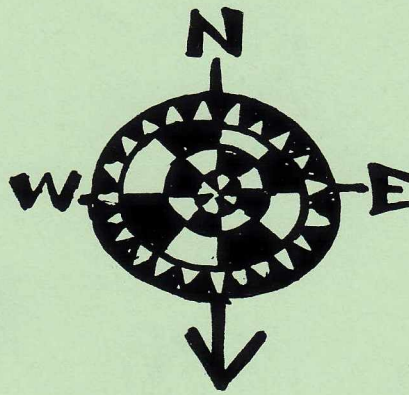


# BOSH GOES SOUTH



*Bob Shaw*



# B'hamacon III

THE 19th DEEP SOUTH CONVENTION • AUGUST 28-30, 1981 • BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA



GUEST OF HONOR

**Bob Shaw**

MASTER OF CEREMONIES

**Gerald Page**

FAN GUEST OF HONOR

**Hank Reinhardt**

## MEMBERSHIP:

- \$8 to October 15, 1980
- \$10 October 16, 1980 to August 1, 1981
- \$12 at the Door

The Birmingham Science Fiction Club invites you to attend the 19th annual gathering of Southern Fandom at the Birmingham Hilton and Conference Center.

This hotel is newly renovated and has over 15,000 square feet of meeting space. All of this space has been reserved for B'hamacon's activities, which will include the traditional Hearts Journey, Trivia Quiz, and Masquerade, as well as the reinauguration of the Hank Reinhardt awakening ceremony.

We will, of course, have all of the usual DSC events, such as a Hucker room, Art Show, and a 24 hour con suite.

For more information Contact:

**B'hamacon 2**

P. O. Box 57031, Birmingham, AL 35259

## Credits:

B'hamacon II (DSC 19) Flyer, August, 1981, IFC, artwork by Wade Gilbreath

"Bob's First Visit to the South" by Bob Shaw, reprinted from the TriContinental One-Shot, August, 1981.

"Bob Shaw Enters Irish Fandom" from a slightly longer piece entitled "Bob Shaw" by Walt Willis in the Confederation program book, August, 1986.

"How DO They Say It?" by Bob Shaw, reprinted from ANVIL 55, April, 1993.

"What I Learned from Watching Star Trek" Rivercon XII (August 1987) Guest of Honour speech. From MIMOSA #3, September, 1987 Reprinted by permission of Dick and Nicki Lynch.

"Bargaining Up the Wrong Tree" by Bob Shaw, reprinted from ANVIL 54, July, 1992.

"Seasonal Greetings" by Bob Shaw, reprinted from ANVIL 53, April, 1991.

"Life is but a Raffle" by Bob Shaw, reprinted from ANVIL 52, October, 1990.

"BoSh Speaks to DSC" reprinted from ANVIL 52, October, 1990. Transcribed and abridged by Dick Lynch, Charlotte Proctor and Rebecca Brayman.

"Merry Christmas" by Bob Shaw, from ANVIL 49, May, 1989.

"Bob Shaw's Patented Ever-Fail Get-Rich-Quick Schemes..." by Bob Shaw, reprinted from the Confederation (1986 Worldcon) program book, August 1986.

"They're Such Graceful Creatures, Aren't They?" by Bob Shaw, first printed in ANVIL 20/30 November, 1983.

"How to be Sick, and Live to tell about it" by Bob Shaw, from ANVIL 36, June, 1985.

"Has-to-Ride Belt" or A Streetcar Named Bizarre, by Bob Shaw first printed in ANVIL 22, July, 1982.

"Bob Shaw Talks to BoShCon" first printed in ANVIL 27, May 1983, transcribed and abridged by Steven Carlberg.

"The Fugitive Book" - Sandercock, Proctor, Shaw - first publication.

Cover, Wade Gilbreath, 1994

Title Page, BoSh illo by Cindy Riley, 1982. Reprinted courtesy of the artist.

Page 3, "B'hamaCon Committee Takes Bob Shaw to Lunch", illo by Bob Shaw, reprinted from the TriContinental One-Shot, August, 1981.

Page 7, Cat illo, - by Cindy Riley, ANVIL 29/30, Nov. 1983, reprinted courtesy of the artist.

Page 14, Radio illo - by Taral Wayne, from ANVIL 53, April, 1991

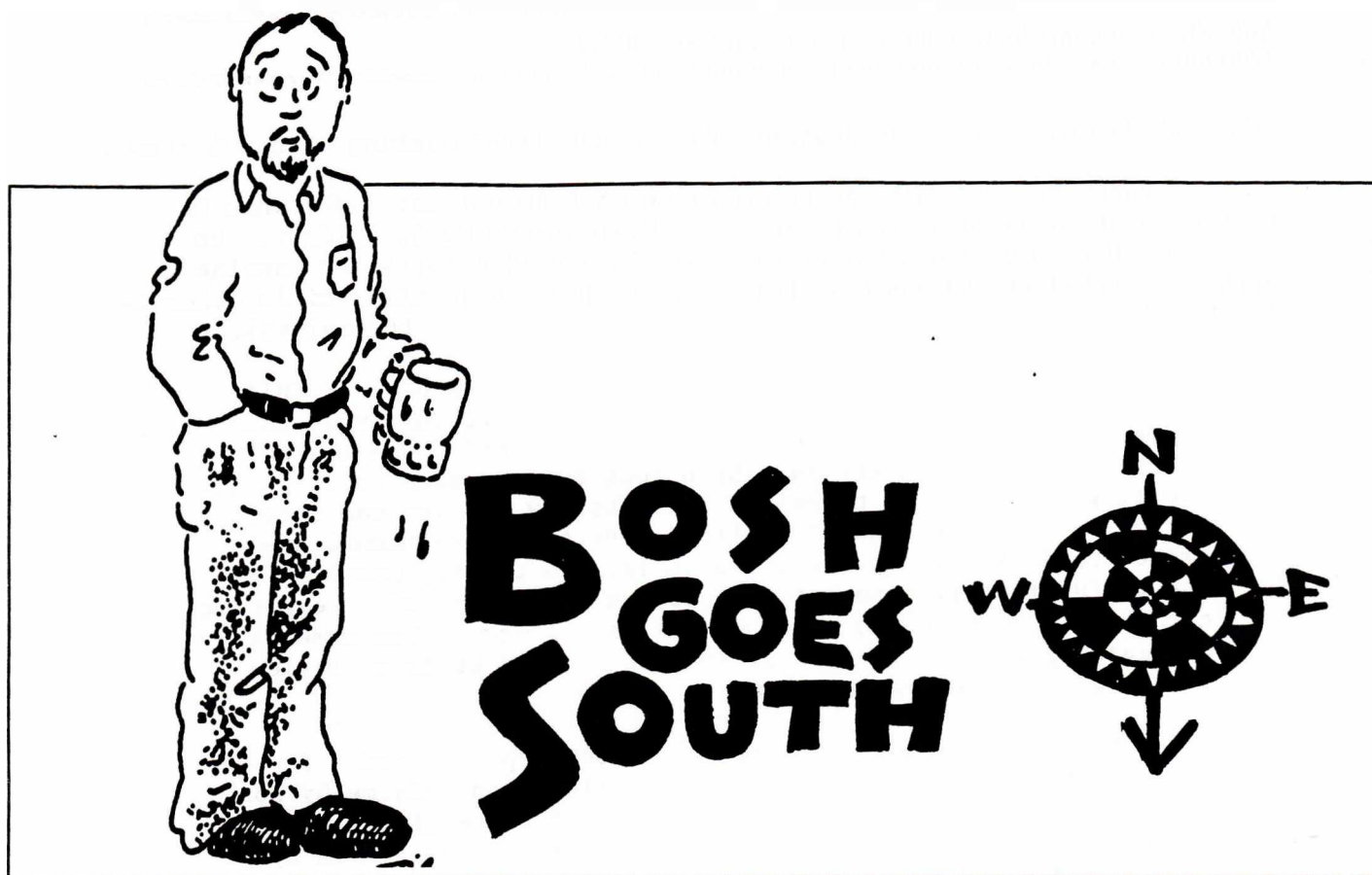
Page 21, Metal detector illo, by Wade Gilbreath, 1986.

Page 22, 23, 24, 25 - "Star Trek" illos by Charlie Williams for Mimosa 3, September, 1987, reprinted courtesy of Dick and Nicki Lynch.

Page 39, B'hamacon II Dead Dog Party, illo by Bob Shaw, TriContinental One-Shot, Aug. 81 Bacoover, Bob Shaw, 1993, first printed in Interzone Science Fiction and Fantasy.

BoSh Goes South was produced by Charlotte Proctor  
8325 7th Avenue South, Birmingham, AL 35206 USA  
for: B'hamaCon III, DeepSouthCon 32, August, 1994





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*BoSh Goes South* is a collection of Bob Shaw's fan writings for his friends in the South and transcripts of his GoH speeches at Southern cons, from 1981 through 1993. Exception: Walt Willis' 1986 piece introducing BoSh to ConFederation. Vintage artwork included, see credits.

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## Bob Shaw Enters Irish Fandom - November, 1950

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(Walt Willis describes for Southern fandom his first meeting with Bob Shaw.)

I first met Bob Shaw in the evening of 10th October 1950, when he turned up at my front door at 170 Upper Newtownards Road, Belfast. He described the encounter nine years later in one of a series of fanzine articles called the History of Irish Fandom (the pretentious title concealing the joke that all the contributors just wrote about themselves):

"I made three previous attempts to write my part of this history; none of them seemed any good and I tore them up. This period of futile effort lasted about a month and I was beginning to get worried, even though Gibbon took twenty years to write his 'Decline and Fall' -- there's a limit to how far you can stretch a fanzine deadline. Then I realized that the conventional approach to history, the narrative style, was totally unsuited to the fitful fervor, somewhat akin to the last gasps of an expiring candle, of the workings of my mind. What I needed was some way of flashing back to the events so that I could write a little series of vignettes about them.

Having so decided I seized my tv set, spot welded a few bus bars and things and then, using a soldering iron sold me by Don Channing, I hooked in a calendar and one of those little pencil sharpener globes of the world. Come with me now as I warm my time-viewer up. I will focus it on the night I entered Irish Fandom; using the mechanical calendar and then selecting Walt Willis's house on the globe, I'll tune in on that great occasion. As I recall I was looking pretty sharp that night: I distinctly remember I was on top form at making puns and jokes too. I must have made an excellent impression on Walt... as, the picture is forming now. Here we are late in 1950 outside Oblique House... Aaarrggghhh! Something must be wrong. Who is that weird-looking being with the shabby raincoat munching at a bag of chips as he walks up the path? Okay, I'll keep quiet and let you hear what happens...

The dimly seen figure halts at the front door, peers at the number and then finishes his chips, showing that he is at both thrifty and clean by chewing up the bag to extract any vinegar and salt that may have been absorbed into it, and then carefully licking his fingers. Next he rings the doorbell and waits. Next he knocks the knocker and waits. Next he rings, knocks, kicks and bangs his head against the door and waits. Finally, bruised and beaten he turns away from the unresponsive door and begins to shamle off down the path when suddenly the door is flung open and a tall figure is limned in yellow light from inside.

"Did you knock?" Walt Willis says.

Overawed, the shabby figure goes, "I..I..that is if... I washed my hair last night...I hope."

"You must be Bob Shaw," Walt says, "I got your name from Ken Slater. Won't you come in?"

Still emitting inarticulate sounds the shabby figure enters the house. Two or three hours go by, during which he is seen briefly at the windows excitedly waving handfuls of science fiction magazines and sandwiches, talking rapidly, describing orbits and spaceship trajectories with his hands. He looks ecstatically happy. He is.

Click.

Well, that's enough of that. I cannot bear to watch such neofannish behavior. I read right through Walt's collection after that and cured my hunger for sf, meanwhile helping Walt and James White produce the famous Slant, doing linocuts and getting rid of all the pent-up fantalk I'd been storing up all the time I thought I was the only lover of sf in the world. Soon the time of my first convention rolled around..."

The fanzine Slant to which he refers was letterpress printed, set and printed by hand with immense labor, and somehow after Bob arrived it seemed to get in the way of talking and laughing and having fun so that by 1952 we were publishing instead a cheap little mimeographed fanzine called Hyphen. Recently on learning to my immense surprise that single copies of this were now fetching upwards of \$15.00 in the TAFF auction I took my little bundle of waste paper and had it stapled together. For a while, I had thought of selecting a cover from one of the later, cleaner issues (every issue had a cartoon cover) but then it was clear to me that the cover Bob had done for the very first issue said everything. It showed a scruffy fan in his untidy den reading a poetry fanzine of the time called Different, and the caption was a quotation from one of the poems in it, by (I think) Lilith Lorraine:

We are the builders of brave tomorrows,  
We are the dreamers at last awake.

