absolutely justified. He illustrated many of my fanzine stories in the late fifties, early sixties, utilising a technique that is probably almost unimaginable to present-day fan artists with the present sophisticated methods of reproduction. I sent Arthur batches of stencils and attendant brief story lines, and within a couple of weeks a parcel of carefully packed fully illustrated stencils were returned. I still recall the thrill of opening the envelopes, even though it was over forty years ago.

What ATOM did was to place a piece of carbon paper, face up, between the waxed stencil and its base. He used a stylus (which he made himself at the aircraft factory where he worked) to cut the designs into the stencil, depicting exactly the sketchy details I had submitted to him. The sheet of carbon paper performed a two-fold purpose - it showed what ATOM had drawn, and I consider it also permitted the stylus to gently penetrate the stencil rather than directly cutting into it. (I know this because Arthur also made me a stylus and gave me detailed instructions how to use it to 'cut' stencils.) No matter whether it was a half-page heading, or a small space filler, ATOM was skilled enough to perfectly project my notions.

I must now confess that I - and most probably the considerable number of faneds for whom he illoed to order, were blasé, recognising his magnificent skills, but accepting their availability for a mere postage stamp !

It is only since I have prepared these five volumes of my Irish Fandom stories that the full impact of his exquisite

skills have struck me. I have examined a considerable number of his illo's, from fillers to full page A4's, and have marvelled at his concise artistry. I have found myself studying his drawings for long periods, now noting subtle details that had eluded me for many years. With merely little dots and dashes for eyes and mouths he has permitted expressions ranging from sheer delight to grimness and frustration...admittedly the stock technique of highly-paid commercial artists, but ATOM did his drawings for pleasure, both for him and his appreciative fannish readers.

His BEM's are magnificent, usually executed in great detail but all immediately available to the viewer as distinct personalities. The illo heading for this tribute is a typical example of his considerable prowess.

I regret very much that on the few occasions I met Arthur I did not proffer him the full requirement of egoboo due to him. Of course I told him that he was a magnificent artist, the major stylus exponent in fandom, but I believe I did not say it with sufficient authority...possibly I was so selfish that I expressed these opinions in order to obtain more illo's from him to accomodate my then vast output.

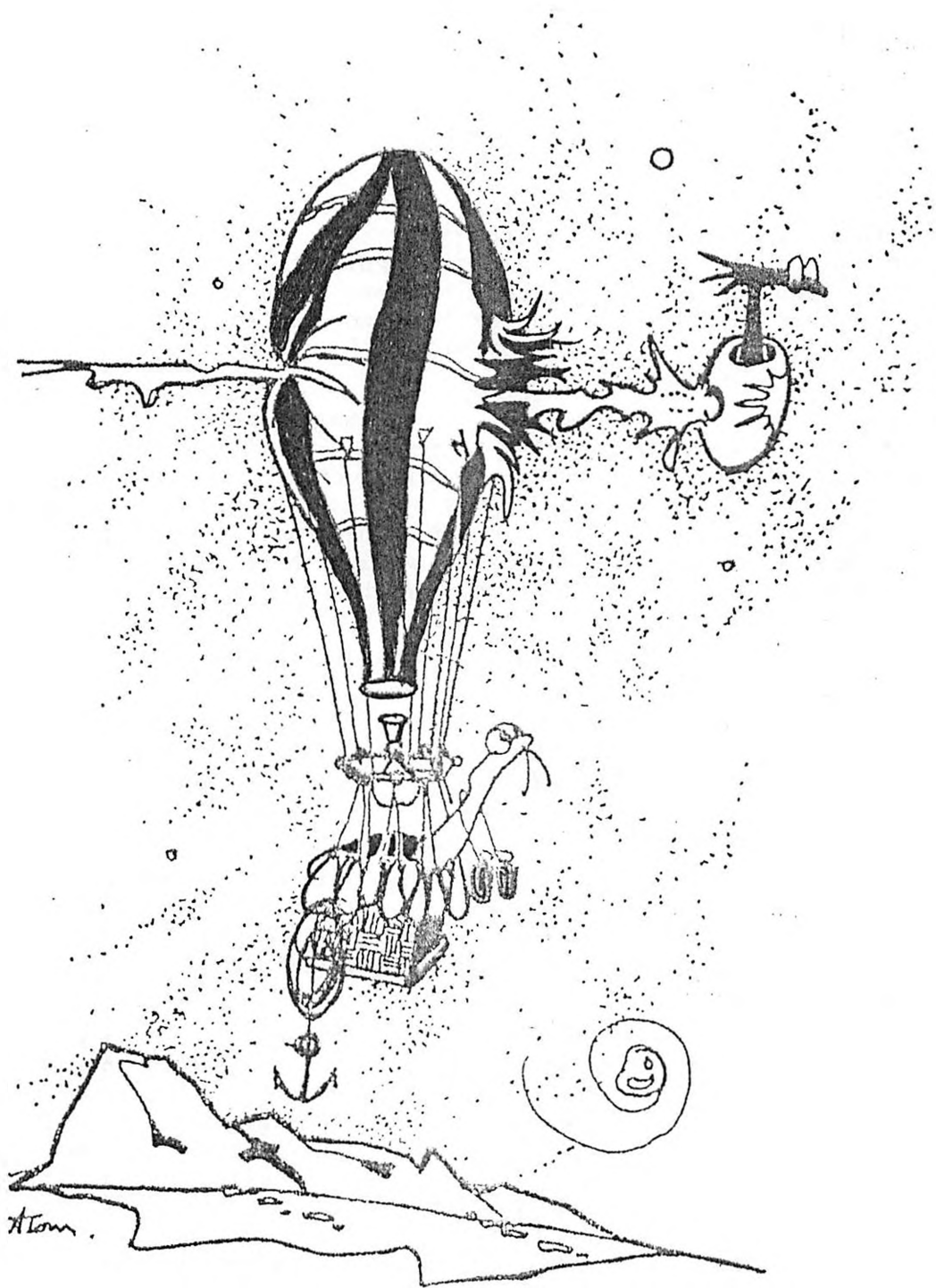
Now, to repeat myself, I see his genius before me on every page that his drawings have appeared in these five volumes. I see a vivid imagination at work, but always on cue...never inhibited... give him a pile of stencils and his stylus flashed almost recklessly ...I'm sure he chuckled to himself as he created immediate characterizations of so many fans, giving their physical idiosyncracies just the faintest exaggeration so that, without rancour, they recognised themselves and smiled with pleasure.

He characterized the major players in my Irish Fandom stories wonderfully; not only because of the fannish situations I placed them in, but because he had met them all, and was thus able to cleverly insinuate nuances which shouted out loud without being vindictive. I now belatedly accept that the ATOM illo's carried my fanciful stories.

ATOM - A TRIBUTE, published by A.Vincent Clarke, 16, Wendover Way, Welling, Kent, in April 1990 is a thick, masterly treatise on ATOM's contribution to our microcosm featuring many of his illo's and quoting observations made by his many fannish friends. The late Bob Shaw, an extremely perceptive writer, provided this superb eulogy:-

'Arthur Thomson and I have always lived far apart; circumstances seemed to conspire against us meeting more than once every four or five years; we exchanged only a couple of letters in decades - and yet I knew that he was a good and close friend. There is no contradiction involved. Anyone with even a smidgin of fannish telepathy could tell he was one of the Good People.

I entered fandom forty years ago, and stayed precisely because it contained a few people like Arthur. It wasn't necessary for me to meet him regularly in the flesh - he was always around in the mental hyperspace of fandom, enriching my life with his talent and personality. It is hard to accept the fact of his death. Somehow it seems an affront to all that is good and right in the Universe.'



Magna Charters.

George "All the Way" Charters is up there, somewhere, sitting on a cloud, propeller beanie spinning, clutching his Max Brand anthology. I met him for the first time on one of my early visits to Irish Fandom's H.Q. at Oblique House, 170 Upper Newtownards Road in Belfast, in 1954. I was 28 years of age then, and so to me he appeared quite old. Young people are apt to underestimate the elderly, a gross error, because now that I am in that category I do really still feel mostly in full possession of my mental and physical faculties.

I hope he isn't constantly frowning at the thought of my allusions to his old age in the many fables of Irish Fandom in which he was always featured. He was venerable, of course, but mostly alert to the ramifications of his surroundings. Even when I went 'over the top' in my descriptions of his senility, he really enjoyed the allusions, especially in my "Twilight of the Ghods" (in *Hyphen* 16, of 1956). The plot was suggested by Walt and Madeleine Willis; Robert Heinlein had promised to visit Oblique House in 1956, and Walt and Madeleine were obviously enthralled at this prestigious visit and desired to hire a butler for the evening...

George raised himself to a sitting position, and, rapping his crutch against the wall, signified his intention of wanting to take part in the conversation.

"Walt," he croaked, "I have held a great variety of, er, occupations in my time, and it has, er, heh heh, always been my ambition to be a, er, heh heh, butler. It would be the fulfillment of my, er, wildest dream if I could, er, heh heh, butler on this most important occasion. Heh heh."

This shook Willis, folks. I could see that he didn't want to hurt George's feelings, as none of us did, but after all, Robert Heinlein was a pretty important person.

