

Chuch Harris Appreciation Society Magazine



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ABOUT THIS PUBLICATION

This partial collection of the work of Chuck Harris is being published in honor of the visit of Mr Harris to the US in April 1989. In view of the important role played by Chuck in the founding of the Trans-Atlantic Fan Fund as well as his fanzine publishing accomplishments, both the honor and the visit have been a long time coming.

Selecting from the Harris articles suggested by fans on both sides of the Atlantic was difficult. We decided to concentrate on the fandom stories — convention and trip reports and accounts of fannish gatherings. In this way I think we've been able to select some of the old and new, as well as the long and short of Chuck's oeuvre. But there is plenty of great fan writing for future volumes of *Chasm*!

Given the long friendship and collaboration between Chuck Harris and Arthur Thomson, we've chosen to illustrate this collection with Atom's artwork. In many cases we've reprinted the original illos drawn for each article. Others were drawn for and appeared in *Quinsy*.

We hope you enjoy reading this issue of the *Chuck Harris Appreciation Society*. If you do, let Chuck and Arthur know!

...Spike Parsons, copyright © 1989

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

The first contact Charles Randolph Harris (aka 'Chuck' or 'Chuch') had with fandom was in 1949 via Fred Brown, a friend of his father's and an old time fan. From there Chuck joined the International Science Fiction Correspondence Club and later, in a prozine, came across a review of a certain fanzine then being published out of Belfast, Northern Ireland. He decided to write off for it...

Slant was a fanzine published by Belfast fans Walter Willis and James White. The first issue came out in 1948 and by this point the third had appeared. Response to *Slant* 3 was disappointing but in March 1950 Walt received a momentous letter, not that it appeared that way at the time. It was a request for a subscription that began "Dear Mr. Ellis...", and its writer was Chuck Harris. The following month Walt received a fanzine containing a story by Chuck that impressed him sufficiently to ask Chuck to submit one to *Slant*. "You really startle me," Chuck jokingly replied, "do you mean you'll consider publishing a story by me without paying me for it?" As Walt remembers:

"The story when it arrived turned out to be about a werewolf who picked up a girl in India who when confronted by a death worse than fate turned out to be a weretiger. James White saw the gimmick after the second paragraph and I told Chuck this when rejecting the story, which was the beginning of the great White/Harris 'Feud.' At about this time Chuck had a regular thing about werewolves and produced the first line of a story about a whole group of them which was really a classic among first lines: 'The family were changing for dinner'..."



In the autumn of 1950, Walt visited England. One of those he had hoped to visit was Chuck Harris, but it was not to be. On 24th August, Chuck wrote to Walt and revealed what he'd hitherto kept a secret:

"...I don't think you'll be seeing me when you come over. During the war I caught meningitis, whilst in the Navy, and it destroyed both auditory nerves. Hence I am completely deaf. Lip-reading is a very exacting science (harder than Dianetics!) and I'm not very proficient. Most of the 'conversation' has to be written down for me, and it makes things rather difficult."

At this time, Chuck was living on the eastern outskirts of London, a city that contained more than its share of fans—among them Ken Bulmer and Vinc Clarke. These two had been sharing a flat in north London for a year, one they dubbed 'The Epicentre' (which became a legendary fan haunt), and were among the capital's most active fans. Though respecting Chuck's reason for shying away from in-person contact with other fans, Walt nevertheless kept nudging him and the denizens of the Epicentre towards one another and eventually this process bore fruit. On 27th January 1952 Chuck visited that hallowed place, and afterwards wrote excitedly to Walt of his first contact with other fans:

"Last night!!! Hell, I just can't describe everything that happened. It was the most enjoyable night that I've had out in a long time. I think Vinc and Ken are really terrific. Even Gold couldn't have had a better welcome. Almost all the time I was there Vince balanced his portable on his knee and provided a sort of running commentary...Primarily, I went to see the duplicators but we never got around to it...I'm going again Sunday week!!"

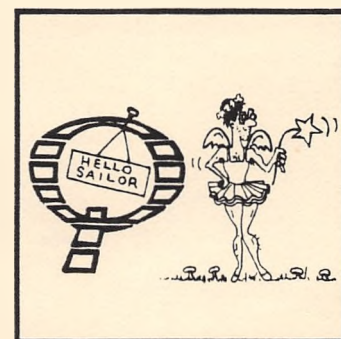
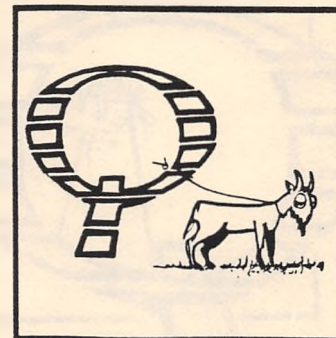
Looking back on this meeting many years later, Walt saw it not just as an event of great personal significance for Chuck but the beginning of something larger:

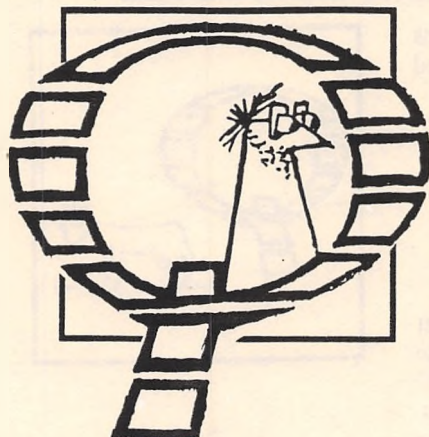
"And so it started, the nucleus of what later came to be known as Sixth Fandom, the closest and happiest *gestalt* ever formed in international fandom. It lasted until the Great Mackenzie War ((Willis' own name for the interconnected series of conflicts that were to afflict British fandom in the latter half of the decade)), but that was a long time in the future, and meanwhile fandom became in one sense of the hackneyed phrase a way of life."

Sixth Fandom as a group consisted of fans on both sides of the Atlantic and its focal point was Lee Hoffman's *Quandry*. Over here Sixth fandom was made up of people such as Harris, Clarke, Bulmer, and the members of Irish Fandom, while over there it's main stalwarts were people such as Hoffman, Bob Tucker, Bob Bloch, Max Keasler, and Shelby Vick. The name itself derived from a system devised by Bob Silverberg for numbering distinct periods of fannish activity in the US, the period they then found themselves in being reckoned the sixth under his system. It was to be the most fruitful and harmonious period in US/UK fannish relations there has ever been.

Being a letterpress production *Slant* took a lot of time and effort to put together so Walt Willis decided to publish another fanzine, one which would appear between issues of *Slant*. Chuck Harris was his co-editor and he and Walt got the first issue out in time for LONCON, that year's national convention. The fanzine was called *Hyphen*. It would go on to be possibly the most famous fanzine of all time.

Though he had now met other fans Chuck still wasn't yet quite ready for a convention and so skipped LONCON, which was held in London during May. However, after the con Walt Willis and James White visited Vinc Clarke at his house in Welling (which he'd moved back to a few weeks earlier) so Clarke called Chuck to let him know they were there. Naturally, Chuck rushed over to meet them. As he walked up to the house, James burst out through the front-door, squirting wildly at his 'nemeses' with a water-pistol. This incident was written up, from both sides, in *Hyphen 2*.





Chuck's first con was the 1953 national convention, CORONCON (so called because this was the year of the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II, and again held in London), and he got involved in the fannish institution that was born there. This came about when con chairman Ted Carnell announced that the Cincinnati Fantasy Group, having raised the money to bring British fan Norman Ashfield over to the US for the 1953 Worldcon, were throwing their offer open to any British fan who could make the trip now that Ashfield had declined. Since there wasn't time to make such arrangements by Worldcon it was decided instead to use the CFG donation as seed-money for a permanent fund to help US and UK fans to attend each other's conventions. The permanent system of financing trans-Atlantic trips and the organisational structure needed to make it self-sustaining were hammered-out by those at CORONCON, among them Chuck Harris. Thus was born TAFF, the Trans-Atlantic Fan Fund. Though a popular fan by this point, Chuck declined to be nominated for the fund, preferring instead to help raise funds for it and taking pride in his part in its birth.

In mid-1954, Vinø and Ken Bulmer created OMPA, Offtrail Magazine Publisher's Association, British fandom's first apa. Chuck was drafted in as its first treasurer and contributed greatly to its early success with a number of fine contributions including *Through Darkest Ireland*, an account of his trip to Belfast to visit Walt and Madeleine Willis.

Chuck continued to be an active fan through the 1950s, as both co-editor of *Hyphen* and one of fandom's funniest writers, but towards the end of the decade disillusionment began to set in, particularly with all the fuss the result of the 1957 TAFF race caused. Chuck was among those who felt that TAFF at that point was drifting away from those who had founded it in 1953, and he was just as outraged at the result of the 1959 race. Coming on top of the other troubles that were plaguing British fandom at the end of the '50s this was too much for Chuck, and he quit fandom in disgust.

"You see," he later wrote, "I had a sort of personal trinity in fandom. I had a hand in founding three things: *Hyphen*, OMPA, and TAFF, and I had a sort of weird parental affection for all of them. They all seemed such worthwhile projects and I was very proud of them. And I was especially proud of TAFF."

Apart from the occasional contact (such as dropping in at the 1965 British Worldcon) two decades were to pass before Chuck returned to fandom. During that time he married, fathered two children, and moved from Dagenham to Daventry in Northants when his employer, Ford Motors, relocated there. In the early '80s Chuck was one of a number of 1950s fans who mysteriously re-surfaced in British fandom and he was soon delighting his correspondents with tales of his golf-mad family (his wife, Sue, is Captain of the women's team at Staverton, their local club), his job in the accounts department at Fords, and hilarious but often spot-on observations on the contemporary fandom he was discovering at conventions and through the pages of modern fanzines. Naturally, his correspondents decided that such writing deserved a wider audience and soon it began appearing as the column 'Creative Random History,' first in Terry Hill's *Microwave* and later in *Pulp*, whose current 'editorial collective' consists of Vinø Clarke, John Harvey, Avedon Carol, and Rob Hansen.

...Rob Hansen, copyright © 1989

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Years ago, when I told Terry Carr I was working up the nerve to ask Atom for some illos, he wrote back and said I shouldn't worry. "Arthur Thomson is a pussycat," is about the way he put it. And so it was. I made my request to Arthur and he sent some logos and artwork for my fanzine under a purring cover note. Since then, I have come to London and seen the Chuch & Arfer show many times. Although they were tearing their way through fandom way back in pre-history, they are still very much a part of my own fannish generation and possibly the youngest and most enthusiastic guys in British fandom today.



Chuch Harris is always telling us about Arf. He says Atom is somewhere in the line of succession for the throne, for example, "and if 2,000 High Nerds and Wallies die, our Arf will be King!" And you better believe we pay proper respect to our King Arfer, all right. Our fanzines wouldn't be the same without him.

Chuch, on the other hand, is not the least intimidated by Arthur's lineage. They have pretended to be competing with each other since before stencils were invented, and each tends to refer to the advanced age of the other. In fact, they are only a year apart in age, but no one is quite sure what that age is. "Why do you always talk about how old Arthur is?" Pam Wells once innocently asked Chuch. "Got to keep the edge on the competition!" responded my dear Fanfather, cackling gleefully.

There's a lot of love between these two guys — Arthur is one of the few fans whose lips Chuch has no trouble reading, so conversation between them usually flies pretty fast. When Chuch & Arf get together, the rest of us are pretty much along for the ride — you just sit back and watch in wonder. They've got running gags going back to the dark ages, the two of them. And when Arthur does a piece of artwork that really hits the spot, Chuch is always the first guy to rave about how brilliant it is.

Arthur is never cheap with his egoboo, either. He writes letters of heart-felt praise when he thinks you've done something right, although he is ever so shy and humble about his own expressive abilities. The last time he sent me such a letter, he poured on the strokes, but finished: "You get all this first draft tippex an' all. I refuse to rewrite all this and make it ever so clever and erudite." He's very definitely a From-the-Heart kind of guy.

I've been using his artwork ever since that first batch came in, of course. He designed the logo for *Pulp*, the fanzine Rob & I have been publishing with Vince Clarke and John Harvey for the last few years, and he's drawn every one of our covers either by himself or in tandem with another fanartist. Even before that, what little art I've used in *Blatan* has most often come from Atom. But his work has graced fanzines since before I'd ever heard of fandom, with his funny little creatures, his pop-eyed caricatures of Chuch Harris Himself, and nowadays those all-hair-and-nose beings that no one could mistake for anyone but me.