The obvious joke of course was the contrasts between the scruffiness of the fan and the nobility of the sentiment, but there was more to it than that. For it was obvious from the wry smile on the fan's face that he appreciated to joke against himself. And more again, that he respected and understood the belief expressed by Lilith Lorraine. And more again, that he secretly and deep down believed as I think all sf fans deep down believe that we really are dreamers and builders. And maybe we are. For our commerce is ideas, and nothing gets built without behind it. After Bob left that night in October 1950 I wrote to my friends Vince Clarke and Ken Bulmer in London...

"We have discovered a fan who is...listen to this: A. Mad, keen to be active, publish fanzines and all that. B. Writes stories. 3. Draws some of the best sf illos I have ever seen. Can you imagine! And lives not more than a quarter of a mile from my front door. He didn't know a thing about fandom and you are the first to hear about him. But you won't be the last."

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Bob's First Visit to the South - August, 1981  
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((Bob's account of his departure for Birmingham, and his reaction-- in cartoon-- to being taken to Baby Does's Matchless Mine for dinner.))

There I was, sitting at home in the English Lake District, sipping a half-pint whiskey malt, enjoying the sunshine and idly turning over in my mind the idea that I should begin to think about making a few notes for my talk at the DSC. Hardly had I reached the bottom of my fourth glass when the telephone rang. Doing my best to sound reasonably sober, I picked up the instrument and found I was speaking to an editor in Copen Hagen for whom I do some comic strip work. We chatted for a minute then he said, "By the way, when are you going to the states?"

"Not 'til the 26th," I replied.

"Oh," he said, "you mean tomorrow."

"No," I said, "the day after tomorrow." I was so convinced that he was wrong that I gave him a big argument, when my eye fell on the calendar-- some day I'll have to get that eye glued in properly--and it dawned on me that he was right!

That gave me some thirty minutes to pack up my case, wrap up my daily affairs, and catch a train to London. I managed to make it, but only just, and when I got here I found I had left behind all kinds of necessities, such as clean clothes, money, and my watch. That is the reason I did not present my usual self at the DSC--a cross between Beau Brummel and Prince Charles-- but it is a measure of the goodness of the Birmingham fans' hearts that they pretended not to notice anything amiss. And I have had a ball!

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\*\*\*\*\*  
THE FUGITIVE BOOK  
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Alan Sandercock, 612 Clairmont Circle, Decatur, GA 30033.

Dear Charlotte: May 3, 1993

A couple of months ago Sue and I were browsing through the Southern Highland Books second hand store here in Atlanta when I happened upon an autographed copy of The Fugitive Worlds by Bob Shaw. I was initially attracted to it because it was a first edition Victor Gollancz edition in reasonably good condition selling for only \$3.00. But when I opened the book I noticed that Bob had scribbled on the title page the following:

To Charlotte,  
With thanks for the  
Grand Old Okra!  
Bob Shaw  
1st Sept 1990

It's amazing what you find when you're not really trying! I certainly bought the book even though my name is not Charlotte, and haven't read the other books in this particular series. Cheers, Alan.

Charlotte Proctor, 8325 7th Ave. S., Birmingham, AL 35206

Dear Alan: May 14, 1993

Received your letter of May 3 yesterday. I am enclosing excerpts from Anvil 52, published October 1990, of the last time we saw Bob Shaw in June of 1990, first at DSC in Chattanooga and then here in Birmingham. I have highlighted the okra reference. On page 12, I have highlighted the fact that he went off and left his wallet and trousers in the hotel room in Chattanooga. Maybe he left more than he told us about. Maybe he left that book, too, that he had brought over from England, and signed especially for me. The hardcover was published in England in 1989, and Baen published a paperback version in 1990. It was available at this June convention and in fact I have one. I could almost believe that this book somehow got from the "lost and found" bin in the hotel in Chattanooga to a second hand book store in Atlanta until I look at the date you say the book is signed -- 1st September 1990. Now, why was it signed 1 Sept. when the date was really 10 June? Maybe Bob not only forgets his wallet, but also doesn't know what day (or month) it is. I don't know... All I know is I want that book. Pretty please? I would be more than happy to replace it with my Baen paperback.

Mystified, Charlotte.

Dear Charlotte: May 17, 1993

That certainly was an intriguing letter you sent me. The business about The Fugitive Worlds by Bob Shaw is quite strange, although Sue doesn't think it particularly weird that he might have mistakenly signed the book 1st Sept 1990 since once she, less than five years ago, sent a letter and dated it 7th Dec 1942!

Well, I don't know what is going on. You should note that the book was actually published in England in 1989, and so it is definitely possible for Bob to have had it in his possession when he saw you in June of 1990. Anyway, you can have the book. I shall send it over to Birmingham by mail, and I am quite satisfied to get the Baen paperback in return. You should know that there was no dust cover on this book when I bought it. Those Gollancz paper covers probably can't be expected to last through all of the travels that this book has seen! Part of the cloth on the bottom of the back cover is also worn off and there is a slight stain on the dark blue back cover, but the paper is still white -- those non acid free pages still resisting disintegration. I realize after writing the above that I would also like some addresses of fanzines; I do want to get onto some further mailing lists, and write more Locs. You should look for the book to arrive on your doorstep before too long.

All the best, Alan.

Dear Alan:

May 21, 1993

I am anxiously awaiting the arrival of my much delayed book, and am anxious about the fate it may suffer at the hands of the postal service. Think about it. Maybe he mailed it to me in September of 1990 and it never arrived and ended up at the Regional Dead Letter Office (in Atlanta) and was sold.... You bet you can have anything you ask in exchange. I am compiling a list of names and addresses to enclose with the Baen book. All this is rather worrying. I'm sure Bob thinks I am an ingrate because I never thanked him for the book. No telling what you thought when you found it in the bookstore. Even I had an "Oh, my God, what have I done?" reaction when I read your first letter. Did I loan it to somebody, I asked myself, or accidentally put it in a box to trade? Having worked up a good guilt trip, my self finally answered: WAIT a minute. I never had that book. But nearly three years later I WILL have the book.

It just goes to prove that even ragged books would'n be fugitive forever.

Satisfied, Charlotte

Bob Shaw, 66 Knutsford Rd., Grappenhall, Warrington, Cheshire UK WA4 2PB

Dear Charlotte:

May 26, 1993

Thanks for letting me see the correspondence between you and Alan Sandercock about that copy of THE FUGITIVE WORLDS. I think I can solve the mystery, but I'm afraid the story isn't particularly happy or fannish. The confusion has arisen because you are not the Charlotte to whom the book was dedicated. I autographed it at the DSC in Chattanooga for a woman called Charlotte Knarp.

I had never met her before, but we had corresponded a few times in the 1980s, when she was living in a place called Everett, which I think is quite close to Seattle. I can't give you the exact address because my old address book has disappeared. It was quite a surprise to me when she showed up in Chattanooga and produced a copy of THE FUGITIVE WORLDS which she asked me to



sign. She was a smallish woman in her forties, very pretty in a fading rose sort of way, and walked with a slight limp.

She was not a fan so we left the convention and went for a bite to eat in that restaurant where, earlier in the day, you had introduced me to okra. I had more okra with our snack, for which she insisted on paying. We had a very pleasant couple of hours, but I couldn't help noticing that she was not at all like the breezy, cheerful person of her letters. She seemed nervous and abstracted, not to say worried, and it was in an attempt to lighten her mood that I composed that silly dedication about the Grand Old Okra. She smiled over it and said she would keep the book always, which somehow made me feel more concerned about her state of mind -- people don't usually react that way to my jokes.

While we were having coffee she grew even more edgy and finally told me that she had left the Seattle area and had been able to drop in at the con for a few hours because she was on her way to live in, I think, Athens, Georgia. I asked if she had relatives or friends there and she said something like, "No, but I think I'll be safe there." This might sound ridiculous, but I got the impression she was mixed up in something deadly serious -- like being a witness that the FBI was moving to a safe address.

When she was getting into her car to leave she said she would write to me soon "all being well" -- but I haven't heard from her since that day. I supposed she had lost interest in the correspondence, but the little episode has lingered strangely in my mind, and the fact that her copy of THE FUGITIVE WORLDS has turned up in a secondhand book store in Atlanta is giving me some misgivings. (I don't believe in all that synchronicity stuff, but I keep remembering that the one book of my output that she brought had the word "fugitive" in the title.)

It is almost certain that I have allowed the whole thing to build up too much in my imagination, but I do have a feeling of uneasiness deep inside. I just hope she is all right.

Yours sincerely, Bob.

P.S. I can't explain the discrepancy in dates.

Dear Readers:

June 4, 1993

Try to imagine my mixed emotions upon receiving in the same mail both the book in question from Alan, and the above letter from Bob. Certainly I was glad to have what I thought was mine, but Bob's letter left me feeling a little bit foolish and more than a little bit jealous. Reason prevailed, however, and I put the fugitive book on the shelf with its fellows. I suppose all this will make a good story to tell in years to come, but for now I think I'll just close the door on this little episode.

Mortified, Charlotte

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\*\*\*\*\*  
THEY'RE SUCH GRACEFUL CREATURES, AREN'T THEY?  
\*\*\*\*\*

Jean Morris knocked loudly on the door of the old detached house where her widowed mother lived alone with her pets. There was no reply. An unusual silence reigned within. Suddenly feeling apprehensive over not having called for two weeks, Jean used her key and went into the house.

A moment later she came running out, screaming.

That night, even with the heavy sedation, she was still unable to stop going over every detail of the episode in her mind.

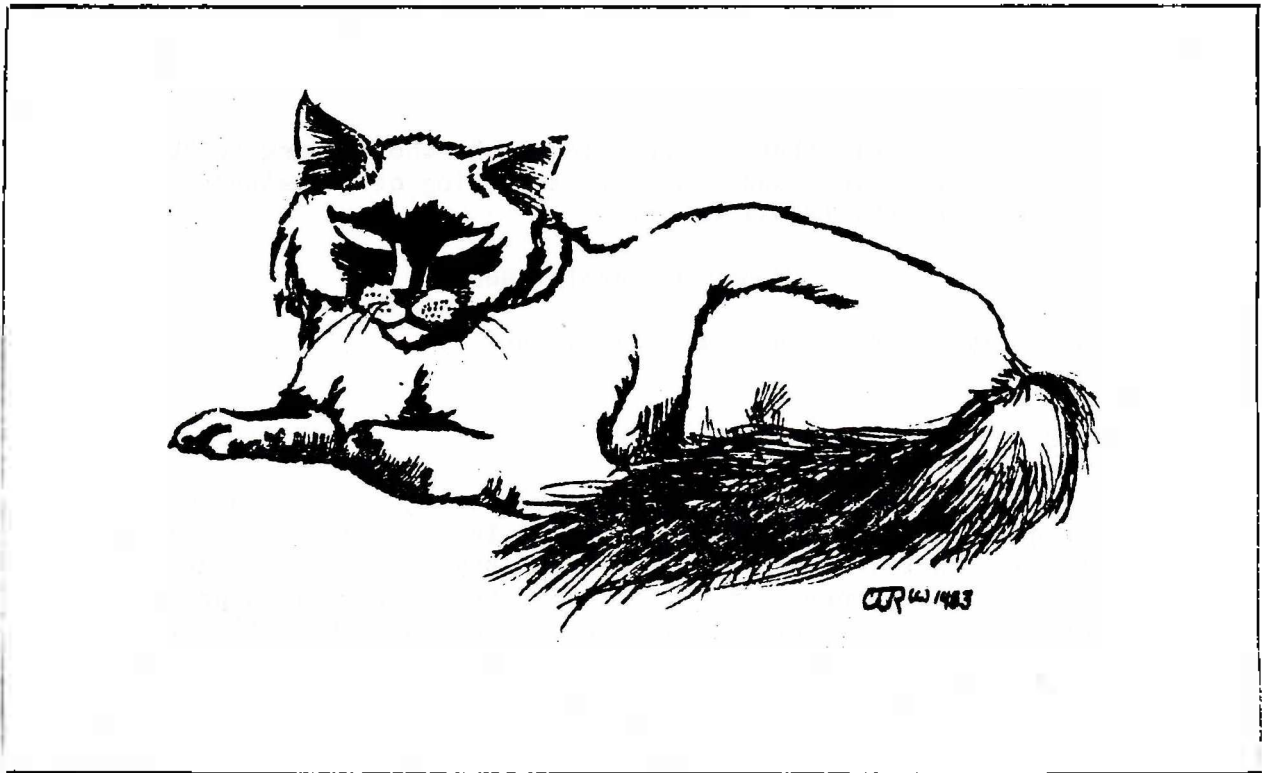
"Why are you so quiet, mother?" she had called as she tapped on the bedroom door.

Why could I not have left it at that? The reproaches yammered incessantly inside her head, with their message that she would never again be far away from nightmare. Why did I have to be flippant?

And when drugged sleep finally claimed her an hour later her lips were still silently framing the words she had uttered in those last few seconds before opening the bedroom door.