"I'm sorry, George..." began Walt. George looked downwards, a spasm of resignation flickering over his venerable form. There was a silence for several seconds, and then Willis, doing the stupid thing and letting sentiment overcome his common sense, gave a big sigh and nodded to George.

With a terrific show of exuberance, George gripped the side of his bath chair, staggered to his feet, and hobbled from the room, cackling to himself happily.

A message was received that Heinlein's plane had landed in Dublin instead of Belfast, and therefore he would not be visiting Oblique House. In order not to disappoint George, Walt Willis decided to impersonate Heinlein, George having poor eyesight. I was one of the first visitors, and George was on duty, ready to receive Heinlein...

I felt quite proud when I saw George the following night. He opened the door majestically to my ring, and I nearly collapsed in the airlock at the sight of him. He looked like a penguin, his remaining silver locks brushed back carefully over his pate.

"Welcome to Oblique House, sor," he said, addressing the hallstand.

"It's me, George," I hissed.

It hit him like a physical blow.

"Third time tonight," he complained. "How do I look?"

"I gotta hand it to you," I cringed, pushing him gently out of the way as I passed, noting his red waistcoat and buckled shoes.

* * * * *

In his brief biography (in *Hyphen* 16), George reveals he was born in County Roscommon in southern Ireland in 1910. His second christian name initial is 'L', and he quite wittily alludes to the mystery of it (I have transposed third to first person):

Many people, and even fans, wonder what the 'L' stands for. It is just not true that I was called 'Lancelot' because I suffered so much from boils in my youth. Indeed, on this sore point no information is forthcoming. Some think that because I stand over six feet tall the 'L' stands for 'Long-fellow'. Others think that the 'L' stands for 'Yngvi'...

He lists the titles of books he kept as a young child, considering that *Through Flood and Flame*, *King of the Air*, and *The Second Form Master at St. Syril's* might be categorised as science fiction!

His interest in science fiction was stimulated to such an extent that he

describes travelling on a tram in Belfast when he was a young man, and seeing MARTIAN HOSTEL on a building. It registering slowly in his mind because he was reading an sf novel at the time. He leapt off the tram, and discovered to his chagrin that it was the SAMARITAN HOSPITAL.

Throughout the Second World War he worked in an aircraft factory in Belfast, but studiously traced "...two trickles of sf, *Astounding* and *Unknown*." In 1947, through the pages of *Wonder*, he made contact with prominent English fans, and ultimately got in touch with Irish Fandom.

* * * * *

George was a supreme punster, well suited to the cut and thrust of the rapid verbal interplay by members of IF, always able to deliver many a *bon mot* of subtle sophistication. He was also a poet, and in *Grue* 28 (in 1959), his poem on Ghoodminton was published, written in the style of "Hiawatha." Herewith a quote...

In the finals of the contest,
"Ghoodminton," cried Walter Willis,
Walter Alexander Willis,
"We will show them how to 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, weightd 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 trademark,
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.

A memorable pastiche.

* * * * *

The final meeting of Irish Fandom took place at Oblique House on 26th April 1965, attended by Walt and Madeleine Willis, James White, Bob and Sadie Shaw, George Charters, and myself. I met George quite regularly after that, until I left Belfast and returned to England in the early seventies. George still worked at the same aircraft factory as previously mentioned -- he had obtained the sinecure of working permanently on the night shift; almost every week he called to see me in the evening before the commencement of his nightly sojourn. I know his eyesight troubled him, yet he drove from his home in Bangor to Belfast every night. He parked his car in a neighbour's drive, once, unfortunately, when the neighbour was already parked there. We drank tea and ate toast, and philosophised about the old days.

* * * * *

In 1987, Walt Willis published a special issue of *Hyphen* to commemorate the fortieth anniversary of the founding of Irish Fandom, for which I wrote a story, "The Re-union." The plot concerned my wish to hire an actor to impersonate George and call at Oblique House so that we would have a complete attendance at a

commemorative meeting. Three other members of IF had the same idea, resulting in four pseudo George Charters appearing at the meeting. At the end of the amazing scenerio, Walt Willis bade us all sit down...

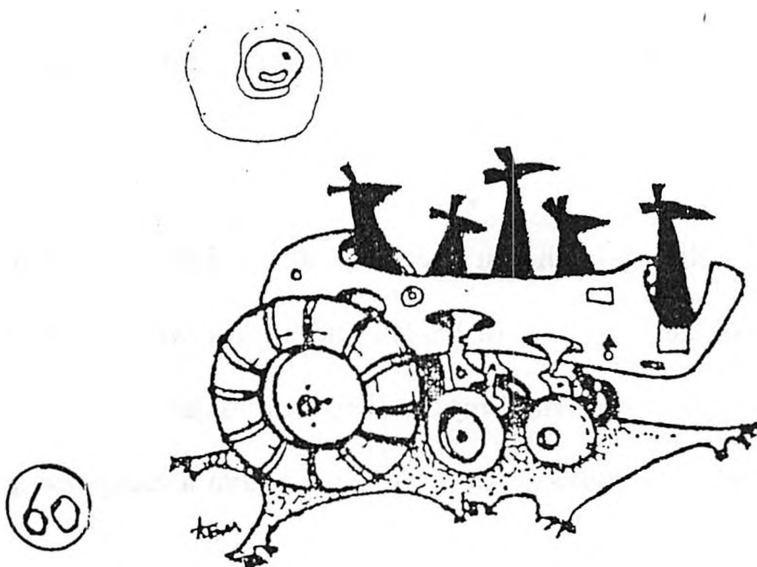
Suddenly something like an electric shock ran up my legs, up my spine. My hair stood rampant; tears sprang to my eyes. The other three also sat transfixed. There was a sudden chill in the air, followed by a warmth that somehow seemed relaxing...happy...familiar?

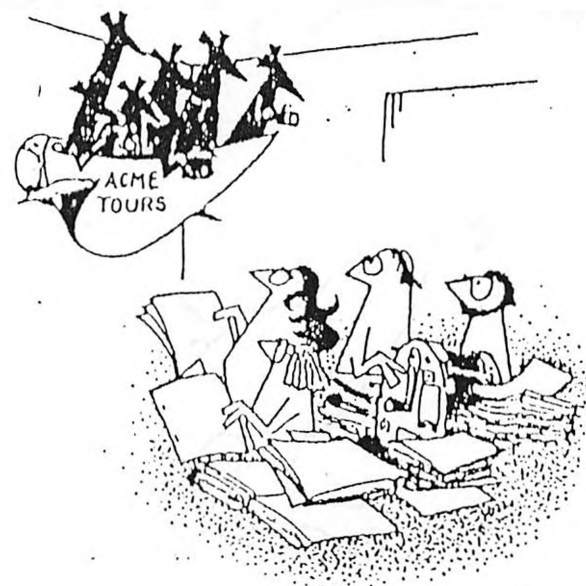
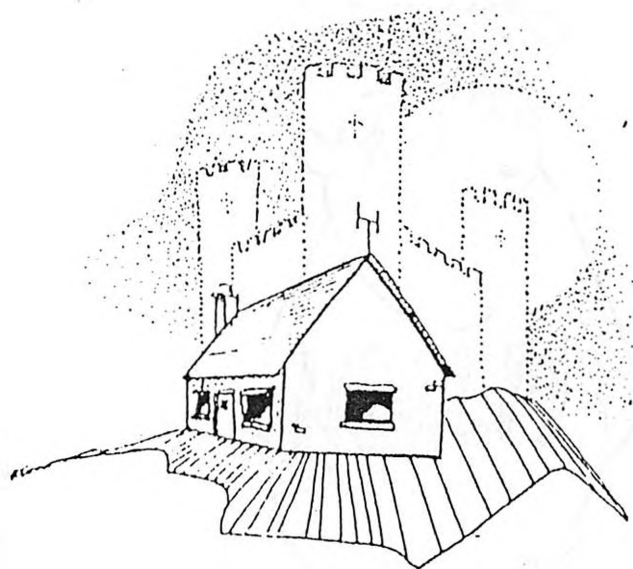
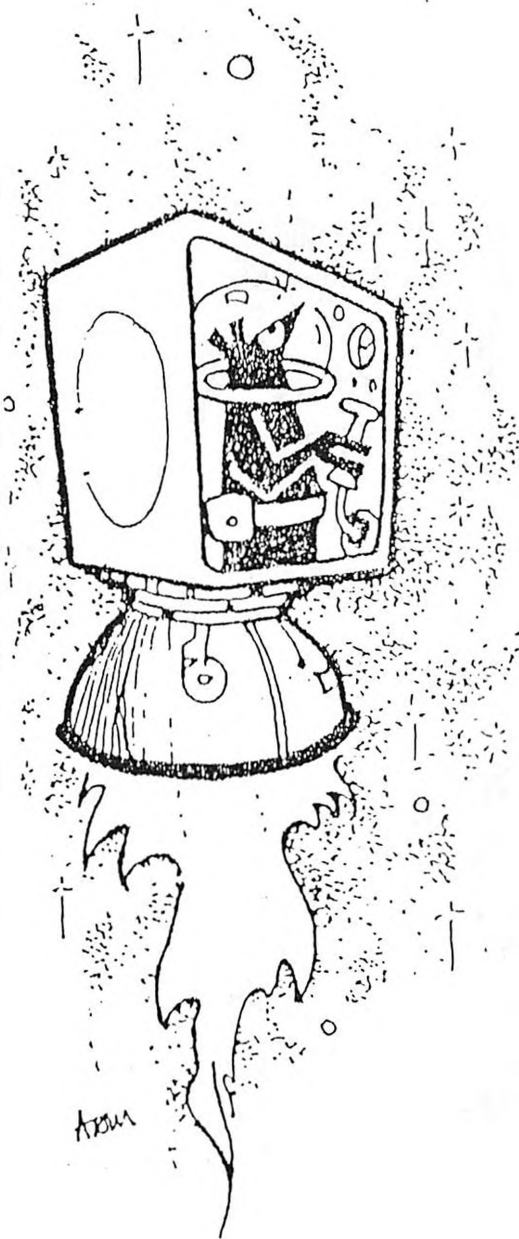
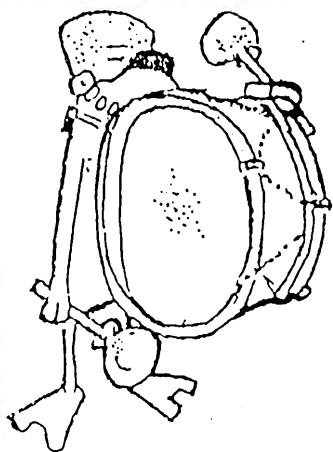
We looked at each other, eyes blinking in astonishment. "Gentlemen," said Walt, his voice firmly under control, "we are complete."