So, I'm really glad Terry advised me to relax and write to Atom. Not only did I get a fine contributor, but I've had the chance to enjoy some great conversations, as well as Arthur's easy laugh and the twinkle in his eye.

...Avedon Carol, copyright © 1989

THROUGH DARKEST IRELAND WITH KNIFE, FORK & SPOON

18,000 words on a one-string harp

Written and produced for FAPA, OMPA, and my own amusement.

This is a long a rambling account of two weeks that I spent in Ireland last summer. It seems to be mostly about what I had to eat — hence the title.

The “Duke of Rothesay” sailed from Heysham on the midnight tide. Her precious cargo was me. I’d been warned that even with good weather conditions the crossing to Ireland was pretty bad, but I’d thought my informants were just cissies. Believe me, they weren’t. The boat was jammed tight with people, and I’d considered myself lucky to have found a canvas chair to sit in and a little corner in the hold where I was out of the wind. In place of the hatches there was a sailcloth awning; below it us passengers were crammed shoulder to shoulder in a sort of open-air sardine tin.

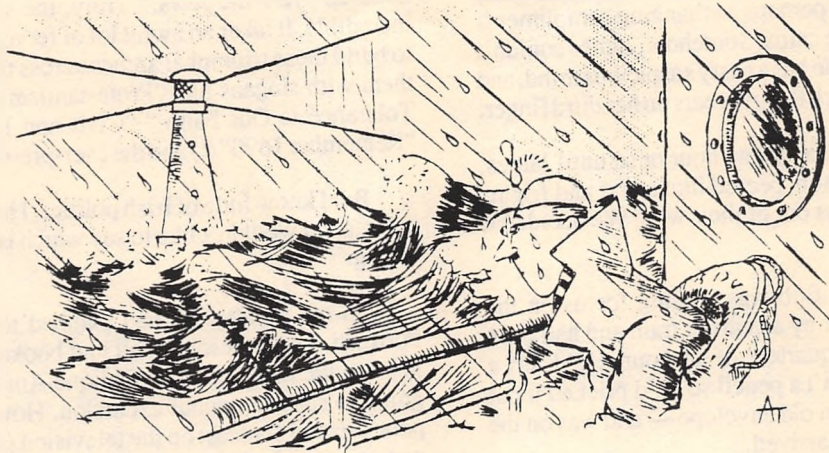
Before we sailed there was a bar open and doing a brisk business, but it closed as soon as the ship cast off. The bartender probably got out and swam along with the rest of the crew — we didn’t see any of them again until the boat docked eight hours later in Belfast.

As soon as we got outside Heysham harbour the boat began to rock a bit. It was by no means a dark and stormy night, but it was more than sufficient for the people who had been stocking up at the bar. As if by prearranged signal, half of the passengers began to throw up. I’d been more interested in hanging onto my chair and my corner than in fighting my way to the bar for a drink, and I wasn’t sick myself. I just sat there, tried to ignore what was going on, and read my Ogden Nash book. (I’m sorry it wasn’t *Galaxy*. The only excuse I can offer is that I’d never intended to write this report.)

After the bad sailors had given us their all, Ghod took a hand. It began to rain. This was no gentle shower pit-patting on the surface of the sea — this was the sort of stuff Maugham based “rain” upon. It was bitterly cold, the rain poured in through and around the awning, and I began to feel like a character in a Hitchcock film — the one who dies ignobly and messily just before the end. I looked around for a drier spot and was fortunate in being able to edge my way underneath the edge of the hatch. There were three kids travelling with their mother and father, and they squeezed together to make room for me. The eldest boy, a wee kid of about ten, was crying with the cold, but his parents had their hands full trying to keep his two brothers warm. I felt sorry for him — I was damn near crying myself — so I shared the rest of my thermos flask with him, and then had him on my lap under my raincoat for the rest of the night. We kept each other warm, and he slept until we steamed upon Belfast Lough and tied up at Donegall Quay.

After we’d docked, as I was going up the companion-way to get out of the hell-hold, I found a brass plaque on the wall. It certified this poop-deck as being “811 ft. square and accommodation for 90 third-class passengers when not occupied by cattle.” Irish Fandom thought this was pretty funny when I told them about it.

Walt was waiting for me at the bottom of the gang-plank. I hadn’t been able to tell him what time the boat



would dock, and he'd been up meeting all the boats since 6.30. a.m. We were very pleased to see each other. The Morris — the one Bea Mahaffey rode in that has space for a kettle under the bonnet — was parked around the corner, and in a couple of minutes we were on our way to Oblique House. The whole of the town was decorated with flags and bunting, and there were triumphal arches spanning the road. Walt spent most of the journey trying to convince me that it was spontaneous demonstration by readers of the *Vargo Statten Magazine*. I didn't really believe him.

170 Upper Newtownards Road is a large terrace house built about 50 years ago. I recognised it right away because it had 170 above the door and Madeleine on the doorstep. She'd been up since 6.30. too and had enormous quantities of tea, eggs, bacon, toast, and mail waiting for us — along with James White, who had travelled right across Belfast so that he could greet me with "Hiya Claude!" when I arrived.

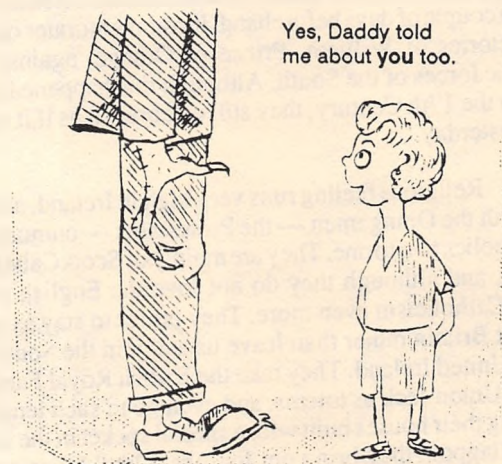
We did more talking than eating — although not much more — but Walt and James both had to go to work and I thought I'd better get some sleep in. I'd been up since 6 a.m. the previous morning and I felt pretty tired. They took me up to my room and promised to waken me at lunch time. I undressed and went to bed.

I stayed there for almost ten minutes. The bed was comfortable enough, and Madeleine had slipped an electric blanket in to warm it for me, but I was excited and it seemed such an anti-climax to arrive in Belfast and then go straight to bed. So I got out, got dressed and began a tour of inspection.

This was Carol's room — Carol is seven — and on the Mickey Mouse blackboard there was written permission for me to play with her toys. These had been placed in one corner of the room and carefully labelled as a sort of fannish museum. I thought it was worth the whole trip just to see the genuine original bucket that had been kicked so recently by the late Mr Ziff, and a heap of similar fan rarities.

Downstairs I found Madeleine and Carol. I hadn't met Carol before, but we'd heard of each other, and we got along fine. We went off upstairs again to play bricks, but by the time we'd inspected the dolls and glanced at the comics (Carol is also a Pogo fan), Walt was home and lunch was ready. Along with dessert I gave him a note written by Carol. It said: CHUCK HARRIS IS No. 1 FAN. {Signed} CAROL WILLIS. A perceptive kid is young Carol.

Bob Shaw had gotten himself married a week or so before I arrived. He'd gone down to Eire for the honeymoon, but had sent us a pocsard to say that he'd be home that evening if he didn't get lost again. ("We got lost and had to ask the way to Bray three times — and nobody said 'With your head back.'") We went down the station to meet the Happy Couple, but we missed them and met James and Peggy Martin instead. Peggy is a pretty wench — most Irish women seem to be above average in looks (and brother! those Connemara redheads!) — but she is far too nice to be a figment of my imagination as somebody once suggested in *Hyphen*. I'd been writing to her for some time, and



naturally, I was hoping that we would be able to spend some time together talking and perhaps exchanging compliments on our tastes in Valentine cards. Somehow, James couldn't understand this though. He has a nasty suspicious mind, and a big investment in the rock Peggy wears on her third finger.

We stayed at the station for an hour or so until James, diligently searching for Bob, peered into a taxi and frightened two inoffensive nuns out of their wits. We decided it was time to go home.

When we got there, Bob was waiting for us on the doorstep. He'd come back by an earlier train and had been standing there for three-quarters of an hour. He'd left a message for us — he hadn't a pencil so he'd pricked it out with a pin on the back of an old envelope — and was on the point of leaving when we arrived.

I was glad we caught him — he had Sadie with him (and I'm glad she caught him too). I'd been anxious to meet her ever since Bob showed me a picture of her two years ago at the White Horse, and she'd heard about me too. (Gad, I'm famous in Ireland.) We sat around and talked about the wedding and looked at the photographs, but it was getting late, and they had to get home.

It was quite dark by this time, but at almost every street corner enormous bonfires were being lit as part of "The Glorious 12th" celebrations. This, it turned out, was also the real reason for the flag-bedecked streets. It was something entirely new to me — I'd never seen anything like it before in all my life. In England, the only time I can remember bonfires in the streets was on VE night, but that was just small stuff, nothing comparable with this. Here there were crowds of people dragging up fuel. The flames were right up to the housetops (Walt tells me that sometimes the flames are the housetops), and everybody was singing loyalist songs and generally having themselves a time.

The 12th, The Glorious 12th, is the big day of the year for the Protestants in Northern Ireland, and the celebrations begin a couple of days beforehand. It commemorates one of the victories of William, Prince of Orange, against the Catholic forces of the South. Although this happened way back in the 17th Century, they still celebrate it as if it were only yesterday.

Religious feeling runs very high in Ireland, and in the North the Orangemen — the Protestants — outnumber the Catholics two to one. They are mainly of Scots Calvinist descent, and although they do not love the English they dislike Catholicism even more. They prefer to stay as part of Great Britain rather than leave us and join the South to form a United Ireland. They take the British Royal Family and the Union Jack as totems, and even go to such lengths as having their houses built with a special socket in the wall for the flagpole they bring out for "the 12th." I was quite astonished to see "God Save the Queen" white-washed onto blank walls in the same way as London's East End Fascists

daub up "Kill the Jews." Truly, the whole business was incredible. It takes an awful lot of fervour as well as timber to build these triumphal arches across the streets and cover them with slogans like "Protestantism is Our Religion — Tolerance is Our Faith," "Civil and Religious Liberty," "Remember 1690" (!) and the ever-present "No Surrender."

But I know little of Irish politics, I have friends on both sides, and I wouldn't like to say which is right and which is wrong.

On the Sunday we had planned to spend the day at Portrush, a coast resort. Walt had booked a train compartment in the name of "The Oblique Angles," and we were going to start an annual excursion. However, there was a poor weather forecast on the television (there was always a poor weather forecast on the TV — Walt was so dissatisfied that he was talking of buying a new set with guaranteed weather forecasts), so we decided to stay home. We had already arranged to meet George Charters at the station, so as soon as we'd had breakfast Walt and I went off to collect him and bring him home.

Somehow or other, I am always disappointed when I meet George. He doesn't look like Somebody Who Has Appeared in Hard Covers, and he doesn't say "Howdy pardners!" in the way you would expect from a real fanatical Max Brand addict. Still, he tried hard — he wore his two-tone cowboy shirt, and managed to mention Frederick Faust within five minutes of meeting me.

On the bus home from the station I'd given the conductor a half-crown for the fares, and amongst the change he gave me two foreign coins. I thought he'd mistaken my accent and believed me to be a tourist from Wiltshire instead of from Essex. It wasn't until later that somebody told me that both English and Eire currency were valid in Northern Ireland, and were always used interchangeably. I was very happy to hear it.

The television had promised us cloud, rain, and an unsettled further outlook. I guess that the set may have been at fault after all, because the sun came out and it was one of the best days we had. We took rugs out onto the lawn in front of the house, sprawled in the sun, and talked. This, on a



Sunday in Belfast, is Unconventional. James and Peggy arrived, then Bob and Sadie and the affair developed into a Sprawling Championship that was judged by the Respectable People who peered over the hedge at us on their way home from church. It was a wonderful day. I admit that we did mention science-fiction once or twice, and we spent a couple of hours talking about *Hyphen*, but nobody suggested that we got up and Did Something.

Except Madeleine.

Sometimes I think that the girl doesn't realise that even Jophan must have spent some time in the glades of gafia. Here we were, all busily improving our suntans and doing tricks with matches when she came out to ask us what we would like for supper. This was a good subject for a discussion. I like chips (if Lee Hoffman can get away with cold mashed potato sandwiches, I don't see why I shouldn't have a fetish for chips), and eventually everyone else thought they would like chips too.