"Has the cat got your tongue?"

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\*\*\*\*\*  
BARGAINING UP THE WRONG TREE  
\*\*\*\*\*

I hate having to buy or sell something. One of the things that get on my nerves after making a purchase, specially when a good sum of money was involved, is the reaction of friends. "Why didn't you tell me you were going to buy an xyz?" they always begin, following by (a) "I could have got you one from work at 70% off," (b) "For the price of a beer I could have sold you the one I got for Christmas --and it's unused, still in the box," or (c) "I dumped a perfectly good one last week."

I've become so neurotic over that that I now find it almost impossible to go shopping for anything that costs more than a few quid. Days and weeks slip by while I go around buttonholing friends and acquaintances telling them I'm about to make a major purchase. Incredibly, the most common response then is, "Go for the top of the range, Bob. Spend the maximum you can afford. Don't mess around with so-called bargains and second-hand rubbish."

Needless to say, I'm also very bad at selling, the main reason being that I just can't bring myself to haggle. I've only met one other man who was more embarrassed when it came to discussing money -- and he became my literary agent. We made a great pair for a while. I used to have to telephone publishers and plead on his behalf while he, in a state of funk, waited at home to hear the outcome!

On very rare occasions I advertise an item for sale and find myself dealing with a real softy, somebody as inept as I am at the whole bargaining process. We correctly classify each other at first glance; he immediately offers the full asking price; I mumble my grateful acceptance; we make the exchange, shake hands and part company at once, both of us trembling and with a light sweat on our brows. Sometimes the entire transaction is over in about sixty seconds.

But, as I sail, the customer is usually the opposite of a softy. With my flair for originality, I call this kind of person a sharp. I can identify a sharp as soon as I see him coming along the path to my door. He might be aware of my presence behind the living room curtains, but he doesn't show it. As he approaches he studies the whole frontage of the place with a look of purest contempt. I have to suppress an urge to dash out and apologize for the state of the paint-work. Already, before we have even spoken, he has established a buyer's market. The eyes are the surest indicator of a sharp -- they are usually pale grey or pale blue, and they seem to view the universe with an ice-watery disdain.

If what I'm selling happens to be a car it is even easier to spot the sharp. He is accompanied by a scowling individual who reveals himself to be a motor mechanic by the way in which, even before the doorbell has sounded, he throws himself savagely at the car and does his best to inflict permanent damage on it. A favorite opening move is to try wrenching the wheels off with the bare hands. I have never figured out why they do that.

Hardly have negotiations begun when, the sharp -- having shown complete lack of interest in everything I said -- fixes me with those pelagic orbs and makes an offer which is so far below my hopes that I

immediately experience a strange psychic malaise, a deadly paralysis of the will. I know at once that I'm doomed. It's "The Cat and the Canary" all over again. This man is a natural financial predator and I am his natural prey, and the most that I can reasonably hope for is that he will proceed to disembowel me quickly and cleanly, without inflicting too much pain.

A lifetime of that kind of thing has reduced me to a commercial jellyfish, but once in a while -- to mix a metaphor -- I try to show a little backbone and force the worm to turn. Usually it happens in response to the jeering of my family after I have completed one of my "deals". To a man, they expect me to sell things for more than I paid, and to buy things for much less than the vendor paid. For years I have tried to point out the inherent unfairness of this charge, but to no avail. They continue to regard me as an idiot.

Thus it was, many years ago, when it came time for my son to have his first bicycle, I decided that -- once and for all -- I was going to Prove My Mettle. I was going to demonstrate to them all that I was a good provider, that I too could go out into the world and do battle for the sake of my fledglings.

There were two children's bikes advertised that night in the Belfast Telegraph, both in convenient districts. One was in for nine quid and the other for five. (I told you it was a long time ago.) I memorized the addresses and set out in my car, all the while vowing the mightiest of vows -- this time I was not going to be a sucker. The family were going to be proud of me...

Not trusting my ability as a haggler, I decided on a simple strategy. Regardless of how good a bicycle might look, no matter how much of a gift it might seem, I was going to offer 2 pounds less than the asking price. Deciding to start at the lower end of the scale, I went to the first of the addresses. It was in a pleasant well-to-do suburb. Assuming a cobra-like stare, I marched up to the door and rang the bell.

The door was opened by a kindly-looking man who was smoking a pipe and wearing a roomy cardigan and carpet slippers. Behind him in the hall was a gleaming bicycle which looked practically new and which was exactly what I had in mind for my son. He gave me a tentative smile, and I liked him immediately and instinctively -- but, I reminded myself as I entered the orange-lit hall, this was no time for sentiment.

I inspected the bicycle and at once fell in love with it. This machine was a real bargain, better than I could reasonably have expected. The owner was practically giving it away, but -- sticking to my new-found principles -- I glared at it with every sign of distaste. I rubbed my chin and tried to turn the look of distaste into one of positive loathing.

"I suppose it's passable," I said grudgingly, "but I don't think it's worth more than three quid." Backing up my opinion, I fished three bank-notes out of my pocket.



The effect of my words was immediate and dramatic. The man gave a barely audible whimper and stepped back with a stricken, despairing look in his eyes. I gazed at him in some concern, and then recognized that helpless, hopeless expression -- it was the one I always wore during an encounter with a sharpie. For a moment I was puzzled. After all, a drop of two quid in the price wasn't all that catastrophic. Then a terrible realization came to me -- I had mixed up two addresses. I had just offered 8 pounds for the 9 pound bike! Its owner was an archetypal softy and he thought he was dealing with a sharpie.

We stared at each other in mutual dismay. The centrally positioned orange lamp was swinging gently in a draught, highlighting one face and then the other, as if we were in an old movie. Time slowed to a crawl. One by one, the pores of our foreheads exuded beads of sweat. It was one of the worst moments of my life.

"Look," I finally said weakly, full of remorse, "I.. perhaps... maybe..." I wanted to apologize, but my flustered and guilt-ridden brain refused to formulate the words.

"Three pounds?" the man said dully, surrendering to his softy's fate. "All right -- three pounds will do."

"But.. but.." I felt an urge to drive the price up. I almost wanted to go down on my knees and beg his forgiveness, but suddenly he had become quite brusque and forceful. He snatched my money, shoved the bike forwards and bundled me out into the darkness with it. The slamming of the door showed how anxious he was to bring his humiliation to a quick end.

Feeling slightly ill, I took the bike home, and -- human nature being what it is -- was soon boasting to the family about how I had haggled and driven a hard bargain. To this day, however, I still wish I had offered 7 pounds for the damned machine.

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#### How Do They Say It?

It's Zesty and Zingy,  
Is the name of Vinge;  
And a Cheerful ring,  
Attaches to Vinge.

But something so dingy,  
In the sound of Vinge;  
And surely they cringe,  
At the mention of Vinge.

-- BoSh

\*\*\*\*\*

I think it's only appropriate after having been introduced by Forrey Ackerman, that I should reveal some of my connections with the movie world. There's not many people that know of them.

When I'm at a good room party at a convention and the telephone rings, a dead silence usually falls over the whole room. So I'll say, "If that's Stanley Kubrick for me, tell him I'll call him back tomorrow." It was a nice joke, but after the first two or three times, they stopped laughing... Then last year, sitting at home with a few fans around for a drink, with a noisy party going on, the telephone rang. I went to it and picked it up, and on the other end of the line was Stanley Kubrick. I turned around to everybody and said, "Shhh! I've got Stanley Kubrick on the line here!" And they said, "Yes, Bob, yes... we've heard that one before."

I was quite stunned by the whole business. He didn't want to make any of my stories into a screenplay, but he'd bought a Brian Aldiss short story and he wanted me to develop it with him. The original story lasted three pages, and he wanted me to turn it into a 120 minute screen epic. I realized it was a sticky wicket right away, but I took the job anyway. Kubrick has lived in England since he made Lolita, which has been a long time. He doesn't like flying and for some reason he doesn't like the States. I had to go through two sets of electrically controlled gates to get into his estate. He gave me a room to work in, about the size of this room, and there was a kitchen right next to it. The first thing he said to me was, "Do you like Chinese food?" I said yes, so he waved his hand, a door opened, and people came in carrying plate after plate of steaming hot Chinese food, and set them all over the table. It made me quite dissatisfied with my lifestyle...

He said, "If we are going to work together, we'd better be real close. You've got to get used to that so when we talk together, if I say something that you think is stupid, you've got to be able to say, 'Kubrick, that's shit!'" So I said "All right, I'll try to work up to that state." We kicked ideas around for week after week, and he kept turning down my good ideas and putting up his bad ideas. In the end, I decided to take his advice. When he came up with a really awful one I said to him, "Kubrick, that's shit!" And do you know what he did? It was a revelation to me. He gave me the sack! So that was the end of my collaboration with Mr. Kubrick.

I wasn't sure if I really wanted to be in the movie business, anyway. There are far too many cliches in films. In England, old timey science fiction films are largely made out of cliches. You've got these sort of movies set in a village in the south of England, in the 1920s or 1930s, where something has happened. The local bobby comes up on his bike and finds a body on the side of the road, there's a bag of cocaine -- about the size of a hot water bottle. There's always somebody there -- the village postmistress, the village idiot, someone you would find in 1920s rural England. And he always picks the bag up, cuts it with a knife, tastes some, and says, "Yes, that's cocaine, yeah, that's it! That's cocaine!" How do they know?

I like a good detective story. Sometimes I am fortunate enough to see a good play about crime. When I see a crime I know immediately what it is. When something happens, I know what it is. Nobody in the movies ever does, so they have to go and stick their fingers in. And they say, "Yes, that's

blood..." I think the all-time classic cliché is when somebody gets killed, say a policeman gets killed on duty. And somebody's got to take the news to his wife. Now they never do it the way a normal sensible person would do it. Say if Officer Jones has been killed on duty, wouldn't you just pick up the phone and say, "Hello? Widow Jones?..."

It's a matter of extremes. Say somebody's mother has been killed by a maniac, and chopped up, and boiled in a pot. Now that's a hard thing to break to someone. They say, well, first of all they always say, "Sit down." They don't impart this sort of news to anyone unless they sit down first. And once they are sitting down, they don't want to lead up to it. They just say, "Your mother was chopped up by a maniac and stewed." Couldn't they just sidle up to it, and possibly start off by saying, "You know how your mother always wanted to make a good stew?"

There is one film that's really criticized for its clichés and that is The Amityville Horror. I've been watching pictures like The Exorcist. I had a cliché in mind about the priest who would fight the devil to the very death. He would just go in there and fight, and not ever give up. But the priest in The Amityville Horror was a man after my own heart. These people moved into this house and started having bad experiences, and they rang the priest. He went round in his car, and parked. He was walking up to the front of the house and he thought he heard something saying "Go away". So he went away. The rest is about all the awful things that happened when he actually went back, all the supernatural appearances. One of them was the muffler fell off his car. When he got home he developed a rash on his hand, and he took a head cold. Obviously Satan was really at work here.

A masterpiece of clichés is Star Wars. One of my favorite scenes -- the big scene to me -- was the battle over the Death Star. What it boiled down to was that the Death Star was a sort of planet -- a huge planet sized weapon. And you always find in a science fiction super planet, that there's always a little porthole. There's always one somewhere. This one was located at the end of a sort of metal canal about fifty miles long, and it was right at the end of it. The plan was, if you could just go up there, and shoot a missile into the porthole, the Death Star would be destroyed. The entire planet was run by computer, and the computer analyzed the attack plan and said it had merit. The attack plan was to get into this 50 mile long canal and fly along it all the way, and then shoot the torpedo into the converter.

I may be devious in my thinking, but to me a better plan would have been to just sort of fly around a little bit somewhere else, and then pop into this canal -- sort of "here you are, stupid." To show you how stupid the computer on the Death Star was, you had this design, with all these hundreds of cannon defending this little hole that goes down to.. I don't know.. the captain's toilet or something. It seems to me a more cost effective solution would be to put a metal grill over the hole. Luckily they didn't show the actual details of what happens. I can just imagine what would happen if it ends up in the captain's toilet. I just hope he wasn't sitting on it at the time.

And that the main reason I'm not having anything more to do with Stanley Kubrick.

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SEASONAL GREETINGS from the President of the Christmas as a  
Movable Feast Society!  
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This year it has been decreed that Christmas in on the 10th of January 1991 -- partly because that's the day my best briar is due back from the pipe hospital; partly because it's the anniversary of the birth of Wilf McVittie, inventor of the only typewriter with a line spacing that matches the lines on the back of the Post Office's air letter form; but mainly because I got all my correspondence into a bigger mess than usual this time and missed the deadline for normal Christmas posting.

In this annus mirabilis, people throughout the world have been thinking hard about the demise of communism, the Hubble trouble and Brazilian rain forests. I, however, have been occupying my mind with one of the great imponderables of history -- why is it that some people have no sense of humor?