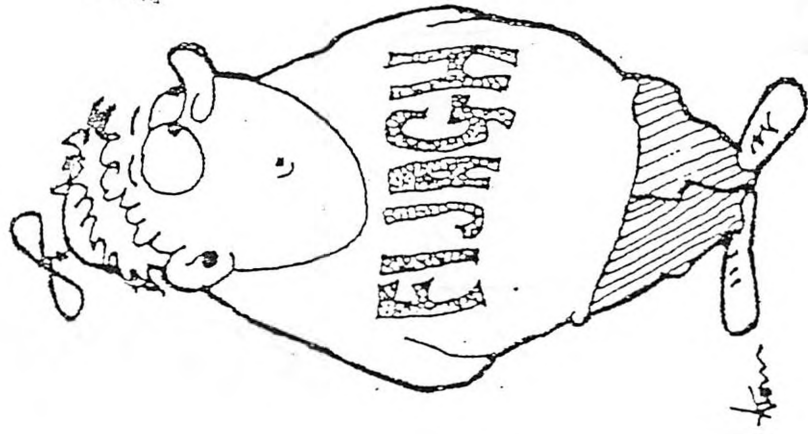
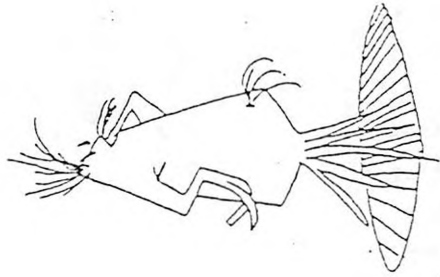
That story came from my heart.

* * * * *

George Charters upheld the finer Victorian principles of kindness, modesty, and thoughtfulness, and was polite and chivalrous to women (he wasn't married!). He saw and appreciated the best in everyone, and was always a stalwart of Irish Fandom.







Shaw to Please.

I retired from my fingerprint office in 1991, upon reaching the pensionable age of 65, and took the opportunity I had waited for for many years, to nicely type my Irish Fandom stories, all 54 of them, and got the contents professionally bound with green buckram, hard covers, no less, with gold lettering on the spine announcing *A Time Regained — Fables of Irish Fandom*. A few days ago, I read in a fanzine about the death of Bob Shaw. It was mind-numbing; I immediately went to my den, reached for *A Time Regained*, and flipped through the entire 240 pages. Bob's name was on almost every page. I looked down the list of pun titles of my stories; he had presented me with many of them. I started to read the stories...

* * *

The first article I wrote in fandom, "Coming Up for the Third Time," (a Willis title) partly concerned ghoddminton... in fact, many of my IF stories concern variations on this theme. I particularly remember Bob, a quiet, delicate, skillful player, holding his square of cardboard in a rather effete manner, hitting the shuttlecock only because he had to, being totally non-aggressive. I found myself usually partnering another member of IF, with Bob and his beautiful young wife Sadie across the net. It has been said quite correctly that, when playing ghoddminton, I was a terror to behold, with hair askew, moustache at 6 pm, sweating, attired in a grimy once-white vest, threadbare grey trousers and size 12 hobnail boots, leaping about in an uncoordinated manner. I chuckled to myself as I turned the pages, visualizing Bob across the net, grinning to himself, as if a vagrant witty pun had flickered across his mind, interrupting his play. And then, yesterday, after 40 years, an

example of his utter subtlety struck me. Why hadn't I thought of it before? It was absolute genius, the epitome of gamesmanship.

I must say I was rather chagrined to read an article written by Madeleine Willis, in which she wrote that whenever I visited Oblique House, she always adjusted her neckline. Bob and Sadie Shaw had lived in the Willis household for a time. So it suddenly struck me, as I sat there thinking about Bob, that perchance certain conversations had taken place, and, on reflection, what else could explain Bob's ghoddminton ploy?

James White and I were 19 points against the Shaws' 16 points. James and I were superb; the game was won. Then I heard Bob whisper to Sadie, "You look rather hot and flustered. Our opponents will not object if you divest yourself of your blouse; you'll feel cooler and refreshed."

Very slowly, Sadie complied, a tactile fumbling with pearl buttons being eased out of pink cross-stitched button holes, the white satin garment with little green shamrocks embroidered around the collar and sleeves being eased off white shoulders, revealing...

"21-19, the Shaws have won!" I heard Walt Willis shout loudly.

* * *

Everybody knows that punning was a major pastime at Oblique House, and although all the members of IF were adept at the technique, Bob Shaw's were the most cultured and devious. I can do no better to illustrate his métier than by quoting directly from my column 'Belfasters', this excerpt

from an issue of Dean Grennell's *Grue* published in 1956:

"Listen," Bob said to me one night, "I've noticed you always use the expression 'a cry of frustration'."

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

I once wrote an article for Gregg Calkins's *Opsla* about a robot Bob Shaw and a robot budgerigar, as part of our long-running feud about whether or not budgerigars could talk; I avered that they were quite good conversationalists, although not understanding everything they uttered. I couldn't think of a suitable title for the work, and I asked members of IF to assist me. Bob immediately came to my rescue:

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

"So?" I yawned.

"So," said Bob, "you could call your story 'A Hand in the Bird Is Worth Two in the BoSh'."

* * *

One of the stories that went the rounds of fandom in the middle fifties concerned my typewriter, which worked only by the use of a 'can of beans' drive. Naturally, because fans suspected that I was prone to exaggerate, it was treated as a myth, broadcast by IF — it couldn't have happened, it was just too incredible. But it was absolutely true, the typer was a wreck, but I needed to use it because my flow of articles for fanzines was a waterfall without the dam. But the platen had seized up, and the only way I

could get it to work was by tying a length of cord to the roller on the left end of the platen, and suspending a can of beans. Ergo, every time I pressed a key, the platen was released and the can of beans, using gravity, forced it to move one stop with each pressure on a key. I wrote over one hundred stories for fanzines on the 'can of beans drive' typer, until Les Gerber presented me with a portable typer in New York in 1959. But how did I get conned into purchasing that typer wreck in the first instance? I explained it all in a 1957 *Opsla*:

(Bob had invited me to his room in Oblique House to examine a typer he wanted to sell to me. I was thrilled being asked to purchase a vile pro's typewriter, even though it looked rusty, and in fact did appear to represent a hunk of junk.)

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

My pet word for breaking in a typewriter is 'terminologicalinexactitudinously'. I've typed it so often that I can do it blindfold, so there was no requirement for me to remove the layer of scum on the keys.

So I typed it.

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

I peered at the sheet of paper and saw something like this:

tge

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

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

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

term oloꝝ inexactið e

"Hmmm," mused Bob. "There must be something wrong with the gribble draw-back lever. It's probably being gouled by the trumbickel snatch wire. I think I can fix it."

(And so on... With each moment that passed

by, as Bob tried to demonstrate how I needed that machine, the situation deteriorated...)

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

Rather a difficult situation for me to be in. I guessed that only a dedicated typer mechanic could fix it, but at what incredible fee?? I didn't want to hurt Bob's feelings and say something reasonable, like half a crown. On the other hand, I didn't want to throw my money away and say something fantastic like five shillings. Whilst I was trying to formulate a reply, Bob leaned over the machine, and patted it affectionately. Tears welled in his eyes...

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

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

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

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

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

* * *

Most fans nowadays all have wheels; even neofans turn up at conventions in high-powered autos. They would not know or appreciate that, forty years ago, Irish fans predominantly used pedal cycles to travel on, although, as we gradually became somewhat more prosperous the motor-assisted pedal cycle began to make an appearance. But in 1954, Bob and myself possessed pedal cycles which were velocipedes in name only.