"Shurely," she said, and then quite calmly detailed us as a working party to go to her father's allotment and dig the potatoes to make the chips. Those "Galway Bay" Micks are just a myth — if you want taties for dinner, then brother, you dig them.

The allotment is just around the corner. We took the biggest baskets we could find and all went together. Walt, Bob, and George had difficulty in keeping up with the rest of us, so that by the time we arrived there was only James and myself available to dig the damn things. James convinced me that he'd never seen a garden fork before in his life and it finished with me digging whilst he picked up the potatoes as I unearthed them. At first there didn't seem to be any — we'd been digging up the late potatoes instead of the early ones — but eventually we found the right section and dug enough potatoes to last them until they get another tourist who decides that he might like chips for supper. After that we replanted the late potato plants whilst the girls went off to look for strawberries. It was a fairly fruitless quest. Walt, Bob, and George arrived in time to help us put the tools away, and we locked the gate and fled as quietly as a herd of locusts.

Mealtimes with the Heels of IF is another of those Experiences. Madeleine is a beautiful cook with a flair for extraordinarily good cakes. That night, apart from the chips and other stuff, there was gingerbread, chocolate sponge, cream sponge, cherry cake, flan, macaroons and pancakes as well as oddments such as biscuits that I never got around to. James is on a diet and has some sort of wholemeal biscuits that everyone else helps him to eat. He's liable to make disparaging remarks about food and scathingly refer to it as "just fuel" — but as Walt pointed out, "All the resources of modern science are devoted to keeping James alive. Hardly seems worthwhile, does it?" With the rest of us, food occupies the same status as bheer does in other fan groups. The others fall on the grub like ravenous beasts, and

if you're too timid to take more than two pieces of each separate cake, they stop for an instant to inquire politely about the state of your health. The conversation is as good as the food and the whole thing is rather like living in a world straight out of one of Walt's Xmas cards... It's impossible to give any real idea of what goes on, but here is a short (the whole thing is just a two minute section of an hour-long affair), verbatim sample. For once they've been talking about science-fiction, and are now discussing *Hero's Walk*. Walt mentions that it reads as if it were written with a ball-point pen — all balls and no point — and Madeleine hastily asks George what he thought about it.

George: "Crud. The only action that takes place is when you close the book after you've finished."

Peggy: "Well! It was much better than John Carter of Barsoom. I don't like bloodthirsty villains ——— except Chuck."

James: "He's sampled me. He knows good blood when he sees it."

Peggy: "You've got blood?"

James: "Bite me and see."

Peggy: (ultra-piously) "It's Friday!"

While this is going on, Bob and I are quietly working our way through the cakes. Bob shares my passion for gingerbread and Walt is teasing him by moving the plate out of reach. He has already eaten eight pieces running — two more than I have — and Walt has accused him of having a fifth dimensional gut. Madeleine has joined in and is offering us little pancakes instead of the gingerbread.

Bob: "No thanks. You gave us those wee things to put our cups on before.....but I'll have some of that fake flan."

Walt: "Your favourite dish....food."

Bob: (Indignantly) "I'm not really greedy, I only do this for fun. Think of the material Chuck's getting for his next column." (He holds out his cup for some more tea.) "I'm not hungry, I only eat the stuff because I don't want to offend Madeleine." (Aside) "Note the steady hand with which she fills the saucer full of tea."

Sadie: (apologetically) "He's off his food today."

George, Peggy, James, & Madeleine: "He's on Walters!"

Walt: (in a supremely sarcastic tone as he offers the plate) "Have you tried the gingerbread?"

Bob: (stretching out both hands for it) "Yes, and found it not guilty."

This is a fair sample of the chitchat and it goes on until the last biscuit has been fought over — and then they start to squabble about who will do the dishes. George is usually the first to leave because he has to catch a train back to Bangor, and he invariably manages to miss the washing-up. Madeleine and Peggy have told him that they saved him some dishes from last night, but he is happily ignoring them. Peggy is determined that he shall do them and decides to appeal to his chivalry.

Peggy: (piteously) "Dishes are a man's job. George, you wouldn't stand by and see us soil our lily-white hands, would you?"

George: (horrified) "Ghod, no! I shall be upstairs playing ghoddminton with the others."

Madeleine: "Very well, Chuck and Peggy can do the dishes. You two can be alone out there."

James: (shocked to the core) "Him, alone with my dish?"

Bob: (who won the last biscuit) "Huh. Chuck is an expert at slaving over Hot Dishes."

In the end, all the men did the dishes. I bet I'm the first Belfast pilgrim to return home with dishpan hands.

The next day was the genuine, original Glorious Twelfth and everybody — both Catholic and Protestant alike — got two days off from work to celebrate. The Big Event of the holiday is the mass parade of the various Protestant Societies: the Loyal Orange Lodges, Total Abstinence Groups, Total Drunkenness Groups, etc. Walt and I got up early and went downtown to watch it. We arrived after it had started, and when we left an hour and a half later they were still marching.

Contingents come from all over Northern Ireland, and there were one or two groups from Eire too. There were no women or children in the procession, partly because this is a male demonstration, and partly because there has been trouble in previous years as they marched through Catholic districts.

The men were dressed in their best suits and bowler hats and wore an impressive purple and orange sash across their shoulders. They were formed up into detachments, each with its own band and its own banner depicting "William, Prince of Orange, of Glorious, Pious, and Immortal Memory," and they marched ten abreast to the old traditional Loyalist songs like "The Protestant Boys" and "The Sash me Father Wore." I don't go for this sort of guff usually but I was rather impressed. There was no carnival air present, and I couldn't help but admire some of the old

gaffers with a full set of Great War medals who pulled their shoulders back and marched in line and in step with their grandsons. They were a very determined-looking bunch. Grim.

Apart from the length of the procession, I think the most noteworthy thing was the number of bands. There were pipe bands (with Irish pipers in their saffron kilts and Highlanders in tartans), there were accordion bands, drum and fife bands, mixed bands, concertina bands (!), bugle bands, and just about every thing that is portable and can produce music except gramophones.

Their theme song is "The Sash Me Father Wore." I copied the words from a little book I found in Walt's room:

"It's old but it's beautiful, it's the best you ever seen

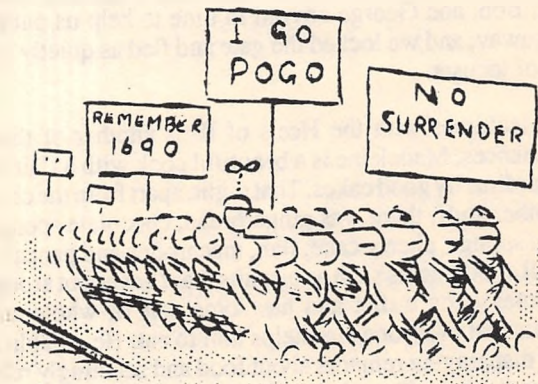
Been worn for more than ninety years in that little Isle of Green

From my Orange and Purple Forefather it descended with galore

It's a terror to them paypish boys, the sash me father wore..."

Actually, "them paypish boys" are unlikely to see it. The only people on the streets of Belfast are Protestants wearing an Ulster Lily in their buttonhole, and the Catholics (or many of them) spend the holiday on a cruise to the Isle of Man. But it's a fine parade and afterwards, the taverns — and there are plenty of them — have a field day.

The Oblique Angles didn't join it though. After we'd been home and had lunch we all went off on a substitute excursion to Helen's Bay, a little place on the shore of Belfast Lough. We packed sandwiches and carried thermos flasks of tea for a picnic.



Walt marshalled us down to the railway station, got us into the carriage and counted us three times to make certain that we were all there. The train was packed tight and I'd been warned to stay close to Bob and not get lost. When we got out at Helen's Bay, we held another census on the platform and discovered that George was missing. Panic! We scurried frantically along the platform looking into the windows of the departing train and bleating "George, ghodamn you, George." GATWC is notoriously absent-minded and we thought he'd been in his usual state of somnolence and had travelled onto Bangor out of habit. Our day was spoilt and we were holding the wake on the platform when George calmly walked out of the "Gentlemen's." We damn near lynched him on the signal post.

We came out of the station and began to walk down to the beach. After five minutes or so, through a gap in the houses, we had our first glimpse of the sea. Bob perked up immediately. "Doesn't the sea air make you feel hungry?" he announced casually. James, the only person we could trust to carry the fhood, quietly ignored him and couldn't even be tempted to offer a biscuit for the tapeworm.

Helen's Bay is a very quiet place and a great favourite with courting couples. Here was raw, searing passion and I was shocked. I tried looking the other way, but it was just as bad in all directions. I mentioned that I hadn't expected a race of saints and scholars to behave in such a fashion, but Walt was good enough to explain that these were not Irish people but just London excursionists. I suppose I should have guessed that.



We were in no hurry to eat — apart from Bob — and just ambled along the shore towards the village of Carnalea. (Yes, I know it's an apt name.) After a couple of miles the excursionists became scarcer, and we came upon a small deserted cove and, more important, an empty tin can on the sand. We propped the can on a rock and for half an hour, instead of acting like the intelligentsia of international

fandom, we behaved like people, and spent the time throwing pebbles at it. I began to doubt if we were really star-begotten after all.

After all this exercise, Bob was almost collapsing from hunger, so we began to look for a picnic spot. We were all pretty ravenous. Even James thought that "the mantle of Bob Shaw had fallen on our stomachs." We sat down and for the first and last time I can remember, the table talk — except that we didn't have a table — consisted of "Yes, please," or "Are there anymore eggs left, and if not, kindly pass the cake."

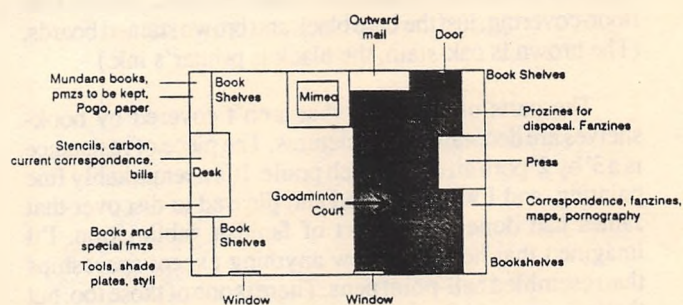
After we'd finished eating and had burnt the debris, it was time to start our way back home. Helen's Bay was miles behind us so we came up over the cliffs to another station. It was fortunate that the rest of them were familiar with the district because I would never have found the station by myself. Neither Station Avenue or Station Road had anything to do with the railway at all. The only route lay along a little cart-track called Station Approach. It was an insight on the Irish Way of Life that the others should seem startled at me finding something peculiar about the arrangement.

* * *

On the Tuesday I began to explore The Attic. This room is the nucleus of Oblique House, and is something like the dear old Epicentre — except that it's a lot tidier. That doesn't seem a very helpful explanation though — maybe a plan would be better. It looks something like this.....

Visitors Guide to the Shrine

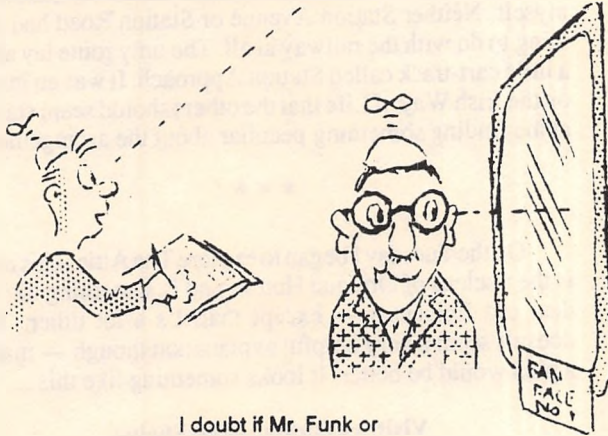
(Neofen remove shoes on entering, but this is the sole restriction)



((This is a rough copy of a plan that had been prepared and pinned to the wall for my special guidance. Intending pilgrims should cut it out and keep it in a place of safety; it represents my first and last intrusion into the Art Dept. — CH)) [Redrawn 4/1/89, solely for readability.]