It all began in my office one Saturday lunchtime a few weeks ago. I listen to Radio 2 when I'm working, trying to keep the volume such that I can hear the middle-of-the-road music but not the vacuous chatter inbetween. At midday on Saturdays there is a programme, hosted by actor Gerald Harper (Adam Adamant, in the early TV series), in which any listener can nominate a good, kind and thoughtful neighbour to receive a bottle of champagne. That's fine with me, but of late Harper's dawdling, affected, condescending delivery has begun to penetrate and irritate the depths of my soul.

One fateful day he got on my nerves so much that, in a fit of peevishness, I grabbed a sheet of paper and -- in spidery script suitable for an octogenarian -- wrote him a letter which was an obvious parody of those he reads out every Saturday. I don't like anonymous letters, and as I was personally having a tilt at Gerald Harper, I felt obliged to disclose my real name and address. The following is the main text:

Dear Mr. Harper:

Each week I hear you giving a bottle of champagne to a good neighbor, and I would like to nominate my friend Bob Shaw for a bottle because I think he is the best and kindest neighbour one could ever hope to meet.

This summer a big Rotweiler dog came into my back garden and tried to kill my cat, Daisy. The cat was so terrified that it took refuge in the top of my old pear tree. Bob's house is behind mine, and when he saw what was happening he rushed into my garden and drove the Rotweiler away.

He was not the slightest bit afraid of the dog, even though he is partly disabled from his time as a fighter pilot in Korea. Not content with driving off the horrible dog, Bob then climbed up the tree and rescued Daisy, who was too scared to move. Ever since that day Bob has popped into my house three or four times a week just to make sure that Daisy and I are all right. I am a widow and find it hard to cook for myself because of my arthritis, but Bob always brings me



some lovely home-cooked food. He is a wonderful cook and I am sure he could win prizes for it if he tried, but I would like him to have a prize for being the nicest neighbour in the world. He hardly ever touches alcohol, but I am sure he would enjoy a glass of champagne in the knowledge that it had come from you and the BBC.

Yours sincerely,

Edna Baines (Mrs)

I mailed the thing off, luxuriating in the strange tranquillity which comes from writing a letter to the media, and thought that would be the end of it. (The most I expected was a note saying "Nice try, Mr. Shaw, but I wasn't born yesterday.") It was a considerable shock to my system, therefore, when the letter was read out to millions of Radio 2 listeners on Saturday, 1 December. To make matters worse, it wasn't Gerald Harper who did the reading. He was off ill, probably as a result of trying to sound like the old BT dialing tone every time he speaks on radio. It was good old Vince Hill, the nicest nonentity in showbiz, who did the reading. My poisoned dart had hit the wrong target.

And, to make matters worse than worse, a couple of weeks later a bottle of really good champagne was delivered to my house. None of your Sainsbury's or Tesco stuff here! Sadie is quite embarrassed over the whole episode, and currently we are lying low, waiting for the heat to die down.

I think I'm finished with practical jokes.

Sincere best wishes for Christmas and the New Year!

BoSh



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LIFE IS BUT A RAFFLE  
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Life has its low points, but to make up for that there are times when the old cup runneth over.

My cup was definitely runneth over on the evening when my wife and I set off for Perth, Australia, where I was to be guest of honour at Swancon 14. Firstly, there was the fact of the trip itself. I entered fandom away back in 1950, and used to cycle over to Walt Willis' house three times a week to help with the work on SLANT and its successor HYPHEN. Doing so was a matter of pure fannish job, and if an oracle had told me that I would some day travel the world as a direct result of it I might have died from a simple surfeit of happiness. So there I was in a nice aisle seat of a 747, starting my second trip to Australia, feeling so good that I could almost have looked at a picture of Margaret Thatcher without my stomach muscles clenching in the usual knot.

Secondly, we had arranged a two-day stopover in Singapore and I had a grandiose scheme in mind. Scanning the map of Singapore provided by the travel agent, I had discovered that our hotel was only a block away from the famous Raffles Hotel. As well as the famous Long Bar, the Raffles has the legendary Writers' Bar, where generations of authors have signed their names on the ceiling. I had a copy of my latest book in my briefcase, with my photo on the back cover to prove authenticity, and I was prepared to bribe every barman in the place if necessary to let me inscribe my name up there along with Somerset Maugham and all the others. We were due to check into our hotel at 8:00 p.m., so the expedition to the Raffles would make a great start to our stay in Singapore.

Thirdly, there was the fact that our plane was leaving from Manchester. I live only 15 minutes' drive from Manchester airport, and thus was spared having to make my way down to one of the London airports. To anybody who knows England only as a speck on the globe, this may not seem much of a bonus, but in this country we have never become psychologically adjusted to time-consuming journeys. Motels are practically nonexistent in Britain because the scale of the country is such that, if one is really determined, even the longest journey can be completed in one grim-faced shot.

The 747 had taken aboard only a handful of passengers in Manchester, and was scheduled to land briefly in London to pick up the main load bound for the Far East. The 175 mile hop was nothing for the great silver bird, so all-in-all -- as we sat there listening to the Jumbo's engines stirring into life -- I was in one of those moods in which all prospects are pleasing to the eye.

When I say that all prospects were pleasing, I should mention one little cloud on the horizon in the form of a woman seated next to Sarah in our row of four central seats. She looked and sounded like the English actress Thora Hird, and was accompanied by her husband -- a geriatric hulk of about 300 lbs., who was fast asleep in the aisle seat farthest from me. Thora had flown to Singapore once before and thus, quite naturally, was an expert on the design, construction and operation of long-range aircraft.

She engaged Sarah in conversation and immediately endeared herself to me by saying it was a good job that I had been placed at the opposite end of the row from her husband because it would help to balance the aircraft. I

have never been of a build that one might describe as willowy or lissome, but I felt the comment was quite uncalled for and I decided to ignore her for the rest of the flight. Unfortunately she had one of those razor-edged, George Formby, Lancastershire voices -- the aural equivalent of a laser beam -- which can effortlessly slice through the roar of a football crowd, and ignoring her proved to be quite impossible.

Everything she said about the aircraft was wrong, but somehow she managed to impress Sarah with her "knowledge". That was rather galling for me, especially as I had worked as an aircraft designer, so I was forced to try calming Sarah down as she reacted uneasily to the flood of alarming pronouncements which came forth.

The irritation started almost at once. As soon as the engines got going in the confined space of the loading fingers some of the exhaust, as always happens, was picked up by the air intakes and recirculated through the cabin.

Thora shot bolt upright, nose twitching like that of a gopher, and she said, "There's something wrong with the engines -- I can smell fuel!"

Sarah gripped my arm. "There's something wrong with the engines!"

"Nonsense," I said. "I'm a qualified engineer and I'm telling you the engines are just fine."

"Are you sure?"

"Trust me." I managed to calm Sarah down in spite of Thora's continued claims that her finely attuned senses had diagnosed serious trouble, and the plane took off on the little flip down to London. We got there in a matter of minutes, the main load of passengers came on board, the engines revved up and then -- unexpectedly -- fell silent again.

"I'm sorry, ladies and gentlemen..." the captain announced, "but our departure has to be delayed because we are having a little engine trouble."

Thora sat up straighter, directing a triumphant I-told-you-so look at everyone in the vicinity.

The captain went on to explain that a gearbox on one of the engines had begun to leak some oil, and that it would have to be replaced before the flight could continue. The odds against that fault developing in such a short flight were astronomical, and of course it could have had absolutely no effect on the burning of fuel -- but the damage had been done. Sarah now regarded Thora as an aircraft faultfinding genius.

We had to disembark, and we spent two hours in the Heathrow snack bar, during which I drank the awful free beer and tried to convince Sarah that it had all been a coincidence and that Thora was a total idiot. Eventually we were allowed on board again, and to my chagrin the whole miserable, infuriating process started all over! The engines started up, some exhaust came in through the ventilation system, Thora shot upright -- and by now I could

almost see the gopher whiskers sticking out on each side of her snout -- and said, "The engines still aren't right -- I can smell fuel!"

I told Sarah to pay no attention or I might be forced to kill her; we taxied out to the runway; we lined up -- and then we turned back. The captain announced that our departure had to be delayed because one of the hydraulic pressure warning lights on the control deck was giving what appeared to be a false reading.

Thora almost stood up and took a bow.

I, in turn, almost went down on my knees and pleaded with Sarah to listen to me, to believe that it was all a ghastly fluke, that Thora was a cretin...

To cut a long story short, as they say, I can relate that we finally became airborne four hours later than scheduled. The lost time was not made up, and when we checked into our hotel in Singapore the time was midnight instead of 8 p.m. It was too late for the planned excursion to the Raffles, and we were tired out in any case, so I decided to be philosophical. We'll pop into the Writers' Bar in the morning, I decided. It'll be quieter at that time of day. The mood will be more reflective...

On the following morning, immediately after breakfast, we nipped around the corner to the Raffles. I was clutching my book, and looking forward to ordering a sinfully early Singapore Sling and coyly introducing myself to the head barman.

But things didn't work out that way.

Before we got within fifty yards of the Raffles' main entrance we saw that it was the centre of a mob of tourists, all of whom were unsuccessfully trying to get in. Some were trying to bribe their way in, others to fight their way in, and they were being repelled by an army of native defenders, some dressed as waiters, others as workmen. It transpired that the Raffles was being closed for six months of renovation -- and can you guess the exact moment at which the doors were shut?

You've got it!

Midnight on the previous day, just as Sarah and I were checking into our hotel four hours behind schedule!

It is, of course, important to adopt the cosmic view point in matters like this, but it still churns me up every time I remember that a little oil seal springing a leak over Sutton Coldfield robbed me of my chances of immortality in Singapore.

Sometimes I suspect that that Thora woman had something to do with it.

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From President of the Christmas Should Be A Moveable Feast Association, and co-founder of the More Reading on Christmas Cards Movement: I hope you will have a lovely time on Christmas Day, which-- as you can see from the above-- falls on 14 March 1989. One of the reasons I founded the CSBAMFA is that I was pretty ill just before the old-fashioned fixed date for Christmas, and did not get round to sending out the conventional type of card. I came down with acute bronchitis, spent three weeks confined to bed and a further month convalescing. I used to think bronchitis meant having a bit of a cough, but thousands of people die from it every year and I have been given an insight into how they do it. On the few occasions when I dared look at the back of my throat it resembled crimson wallpaper closely covered with yellow polka dots. The dots were ulcers which hurt so much when solid food was going by that eating simply wasn't worth while. For almost a week I lived on ice cream. I ate it with a teaspoon, fashioning it into little canoe shapes which I then sent sailing down into the fiery furnace of my thorax. Each one expired in a satisfying puff of steam. Had it not been for my superb constitution-- carefully preserved by a life of clean living and moderate habits-- I might not be here today. I might be somewhere else -- Paris, Rio, Scunthorpe-- but enough of this introspection! On with the seasonal greetings...

As is only befitting on the occasion of a religious festival, I should pen a word or two about the great controversy of the day-- the Rushdie affair. It is important for the free-lance author to look out for new markets, so which I saw TV pictures of those zealots in Bradford burning a copy of SATANIC VERSES my commercial instincts were aroused. I wrote to the BBC, ITV and some local newspapers informing that that I had published a couple of dozen books which had made irreverent comments about practically every religion going. The books, I said, are printed on top-grade paper, are easily ignited and will give a satisfactory blaze right through to the last page. Leaders of religious groups wishing to carry out ceremonial burnings of my work, I went on, can obtain copies from all leading book-sellers. The humourless bastards who edit the letters in the local media totally ignored me, but -- although I was peeved at the time -- I have since become quite relieved. It is bad enough having hit men from the Stephen Donaldson Fan Club stalking me for remarks I made about his books without my having to go into hiding from a bunch of characters from the Arabian Nights.

On Christmas Eve (i.e. March 13th) I will be setting out on my second visit to Australia -- and I go numb with astonishment every time I think of it. If anybody had suggested, back in 1950 when I entered fandom, that I would some day travel the world as a consequence I would have dismissed the notion as purest fantasy. The work we did on fanzines in those days was a labour of love, with emphasis on the word "labour". In the absence of space age reproduction technology, three of us -- Walt Willis, James White and I -- used to spend an entire evening setting up one page of a 50-page fanzine in lead type. But it was done with joy. We were among the handful of people in the known universe who were addicted to SF. The more scorn that was heaped on us by the mundane world -- and there was a lot of it -- the better we felt, because we knew we were the star-begotten and we were nostalgic for the future. The future has arrived, and in many ways it is more rewarding than any of us expected, but those convivial evenings of a past in which we were materially less well off continue to have a special golden glow.

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Here's an invaluable piece of advice -- for free! By all means carry on saying no to dangerous drugs, but if somebody ever tries to interest you in buying a metal detector, not only say no, but take the infernal instrument and break it over his skull.