My pedal cycle was very old and had served me well when, as a village constable in County Down, I had spent most dark nights speeding round the quiet county lanes looking for miscreants who dared to encroach on my district without having red taillights on their bicycles. It had become rusted, and needed to be almost permanently sprayed with oil to make the wheels go around.

But Bob Shaw's bike was in a much worse condition, and he decided to give it a symbolic burial. The whole poignant affair was described in my "Rust in Peace" in the March 1955 issue of *Hyphen*. Bob decided to dump the bicycle in the River Lagan at Shaw's Bridge, aptly named. It was a few miles west of Belfast, and Bob asked all members of IF to attend the ceremony. We met there at the appointed time:

Everyone was there except Bob.

"Where is he?" I queried.

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

Ten minutes later a horrible squeaky noise issued from the Belfast direction. We exchanged knowing glances. Fifteen minutes later he arrived, and stopped by the simple expedient of kicking away the back wheel. He replaced the wheel, and jerked spasmodically over to us; the bike didn't have a saddle.

"Here it is," he said slowly. "Let's get it over with."

Walt Willis asked James White to fire the salvo. Thirteen rockets blasted to the Heavens, one for each year of the bike's co-existence with Bob.

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

"This is for you, John," he sniffed. "It's not much, but I know you will treasure it." He handed me the cycle pump. I put it in my pocket. I didn't say a word. He knew how I felt.

We all lined the towpath: Walt, Sadie, George, Madeleine, myself, James, Peggy, and Bob. Walt read the address:

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

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

I pulled by bike from the bank, ran down the towpath for a few yards, and vaulted onto the saddle.

I shrieked aloud in torment. Instead of a saddle, I had landed on a vertical piece of steel tubing. The hair rose on the back of my head. I got off the bike and rushed to the bridge. I still had the handlebars in my hands.

I thumped my fists on the parapet. "You fool, Shaw!" I screamed. "You absolute fool!"

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

I am keeping the pump until I meet Shaw again. It is filled with lead shot...

* * *

I could fill this issue of *Mimosa* with stories about Bob Shaw, but my brief sojourn into his persona is to merely try to give the impression of what a live-wire, bubbling character he was — always

kind and thoughtful, lips trembling with the attempt to express the whimsical thoughts tumbling through his creative mind. Bob Shaw *was* the compleat fan, almost unique in the fannish requirements he possessed — as fannish wit, cartoonist (as BoSh), prolific fanzine writer (including much fan fiction), convention attendee and speaker, raconteur, and vile pro (some thirty novels, and many short stories that have been anthologized). Frankly, who else in fandom at the present time could compete with his vast fannish umbrella?

Bob Shaw is irreplaceable. To quote a well-worn but magnificently apt cliché, we will never see his like again. ☼





And so we arrive at the end of the five volumes of my FABLES OF IRISH FANDOM, which one or two critics observed as being 'silly' and 'childish'...nevertheless recording for fannish posterity the activities, factual and mythical, of several never - to - be - forgotten fabulous personalities, all collectively kind, gracious, highly intelligent, creative...all imbued with the trufannish a spirit.

Reader's comments on Volumes 1 to 4 were considerably varied...although many fans valued the opportunity to enter into the orbit of a very well known group of fans, several of whose members achieved considerable status as professional science fiction writers, much anthologised. My quaint usage of the English Language occasionally engendered criticism, but I recall Madeleine Willis telling me, maybe forty years ago (before my syntax became so assured) that my writings had...'an indefinable charm'... which I accepted as being intentional egoboo.

Ken and I were particularly delighted to receive a rather poignant letter from a femme who told us that after reading the four volumes of stories, they made her think nostalgically about her own numerous children, two of whom had died ...she particularly liked the bonding of the...'heroes and heroines of Irish Fandom.'

Amongst the varied descriptions of my writings in Volumes 1 to 4, I appreciated the comment...'somewhat fanciful tales, bursting with boisterous Berry humour'...and I was also quite thrilled to be the fountain of...'humorous excesses.' I also felt quite guilty regarding an observation that in a hundred years time, fans would still be trying to grapple with Irish Fandom puns...

Without exception every letter Ken and I received mentioned ATOM's magnificent artwork. Personally, I felt it quite reassuring that a number of fans hoped that I would not be disappointed or offended if they stated that if they had to make a

choice, they considered that ATOM's illo's were superior to my own contributions. I acknowledge humbly that ATOM's artistry embellished my words, creating exciting and memorable pictures of my characters, putting lavish coats of paint over my skeletal outlines. Of course, we used ATOM illustrations from Ella Parker's 1965 Anthology, and also from drawings included in the late and very lamented Vince Clarke's tribute to ATOM, IN MEMORIAM, published shortly after ATOM's death in 1990; Ken and I also wish to thank the many faneds whose fanzines featured ATOM, both as complementary to my stories and in their own right. Steve Green, Birmingham, shrewdly writes:-

'I am increasingly of the opinion that we need to resurrect as many illo's of Arthur's as we can find and spread them out again amongst fandom - it's criminal that such wonderful artwork should only be known by those who 'grew up' with it.'

I have paid fullsome tribute to ATOM in this issue, and I must state that it was to my eternal delight that Arthur and Olive, and their two beautiful daughters visited Diane and myself in Hatfield one Sunday shortly before his demise, and we reminisced joyfully about Arthur and Olive's visit to our house in Belfast in 1956.

I must place on record the valuable and unstinting work carried out by Ken Cheslin to produce these five volumes so superbly. Most fans know that Ken and Jean have not been in good health for some time, and yet he fought the coldness of his garage and his physical problems during the winter to operate his photocopier. I used to telephone him after posting the proofs to him, to confirm that they had arrived safely, and he would so... 'I'm overwhelmed', or '...I'm electrified', which at that time I took to be a reference to the excellence of my typing and the choice of ATOM illo's, but which, on reflection, were probably expressions of alarm in anticipation of more long days in the intemperate chill of the garage.

Ken's speed in producing these five volumes, and his alacrity in posting them all over the world speaks highly of his enthusiasm for the project - just as when he edited and produced THE BLEARY EYES volumes some years ago. I can never thank him adequately for his many sacrifices working on a 'shoestring' budget.

When Ken and I discussed this project last year, I was aware that the page count would exceed three hundred pages, and I made up my mind that I would eliminate all typographical errors. Consequently, I keenly searched my typed pages several times, and, blast it, to my chagrin a few still eluded my eye-wrinkled search, for which I apologise.

To close, I wish to publish this paragraph from a letter of comment from E.B.Frohert, U.S.A:-

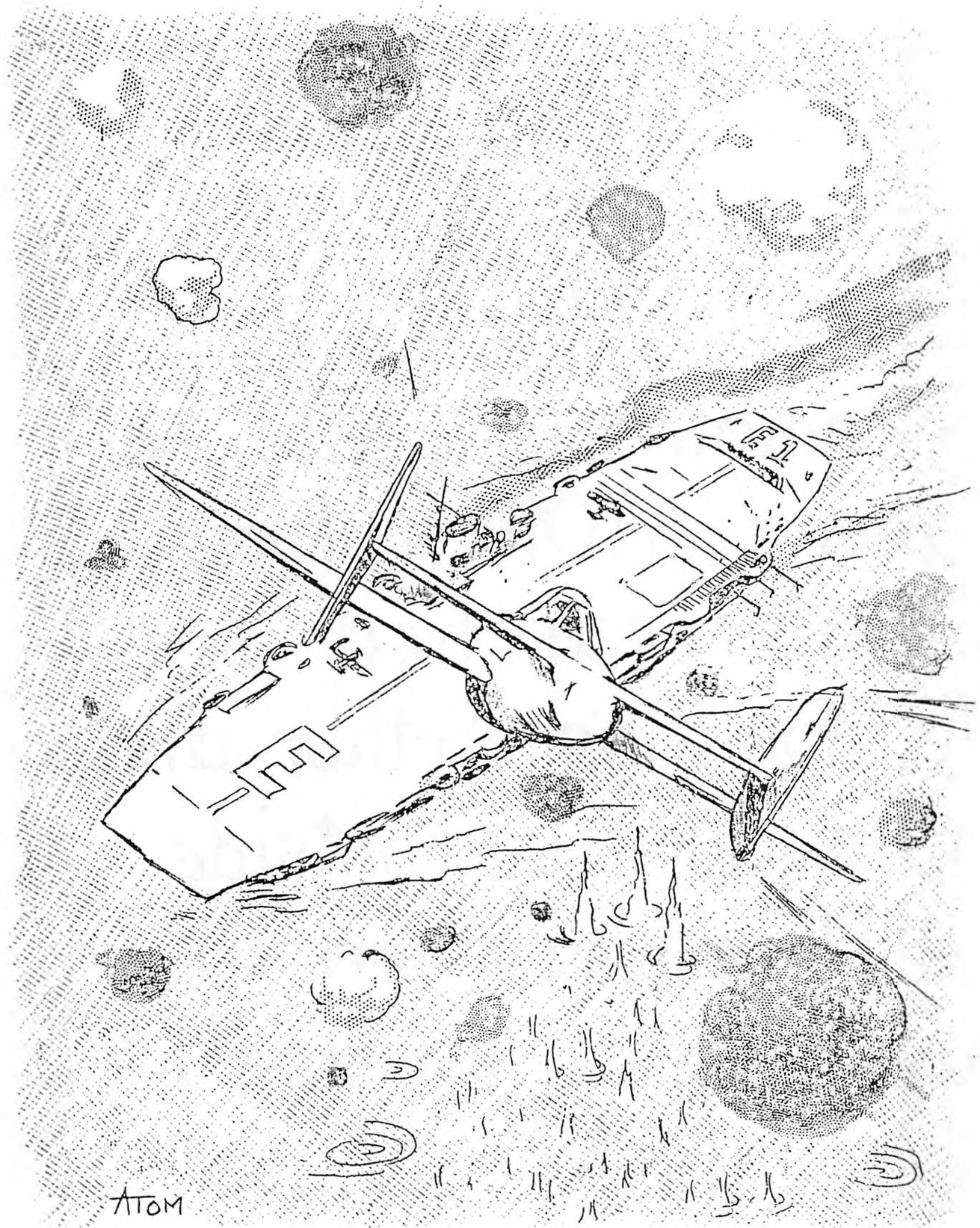
'Not knowing the individuals involved, except by reputation, what struck me most about the stories was the description of families and friends and children going happily about Belfast and environs, when, for as long as I remember, BELFAST has been a name which conjures thoughts of brutality, murder, insane partisan prejudice. Odd to think of Northern Ireland as a peaceful place to live and raise a family.'