But, a couple of lines with "Bookshelves" written between them doesn't seem to convey very much about what the shelves actually look like. Almost everywhere in the room where it's possible to get a shelf, he's fixed one in, and every single one of them is jammed tight. There must be at least a couple of hundredweight of fanzines alone as well as shelf after shelf of prozines (Walt is inclined to proziness), and bound books.

The main piece of furniture is the writing-desk. This started life as an old-fashioned, marble-topped washstand until Madeleine bought it at an auction for £2. In true stefnic fashion she placed the typer onto the marble and the thing was transformed into a writing-desk. And a very fine one too. It has more drawers, shelves and cupboards than would be found in a dozen prosaic desks, and a large mirror at the back with a flattering "Fan-Face No. 1." at its bottom edge. My face seemed to fit that mirror.



I doubt if Mr. Funk or Mr. Wagnall will agree.

The rest of the furniture — four chairs, a small table, and two waste-paper baskets — are scattered around the edges of the room so that the centre is clear. There is no floor-covering, just the bare black and brown stained boards. (The brown is oak-stain, the black is printer's ink.)

The parts of the walls that aren't covered by bookshelves are decorated with pictures. The piece of resistance is a 3' by 2' portrait of a French poule. It's a remarkably fine painting, and I was surprised and pleased to discover that James had done it as a sort of fannish sublimation. I'd imagined that he never drew anything except spaceships that resembled ball-point pens. There is one of these too, but that's just an ordinary thing of the type that any good prozine might feature on its cover. I didn't know before this that James had so much artistic talent. If he hadn't been having trouble with his eyes and had to give up painting, I would have been after him for some serious artwork for *Hyphen*. It's a pity about his yes, but he finds it easier and a lot more profitable to spend his time writing.

Just to the left of the door there's the fannish portrait gallery. Walt's a completist for photographs Hoffman,

Grennell, Mahaffey, Bloch, Tucker, 4e — they're all here. I think the only fanface I couldn't find was Burbee.

But this isn't just Walt's room though. I do not believe that Bob was kidding when he said that he hated the way Willis walks around as if he owns the place. I myself, even though I was only there for two weeks, had a sense of "ownership" about it (as if I'd planned it myself), right down to the little details like the Marilyn Monroe calendar between the windows, and the rocket with a long exhaust trail that Bob painted on the other mirror to disguise the crack.

Ghod, this is still Tuesday.

After lunch, we left Madeleine to do the dishes and went with James, George and Peggy to Shaw's Bridge. This was in no way a pilgrimage — it's just a local beauty spot and is not named after Bob. The Lagan, the river that Belfast is built around, is a smaller more rural stream up here, and the river banks are another favourite spot with the London excursionists. But all we came for was the scenery.

Fortunately we seemed to be the only people there during the afternoon. If it had been otherwise, I don't know how we would have explained away James. The rest of us leaned on the parapet of the bridge and watched solemnly whilst James cut out a twig and then stood in the middle of the arch with his dowsing rod and discovered the Lagan beneath his feet. We almost came home to write to Manly Banister about it.

Once we'd found the river, the obvious thing to do was sail paper boats on it. So we did so. I don't know if we designed them wrongly or whether we had unconsciously imitated a Bert Campbell invention, but our paper boats metamorphosed into gliders as we dropped them from the bridge and went sailing off on the breeze instead of on the water. We said to hell with it and began to walk along the riverbank.

When it comes to riverbanks, it must be admitted that the excursionists have pretty good taste. The Lagan is a very slow, lazy river with a border of trees leaning over to stroke the waters with their branches. It was very pleasant, and it suited our mood.

Unfortunately the idyll didn't last very long. Swarms of flies decided to, well, swarm, and we were forced back into fanning again. We used bunches of grass this time, but they weren't a lot of help.

The others had brought some food with them, so we climbed a small hillock and helped them to dispose of it. We built a small fire out of old convention programmes (honest!), but it seemed to attract the midges and repel us. Eventually we had to quit and fled down the towpath in retreat.

As we got nearer to Belfast, the river lost its rural look and the reedy fringes were replaced by concrete banks. Less aesthetic perhaps, but a lot easier to walk on.

For all I know it may be illegal to pun outside the city limits, or perhaps it was the ferry that started it. This was just a rowing boat behind a house. Walt made a gallant effort, but he didn't get any further than "Ferries at the..." before we chorused the rest of it for him. He looked subdued and beaten. Peggy was slightly ahead of us and singing softly to herself. As we passed some swans, George suggested that she needed a cygneture tune, somebody else suggested follow-the-Leda, and everything was back to normal again.

When we got home, Bob and Sadie had arrived, and we decided to go up to the attic for a ghoominton tournament. Ghoominton is the sole reason for the collapse of *Slant* and the irregular publishing schedule of *Hyphen*. It's played on every occasion when it's possible to muster a fivesome (four players and a non-combatant referee), and goes on for set after set until somebody is maimed or collapses from exhaustion. It's no new craze like "Scrabble" or "Canasta." It began years ago in Walt's office, and he introduced it to the others and formulated a set of rules. The others promptly changed the rules to fit the attic and put themselves on equal terms with Willis.

Basically, the game is a little like table tennis. But not much. A table tennis net is stretched chest-high between the printing press and a chair, and the small table is placed under the net to keep the players apart. A badminton shuttlecock in the last stages of moulting takes the place of a ball and the racquets are squares of heavy card board. A set consists of three games. I sincerely believe that it is beyond the limits of human endurance to play more than two sets running.

The rules of the game are as follows...

RULES OF GHOODMINTON

(As amended at a meeting of the Governing Body on 6th July 1954, George ATW Charters dissenting)

1. The score shall be kept as in table tennis.
2. The boundaries of the court shall be the edge of the mirror at the North End and Marilyn Monroe's navel at the South End.
3. Services must be hit upward. If in the opinion of a noncombatant the service was hit downwards, or if the opponents protest vehemently enough, the service shall be taken again. A point shall not be lost for a low service, except that the opponents may elect to play it.

4. It shall be illegal to serve the shuttle against the ceiling and the server shall lose the point.

5. The shuttle shall be out of play only if it has struck the floor or come to a state of rest elsewhere.

6. It shall be illegal to move completely into the opponent's court to obstruct his play.

7. It shall be illegal to throw heavy objects at the opponent or to knock the shuttle out of his hand before he has served.

8. A service which strikes the opponent on the face shall count as a point against the server.

9. (Amendment). It shall be illegal to hold the shuttle in one's hand during a rally or to cover it completely with the hand and the bat to prevent the opponent from disturbing it. This rule may be dispensed with in particular games in which George ATW Charters is participating with the consent of those members of the Governing Board present.

10. Apart from the above rules there shall be no restriction on the initiative of players. The shuttle may be hit any number of times in any position with any part of the body, and advantage may be taken of any natural hazards in the opponent's court, such as bookcases, (Note: a short which lodges inside a bookcase is however deemed to be out), pictures etc. Any means including physical violence may be used to prevent the opponent playing the shuttlecock, subject to the provisions of Rules 6 and 7.

((My thanks are due to the Governing Board for permission to publish these.))

It should be noted that this is not a jolly little family game. The rules are strictly adhered to, and the players have a fierce determination to wipe the floor, literally, with the other side. Every set is played with an air of grim seriousness punctuated by spasms of hysterical laughter. We usually played mixed doubles and there is no nonsense about gallantry towards the ladies. The first time I played, I thought it was just a game where you patted a shuttlecock from one side of the net to the other, and made sympathetic cooing noises to the girls when they missed it. They knocked that damn nonsense out of me whilst we were still playing for service.

If I could, I played with Madeleine as my partner. It was a lot safer having her on the same side of the net. You haven't really lived until you've seen this sheltered flower doing her damndest to knock her everloving husband's eye out with a shuttlecock or split James' skull with the edge of her racquet. You might say she plays an attacking game: not only does she have an almost unreturnable service, but also

has the enthusiasm to join me in a little victory dance whenever we win a point. Even George ATW Charters acknowledged our superiority at the game and our mastery at disputing his decisions as referee. And it must be remembered that Charters is no tyro at the game. It was George who threw himself into a rally with such abandon that his behind went clean through the window and he would have followed if it hadn't been for the prompt action of his partner. It was nearly George all the way to the crazy paving three stories below.

Personally I never played in such a boisterous manner. The best I could do was shove my hand through the yard-square glass top of the mimeoscope when James patted me on the side of my face with his racquet. It was an accident (I mention this because Willis has been telling his correspondents that his mimeoscope was destroyed by foreign hooligans), and it was a little disconcerting when nobody rushed up with iodine and bandages, but just stood there and argued as to whether I should lose a point or not for dropping my racquet (a "heavy Object" — see Rule 7) on the wrong side of the court.

* * *

We took it easy on Wednesday so that I could recover from Ghoddminton and the ill-effects of sitting up until 3 o'clock in the morning talking about sex, politics, religion, literature and faans.

After breakfast we went downtown to pick up the Varityper and some stencils and to try to book me a plane seat for my journey back home. I had a return boat-and-train ticket but I was spending no more nights on "The Duke of Rothesay" if I could help it. I'd been doubtful if I'd be able to get an air-passage at such short notice, but fortunately they'd increased the service and I was able to book for the Sunday evening plane.

The Varityper repair depot was just off Donegal Place, the Belfast Main Street. As we got off the bus and walked down the road, Walt suddenly darted ahead and I lost him the crowd. I looked around for him and found that he'd cornered a postman in a shop doorway and was demanding mail for 170 Upper etc. This, of course, was highly illegal and Walt was liable to be clapped in the pokey for the next half a dozen fandoms, but he seemed to imagine that it was quite normal to accost postmen in the middle of town and extract mail from them. We stood over the docile little postman whilst he thumbed through his bundle and handed over half a dozen letters and a small parcel. "Is that all?" said Willis. The postman hesitantly handed over another four letters addressed to me. "Thank you," said Walt, and we left the postman cowering in the doorway as we went on to the Varityper depot.

Typewriter mechanics are the same all the world over. The machine wasn't ready, so we had to come home with

just the stencils and the mail. Lunch was delayed until Madeleine had read all the letters, but it was worth the wait. We had Colcannon for the first time. I think that after I'd gone home, Madeleine must have been pleased to see the back of me so that she could alter her menu without me screaming for colcannon encores.



Although this is a remarkably simple dish to make, it seems to be almost unknown outside Ireland. Basically it consists of creamed potatoes that have had the chopped-up tops of spring onions mixed into them. It's served in a heap with about half a pound of butter slowly melting in a little hollow at the top. Glasses of buttermilk are served separately, and you can have meat with it if you insist on acting like a bloody bourgeois. Colcannon is wonderful. The only fault I could find with it is that there seems to be some prejudice against serving it for breakfast and tea. And, for some reason, Madeleine insisted on giving us steaks and things on other days when it would have been just as easy to serve colcannon. Women are peculiar creatures.

We spent most of the afternoon and evening discussing a one-shot that we had thought of doing for FAPA, and congratulating each other on how wonderful it was going to be. We drafted a couple of pages and then, about 10 p.m. we went up to the attic to begin cutting stencils. Madeleine was appointed Art Editor and began to get a Rotsler illo onto stencil, whilst Walt and I cut the rest and began to run them off. It took about four hours, but most of the time was spent cutting the stencils and drinking tea. The actual duplicating took about 30 minutes for the lot. This, I thought, was the most wonderful thing I saw in all Ireland. The stencils were just slapped on and smoothed out, ink was poured into the drum — he uses thinned down printer's ink — and the crank was turned as fast as it could be whizzed round. I didn't have my Gestetner at that time and I'd never known that duplicating could be so easy. I was quite sorry that we only ran off 100 copies. In no time at all, I had progressed from a mere novice to an accomplished crank-turner, and I was getting copies as legible as anyone else's.

We didn't stop to staple them up that night. I had difficulty in keeping my eyes open and the other two weren't in any better shape. We just left the sheets scattered around and went to bed.

* * *

On the Thursday we borrowed the Morris, filled the boot with food, put the kettle under the hood, and set off. Even apart from the scenery, driving in Ireland is an Experience. Outside the main routes the roads degenerate into cart-tracks flanked by high hedgerows, and they are only just wide enough for one-way traffic. We drove for hours down these little twisty lanes and, altho' it was picturesque, it was occasionally nerve-racking. There seemed to be a curve every twenty yards, and it was a more than even chance that sheep, cattle, pigs, chickens or goats were lurking around the next bend. We saw far more livestock than people on the roads, and my conversation consisted of exclamations at ruined castles (the joint is swarming with ruined castles), and "For Pete's sake stop! We're surrounded by pigs."