I was under the spell of my metal detector for about three years, on and off, and although I had many quite pleasant hours with the brute, the only really memorable thing to happen was that I fell off a castle.

It was my own fault, I have to admit -- giving way to a lust for gold which would have earned me a starring role in The Treasure Of The Sierra Madre. People who buy metal detectors usually assure you they are not trying to find buried treasure. What they are doing, the line goes, is indulging in a practical interest in the past, and the notion of turning up treasure trove is far from their minds.

They are, of course, telling lies.

I'm as interested in the past as anybody else, and I can recommend metal detecting in a rural area as a very relaxing way of passing a few hours. Dry land fishing is the term I invented for it. There is a strange, ineffable thrill -- vaguely science fictional and fanciful in nature -- in getting a signal from a grassy clod and gradually breaking it apart, checking each fragment with the detector, **knowing** that somewhere inside it there is a metal object which may have been there for hundreds of years, and that **you** are going to be the first to see it in all that time. But, at the same time, only an absolute nerd would try to claim that he would be just as happy to uncover a 1930s bottle cap as a 1730s gold coin.

The only thing I ever found which could vaguely be classed as historical was a musket ball, which I detected in my own front garden in the Lake District. People who have never done any dry land fishing may be surprised to learn that there were two classes of objects which I turned up **every time** I went out on the prowl. The first one is money. The whole of Britain is seeded with low value coinage of fairly recent manufacture. The second class of object was used cartridges. Perhaps that gives a clue as to the chief preoccupations of the human race.

Anyway, I eventually managed to find a little club in the Ulverston area so that I wouldn't feel so conspicuous when out alone with my detector. That was another problem -- I hated being seen with the damned instrument. Groups of urchins would follow me around, the bleeping of the detector would attract cows from miles away, and every casual passer-by would go hundreds of yards out of his way to ask what I was finding.

Oddly enough, this embarrassment factor has resulted in a weird phenomenon. People who **do** find treasure are often making their first sorties with a brand new detector -- and this enrages the real pros in much the same way the football pools experts get upset when fortunes are scooped by old ladies with their first entry. The explanation is that the metal detector neofan is highly embarrassed at making a spectacle of himself, so he racks his brain to think of a private spot, near at hand, where he can operate unseen. And this is exactly the same kind of thinking employed by somebody who has some loot he wants to put away and yet have easy access to.

I should admit that my detector was not a total dead loss. One day an adolescent friend of my daughter came to the door in tears because she had been out horseback riding in a field and had lost a gold watch given to her by her parents only the previous day. I was tied up with work and couldn't go with her, but I showed her how to switch the detector on and wave it around. She went off with the instrument to search a large field and came back an hour later happily showing off the watch.

I wish I could tell a similar success story about my detector club. It turned out the MD fans are as hard to regulate as SF fans. When a bunch of us went out on a group search we would solemnly vow to proceed exactly line abreast at a fixed speed and to pool all our finds for equal division later on. What always happened was that two or three would scurry ahead, and I would hear their bleeps in the distance and look up to see them cramming stuff into their pockets. And, when asked what it was, they always claimed it was nails or barbed wire they wanted to remove from the land in case some sheep got choked. Hah!

That kind of inconsiderate behavior had shrunk the club to two by the time we got round to trying our luck at Stank Castle, about six miles out of Ulverston. The castle was part of a farmer's land and he used it as an extra barn. That sort of think was characteristic of that part of England -- a farmer would have a thousand-year-old ruin of a castle on his property and think no more of it than having mushrooms pop up in his pasture. (Ulverston's chief claim to fame is that Stan Laurel was born in it. When I first lived in the town I used to think it was odd that somebody so famous had been born there--then I realized Stan Laurel couldn't have been born anywhere else. It was a Stan Laurel place.)

Anyway, farming land is very bad for metal detecting, mainly because agricultural machines keep shredding bits of themselves all over the place and giving useless signals. Joe and I poked around the ruins for a while without any success. After a while I got fed up and was thinking of heading off to the nearest boozier for a pint of bitter -- then I got one of my brainwaves.

About twenty feet up in a ruined wall was a little window. I got this vision of a distraught noblewoman up there, when the wooden floors still existed, watching her husband go off to battle and getting so agitated that she didn't even notice showering gold rings, necklaces, ear rings and so forth all over the window sill like designer dandruff.

This it **it**, I thought. I climbed over a pile of sharp edged boulders beneath the window and swarmed up the wall like Dracula in heat, finding a toehold on every little projection. When I got to the window I checked it out -- and there was **nothing**. That heartless bitch had watched her hubby go off to be killed and hadn't even given him a farewell wave! Probably her boyfriend was already sneaking up the stairs at the time.

Puffing reflectively on my pipe as I considered the fickleness of human nature, I began to edge down the wall again -- but the very first stone I entrusted to weight to flipped itself out of the wall in something like a billionth of a second.

There was no time to react. I fell that twenty feet in a kind of slow motion consciousness, fully aware that life or death depended on the arrangement of the rocks I had clambered over on the way up. Strangely, I felt no fear -- only a sick rage over having put my one and only life in jeopardy in such trivial circumstances. I'm glad I didn't get killed, because the sort of language I was using when I hit the rocks would almost certainly have offended Saint Peter.

I smashed into the boulders on my back, bounced a couple of times and rolled on to the grass. The cursed metal detector, following a different trajectory, somehow managed to land on top of me, inflicting further bruises -- but, miracle of miracles, I was still smoking my pipe and it was undamaged.

It took weeks for me to get over that fall. My back, shoulders, arms and legs were covered with huge contusions which went through the strangest color combinations -- yellow, green, black, magenta, brown, purple... If I hadn't managed to get to a pub with Joe in a few minutes and down six pints of Hartley's best bitter it is quite possible that I would have expired.

That was the main part of the disaster, but there was more to come. The salt had not yet been rubbed into the wounds.

A few days later I heard from another idiot in metal detector fandom who lived a bit farther south. He had just bought his first instrument and had been trying to think of a place to try it out. Somebody had told him that if he saw old broken red tiles in the ground that was a sign there had been a Roman villa on the spot. He remembered seeing a place like that, so he went there, and while he was tuning up his detector he happened to glance down at his feet -- and he found three Roman coins! They had been lying there, on the bloody surface for almost twenty bloody centuries, and he got them -- without even giving one wave of his bloody detector!

That finished me with the whole futile business. I sold my metal detector soon afterwards and am now devoting my time to much more promising pastimes.

Finding the Loch Ness monster is going to make me rich and famous. ###



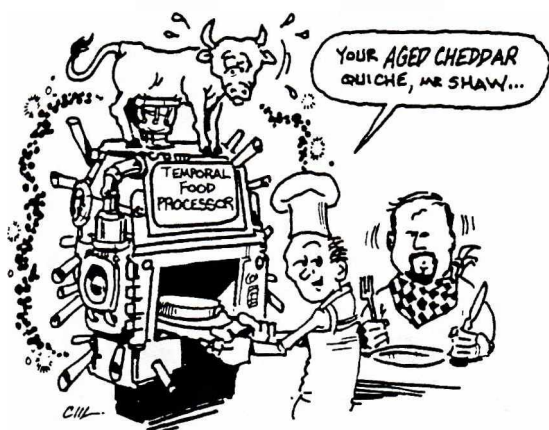




there looking sick, because they had been working on this problem for about four years and they hadn't been able to get anywhere with it; they were stuck. And Scotty looked at it and summoned up all his space ship expertise which he'd acquired from Star Trek, and he looked at them and said, "Have you tried putting that there, and that there, and that there?" So they looked at him and went (\*smacking palm on forehead\*), "Why didn't WE think of that!" And the audience went mad, in that they believed every word of it... I was in aircraft design and I knew it was all lies. They were GOOD lies, but they were lies...

Also at that convention there was Chekhov, Walter Koenig. He was a nice guy, but he came up to me and he said, "I understand that you go on making a lot of money making jokes about me." I didn't try to explain to him that I go to conventions as a fan. It cost me MONEY to make jokes about Star Trek... And also, even more, I didn't like to explain, but I haven't made any jokes about him because he's too unimportant... So that night, when I was doing my speech, I put him in especially, so his feelings wouldn't be hurt...

I find from many years of reading and also writing science fiction that I too have picked up this mistaken knowledge about the way things work. I'm not very good with motor cars, but I know how space ships work, and time machines and things like that... Time machines were a favourite of mine; my favourite design of a time machine came out in a mystery story in Analog. Time machines all sponsored the same description; there was a cage made up of shimmering rods, and if you remember, they always went together at certain angles that were very hard to comprehend. When you tried to study the shape of one of these cages, you got a curious wrenching sensation behind your eyes... I loved those time machines. I put one of them into my science fiction novel called Who Goes Here; it's ten times as funny as Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy, but nobody seems to realize it except me... But in there I have one of these time machines with a cage made of shimmering rods. And this one was used in a restaurant where, if you wanted a vintage wine you just ordered a new wine and shoved it in there, switched it on, and waited a while. You could have it thirty years old if you want, forty even. You took it out, and LIVED it.



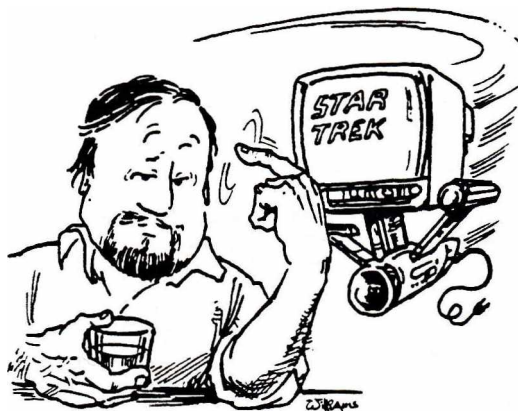
I don't plug my own books, of course... In that same book I had some wonderfully funny ideas. For instance, I had a species of insect that was so ugly, so awful looking that it reproduced through being stomped upon. Its body was full of acid and also eggs, so when you stomped on it the acid ate through the sole of your shoe and before you could get your shoe off you had a foot full of little bugs. They went right through you and it was too late. Mmmmm; that's nice stuff to hear right after a banquet...

But we're drifting away from the subject of time machines, which as I mentioned is a favourite subject of mine. I remember many years ago back in Ireland in the 1950s, for

the cover of a magazine I had to do this picture of a time machine. The only material I had to work with was a wax stencil and a dried-up Bic ball point pen. And so I decided not to attempt the shimmering rods and the curious eye-wrenching effect, on the wax stencil with the dried-up Bic ballpoint... Even Da Vinci couldn't have done it... So I went in for a time machine which looked a bit like a telephone booth, and it was for sale in a shop window. It was obviously a time machine; there was a notice on it -- the thing was called 'Chrono Clipper Mark IV', price \$10,000. And there was a note under it which said, 'four years to pay'... That's a very subtle joke... The idea was that a person could go into that shop, give the owner a hundred dollar deposit, jump into the time machine, come out four years later, and you'd OWN it! But I never figured out who was making the payments... All this goes to show you what a complicated thing time actually is. We tend to visualize it as a straight line, where the present is a dot. It isn't like that; time is more complicated than that. People often get precognizant dreams, and sometimes KNOW something is about to happen before it actually happens. For instance, just last week I dreamt that I needed a haircut.. And I woke up in the morning and I DID need a haircut! It's incredible...

I've come across only one serious attempt to travel into the future. This was an idea invented by an Irish science fiction fan named Walt Willis, who's one of the best writers I've ever met. He invented something called 'subjective induced temporal acceleration'. The system is that you put a person in a very cold, miserable, damp room, and you keep him there for two or three days. He's not even allowed to drink anything except alcohol-free lager, and he's forced to listen to Barry Manilow records. After he's been there for about four days, you pull a handle and the poor bloke falls through a trap door, and he lands in a room where there's beautiful nude young women plus champagne and cigars and everything like that. You know how it is when you're not enjoying yourself, time slows down? Well, when you're enjoying yourself time speeds up. So while he's been in this awful business time has been dragging on; then suddenly he's dropped in this other situation so he goes into temporal overdrive... And disappears into the future... I don't know how far he got into the future, but I volunteered for experimentation...

Science fiction writers do not deal very much with time travel. It's a difficult subject. Take travelling into the past, for instance. One of the best ways to travel into the past is to be struck by lightning. For ordinary people in real life, if you get struck by lightning you just die. But in science fiction if you get struck by lightning you get thrown into the past. And the distance you get thrown into the past is governed by certain variables -- your body weight, the exact number of billions of volts in the lightning stroke, and also the period of history that the author wants to write about... I've never read a time story yet where somebody has got thrown into the past where he couldn't speak the language.