APPENDIX

ATOM ART GALLERY

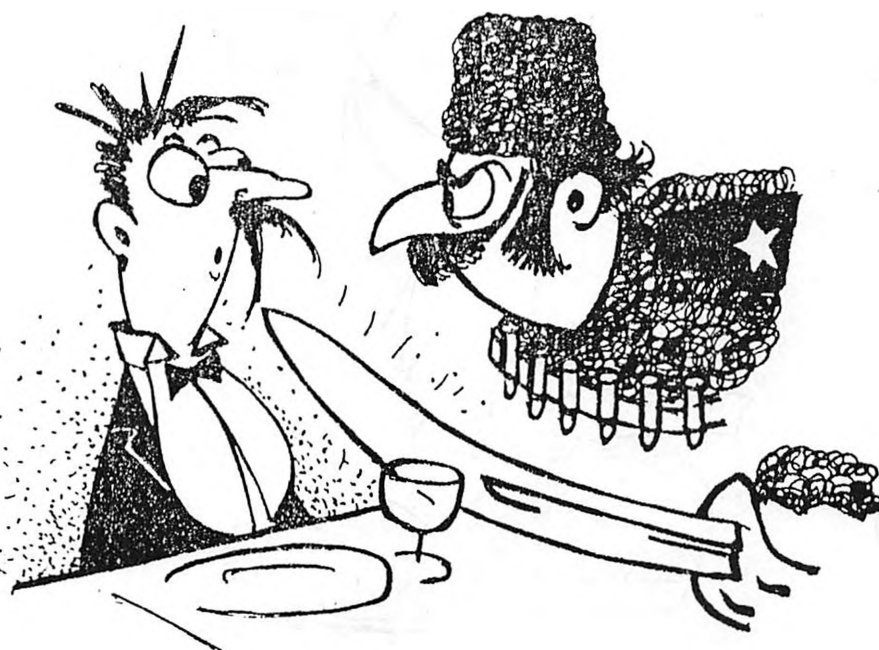
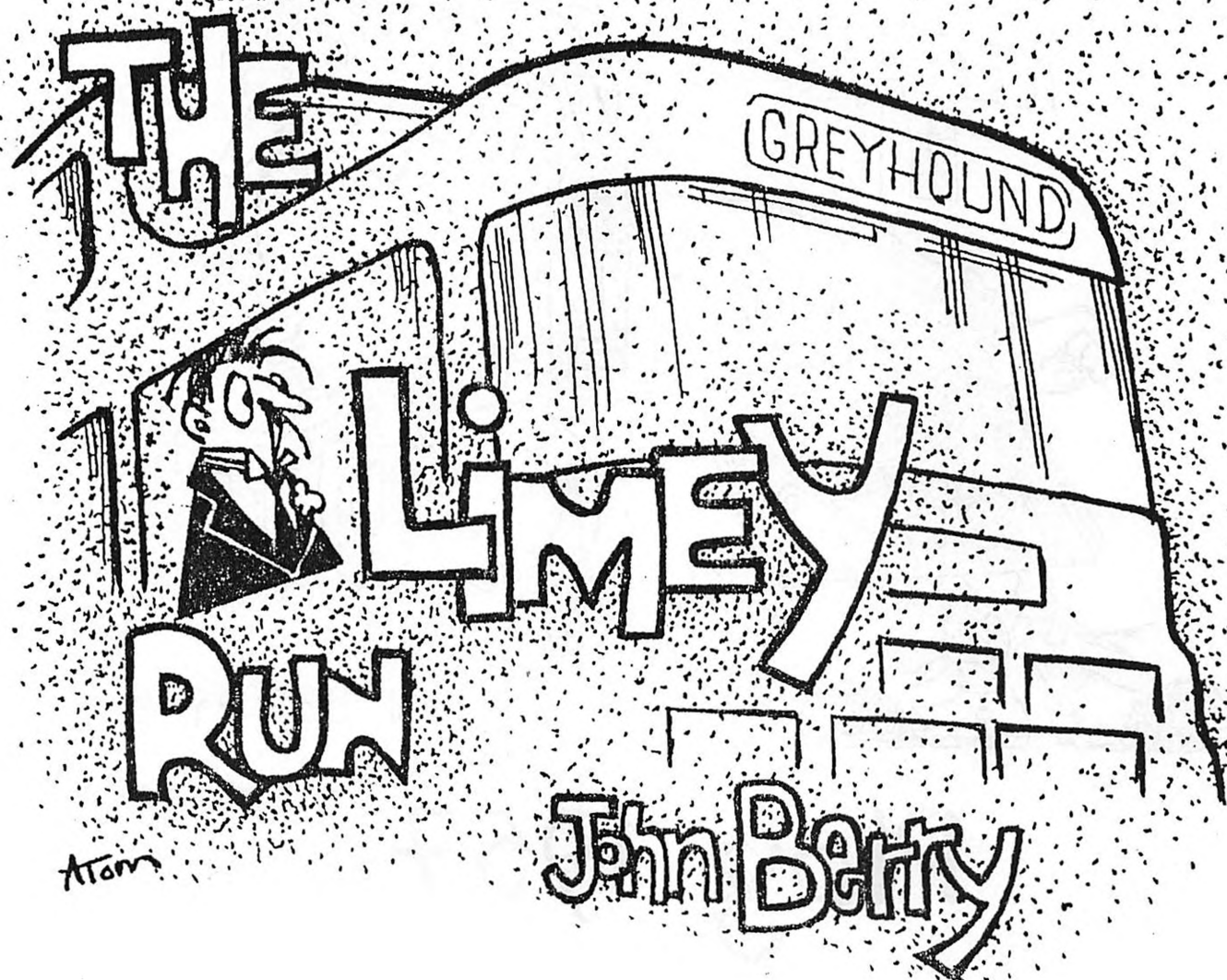
To completely sate the massive ATOM following I have searched my files for illo's Arthur drew for my articles outside the IF sphere. There is no requirement for me to elaborate further, just turn these pages. John Berry
1999.