Walt turned out to be a reasonable driver, but I'd learnt before I came over that there is no driving test in Ireland, and that any moron can get permission to drive simply by going into the Motor Taxation Office and banging down the money for a licence. I doubted if this race of minstrel bhoys were all born drivers, and I was apprehensive about my neck. I do not hold a licence myself, but really I am an expert driver because I once read a book about it. I sat beside Walt in the front seat and helped him along with little hints like: "Take it easy," "Change down," "Slower," "Start the wipers," "Careful," "There's no hurry." This culminated in an episode on the main Bangor-Belfast road. This has a much better surface, but is just as full of bends as the others. I thought that he was pulling out to overtake on the bend, and I mentioned in a perfectly normal scream: "For chrissake, there's traffic on the other side." It turned out that this simple lovable character was just pulling out for a look, had not the slightest intention of overtaking on the curve, and was so startled that he nearly rammed the car ahead. He only looked at me, but that was enough. After that I stayed quiet, and prayed almost inaudibly instead of helping him to drive.

Our first stop was at Downpatrick. We pulled up at the church and went into the cemetery to see St. Patrick's grave. It's not very much to see, just a huge, flat, untrimmed boulder with "Patric" chiselled into the granite, but people come here on pilgrimage from all over the world. And not just Catholics either — St. Patrick is claimed by the Protestants as the founder of their "Church of Ireland" (on the grounds that he never submitted to Rome or something), and they revere the spot too. And, agnostics like myself turn up to take a look and wonder...

The thing I liked best about Downpatrick was the uncommercial attitude to the sacred relics behind the church.

There were no vendors of religious trinkets, no clergymen waiting to save us, no collection boxes for freewill offerings. It was just a quiet country churchyard with the most simple, most effective gravestone I've yet seen. There were no Floral Tributes on it, just the stone lying in the untrimmed grass, with a small yew tree shading it, and surrounding it the graves of unknown labourers who once lived in the parish. I am not usually a graveyard addict — I can never forget what lies underneath the grass — but I liked this one. It compares favourably with the English versions too; the last time I went to Stoke Poges there was an itinerant photographer wanting to take a picture of me beneath those rugged elms and another guy outside trying to sell me a copy of the elegy. (I told him I already had one.)

We left Downpatrick and carried on southwards. We stopped at the top of the first hill, and there, a steel-blue shadow filling the horizon, were the Mourne Mountains. Anything I said about these would be a cliché, but once you've seen them you know immediately why the Irish sing so many songs about them. It isn't a very high range — Walt and Madeleine climbed most of the peaks when they were courting (a damn queer technique) — but they are very impressive and very beautiful.

They were still a good twenty miles ahead of us though, so we decided to have something to eat before going any further. We found a small copse by the roadside, and Walt and Madeleine unloaded the car whilst Carol and I collected wood for a fire. We spread the car rugs over a fallen tree-trunk, brewed tea, and had a picnic. It's a lot more fun to eat in this fashion than it is sitting behind a table — and there are no dishes to wash afterwards.

I'd borrowed my sister's camera for the holiday and took a couple of pictures of them sitting in the glade with the sunlight dappling (I'm sorry, but it was dappling) through the branches. I didn't — and still don't — know the slightest thing about photography, but any moron could see that this was an ideal set-up for camerawork. The results, I thought, would make Grennell green with envy. I changed places with Madeleine so that she could use up the rest of the film. But Dean wasn't green after all, — it wasn't until several days later that James discovered that the damn camera hadn't been working.

After we'd finished and had stamped the fire out, we set off again. As we went along, Walt was trying to explain the derivations of the village place-names through which we passed. Downpatrick was easy enough, Bloody Bridge was named after an ambush during the troubles, but others, Kilkeel or Annalong for instance, needed a knowledge of Gaelic. Walt doesn't have this — all he really knows of the language is how to count from one to ten, or wish people a hundred thousand greetings ("Cead mille fealte!") — but he managed quite well with the help of a little book that explained prefixes and suffixes. Carol was being very quiet in the backseat (because the dolls were sleeping), but as we

passed through Hilltown she joined in the conversation and carefully explained the derivation of the name for my benefit.

Out here we were in the foothills of the mountains. The cottages began to disappear, and the cultivated farmlands gave way to moor, bog, and mountain. The peaks towered above us, and apart from a few sheep cropping the lower slopes, there was nothing to take the edge of desolation off the scenery. We stopped the car so that I could fool some more with the camera. We had climbed quite high and behind us the whole of County Down was spread out like an aerial map with nothing moving except the rapids in the valley below the road.

As we stood there, Walt asked me what I thought of Ireland. I thought about it for a few seconds, but there didn't seem to be any adequate reply, and I disgraced myself for ever by saying: "It's it's green." But it is, and although it may not have been a very profound answer, at least it was true.

It was getting late now and we had to think about getting home to Belfast. The only other road through the middle of the mountains belongs to the Belfast Water Commissioners. We had intended to travel on this so that I could see Silent Valley and some more of the peaks. Unfortunately there was an enormous pair of iron gates barring the road. We stopped the car (there wasn't anything else that we could do) and Walt got out to see if they were locked. They were. There was a house just off the road on the other side so he rattled the gates trying to attract attention, but nobody seemed to be home. We were determined to get permission to use the road if we possibly could. He managed to pull up the iron bolt from its socket in the ground, and when he pushed at the gate afterwards the lock slipped free and it swung open. Walt was very pleased about this but it didn't help him any; he went over to the house, but couldn't find anyone to speak to. He came back, carefully pulled the gates together again and reversed onto the coast road. Personally I would have used the waterboard's road without bothering for permission, but apparently there was another gate at the far end and some comic official with a warped sense of humour might have gotten a kick out of sending us all the way back again if we'd tried it.



And our next Project will be an anthology of Wansborough poems.

However, if we hadn't come back by the coast road I would never have spotted the Mountains of Mourne sweeping down to the sea, and Walt would never have been able to suggest that I write to the National Geographical Society about it.

Even after an enormous dose of undiluted scenery like the Mourne Mountains, I was still far from satisfied. We were up quite early again the next morning, and as soon as we'd finished breakfast and the mail, we were off in the car again. This time we went northwards. I had decided that we would probably survive if Walt drove the car all by himself, so I appointed myself Navigator. This was a sinecure on the outward trip — the road skirted the sea for 50 or 60 miles before we had to turn off — and I was map-reading like an expert. I admit there may have been a few miscalculations but I can hardly be blamed for cartographer's errors or the whimsical peasantry who switch town names just to bitch things up for the tourist trade.

Sure enough, Carrickfergus was right where it was supposed to be, but we didn't stop to inspect the Norman castle (it had been used as an air-raid shelter during the war), but hastened on to Eden. There were barely a half-dozen houses here, but luckily one of them was a post office so we were able to send postcards about serpents and fig-leaves. Soon after we left Eden it began — appropriately — to rain. Carol and I were pretty sore about this because the car-windows had to be closed, and we were reduced to blowing at the sails of the toy windmill Madeleine had bought for us, instead of sticking it out of the window to make it spin. By the time we stopped for some food, I had a stitch in my side as if I'd run a ten-mile marathon.

This, incidentally, was the Donegal Road, that Bea Mahaffey travelled along. Bea seems to have gone down into Irish history along with Brian Boru and Mother Machree. Even the Ballgawley Castle Hotel's sole claim to fame is that Bea stopped there to ring up BoSh. I was half-expecting to see little roadside shrines erected over empty Chesterfield packets that once littered the gutter.

The next halt was at a little black fullstop called the Blowhole. The road here had been cut through the cliff and there was a steep embankment on either side. We stopped the car and climbed up. From the road it was just a 20' ridge, but on the other side it was a sheer drop of about 300' to the sea and the boulder-strewn base.

I know this is despicable and probably unfannish of me, but I am scared rigid of heights; sweat breaks out on my forehead, I get butterflies in my stomach and an undeniable urge to make tracks for the nearest Gentlemen's Toilet. I stood there for thirty eternal crawling seconds and I hated Ireland. Neither Walt nor Madeleine knew about this thing of mine for heights, and they were busy pointing out the coast of Scotland across the channel. I sat down very very carefully, dug my heels into the scree and fought down the impulse to be sick. I grabbed two handfuls of grassroots and



concentrated on appreciating the coast of Scotland. "That's the Mull of Kintyre," he said. "Yeah," I said, "Very nice too." He stood there drinking in the view and sniffing at the fresh air. Madeleine was right on the very edge of the cliff — cliff, hell, precipice — and wanted me to join her and see the waves creaming over the rocks below. "No, I said, "I can see much better from up here." I shut my eyes tightly and tried not to think about the waves creaming over the rocks below. When I opened them again, Carol was doing a creditable imitation of a mountain goat. She'd found a dog-rose growing in a sheltered nook on the cliff face, and wanted me to pull down the canes so that she could pick the flowers. This was a hell of a time for botany. "Come here, honey," I said, "I'll tell you a story. Once upon a time there were three bears, Momma Bear, Poppa Bear..."

Walt said: "I suppose we'd better get..." and in two seconds flat I was down the hummock and onto the road. I jumped the last eight feet.

We drove on a little further and then decided to turn off the coast road and cut through the Antrim Highlands to return home to Belfast. The rain stopped and the sun broke through again. We were pleased about this because with four of us in the car, the windscreen steamed up if we couldn't have a window open, and as this was another of those rutted curving lanes, driving was rather an exacting business. 20 mph was good going under such conditions, and especially so when I wanted to stop the car and admire the view at two mile intervals.

But when we got to the main road at the top of the lane, Walt stopped the car without any promptings from me. Below us, rimmed by the road, was a huge saucer-shaped depression that was just as spectacular in its way as the

mountains we'd seen yesterday. This was one enormous peat-bog and we could see across the basin for fifteen or twenty miles. It was a curious feeling — both beautiful and yet horrible. Within this basin nothing moved. There, for fifteen miles and more, there was no tree, no bush, no houses, people or animals, nothing to break the rolling sea of swamp grass except an occasional outcrop of granite and the geometrical brown patches where the cutters had been at work. I said it was beautiful, but you could never say that it was pretty.

Peat bogs, of course, are common in Ireland, but this one was much larger than usual. They are not the bottomless swamps that are known to every reader of *Weird Tales*, and although the mud would come up over your feet quickly enough it's improbable that you could ever be sucked right under. The surface is covered with a brilliant green reedgrass with the peat itself in layers below. Some layers are quite thick — 25' or more. I suppose the thickness depends on the amount of moss and stuff that is available to rot down and form the spongy peat.

The cutters dig it out in pieces about the size and shape of a house-brick, and then pile it up by the roadside to drain and dry out. The cutting is mainly done in the summer, because peat takes six weeks to dry and cannot be used while it is wet.

I'd never seen the stuff before so I asked Walt if we might take a couple of pieces home to burn. He pulled up at a dry stack and I jumped out and threw four pieces into the boot. I went to get back inside, but before I could do so, Walt gave me a few coppers to leave on the pile to pay for what we had taken. I rather liked that — it hadn't struck me that some poor devil had spaded those lumps out of the bog, or

that I was robbing him of a fire next winter — but it was typical of Walt to remember. I upped the ante and put the money at the bottom of the stack so that the cutter would find it when he carted the rest away.

Then we went home, creamed the potatoes, chopped the spring onion tops and had colcannon for supper.

* * *

Up to this point my notes are pretty clear, but I've been dreading having to write up this weekend. All the Wheels of IF are in occupation most of the time, and Oblique House takes on every aspect of a three-ring circus. This is much worse than conventions; to give a fair idea of what happened I'd need to write a separate report for every room in the house.

It started even before I got up. I tottered along to the bathroom to get washed and shaved, but James, Peggy and Carol were already in occupation and are sailing boats in the bath. James has brought the plastic motorboat that he bought in Manchester, and Peggy, with the help of a toothglass, is christening it "H.M.S. Egoboo." I gave up all ideas about shaving and appointed myself as Chief Tidal Wave Producer with Carol as First Assistant — at least I was getting a wash. Just after we'd discovered how to make whirlpools with the facecloth, Walt arrived. He approved of H.M.S. Egoboo but only stopped long enough to tell us that it had a "full compliment of crew" before he went downstairs. Madeleine was the next to wade in. She didn't seem to notice that the floor was rather more than moist, but wanted to tell me that my breakfast was ready. I appointed her deputy tidal wave producer, went back to my room for some dry clothes, and then went down for breakfast.