That's possibly enough about time machines. I'll tell you what I've learned about space travel through watching Star Trek. I CAN tell you one thing; the old idea of firing people into space by a gun doesn't work. That's no good. The old Jules Verne idea of a gun a mile high is a total impossibility. When you think about a gun a mile high, how could you ever get enough leather to make a holster for it... And who could wear it? You can't even think about wearing it underground because it's illegal to have a concealed weapon...

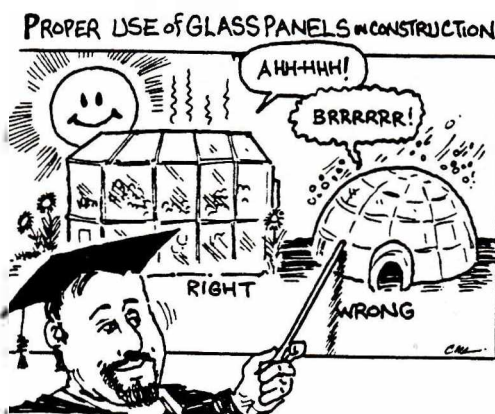
Then there's the modern communications revolution. There's so much happening these days with computers! I'm not quite caught up in that yet; I'm still stuck at the Alexander Graham Bell stage. I feel sorry for that guy; he built himself a telephone and it was no good, because there was nobody to ring up. He finally realized what was wrong, so he invented another telephone and he gave it to somebody so he could ring him up... Then after a while he invented a third telephone and he gave it to somebody else, and when he rang up the second telephone it was engaged...

Well, that covers the field of telecommunications. I think that science fiction is becoming part of education. I remember a good four years ago in Britain we'd been having a series of very bad summers. We haven't had one this year; it's been awfully good, but four years ago it was a typical summer -- raining, cold, and miserable. One day when I was sitting chatting with the landlord, he said "You might not quite buy this, but we don't get good summers anymore." I was interested, so I said, "Why? What is the reason?" He said, "It's this business they've brought in about leap years. Every fourth year they put in an extra day. These days are all adding up, and the calendar is getting out of step with the seasons." There followed three hours of innocent conversation, where I tried to persuade him that he had a nut loose, and that the extra days were there to keep the thing in step. But he won in the end when he told me, "Just look right through the door. Is it summertime, sir?"

There's also the greenhouse effect. Everybody's worried about the ozone layer disappearing. In Britain, energy costs are a bit more expensive than they are here, so people get double glazing on their windows put in to save on their heating bills. And it's a funny thing about this. If you know the greenhouse effect, you have a little glass house; it keeps the heat in and plants grow better. That's what greenhouse means. So, what they're saying is, if you have a greenhouse, the heat comes in and stays in and keeps the place warm. But when you have an ordinary house with windows in

it, the heat goes out through the glass and makes the house colder. So after many years of study I realized that house builders in Britain are putting the glass in the window in backwards... you've just got to turn it around, and all the house will start being warm. Of course a few people made a mistake with greenhouses and they end up with little icehouses instead...

Well, I presume everybody has heard about the Bermuda Triangle mystery. That's another one I solved through my intuitive



knowledge of science gained by watching Star Trek. The big thing about the Bermuda Triangle is that ships and things keep disappearing. Now, there have been millions of books written about the Bermuda Triangle, paperbacks made of very absorbent paper. And since there have been ship loads of books written about it, people who live in the Bermuda Triangle want to read them, naturally enough. So all these ships full of very absorbent paper are fishing around inside the Bermuda Triangle. And when all the absorbent paper gets wet and heavy, all the ships disappear by sinking.. And this leads more people to write books about the Bermuda Triangle mystery, and the whole thing keeps going on and on...

The great thing about science is that to make great scientific discoveries, you don't have to be a genius. I found this out through watching Star Trek... Take the case of old Albert Einstein himself. He made his mark in science, but it wasn't his great I.Q. that made Einstein famous and successful as a scientist; it was the fact that he had a simple child-like approach. For all I know, I might be even more simple and child-like, so I may be making even better discoveries than he did. But the one about the twins paradox I'm afraid was his greatest slip-up. Two twins - one of them gets on a spaceship and flies way around the galaxy, on a holiday cruise... Just like in Star Trek... This character, he swarms around the galaxy for two or three years, having a lovely time, having drinks, watching comets go by and watching Star Trek. Then he comes home and lands and he gets out of the spaceship and he's younger looking than the twin that stayed behind. Well, of course he is! The other one was looking after the house; he was paying the bills. He was doing all the work. That poor twin brother was worn to a shred! He seemed much younger so Einstein misinterpreted that time had passed more slowly for the one on the spaceship. He got it all wrong.

I was promised I'd be heckled... As well as practical science that I've been talking about, I hope I'll say a little bit about pure mathematics, another field of mine that I learned from watching Star Trek... Probability mathematics is a great favourite of mine. It's difficult in that you cannot predict the future as any student of horse racing will tell you. One of the themes of probability mathematics is that if two people lose each other in a very large department store, there's no guarantee that they'll ever meet up again unless one of them stands still. On the face of it, that seems a useful piece of information except that if it happens to you, how do you know which one moves and which one stands around... so it's a big decision to make. You could stand there and the store could close, and one of the assistants could come up and start taking your clothes off.. And that would be all right except they would start by unscrewing your arms... So I've given up on probability mathematics altogether.

Anyway, in closing, I just want to say how pleased I am to be here tonight. And I'm just about as happy as a NASA scientist if a Mars lander had dug up definite proof of the existence of Ray Bradbury. Thank you for listening for so long. Now if anybody wants to heckle, I'll heckle back...

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HOW TO BE SICK... and Live to Tell About it.  
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It all started about four years ago, the year I didn't get my usual pre-Eastercon pimple. Decades of carefully irrigating my system with Guinness have given me a clear complexion, but just to show who is boss my skin likes to produce one really good pimple at a time to coincide with each major convention. It likes to appear right beside my nose and it always is one of the angry red variety which feels like an implanted coat button. It seems to feed on antiseptic creams, and trying to squeeze it or do anything like that only turns it into a painful, throbbing mound which glows like a stop light. And, adding insult to injury, the brute always vanishes without a trace the day after the convention ends. It was a great relief to me, therefore, when the eve of the Glasgow Eastercon dawned and the Shaw countenance remained unblemished, but my pleasure was short-lived. My body chose to have 'flu instead.

I couldn't even consider passing up our major convention, so I decided it was mind-over-matter time. No mere bug was going to knock me over. Dosed up on aspirins and whisky, I went up to Scotland and soldiered my way through that con, fannishly heroic, probably infecting half the population of Clydeside. By the last day I was beginning to feel reasonably fit and I returned home flushed with pride and Johnny Walker, boring everybody with my new lecture about how an iron will can vanquish any disease. So far so good -- then I discovered I had The Cough.

This was no ordinary cough. It was so violent that it could blow paperwork clean off my desk, and it actually hurt the eardrums of people in the same room. Also, it was persistent. Four months later my doctor had tried almost every remedy he knew, all without success, and he was becoming irritable with me for obstinately refusing to get well.

"It's probably just some vague virus," he kept grumbling. Yeah, and so is cancer, I kept thinking. On his orders I gave up smoking my beloved pipe, but even so I got so that I couldn't go into a pub without the smoky atmosphere causing me to blast the froth off pints ten feet away. Life was losing its sparkle.

After six months of this caper I was beginning to get alarmed and went privately to a consultant physician for new X-rays and full tests. The morning of the physical examination will never fade from my memory. The doctor picked up an instrument resembling those tongs they handle food with in good shops, the main difference being that these tongs were immensely strong. He squeezed them together with obvious effort, inserted the contraption into my right nostril and let go! There was a loud twang and my nostril distended out to somewhere near my ear. I could see it. A kind of flat plain of nostril reaching to the horizon.

After shining a lot of lights up the resulting cavity -- possibly he was examining the underside of my brain -- the doctor repeated the process with the other nostril, then he told me to stick out my tongue. Wondering what indignity was coming next, I did as requested, whereupon he wrapped a length of gauze around the timidly protruding piece of flesh. This, I soon learned, was to give him a good grip. Using muscles he must have toughened with the tongs, he pulled my tongue out so far that I could see it. I didn't know I had that much tongue. The doctor then shoved more lights and things down my throat, and all the while I was retching like a hippopotamus with morning sickness.



The final humiliation came when he closed the drapes, popped a small but powerful light bulb into my mouth, plugged me into the mains (it's 220 volts in the UK) and switched me on. The whole room lit up with a pinkish glow which was emanating from my head, and the doctor and a colleague walked around me for a few minutes discussing intimate details of my internal construction. After it was all over the consultant gave me his scientific findings. "There is nothing organically wrong with you," he said. "You just have this cough."

I thanked him with as much sincerity as I could muster, drove back to Ulverston at dangerous speeds and downed four pints of Hartley's best bitter in about ten minutes. My regular doctor next started trying increasingly exotic pills and capsules which had no effect on the cough, but which reduced me to a zombie-like condition in which I could hardly stay awake let alone earn a living. My friends began to talk about me in worried whispers. I found myself falling asleep while people were trying to hold conversations with me, and by the time of my second trip to Birmingham, Alabama -- for BoShcon -- my vital forces were at a low ebb indeed. The whole thing might have been more bearable if I could have looked sick. It would have been quite nice to waste away a little -- I've always wanted to look pale and interesting, like a consumptive poet -- but instead all the drugs and inactivity made me put on a lot of weight. By the time I visited Poland for the 4th International Convention in Cracow I had been coughing for nearly 18 months, and had got to the stage where I had to sit down and have a coughing session after every 100 yards of a walk. Some students at the convention became so worried that they wanted to take me to a world-renowned allergist who lived quite near, but there was no time.

The only relief I got during that trip came when we visited a very old and deep salt mine south of Cracow. The air is so pure down there that they have a permanent hostel for chronic allergy sufferers about 300 feet below the surface. I remember walking around in the cool dimness for about two hours without coughing once and enjoying the simple pleasures of feeling normal.

Back in England, after another month or so of renewed misery, I was beginning to wonder if I might actually be going to die -- and I took a momentous decision. The medication was doing me no good at all, and all the joy had gone out of life, so I decided that I was going to deal with the problem by letting the forces of homeostasis do their work in their own way. I dumped all the pills and did everything I could to induce a relaxed and optimistic frame of mind. My technique went contrary to orthodoxy in that it involved my taking up smoking the pipe again. Not only did it not make me choke when I lit up, but when I went into a pub armed with it my smoke seemed to immunize me to other people's smoke. That may sound like a contrived rationalization to members of the anti-tobacco lobby, but I'm only reporting the facts.

Gradually over a period of six or eight weeks, the cough faded away, and I became more active and began to shed some weight. And one glorious day, nearly two years after that initial bout of 'flu, it came to me that I was healthy again. It was only then that I began to realize just how sick I had been, but perhaps that is nature's way of helping you to get through an illness. I'll tell you one thing I've learned from the experience. If you ever come down with 'flu just before a con -- stay at home in bed and keep in touch with the programme by phone. It's the best way. ###



I think I'm starting to mature.

That's something I feared might never happen, but the thing that has made me more hopeful is the old Clint Eastwood movie I saw on TV the other night. Clint was wearing a British-style tweed sports jacket, and he looked really good in it--and I did not get an urge to dash out and buy a similar garment.

The discovery that I'm no longer susceptible in this respect has come as a great relief, because there was a time when a chance visit to the cinema could upset my life for weeks. When I was growing up in Belfast I went to the pictures a lot--there was little else to do--and I used to get hero fixations. It was all perfectly normal, but my hero worship was always accompanied by a powerful urge to dress like the actor concerned. In Ireland in those days it was hard enough to get decent ordinary clothes, let alone Hollywood creations, and I used to waste days in futile searches of all the local outfitters.

My worst experience came when, in one week, I saw Bogart, Mitchum and Victor Mature, and all three were wearing white trench coats. That did it! I had to have a white trench coat as well. The situation was complicated by the fact that Victor Mature had also been wearing a beautiful hat which had a very broad brim with silk edging. That was another thing I had to have, especially as Mature had a little trick with his headgear which really fired my imagination.

He is the only screen star I know who did most of his acting with his forehead. He had a habit of suddenly raising his eyebrows and creating a splendid array of corrugations on his forehead, and when he did this his hat moved visibly upwards. For some reason--God only knows why--I thought that was the epitome of glamorous, worldly, transatlantic sophistication, and it became my ambition to wear a broad-brimmed, silk-rimmed hat which would move up and down in close formation with my eyebrows.

Oddly enough, I was able to acquire an acceptable coat and hat almost at once. The material in the trench coat seemed rather thin and skimpy compared to Mitchum's--which appeared to have been hewn from quarter-inch thick gabardine--but it was a trench coat and it was white and it had little flaps and straps, and a belt which I could choose to tie romantically instead of buckling, or allow to dangle from its loops with insouciant carelessness. The hat was the weakest point in the ensemble because its brim was much too narrow, making it more suitable for a low-ranking Prudential insurance collector, but on the whole I was quite pleased with the outfit. There seemed a reasonable chance that any attractive young woman glimpsing me in the dim smoky light slanting out from the chinashop window would form the impression that I was a private eye, a shady nightclub owner, or--at the very least--a gambler on the run from syndicate hit men.