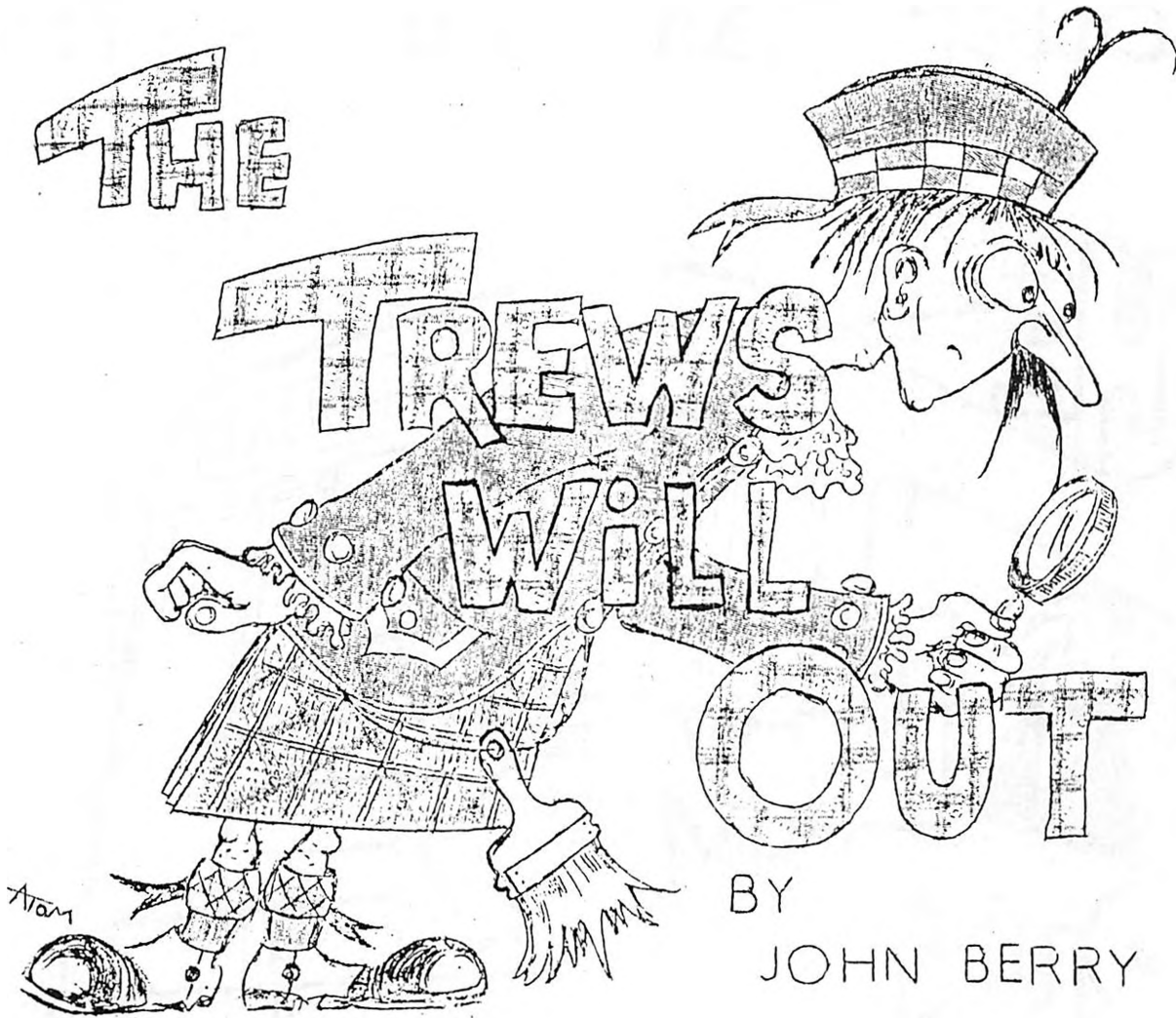
Camber



ATOM

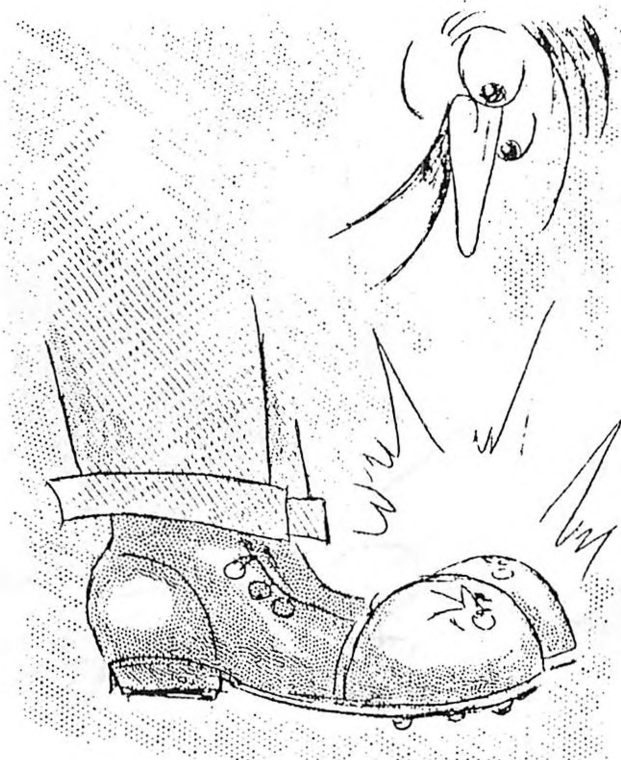
Holier Than Thou ~ 1984

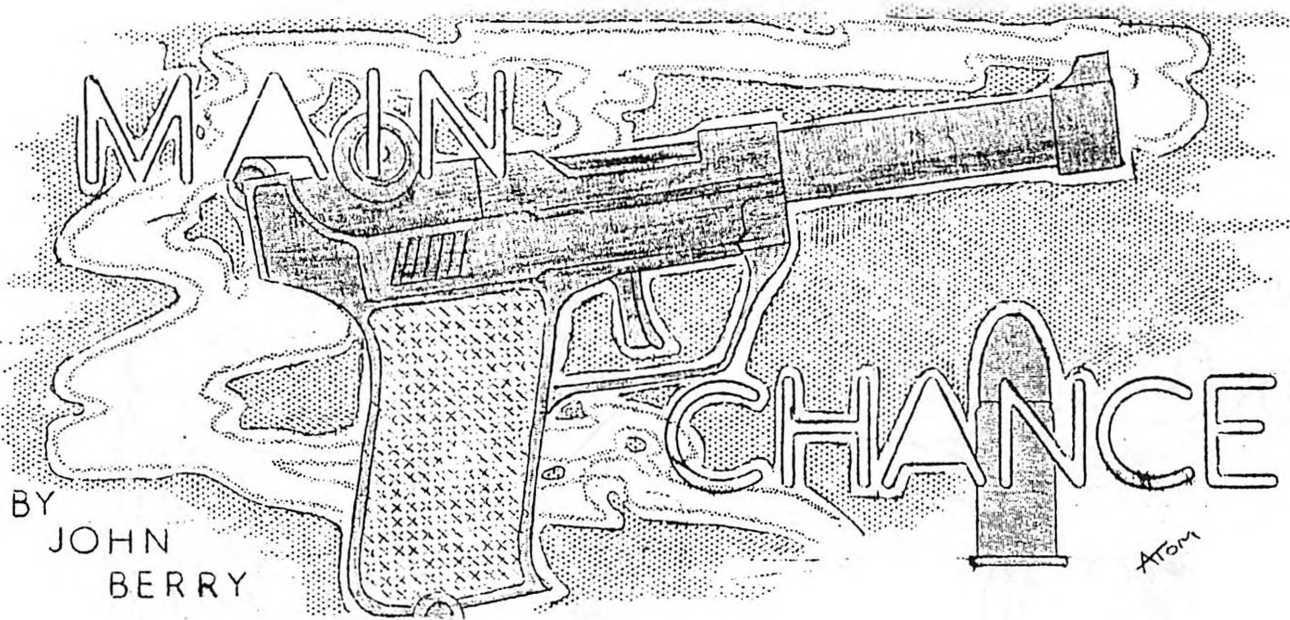




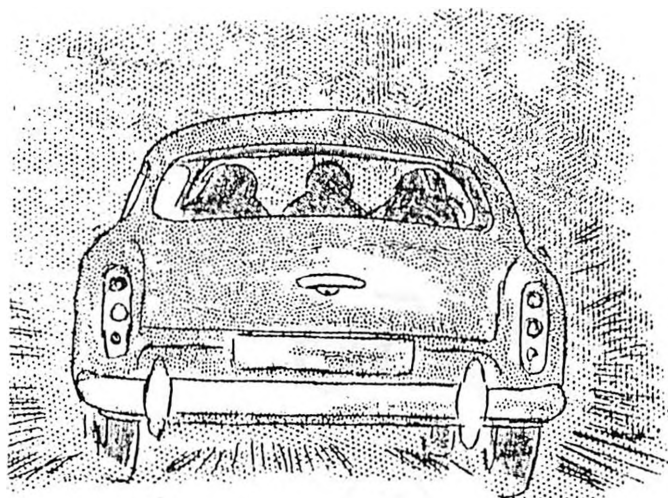
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Ploy
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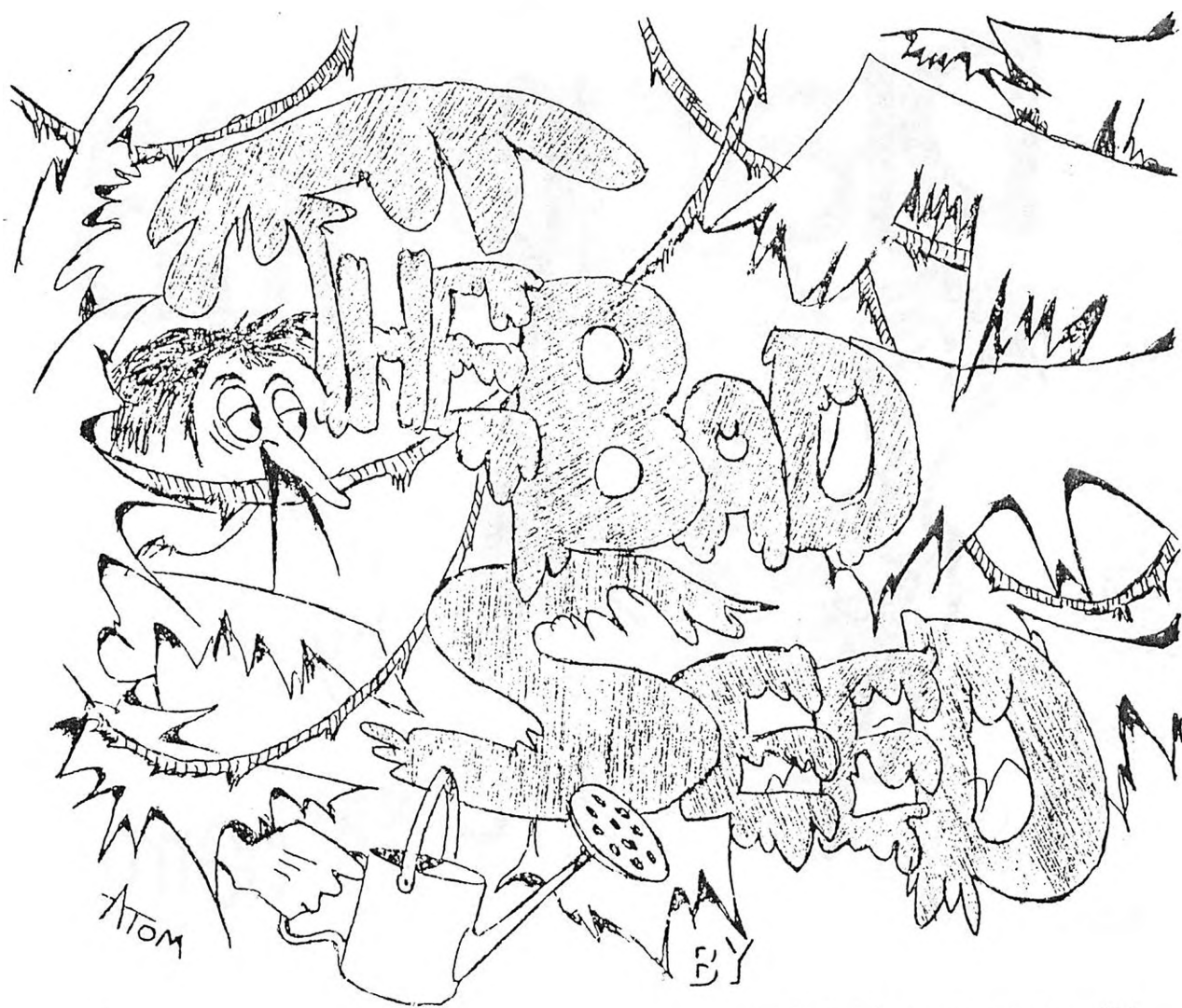