The others also came down and were all in the kitchen along with Bob, George, and the rest. James was guzzling away at his sixth cup of tea — Madeleine brews the stuff by the gallon when she's expecting him — and took his nose out of the cup to tell me: "This is a delightfully infernal breakfast today."

The rest had been waiting for something like that ...

"Don't Faust that stuff off on us."

"Sorry but I've Goethe."

"I thought that was an infection of the thyroid gland?" ((goitre maybe? — they never stop to explain))

"No, bishops wear them on their feet."

"No, that's what Churchill was invested with the order of."

"No, it's a disease you pick up in narrow streets — old crocs succumb to it."



I quit then and fled into the front room, but they came in there too for a meeting of the Ghoodminton Governing Board. In the last tournament, Bob had won a crucial point by serving six shuttlecocks simultaneously. There was nothing in the rules against this so he appealed to their sense of sportsmanship. This shook them. As James said: "In ghoodminton, sportsmanship is a dirty word," so they added Rule 11: "Only one shuttlecock shall be in play at once."

The meeting degenerated after this. George had been demonstrating to Carol how to skate little pieces of card-board across the room by flipping their edges with a fingernail. In nothing flat, everyone else had torn cards and joined in and the room was full of spinning pieces of pasteboard. By the time they'd finished it looked like Broadway after a tickertape parade.

But my stencil supply is getting low and I'd need another couple of quires to write up this weekend properly.....

* * *

Tuesday was the day I'd been looking forward to like a kid anticipates its birthday. We started off in the car early in the morning and went down into Eire. I was disappointed with the actual crossing of the border. These Irish can never have seen a spy movie in all their lives. Instead of armed guards with bayonets ripping through the car's upholstery and searching us all to the skin, nobody seemed to take the least notice of us at all. Walt pulled up at a little wooden cabin and got out to show the car's papers and then went through the same routine again after we'd crossed no-man's land to the Eire Customs Post.

But as soon as we were in Eire itself, things brightened up a bit. It looked foreign. The sign-posts and all the public notices were in large unreadable Gaelic script with tiny English translations below. Eire, of course, has broken from Britain and the British Empire, and England is still a sore subject with them. Gaelic is the official language and is taught in the schools, but as far as I could gather not many of the people use it or read it, and it seemed foolish and irritating to have these large beautiful roadsigns that nobody could understand.

I don't know if the news had been flashed across the border that I was expected, but as soon as we were across we found a good dozen of the legendary jaunting cars standing at the side of the road. I'd imagined that these were just an obscure Irish joke, the sort of thing they keep for Hollywood movie-makers, and I hadn't expected to find a whole cab-rank full of them. I would have dearly loved to have gotten out of the car for a ride in one, but they seemed pretty frail things and I doubted if they would take my weight. And besides, I was trying not to act like a tourist.

Carlingford was our first stop in Eire. It's just a small village and, apart from the tourist trade, its only industry is smuggling. There is no purchase tax south of the border, cigarettes are half the price that we usually pay, and a lot of British "export-only" goods are freely available. Only a few of the routes across the border have Customs Posts on them, and the roving mobile patrols that serve the other roads are not hard to evade. Smuggling is a well-paying and easy game. Penalties are high, but the profits are big and worth the risk. I think it must be a one-way traffic though; I can't think of anything to smuggle into Eire except, perhaps, contraceptives. These are illegal in Eire.

We parked the car in the High Street and went shopping. We were going to have a picnic lunch so Madeleine and Carol went off after food whilst Walt and I made tracks for the tobacconists. I didn't like to go inside myself in case the "1/9 for 20" sign in the window was just a gag. It seemed ever so criminal and something for nothing. So, I kept watch outside whilst Walt went in. When he came out he presented me with a packet called "Sweet Afton." These are the only cigarettes I've ever come across that have a stanza from Robert Burns on every packet.

After Walt had attended to my tobacco supply, I decided to do some shopping for myself. I went to the post-office — it seemed strange to see green mail-boxes instead of red — and bought a couple of dozen stamps, and then went down the road for some pocsards. It was only after I'd bought the damn things that I discovered that all my addresses were in the diary I'd left behind in Belfast. The stamps were useless unless used in Eire (it never struck us that we might have sold them to Laney), so we finished up by sending airmail pocsards to those few addresses we could remember. Tucker and Ackerman must have been overjoyed to hear that it was a fine day. Although Carlingford was just a little dump, the shops seemed to stock just about everything. The place where we bought the cards was quite tiny, but as well as stationery it sold sweets, tobacco, general groceries, nylons, imitation jewelry and religious statuary. All of these were either heavily taxed or in short supply in Northern Ireland. We didn't buy any of it though, except a sort of hard candystick called Peggy's Leg. It was very old, Madeleine said. It looked positively neolithic, but Carol seemed to enjoy it.

Further on we stopped at a farm for some eggs and then came down to Greenore on the shore of Carlingford

Lough. This was a pretty spot. Behind us was an abandoned hotel backed by Slieve Foy, the waters of the lough lapped almost at our feet, and on the opposite shore was the magnificent sweep of the Mourne Mountains tumbling down to the beach.

Whilst Walt and Madeleine unpacked, Carol and I collected dry driftwood for the fire. Walt rather fancied himself at fire lighting ("Look! One match!"), so we left him to it and Carol and I went off to collect sea-shells. We filled our paper bag and then went back to find lunch ready. It was a big lunch — eggs, bacon, sausages, tomatoes, potato bread, homemade bread, (but no colcannon) — and we were all pretty hungry. We opened a tin of peaches for dessert and ate them from the tea-cups. By the time we'd finished these, the kettle was boiling. We brewed the tea in it, and lay in the sun to drink it, watching a porpoise jumping out of the waters of the lough as it made its way to the open sea.

Walt began to tell me about the abandoned hotel behind us. At one time a ferry from England to Eire terminated just here, and the hotel was built to accommodate travellers overnight. Behind it was a small railway station. Trade hadn't been too good, and the ferry and the railway had closed down. The hotel was almost inaccessible by road and had rapidly gone bankrupt.

We went up to have a look at it. It was a ramshackle dump of no use to anybody at all except — and this occurred to us simultaneously — fandom. This was literally the Tuckerhotel — the perfect, permanent convention spot. It had everything: cheap booze and tobacco, hundreds of rooms waiting to be smoke-filled, no local inhabitants to be outraged, and even the lough for throwing pro-editors into. We walked around noting all these points, and then found some heavy metal gratings flush with the walls and overgrown with weeds. That settled it. Obviously these were intended as dungeons for Seventh Fandom. We rushed back to tell Madeleine that we were going into the hotel business and wrote a card to Tucker to offer him a third share in the business if he cared to supply the capital.



".....literally, the Tuckerhotel...."

We'd brought our swimming kit with us, but there was only a shingle beach at Carlingford lough and we wanted to find some sand for Carol to play on. The map showed a big, shallow bay to the south of us and we decided to move along to it. There was a choice of several cart-tracks and we

decided on one that went through a hamlet called Whitestown so that we could stop there and post a card to James. We came to regret this though. The road was the worst we'd encountered so far, and when we reached Whitestown it was just half a dozen houses and there was no postbox.

However, the bay was sandy, and, although it was getting late, Madeleine, Carol, and I decided to go swimming. Walt thought it looked cold and wouldn't come in. We sneered at him and left him by the car; I even thought of kicking sand in his face, but he weighs twice as much as the traditional 90 lbs, and probably wouldn't have appreciated the esoteric fannish symbolism anyway. I ran down the beach — at least I could impress Madeleine and Carol — through the shallows, and flopped down like a pregnant hippo ...

It was freezing cold. Never before in all my life have I found the sea so cold, and I didn't stop to acclimatize myself. I was out in nothing flat and passed Madeleine and Carol as I pounded up the beach to the car. He didn't say, "I told you so," — he didn't need to.

It was getting pretty late by this time and we still had a long way to go if we were to reach Dundalk and the Customs Post before the border was closed for the night at 9 p.m. We left the bay and were lucky enough to find a surfaced road going in the right direction. This was fine, but another trouble had shown up. We were nearly out of gas. Usually we filled up as soon as the dial got low, but in the morning we'd bought just one single gallon north of the border with the idea of getting the rest at a lower price in Eire. We had forgotten to do so, and had already covered more than 20 miles on our gallon. We nursed the car along, and coasted downhill whenever we could manage it. We were all convinced that not only would we have to get out and push, but that we'd have to stay in Eire for the night too, when we reached a roadside pump. According to the pump's indicator we'd been driving without fuel for the last half-hour, but with Ghod behind the wheel anything is possible.

We stopped once more to load up with cheap cigarettes and to fill the kettle from a roadside pump, and then shot through Dundalk and fled for the border.

The procedure is a little different coming back. The British Customs must know damn well that 90% of the cars crossing into Ulster have some sort of contraband aboard, but they can't stop and search every one. They rely mainly on intimidation. If you're caught it means confiscation of the goods, a heavy fine, imprisonment or even confiscation of the car. But, we were all heavy smokers as well as Free-Traders, and were loaded down with cigarettes.

The guard came out of the hut and began his patter. I tried hard to look as if I'd never heard of tobacco, spirits, perfumes, purchase-tax items or nylons. He glared at me so I told him that I'm very deaf and he said it all over again. "No," I said in my honesty-is-the-best-policy tone; "Haven't

got any of those at all." I clench my fist so that he won't see that my forefingers are stained brown with nicotine. He turned to Madeleine in the back seat and said it once more. Madeleine has a couple of hundred cigarettes dropped inside her blouse and is just about the worst liar in the world. She blushes a deep scarlet and admits to thirty cigarettes in her handbag. "That's permissible," he said. Walt was standing outside the car so we had the routine for a third time. Walt hadn't any cigarettes on him at all — he had to get out of the car with the papers and there was too much chance of him being frisked — but he still managed to look far guiltier than anyone else. But the guard decides that we are part of the honest 10% and tells us to carry on.

We tried hard not to look relieved and were away down the road before he could change his mind. As desperadoes we hadn't put up much of a performance, but it was kind of exciting. We stopped once more to make some fresh tea and to congratulate and exchange compliments about our imperturbable sang-froid and then drove through the dusk to Belfast.

* * *

We slept late the next morning. Madeleine, Walt and I invariably sat around talking until two or three o'clock in the morning and nobody ever seemed to be in a hurry to get up the next day. When I did get downstairs for breakfast, Walt had already arrived and was sitting moodily at the table. He wasn't actually crying into his orange juice, but he had the kind of expression you'd expect to see after somebody had told him that *Galaxy* had folded and that Burbee had also bought a stamp album. I gave him my usual pleasant greeting: "Mail?" and he nodded towards five unopened envelopes on the corner of the table, and pretended to be busy reading the paper. It looked like a pretty black day. All the mail had been for me, and not a solitary pocsard, not even a review copy of *Authentic*, had arrived for him. I was kind about it — I let him read my mail and even offered to send him a pocsard when I went down the road for some cigarettes — but he still glowered. Me, I thoroughly enjoyed that breakfast.

Unfortunately, the idyll didn't last longer than my fourth cup of tea. Walt's sister — a tall, good-looking blonde called Dorothy — arrived then to tell Walt that there had been a phone-call for him at his parents' house around the corner. I wasn't paying much attention, I was busy teaching Carol to count: "One letter, two letters, three letters, four letters, five letters..." but then Dorothy said: "From a Mr Ellison, a Mr Ellison of Ohio." It was still early and I didn't have my guard up. "Ohio?" I squawked, "Harlan Ellison? Walt, you never told me you get transatlantic phone calls." I knew immediately I'd said it that I'd boomed on fansmanship again, and that I should have said "Yes, I was wondering when he'd call," but it was too late. Walt grinned until you could see his wisdom teeth on both sides. "They only phone me for important things," he said.

I picked up my five letters and crept away to the attic.

It wasn't until Bob, James, and the others arrived after tea that I discovered the phone call was just another benevolent gesture from Roscoe. There had never been a previous one, and it was just bad luck that it happened just at the crucial moment when Walt most needed a one-upmanship ploy.

We had decided to stay home that day and mail the FAPA oneshot and deal with some of the letters, and we made like a couple of Trufans until the Ghoddminton Experts arrived. I was crippled in the very first set when Peggy tried to split me down the middle with the edge of her racquet, so I crawled away from the carnage and went downstairs to read Carol another installment of SNOW WHITE.