Thus kitted out I felt ready for the big event of the week--the Saturday night dance. I went into town early on my own, scorning the company of my usual companions, and had three bottles of Guinness, which in those days was sufficient to render me pale of cheek and wild of eye for the greater part of the evening. Near the end of the dance I turned the full force of my conversational expertise on a girl--asking her if she went there often and what she thought of the floor, and things like that. I rounded

off by imparting the knowledge that the fat one of the three stooges was dead. (At that time I was convinced that a familiarity with the innermost secrets of the stars made me appear cosmopolitan.) Then I suggested escorting the girl home. She agreed, but with an evident lack of enthusiasm which I would have found dispiriting had it not been for the inner glee I felt over my wonderful hidden trump. The trench coat and hat were waiting in the cloakroom, and I knew she had only to look at me in them to become hopelessly enamoured.

In the cloakroom I jammed the hat on at the correct Victor Mature angle, practiced making it go up and down a few times, then put on the trench coat. Due to having spent several hours crushed in among wet rain-coats, it seemed even skimpier and was definitely less resplendent than I could have wished. After some deliberation I decided not to try the romantic knotting of the belt, partly because I had developed an uneasy suspicion that with its new network of wrinkles my beloved coat had begun to resemble a Harpo Marx cast-off. Settling for the careless dangling of the belt, I took up a position outside the door of the women's cloakroom and waited. The big moment was at hand.

When the girl eventually emerged I was gazing in her direction with lazy, heavy-lidded eyes. As soon as I was sure she was looking at me I raised my eyebrows to their full extent and was gratified to feel the hat go up with them. I reckoned it had moved a good half-inch, perhaps even three-quarters--equal to my record. No woman could have failed to be impressed, so I ambled towards the girl with my best Robert Mitchum stroll.

"What's the matter with you?" she demanded severely. "Are you sick?"

"What do you mean?" I said, somewhat taken aback.

"Your eyes are rollin' in your head." She gave me a look of mingled suspicion and distaste. "Are you sure you're not goin' to throw up? I don't like fellas who boke Guinness over themselves."

Deeply offended, I assured her I was in the peak of condition and that the contents of my stomach would not see daylight again until the time and the place were appropriate. We set off to catch the tram to her home. The discovery that she lived on the Crumlin Road--a thoroughfare which went deep into Republican territory and which I had never been along before--did nothing to alleviate the gloom which had settled over me. Things were not working out as planned. The girl and I sat down in an upstairs window seat facing each other, but the way she stared fixedly out into the rainy darkness made it fairly obvious that this was not the start of something big. I was so desperate that, had I been able to afford to smoke, I would even have tried the old Paul Henreid two-cigarettes-in-the-mouth ploy, despite the risk of pulling a bit of skin off my lip.

"Do you fancy going to see Broken Arrow?" I said. "Jeff Chandler is in it."

"Naw," she demurred. "Already seen it in The Ranch."

The picture palace to which she referred derived its popular name from the management's habit of offering an unvarying diet of low-grade Westerns, and it exuded such an air of decaying menace that I wouldn't have ventured

through its doors for a pension. The revelation that my newfound flower of Belfast maidenhood was a patron of The Ranch gave me fresh qualm. I--a policeman's son--was deep in unknown alien territory on a black, rain-swept night, and for all I knew my companion could be a drill sergeant in the IRA.

"Jeff Chandler is Frankie Laine's brother, you know", I said, offering a piece of folk lore which, although fallacious, remained dear to the hearts of Belfast cinema-goes for decades.

"This is my stop", she replied, standing up as the tram squealed to a halt. "Are you comin'?"

I nodded, slightly heartened by at least having been invited, and with a gentlemanly sweep of the hand allowed her to precede me along the aisle. I stood up to follow, moved one foot forward, and fell back into the seat as something gave my coat a fierce tug from behind.

Barely repressing a whimper of fright, I twisted around to see what had happened. My jaw sagged as I appraised the situation. The old Belfast trams had a slot along the bottom of each window, something to do with the winding mechanisms, and somehow the buckle of my belt had dropped into the one beside my seat as I was sitting down. I tugged at the belt but, having got itself inside the window cavity, the cursed buckle had rotated through ninety degrees like a toggle bolt, and it refused to come out.

I called after the girl, but she was halfway down the stairs and didn't hear me. Mouthing horrible swear words, I pulled the belt back and forth along the slot, hoping to disengage it and only succeeding in coating the end of it with filthy black grease. I tried to snap the belt by brute force, but the material--in spite of its lack of body--seemed to have the tensile strength of a ship's hawser. By this time the girl had descended from the tram, and I could see her down on the footpath, looking around for me in some bewilderment.

Still hauling frantically on the belt, I pounded the window and she glanced up. I pointed at the trapped buckle, but from her lowly vantage point she couldn't have had any idea what I meant. And at that moment the conductor rang the bell and the tram moved off.

I'll never forget the look of utter bafflement on that girl's face as I was majestically borne away into the rainy night, tugging and gesticulating and swearing... It took the tram a couple of minutes to reach the next stop, by which time a superhuman effort on my part had snapped, not the flimsy bloody belt, but the centre bar of the metal buckle. No longer a prisoner, I loped back down the road to the previous tram stop, sweating profusely, and wondering if even my intriguing story about Alan Ladd being only five-foot tall could rescue the occasion from total disaster.

The girl, as is only appropriate in stories like this, was nowhere to be seen, and I never saw her again. Now you can see why I was relieved about not wanting to buy a Clint Eastwood sports jacket, but something else has cropped up in the meantime. I've just seen Robert Taylor in a re-run of Quo Vadis, and I really do think I would make a dashing figure in a Roman helmet and breastplate....

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As promised on the program, this is not going to be a talk. I'm not really going to say anything.

I attended my first convention ever way back in 1951. A lot of you will be amazed that somebody who looks as young as I am can remember back to 1951. Reading science fiction and clean living has kept me young looking.

I have attended a lot of science fiction conventions since then, and have attended a lot of talks at science fiction conventions, and I've been bored out of my skull so many times... I cannot remember a single word of any of the talks I listened to at those conventions--not ever. I mean, I've been through a lot. I've listened to Larry Niven telling me how to turn the galaxy into a spaceship. I've listened to Anne McCaffrey talking about dragons. I've listened to dragons talking about Anne McCaffrey. And still, I just can't remember a word of it. If not for the fact that I'm more or less in the guest of honor business--otherwise I couldn't afford to be here--I'd be tempted to say it's all a great waste of time.

A couple of years back I went to a convention in Poland. I was there partly to spend money. I had had a couple of books published in Poland, and the Poles are very correct about this kind of thing. They pay you when they publish your books, unlike certain other countries in that part of the world. A few years back I had a fan letter from a fan in Estonia, of all places, and he told me how much he liked my work, and said "The books of yours I didn't get in the Estonian editions, I managed to get them in the Russian editions." This is really nice, except that I didn't know there were any Russian editions of the books. But the Poles aren't like that--they pay. But there's only one snag: they pay in their own currency, which of course is non-transferable, the Zloty. The zloty is a very useless piece of currency; there's nothing we can do with it... except put it in a zloty machine or something.

So basically what it amounts to is that they open a bank account for you in Warsaw, and put the money into it and hope that it never gets spent. But they don't know my attitude towards money. When I learned the money was there, I went over and had a big holiday, a very big holiday. I tried to blow the proceeds of two books in a fortnight. It was difficult, too. I got sick of caviar and champagne. I really did. They still have traces of the old pre-revolution living there, and there are some restaurants which operate just the way they did then. I was eating meals with three waiters hovering attentively all the time, watching. It was the opposite of the normal situation. Normally when you go somewhere and you want to eat, you look at the menu outside the place, and decide if you can afford to eat there. I was doing oppositely. We would look at menus there: "Too cheap, too cheap. There must be an expensive one around here somewhere."

But this is turning into a speech. I said it wasn't going to be a speech. Usually after somebody gives a talk, there's five minutes where everybody gets to ask questions. So I think it would be better if we just had that instead.

Q. How many people attended the Polish convention you went to?

They were drawn from all over Europe, and there were about 400 people.

Q. Did they have the same kind of schedule and programming as we have here, or was it more academic?

Yes, it was very, very much on the academic side. A representative from each country had to get up and explain the situation as regards science fiction publishing in his country. There were people probably from 12 different countries, all of which published one and a half science fiction novels per year. So this went on and on. But they have simultaneous translation, if you wanted to listen to the stuff. But I'm afraid I didn't. I've attended lots of conventions with good programs, and I did not see one item on the program. I seem to get trapped in the bar by people who wouldn't let me out of it.

Q. (Concerted "AWWWWW...") Bob, how's your new book coming along?

It isn't. If I wasn't here this week, it would be finished.

Q. Which would you rather be doing?

Are you kidding? I don't like writing books! I do it because that the way I earn my living. But I'm like most authors I know, in that I enjoy having written.

When it's time for me to write a book, my wife is very aware of the fact, because all the jobs she's been nagging at me to do for months around the house--putting up shelves, cutting the grass, all of that--I suddenly do them all. It's only when the very last job is done, and I can't think of any other reason, then I go and do it. Lots of writers are the same. I don't know why it is. It's the only thing we can do. We've got to do it to earn a living, and sometimes we have families depending on it, and mortgages, and bank managers, and in my case, I've got a half a brewery to support. And yet, I put it off until the last possible minute, every time.

Q. How long does it take you to finish a novel?

A tremendous spread. My very best time ever for a novel was six weeks, written in my spare time, holding down a job and writing during the evenings. And my worst time has been six months working full time at it. The one I'm doing at the moment is a sequel to a book I did in 1975 called ORBITSVILLE. I've been threatening to write a sequel for years, but I couldn't get a good enough idea. I feel that most sequels are a step down--I wanted to go the other way, and step up. I took a long time to get this idea. It's a very complicated one and I was slightly afraid of it, I think. Most books get more difficult for about one third of the way, then it gets easy, goes downhill. But this one has been a hard slog right along.

Q. A moment ago you said that you found that fans were the same all over. Is that really the case? Don't different fans from different countries have a different attitude towards science fiction? Do you not find a difference?

No, I don't. I've traveled around. I've been to conventions in a lot of countries -- well, 7 or 8 countries, anyway -- and the thing that's struck me every time is that the fans were just the same. Within five minutes of meeting them, you just feel that you're among old buddies that you've known all your life.

Q. You won a Hugo for fan writing. Does it bother you at all that you haven't won a Hugo for professional writing?

Awards that I don't get, I don't care about. But the awards that I did get, I thought were great. It's difficult for a British writer to get on the Hugo or Nebula nomination list-- partly because of the rules. You must be published in the same year. If the story or the book comes out in Britain first, and then is published in the States, it can't be nominated for a Nebula, because that wasn't its first publication. But it doesn't bother me. Awards are nice, as I say, but the thing is, to be a writer.

Q. Do you see any major changes in fandom since the early 50s?

Yeah. Oh, a lot. When I started out in fandom in the early 1950s in England-- well, in Northern Ireland-- the one thing was that nobody had any money. There just wasn't any money to do anything. I think my total expense for the first convention I went to came to about four pounds or something-- eight dollars. That's traveling from Ireland to England. We stayed with an old-time fan, Vince Clarke... and they were so hard up that at night, to keep warm, there was only one source of heat. They switched on a gas oven, and people had to take turns standing, waving a door back and forward to waft the heat out into the room. We only had one convention a year, and it lasted for a day and a half. Of course that's not just a difference in fandom; things that I saw in Britain outside fandom were totally changed as well. We were still in food rationing. In 1951 England still hadn't got over World War II. I remember I tried to sell Vince Clarke my butter ration so that I could buy an extra pint at the convention, and he wouldn't buy it-- which I thought was highly unfannish of him.

Q. How did you get your idea for Slow Glass?

I don't think anybody quite believes this, but I got the idea by reading a textbook on science. This is cheating for a science fiction writer, to dabble in science. But it's in all the books that if you put a stick into water at an angle, that the stick appears to bend. The explanation they give is something to do with light travelling a little more slowly through water than it does through air. Well, frankly, I've never believed that. I think what happens is that the stick absorbs water, which makes it stretch, and because it's in at an angle, the bottom side absorbs more water than the top side, so the stick bends. When you take it out, it dries off, so the stick straightens out. But I saw this strange theory of light's passing through water, and it mentioned glass as well. I think it causes it to lose about 20% of its velocity. Really it's quite a short step from there to think, now, why not have a bit of glass that really slows it down?