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JOHN BERRY

75

1958

Waldo

Dianetics

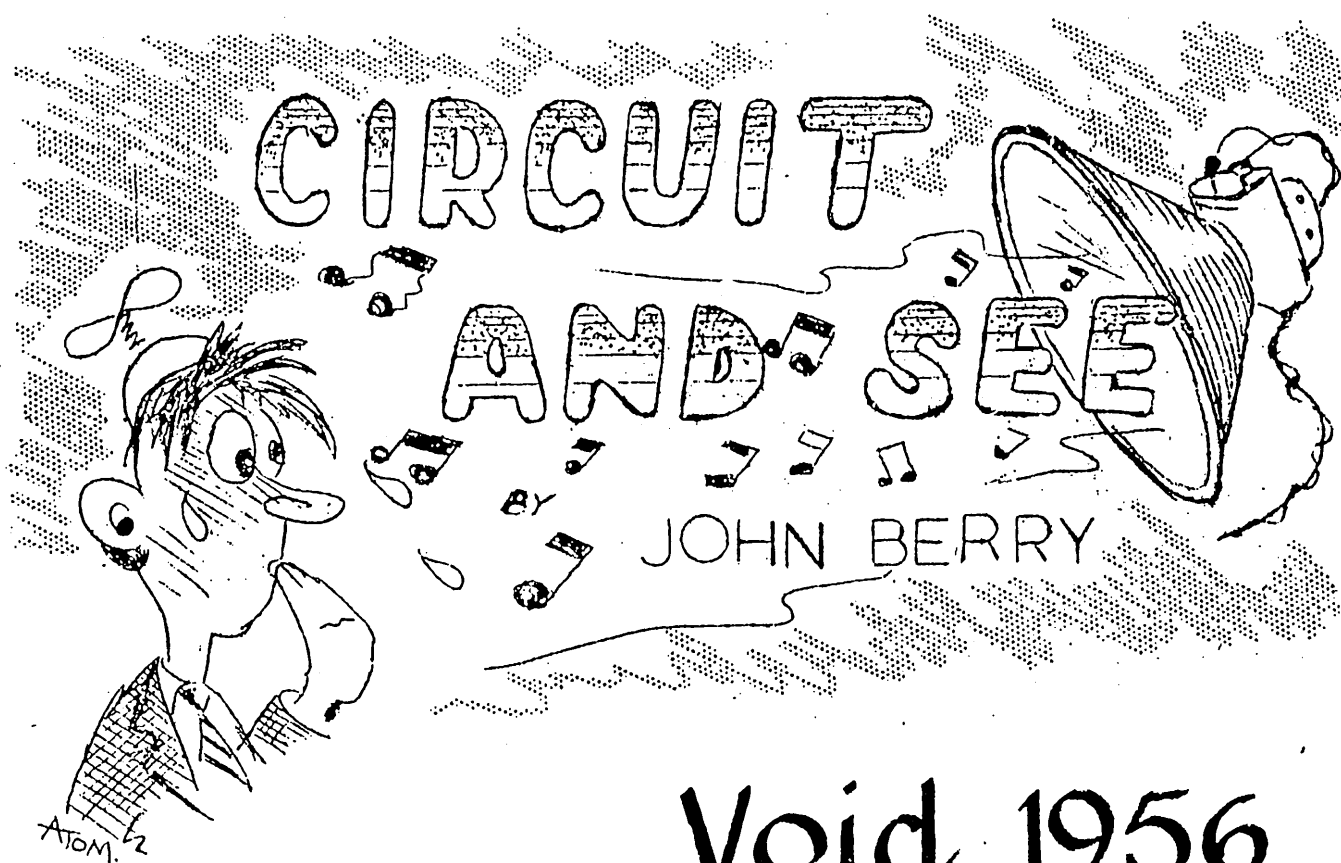


by
John berry

Atom

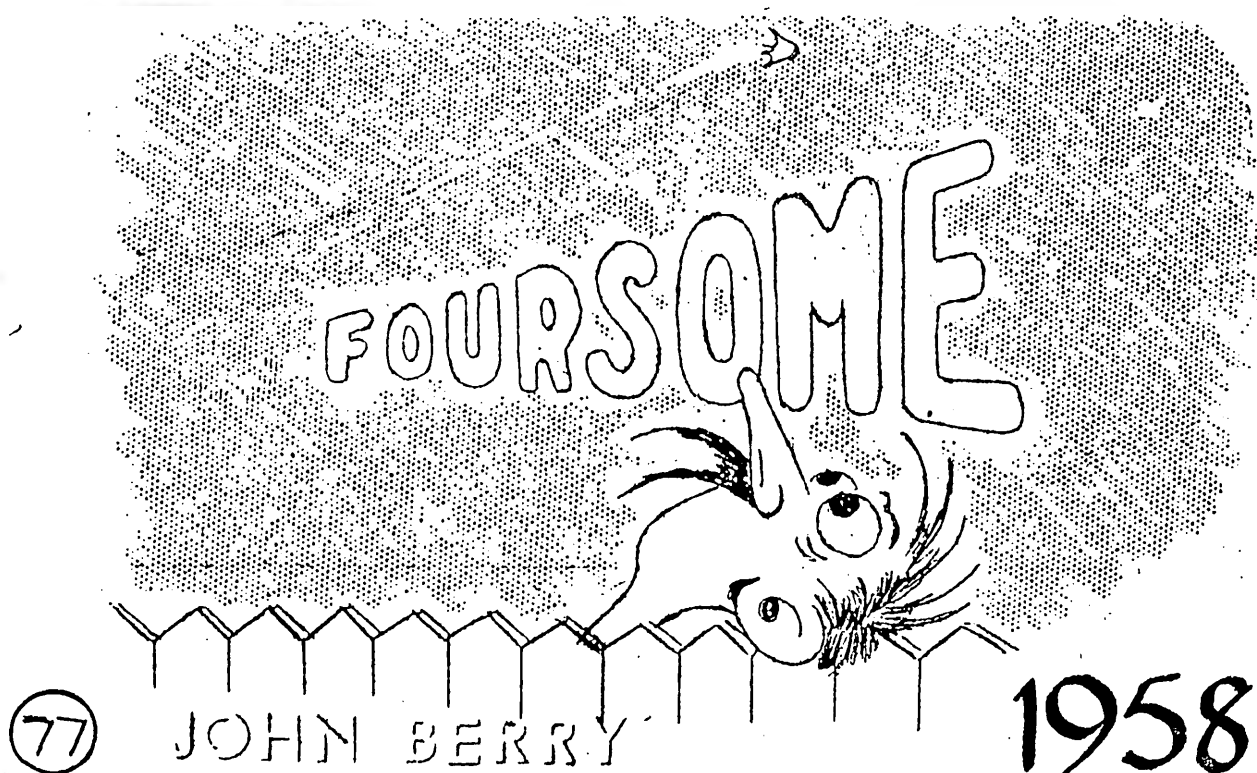
1981

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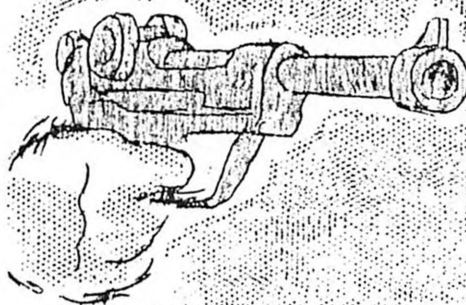
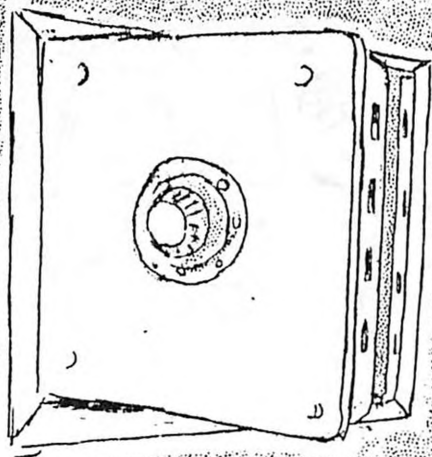
Void 1956