This was a regular procedure. Carol is too young to be able to read much for herself yet, and gets a 20 minute session of bedtime stories each night — and it's hard to say which of us enjoyed it most. This is quite a confession: Chuck Harris, The Terror of Seventh Fandom, the Scourge of the Elsie Horde (it says here), was not only reading "Snow White" but was just as excited as the audience when the girl bites the old apple and swoons. I had to sneak a glance at the last paragraph just to make certain that this was the old upbeat version that I used to read myself.



After Carol had been reassured that really and truly they lived happily ever after I went downstairs for supper. I collected as much food as I could get on to a large plate and then sat in a corner with Peggy to talk about the best-sellers we are going to write just as soon as we get the time. It was an interesting discussion, especially after she remarked that I looked much better with my glasses off. James didn't like it one little bit and when he glared at us and repeated for the sixth time that he thought I looked better with his glasses off too, we decided to move a few centimetres apart. "I suppose

we must look like a two-headed monster," she said embarrassedly.

"I wouldn't say that," said Bob, "more like two one-headed monsters."

"And looking forward to the slither of tiny tentacles?" Peggy added sweetly, "if you must know, we were talking about writing."

Walt nodded. That was a reasonable explanation. "They're contemplating their novels again," he explained to George.

I explained that we were only talking about writing for money and that I had enough to do fulfilling my OMPA and FAPA schedules to keep me busy until we made the trip to South Gate.

"Why not," said George, "why not write up something about your holiday here for that. It might even turn out to be readable."

"A fine idea," said Walt. "It would make your name resound down the fannish corridors of time."

"A hollow empty sound," added James.

And that, buster, is How It All Began.

The peat that we'd brought back from the Antrim Highlands was still lying in the fireplace. We decided to burn it so that I could write about the sweet, musty smell. At first though there didn't seem to be any smell — the stuff never flamed, but burnt with a glow rather like charcoal. It made a pleasant fire, but there was no sweet musty smell, and I said so. Madeleine, realising that the honour of Erin was at stake, helped change my mind. She picked up a damn great redhot chunk with the tongs and started to wave it around under my nose. I tried to tell her that I'd got the full benefit, but she wasn't happy until the room was filled with sweet musty smoke, and you couldn't see from one side to the other.

Curiously enough, there was no ash or smuts floating around the room as there would have been from ordinary coalsmoke. Nothing except the sweet musty smell.

* * *

Saturday morning I went shopping for presents to take back home with me, and I took Walt along as a guide. We inspected almost every shop in Belfast and didn't buy a thing, not even a packet of shamrock seed. Eventually we finished up in the junkshops and second-hand bookstalls of Smithfield. We discovered a very fine pair of mounted horns that would have looked well in the attic with a little sign about the genuine, original dilemma, and a brass bed with knobs on that almost certainly had belonged to Queen

Victoria. I rather fancied the idea of presenting somebody with a brass bed with knobs on, but I was returning by air and needed something a little less bulky. James had warned me about this: "You're allowed to take 60 lbs of baggage, more if you're married to it," so I had to leave the bed where it was.

After lunch we borrowed the car for the last time. I'd already found Shaw's Bridge and Whitestown so Ballywalter hardly came as a surprise. The next stop after that was Ballyferries — also named after a big wheel.

Scrabo is a hill that just misses being a mountain. I guess it must be about 500 feet high — and we climbed it. Or at least, we climbed the last 60 ft; we found another of those cart tracks and got the Morris almost to the summit. There was a fine view from the top with the village of Newtownards like a toytown directly below us, but we didn't stay very long because I wanted to see Tyrella.

We came down from Scrabo and set off southwards again. Enormous tracts of the country here were walled or wired off. These were the estates of Lord Londonderry, the Marquis of Dufferin and Ava, and other aristos, and the walls went on for mile after mile until you began to wonder if there was anything they didn't own this side of the Dublin suburbs. But, this poor peasant got a lot of satisfaction out of being able to rob Londonderry of sufficient brushwood to boil a tea-kettle.

The tea-kettle, incidentally, was part of the reason I was looking forward to Tyrella. As this was my last day, I was to be allowed to light the fire, boil the kettle and make the tea.

Tyrella is one of those places that would make an ideal holiday resort if only it was more accessible. We took the car right down onto the beach and then drove along the hard-packed golden sand until we saw a sheltered spot in the dunes behind. We stopped, unloaded the rugs, fuel, and food, walked over to the dunes, and just left the car standing in the middle of the beach. We could see for several miles each way along the sands and there was nobody in sight; the tide was on the ebb, and nobody was likely to pinch the thing.

Back in the dunes I was presented with one match and the fuel. I built the fire and with the one match and some



surreptitious help from my Ronson I got the thing alight, and found a couple of stones to balance the kettle on. We sat back and waited for the kettle to boil. We waited. And waited. I rearranged the stones so that there would be a forced draught. We waited. I found a piece of board and sat down to fan an even better draught. And we waited. Madeleine, overcome by pity or thirst, came to help me. We broke the twigs into match-sized pieces, and placed each one carefully so that its heat would play directly on the kettle. We decided there was far too much water in the kettle, and threw half of it away. And we waited.

About two hours after we'd decided to have tea, the kettle finally boiled. We made the tea whilst Walt instructed us in woodsy lore, and gave us a detailed account of cooking-fires he had created in the past. If even half of what he says is true, it's a miracle that there is a single scrap of fuel left in Ireland at all.

We hadn't counted on such a leisurely meal and by the time we'd finished it was fast growing dark and was time to go home. We paused on the road for one last look at the Mourne Mountains behind us, and turned north for Belfast for the last time.

* * *

Sunday was horrible. I was flying home in the evening and suddenly there were a thousand things we hadn't talked about, a thousand places we hadn't visited and a thousand things we hadn't done.

The inevitable goodbyes began early in the morning when Carol left to spend the day with her grandparents. I'd already promised to come back next year and we arranged to climb mountains in Donegal.

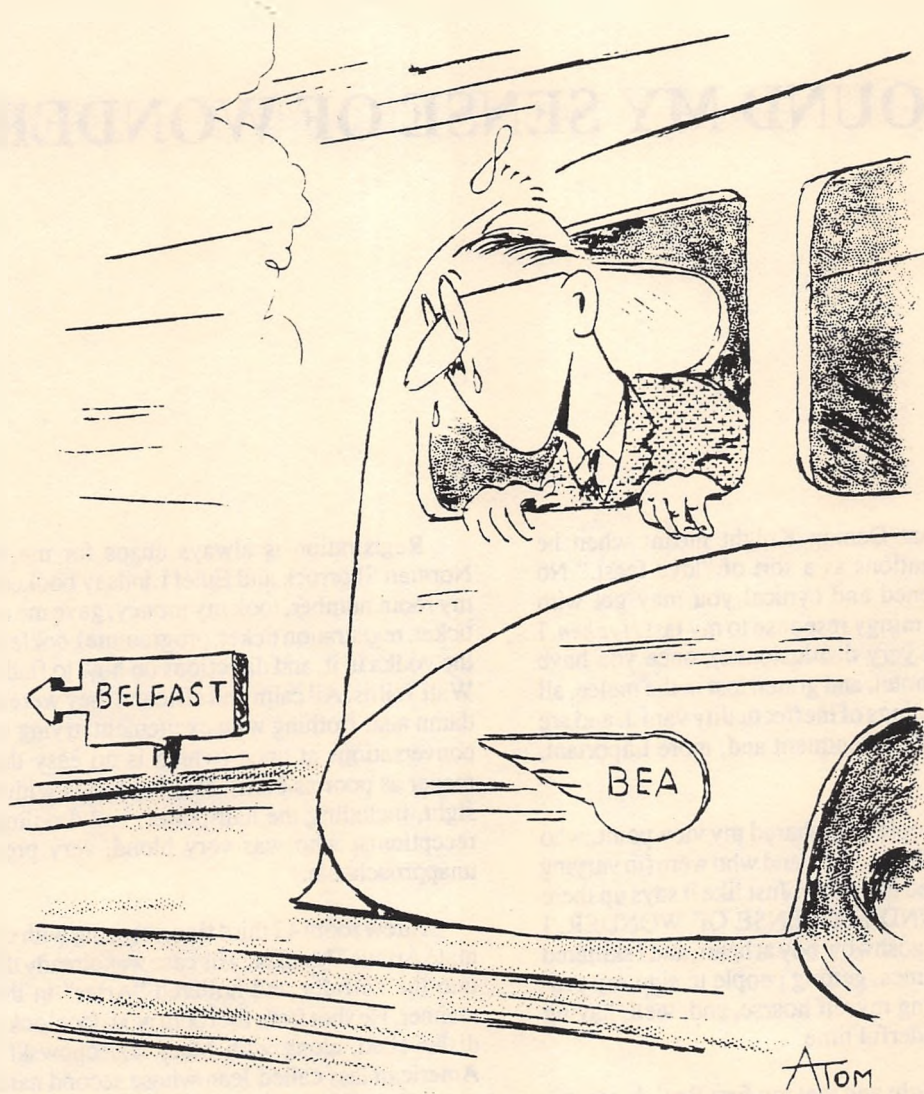
"Next year" set the mood for the whole day. When the others arrived we sat around and made plans for The Annual Excursion in '55, and I tried to tell them what a wonderful holiday I'd had, and failed dismally. I found time and space for just one more piece of gingerbread and then it was time to go down to the B.E.A. terminal and catch the coach for the airport.

They all came down with me. Walt got my baggage weighed, and Madeleine slipped me a phial of airsickness tablets. The other passengers were already aboard the coach and I was the last one. I walked to the door, and Madeleine said: "Are you coming back next year?"

"Yes," I told her, "Yes, I'm coming back next year," and I climbed into the coach.

* * *

But I couldn't wait that long and I went back at Christmas.



I FOUND MY SENSE OF WONDER

I know now what Damon Knight meant when he referred to our conventions as a sort of "love-feast." No matter how disillusioned and cynical you may get with fandom (and after the mingy response to my last *Hyphen*, I was very cynical and very disillusioned), once you have checked into the Con hotel, and gotten lost in the melee, all the resentment and feelings of ineffectuality vanish and are replaced by a sense of contentment and, more important, kinship.

Here were 268 people who shared my viewpoint, who accepted me as one of themselves, and who were (in varying degrees maybe) pleased to see me. Just like it says up there in Big Letters, I FOUND MY SENSE OF WONDER. I discovered I was just a goshwow boy at heart, and I skittered about meeting Big Names, getting people to sign my programme booklet, talking myself hoarse, and, well, having myself a hell of a wonderful time.

I arrived Friday night and met my first Real American at the reception desk: big, calm, competent Belle Dietz, who had been working there for hours and who must have been deadly tired, but who never failed to smile and look genuinely pleased as she greeted each new arrival. Belle, I thought seemed to be the American equivalent of our Bobbie Wild — one of those girls who slog their guts out to make the cons a success, and whose efforts are seldom noticed by the mass of us, and almost never appreciated.

Registration is always chaos for me, but this time Norman Shorrock and Ethel Lindsay booked me in, found my room number, took my money, gave me maps, banquet ticket, registration ticket, programme booklet, my case with the vodka in it, and directions on how to find my room and Walt Willis. All calm and efficient they were too. Me, I was damn near frothing with excitement, trying to carry on six conversations at once (which is no easy thing for a lip-reader as poor as I am), shaking hands with everybody in sight, including the hall-porter, and drooling at the hotel receptionist who was very blond, very pretty, and very unapproachable.

I drew room 42 third floor, sharing with my usual room mate Arthur Thomson. His case was already there. I stepped into the corridor and hollered "Arfer" in the Moscovitz manner. He shot from the room next door looking excitingly dishevelled, along with Mary Dziechowski, and another American lass called Jean whose second name I never did catch. Bringing up the rear was Steve Schultheis and Our Boy Mal Ashworth, who used to be one of my very special friends until he double-crossed me and married my dream-boat, Sheila.

I said hallo to Mary, (umm), to Jean, to Steve, and to Arthur, and then turned to Mal.

"Well, where is she?" I asked.

He knew what I meant and why I asked. I've been due to kiss the bride since way back when, and I don't like leaving these little jobs unfinished. Women are not like vintage port — they don't improve with keeping — and Ashworth was quite capable of keeping her away from me until she was drawing her old age pension.

However, he mumbled something about her arriving the next day so I unpacked the bottle, and after a drink, we went off in search of Walt and Madeleine.