I wish I'd get another idea like that one. The short story "Light of Other Days" has been anthologized something like 30 times. It was published in an American university textbook as an example of good English. There I



was in there with people like Dostoyevski-- I don't know why he wrote good English, being a Russian-- people of that stature, anyway. And somebody sent me a copy of the book, and there I was, "Bob Shaw". I must be a real writer, being there with all these people, I thought. I read the story and puffed up with pride. And I got to the end of it, and they'd put in six questions about the story. And I couldn't answer any of them.

Q. Of all the stories you've written, which are your favorites?

I haven't got any favorite stories. I tend to hate them all equally. I try not to go back over my own stuff and read it.

Q. It's not that bad.

Nice one... I'll see you outside afterwards. Well, the original Slow Glass story has to be the one I dislike least, because it made me the most money. The thing is, when you're a writer, the whole process of writing, of being a writer, involves being read. But if you have written the very best novel in the world, you're still not a writer if nobody has read you. When people are reading your work, one evidence you get of this is money. The more money you're making, the more people are reading you, which is very, very important.

I've got this theory: I think any writer who really likes his own work is in trouble. When I wallpaper a room, all I can see in that room are the three or four little bits where it didn't work. In other words, where I had to fix something-- and that's all I see in that room. All the rest of it that's good, I don't see. I'm the same way with stories. When a publisher sends me a galley proof to correct, I keep it for a week and send it back. I just pretend I've read it. I just get so unhappy-- I'd love to do all the stuff over again, but I can't. I think my idea of real luxury would be to be in a position where I could write a book and put it away in a drawer for six months, and then take it out and read it as a stranger, and do a second draft. But most science fiction writers just cannot afford that time.

Q. Do you get much fan mail, and do you enjoy it?

I don't get a lot, I get quite a lot of mail originating from the fact that I'm active in fandom-- fannish mail. But I don't get much mail originating from the fact that I write books and somebody decided to drop me a line saying what he thought about a book. That happens very rarely to writers. With me it happens about twice a year. Most of the mail is complimentary, but sometimes you get people who enjoy finding faults in a story, and that's the only thing that inspires them to write to you. I worked for years as a journalist on a newspaper. I wrote thousands and thousands of articles. The only articles that ever drew any kind of comment from the public were the ones where I'd made a mistake. And the same thing happens in science fiction. Somebody takes the trouble to write to your publisher saying that on page 124 of such and such a novel, you have sodium chlorate, and obviously it should have been sodium chloride, or something like that. What makes people do it?

I do enjoy getting mail. It's nice to know that somebody out there actually reads the stuff. I don't get around to science fiction conventions

very much. I live in kind of a remote part of England. I don't even see fans very much. I sometimes get a feeling that, you know, it's all part of a big fantasy. That nobody reads the stories. Sometimes I wonder. Perhaps at my last medical checkup, they found out I was dying of cancer, and they said, oh he's always wanted to be a writer, so let's get together-- he can write his novels and send them off, and we'll pretend they're printed. Keep him happy until he snuffs it.

Q. Do you credit your fan writing with starting your professional writing career?

Yeah. Yes, I do. I learned to write by associating with Walt Willis, the well-known science fiction fan of the fifties and sixties. I had a column in his fanzine; I did this column for over ten years. That was where I learned to write. It changed the whole course of my life. I got a job as a professional journalist simply on the strength of having written for fanzines-- though I didn't describe them as fanzines, of course. I said I had had hundreds of articles published in, I think it was "science oriented journals." This impressed them rather a lot. For the first three months after I started, my boss kept asking, "When are you going to bring in these science orientated journals to let me see some of them?" "Aw, hell, I forgot them again." If I'd ever brought him a copy of HYPHEN I'd have been out of a job in a second.

Q. Is there a difference between a chip and a french fry?

Well, to me, a french fry isn't really the same thing as a British chip. I have big arguments over this with my wife. I know how to make chips, she doesn't. She's been brainwashed by reading all these women's magazines, cookbooks and things, and she firmly believes that a french fry or chip should be crisp, dry, hot and golden brown. That's the way she makes them. I know better. I know that a proper chip or french fry isn't any of those things. It's limp-- when you put a fork in it it hangs down on each side of the fork. It's a pale yellowish green in color. It's lukewarm, so you can cram a dozen of them into your mouth at once without burning your tongue. It's got a lovely veil of grease all over so that your teeth are lubricated when you're chewing it. And I've explained this to her over and over again, and every time she make her chips, they still come out all wrong: hot, dry, golden brown. And every time I make them, they come out just right. She mustn't be a proper cook.

Q. Is it difficult adjusting to cold beer?

No. If we want to have a talk about beer, you know, we could sit here all night. The British idea of beer does not coincide with the American idea of beer in any way. The American beers are lagers, and in England, if you want a lager, generally it's chilled, so there's no problem at all. If anybody has never had a pint in an English pub, it's a different drinking experience altogether. I was talking to a friend who is a fanatic about beer, and he told me he'd been away in Greece on holiday for three months, came back, dashed into the first British pub he could get to, and he ordered a pint. When it arrived, it was absolutely flat, no head on it whatsoever; it was lukewarm, a bit cloudy, and sour to the taste. He said, "Perfect."

Q. Can you tell us about when you were a sportswriter? I heard it was pretty funny.

This must be my famous hockey reporter story. I don't like telling stories twice. I suffer from this business. If I've got to send ten letters to people telling them the same thing, or something, something inside me will not let me write the ten identical letters-- I've got to make them all different. It gets to be difficult when I'm away on holiday and sending postcards back to friends. There's no reason why you shouldn't write exactly the same thing on every postcard, the same little joke, but I can't do it. I've got to make up a different joke for every postcard, and it drives me nuts.

One time I got so desperate... the last card I had to send was to Walt Willis and his wife Madeleine, and I'd written all my favorites down, and I couldn't think of another joke. The post time was coming up, so I got an idea-- that I thought was funny-- and I wrote on the postcard, "Dear Walt and Madeleine-- Everything's okay now. Please ignore my telegram." To me, you know, it was a joke. I got back a week later. They'd been to the police. They'd been to the post office giving them hell about a telegram not being delivered. And I said, "No, I just made it up." A distant expression passed over their faces for a moment... and they walked away.

But this hockey story. I joined a big daily newspaper, circulation over a quarter of a million. The same company published two newspapers, a daily and a weekly. The weekly was called the Ulster News. I fancied myself as a feature writer, writing features for this weekly paper, so I got a job with them, resigned from my old job. Then the Friday night before I was due to start, I picked up a newspaper and saw that my newspaper had just be cancelled-- it didn't exist anymore. So I went down to the office anyway. Instead of finding myself as a feature writer on a weekly, I was a general reporter on a daily, which was quite a shock to the system.

The first week, I was looking forward to being off on Saturday, and the sports editor came running up to me, and he handed me a little slip of paper, and said, "That's your match for tomorrow." I said, "What is it?" He said, "It's a hockey match." I said, "I'm sorry, Malcolm, I've never seen a hockey match, so I can't do it." And he said, "Oh, it doesn't matter-- the rules are just the same as football." And he dashed away. And he got away before I could explain to him that I'd never seen a football match, either.

I went out to this dismal field at three o'clock the following afternoon. And it was raining-- gentle, vertical rain that we get a lot of in Ireland-- and there was a hockey match just starting, and about ten people were gathered around the perimeter watching this match, under umbrellas. It was most depressing-- it was like a scene out of War and Peace or Crime and Punishment, or some awful, dreary Russian novel. I had no idea what was happening. The referee kept blowing his whistle-- I couldn't figure out what it meant. And I was standing there thinking, this is my chance of a Pulitzer prize gone. I was thinking about quitting the job, and I suddenly heard somebody under one of the umbrellas saying something like, "Garvy isn't using the left side of the field." And I thought, that sounds good. So I got out my book and I wrote that down, and I moved up to the umbrellas.

I got about ten little comments like that during the next three quarters of an hour. I got the scores, and who scored the goals, and retired to the nearest pub, and had several large hot whiskeys, which is a drink you can get in pubs in Ireland, and I joined all these things together, and phoned them in.

Monday morning, I went to work, not sure if I had a job or not, but the sports editor was delighted. He came up and clapped me on the back and said, "Thought you said you knew nothing about hockey." And I became, over the next three years, that paper's champion hockey reporter. Even at the end of that three years, I still did not know the rules of the game. I'd got my method; I knew how to do it. I just stood near the people who seemed to know and copied down everything they said. I think that's probably what helped me to build up my reputation. All over the country, there must have been people reading my report that night, and saying, "Hey-- this man's good! That's just what I was saying at the match today!"

Q. Bob, when and how did you first meet up with Walt Willis?

I met up with Walt in 1950, I think it was. At that time, I had been reading science fiction for years and years and was quite convinced I was the only science fiction fan in the world. I'd just never met anybody even who admitted to reading the stuff. And then I began to realize that there were secondhand bookshops and magazine shops, and a lot of those magazines were coming and going in and out of them. It was a bit like the way astronomers can detect the presence of a planet by it affecting other planets. I worked out that there were other fans in Ireland, somewhere, by these secondhand bookshops. I saw an ad from a fan organization in an early British magazine. I wrote away and was put in touch with Walt Willis and other Irish fans.

It changed my life, getting in touch with that fan group. Science fiction was what I needed out of life. Belfast has always been a... Let's put it this way: Belfast will never be the fun capital of the galaxy. And when I was growing up there I was miserable and lonely, and it was science fiction that kept me sane. Discovering that there were other people around who read the stuff, and being able to start publishing a fanzine was great.

I still remember the first night, walking back home from Walt's house, that great meeting. And you know this saying about walking on air? That's the way I felt. I could not feel my feet touching the ground. I seemed to float home. I knew that I'd found what I wanted out of life. It was a lot to ask of fandom, but it didn't let me down. As a direct result, I'm here this weekend, which is quite incredible. Most people in England never ever see the States, you know, it's still something that doesn't happen to you. I'm fast becoming almost a commuter.

Q. Is that water you're drinking?

Yes.

Q. You're going to pollute your system, Bob.

No, I find there's nothing wrong with water. I had a drink of it about four years ago, and it was pretty good.

Most people believe that there's a lot of drinking going on at British conventions. British fans tend to drink a lot, but they play it up quite a bit as well. It's become part of the fannish folklore of British fans.

There's a general belief in British science fiction fandom that American science fiction fans at conventions do not drink very much. I've been to conventions up north where I did get that general impression, but one of the things I like about coming to Alabama is, there's lots of people around here to drink nearly as much as I do.

Last year I was giving a talk to the SF group in South Wales, and an old friend who runs the club there met me at the train. We went straight to a pub and had a couple of drinks, and we went and had a meal, and we had a couple of drinks with our meal, and then we went to give my talk, which was held in a pub, and they always like to keep you lubricated while you're talking, so I had a couple more drinks while I was talking. After it was finished, we streaked back into a public bar and had a few more drinks. By that time, we had worked up a thirst. I went back home with my friend, and he opened a bottle of Bell's whiskey, and we drank it between us before we went to bed.

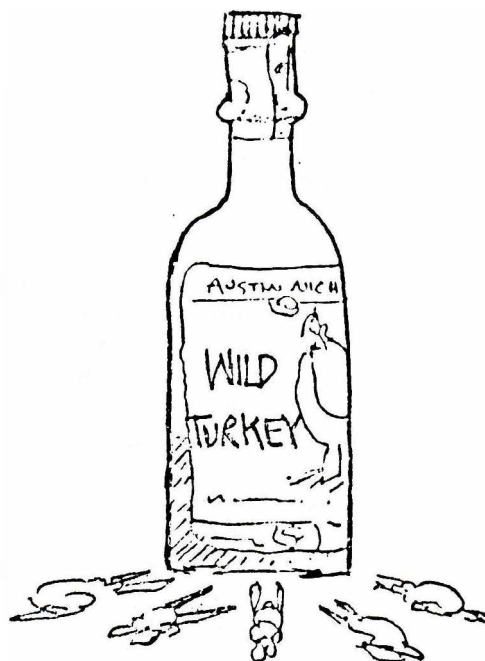
It seemed like a great idea at the time, but the next day, I was sitting on the train, coming up through the counties between Wales and England, feeling like death-- wondering why I'd done it. The thing that upset me was... the carriages were open type, just little seats and tables, all dining size, with an aisle in the middle. The steward of the restaurant car opened the door at the top of the car, came walking along, whistling, looking around and nodding at people, and didn't speak a word. And he got to me, and he stopped and said, "There's a bar in the next car if you feel like having a drink." I nearly went after him and demanded to know what he was implying.

Q. Have you ever tried Southern moonshine?

No, I haven't. Has anybody got any? ...  
Ah, I had my hopes up...

Well, I've built up a great thirst, so if anybody wants to continue this conversation in the living room or the bar, I'll be quite happy to see them. Thanks for listening so long.

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BHAMACON II DEAD DOG  
~~PARTY~~







"Did the Earth move for you, Darling?"