Cry of the Nameless



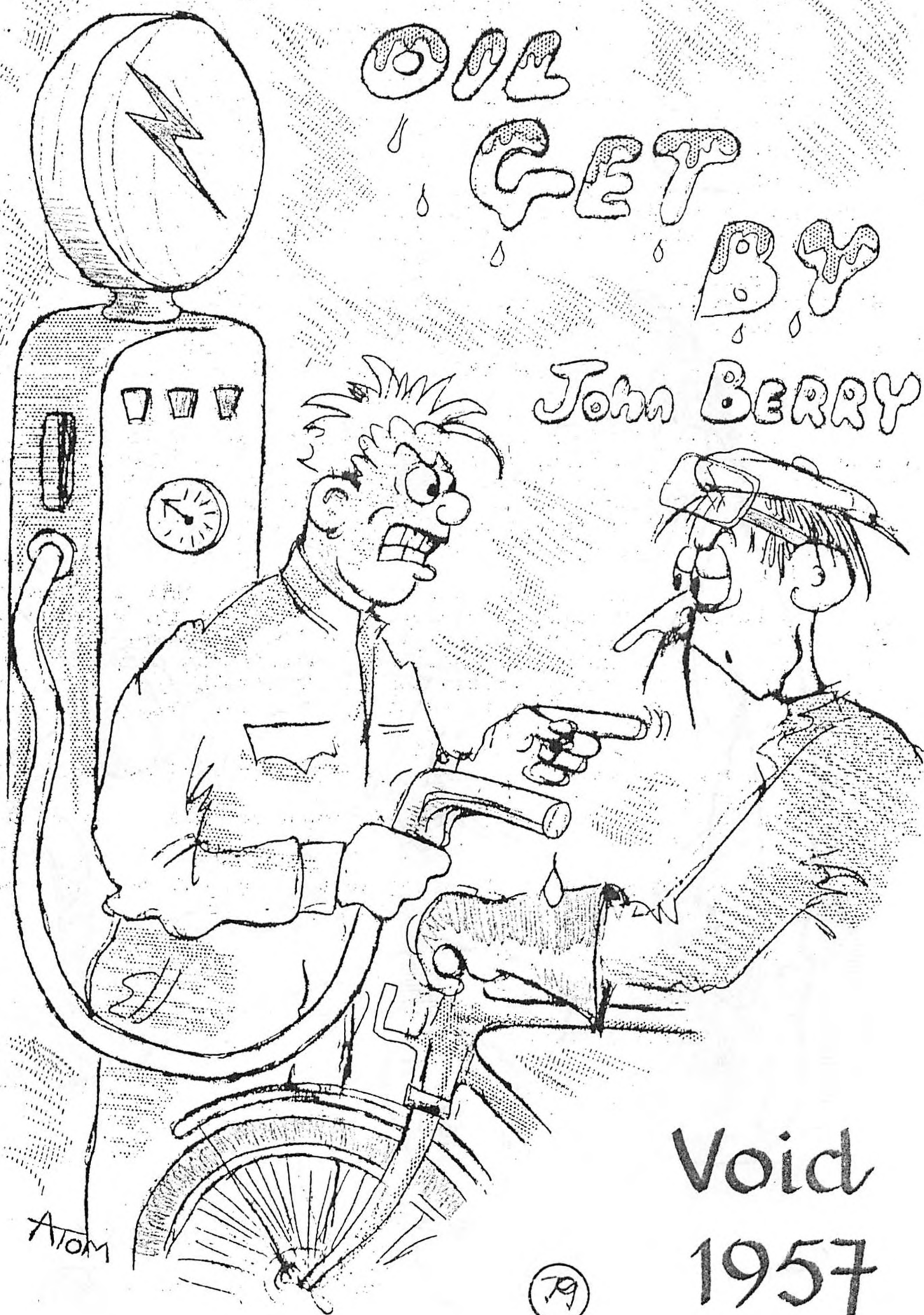
77 JOHN BERRY

1958



ONE GET BY

John BERRY



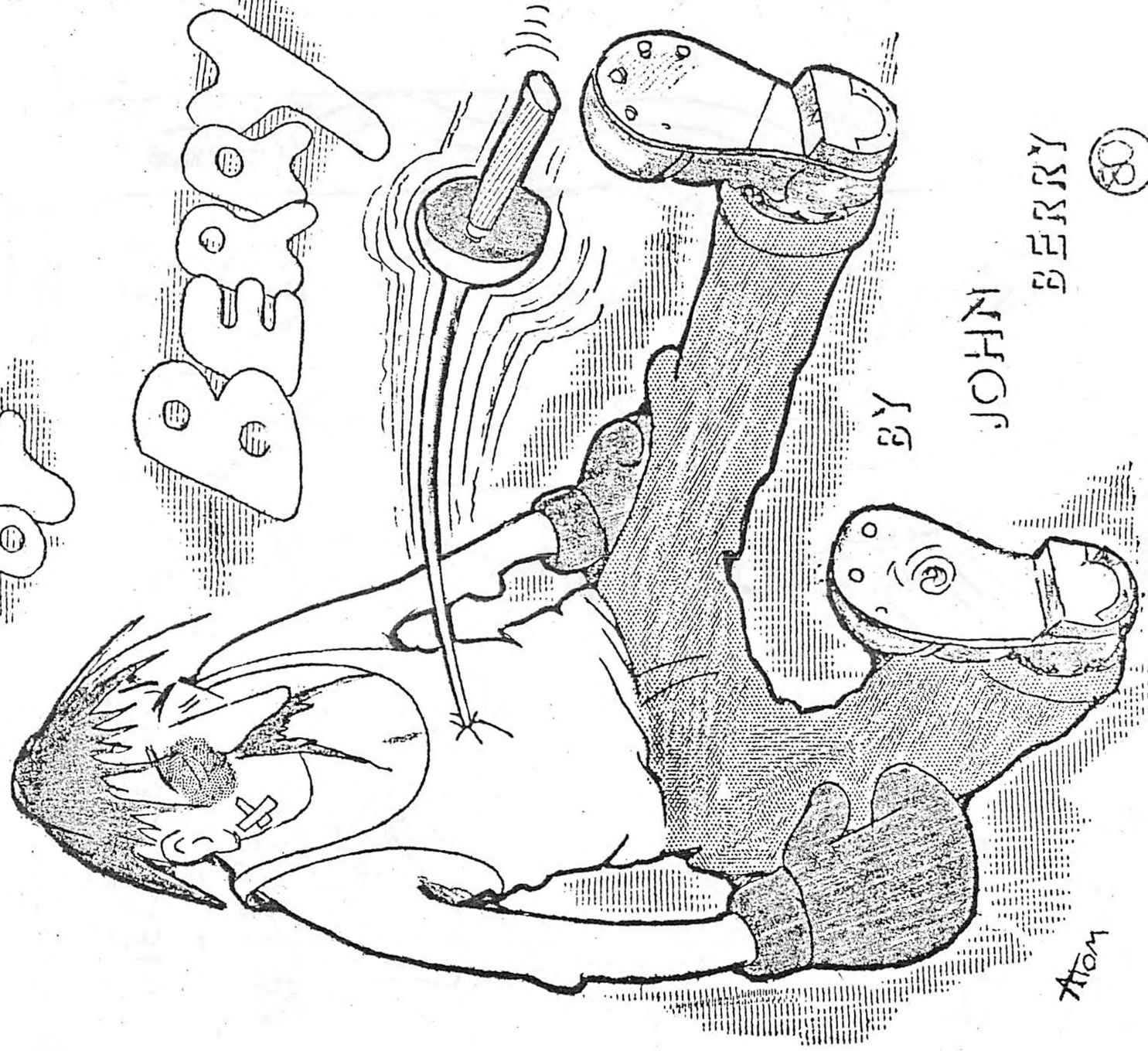
Void
1957

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Son

OF

BERRY



BY

JOHN

BERRY