Walter Himself was talking to The Press, (Reuter's, no less!), and I wasn't able to get to him. So, I met Forrest J Ackerman Himself instead. I didn't do anything, it just happened to me. I was just standing there being quiet, on the landing, when this burly great chap came up, smiling from ear to ear, pumped my hand between both of his and said, "I'm very pleased to meet you, Chuck. I'm Forry Ackerman." Well, I gulped and I guess I said something in reply, but I'm damned if I'll ever know what it was now. Gosh-wow or not, brother, this was my Big Moment and if I had a tail it would be wagging yet. This was the man who was directly responsible for me being in fandom. The first fanzines I ever saw were *Vom* and *Shangri L' Affairs* which Ackerman had sent to Fred Brown. (Fred, one of Britain's biggest collectors, has always given me the run of his enormous library and encouraged me to take an active part in fandom. He used to save the fmzs for me, and patiently explain all the esoteric bits about poos and yobbers and the rooster who wore red pants.) Dammit, here was the automatic choice of World's Number One Fan for all time, and he was pleased to meet me.

Is this naive? Is it gushing ingenuousness to say that I found him one helluva guy — lovable, unassuming, humble and so wonderfully approachable? He has no trace of that stand-offishness that afflicts many of the Big Names in the field, and he was just as pleasant and as courteous when he talked to Peter Reaney as he was when he talked to Arthur C Clarke.

(Which, incidentally, is more than can be said for Chuck Harris.)

Well, now I had to find Walt. I ran him to earth in the bar, chastely kissed Madeleine's cheek (a privilege reserved solely for co-editors of *Hyphen*), showed them the very hand that had been shaken, and then bubbled about 4e until Ken Bulmer arrived with A Bombshell.

Whilst I had been meeting Ackerman on the landing, Ken had been there talking to the T.V. representative. Part of the jollity was to be televised and various people were being selected for interviews. Now, the T.V. man — a keen, perceptive type — has spotted me, fallen in love with my clean intelligent star-begotten looks, and had wanted me to enchant his eight million viewers.

Cor! And better still, he didn't ask Walt Willis or

James White. My cup runneth over.

However, Ken knows me better than most people and guessed that I wouldn't want to take part in the show. He told the bod I was deaf and would have to work from a pre-arranged script (my lip reading can't be depended upon, and nobody seemed to have thought of a T.V. with sub-titles), but the man was still eager and interested, so Ken came and told me about it.

Ordinarily, I would have politely refused to even consider such an idea unless they promised me a two-minute commercial spot for a *Hyphen* plug, but under the circumstances ruling at this time, even Jayne Mansfield wouldn't have been able to drag me on the screen. I was away sick from work and desperately holding the boss at bay with sheaves of medical certificates stating that I had influenza, coryza, bronchitis, and just about everything up to, and including, Stigwort's Disease. If he knew that I was even out of bed, let alone whooping it up in a West End hotel and starring on his telly, he'd have fired me out of hand. The very thought of such things was enough to send me into a decline, and it was fortunate that Eric Bentcliffe arrived at the Crucial Moment with a free drink to revive my shattered nerves.

The Con proper was due to commence at 9 p.m. and Good Old Ted Carnell, a stickler for tradition, only kept us waiting for the minimum ten minutes before actually opening the thing. Ted is awfully good at platform work. He has a good relaxed manner, and a sort of authority which holds the audience. After declaring us open, he introduced the Guest of Honour.

Campbell, a huge man-mountain apparently consisting of 95% brain, physically and mentally dwarfed everyone else present and earned a huge ovation. He has an impressive personality, and he gesticulates like a Frenchman, but it struck me that just below the surface, he was very shy, nervous, and tense. I suppose it must be a bit of a strain at that, to be damn near revered by 300 people, and to know that later on each and every one of them is going to get you into a corner and demand that *Unknown* is revived by next Thursday week at the latest. As the Con went on he grew more at ease and seemed more relaxed, but the mere fact that he is THE Campbell seemed to act as a moat between him and the rest of us that has not yet been bridged. I suspect that this demigod would dearly love to step down from his pedestal if only he knew how; that underneath that Editor of *Astounding* facade there is an awful lot of Joe Fann just waiting to be discovered.

A paragraph in a recent letter from Walt adds weight to this surmise of mine: (Quote) "Do yo know Ellis Mills invited him to his room party and he was delighted? So Mrs JWC said. Apparently in the US the fans never invite him.....and he was tickled pink."

I wish now that I'd given him that free copy of "-" and a shot from my bottle, instead of shaking hands so very respectfully and calling him Mr Campbell.



Mrs Campbell was entirely different from John, and made a big hit all by herself. She was so warm and so nicely ordinary that towards the end of the Con there was a sort of spontaneous movement amongst everyone that ended with her being presented with a little souvenir to mark the occasion. Apart from Eric Frank Russell — who is scared of nothing except the ghost of Charles Fort — she was probably the only person present who wasn't intimidated by JWC, and she was fun too. On Sunday morning the Campbells went to Hyde Park Corner. This is where the orators, each mounted on a soap-box or a pair of steps, preach total abstinence, total drunkenness, salvation and bloody revolution to anybody who'll stop to listen. Peg Campbell enjoyed it all immensely and came back proclaiming, much to our delight, that she was going to buy John a pair of steps. If you see any added vehemence in future *ASF* editorials, you'll know why.

After this session we sat in the lounge (Arthur, Ethel, Walt, Madeleine, Bobbie, the Dietz's, Raeburn, Schultheis — hell, a big crowd of us) and talked ourselves dry.

Hours later, after Belle had bought a great raft of coffee for everyone, I found Arthur (who had sneaked off to Bentcliffe's room to swill Belgian whisky with Boyd Raeburn), and we went to bed at 2.30 a.m.

We got four hours sleep and then awoke and groaned in unison. I felt awful, but Arfer insisted that he felt fine, and that there were no after-effects to the Belgian whisky of the night before. Personally I found this a little hard to believe; he was bending over the wash-basin, gently scrubbing his

teeth, and had his free hand pressed firmly to the top of his head to stop the damn thing falling off.

We phoned the desk to ask if they could send up some tea, but his was refused because we hadn't ordered it the previous night. Breakfast was still hours away so we went out and found a transport cafe in a side street that was open. It was a crummy fly-specked place, but the tea was like nectar, and after a couple of cups apiece we began to feel more human and convention-minded again.

Back at the hotel most everybody were still in bed, but we found Mary Dziechowski looking all fresh and vivacious in the lounge, waiting for the restaurant to open. She had been up until 6 a.m. and then gone to bed and found that she couldn't sleep. (Convention insomnia is something new to me, and something which I hope I never catch myself.) She'd gotten dressed and came downstairs again but found it lonesome. Forry had been talking with her group all night and had gone to bed at the same time. Mary liked Ackerman. She decided that he would make an ideal breakfast companion. So, she picked up the phone, dialled his room, and told him to come down for breakfast.

"Was he pleased?" I asked her.

"Well," she said, "he didn't sound very enthusiastic, but he's coming!"

Personally I would have screamed obscenities at her, pretty as she is, and come downstairs only to clobber her into insensibility with the bedroom utensil, but American men are different. Ackerman came downstairs almost limp with fatigue — but still as courteous and as charming as ever — and toddled off to breakfast with us.

This courtesy stuff was the thing that impressed me most about the American contingent. They were all disarmingly friendly, polite, and without the slightest trace of the brashness that I was led to expect from them. Arfer and I liked them all very much indeed and spent most of the morning circulating, and asking what they liked and disliked most about England. They were all prompt enough to answer about the things they liked, but very reluctant to criticise anything at all. Most of them decided that the nicest thing were the British themselves. They thought everyone was friendly and helpful and far different from what they had expected. The things they liked least ranged from the old complaint about the thickness of English toilet paper to a criticism of English licensing hours (in N.Y. the bars are open all day and you buy a drink at anytime), but I thought the most remarkable one came from Rory Faulkner.

Rory, petite and near seventy, but still as pert as any teen-ager and not the least bit flurried about travelling over half the world from L.A. to London, thought for a bit, and then decided that the worst thing she had encountered were the English flush-toilets. She is small. The pedestals were too high for her liking, and she said so in no uncertain terms.

I suppose we should have felt sorry for poor Rory sitting there with her feet dangling into space, but nobody, unfortunately, was the least bit sympathetic, and we roared with laughter.

Ackerman didn't help any by drawling, "Odd Johns!" either.

After Walt and Madeleine had got up and had breakfast, we all congregated in the bar again. I don't know why we became bar-flies for this Con — perhaps Walt was expecting Tucker and Bloch to drop in, and wanted to be the first to greet them — but it was a good place for meeting Legendary Figures that have been just names to me for the last ten years or so.

Sam Moscovitz was the first one, and I liked him very much indeed. Stocky, well-dressed, charming and affable, he looked anything but the tough truck-driver that I'd been expecting, and he was one of the most fascinating conversationalists that I'd ever met. He was full of his adventures in England so far, and told us of his experiences the previous night.

He'd been out walking with Bob Madle and (probably in the Bayswater Road) he'd been accosted by street-walkers no less than five times in three blocks. SaM, an ex-editor of *Sexology* (the facts-of-life magazine), was interested in such a phenomenon. New York streets, he said, were comparatively free of whores, so he stopped to chat with the last girl who smiled at him. "Stunning girl," he said. "Face, figure..." he waved his hands expressively and didn't need to say any more. He went on to ask the girl what she thought of the Wolfendon Report (a preface to some new legislation aimed at cleaning up vice in London). She reckoned that all the men Should Do Something About it — they should write in and protest!

SaM had a most wonderful attitude to the whole business, as if in a sense he and the girl were sort of coworkers in the field, and he was all serious and constructive about the business. A girl accosts him in the street and rightaway he gets down to market research and analysis just as if it were sf.

And when would you say
you lost your sense of wonder?



Anyway, after a long talk with this girl he eventually got a most cordial invitation to her flat. He refused the offer,

but courteous to the last, softened the blow with a white lie about how it takes all his time to keep his girl-friend serviced.

Oddly enough though (and this possibly comes from working for Gernsback), he had forgotten to ask her what her rates were. Ever helpful, we told him... about £ 3 to the natives, or £ 5 to the rich Americans. SaM was silent for a split second whilst he multiplied by 2.80 to get a total in dollars, then he looked up, grinned and drawled slowly, "Is that with or without shower?"

These bloody hygienic, dispassionate Americans!

Bob Silverberg arrived and sat talking for a while too. Very dark, and, I imagine very attractive to women, he has the same sort of deadpan humour that James White specialises in, and a sort of whacky style that cannot be recaptured properly in print.

I had a heavy cold and my ever-present box of Kleenex was on the table in front of me. Bob sat down, and whilst he was busily talking to Walt, he leant across the table, took one of the tissues, folded it carefully and tucked it into his pocket.

"Take some more," I said generously, "there's plenty there."

He shook his head once, and tapped the pocket. "Compleatist," he said, dead-pokerfaced without even the suspicion of a smile, and carried on his conversation with Walt without a pause. James, with all the years he's been working at it, couldn't have timed it better.

The next person that Walt introduced me to was Bob Madle, the TAFF representative. He was a nice guy, and I liked him. I think everybody found him completely and utterly charming, and I think he liked us too and that he enjoyed his trip. But — and you are at liberty to call me a bad sportsman if you wish — I still don't think he ever should have been nominated, and I still think that Eney should have won. Bob was very nice and very pleasant, but we just hadn't even heard of him before he was nominated, and we shared little in common with him.

Apropos of nothing, does any of the audience believe that TAFF would have survived if Madle had fallen sick, and left Hoffman to make the trip and to administer the fund next year, hmm?

The Convention Banquet was a new innovation for Anglo-fandom, and one that I hope will be repeated at all future conventions. It was an enormous success, and a complete sell-out. The only thing that marred it was the fact that the hotel restaurant — a very long, very narrow, room — wasn't really suitable for such a large luncheon. However, the management and the ConCommittee had done their best to overcome this by a clever arrangement of tables

and seating. The tables really sparkled with glassware and cutlery, and were most effectively decorated with flowers and lighted candles (for poverty-stricken fans without Ronsons), as centre-pieces.

I was sitting at a fine fannish table, flanked by Madeleine and Terry Jeeves, and opposite some dark-haired dish who turned out to be Erika Russell. I thought she was a bit of all right too—a bloody sight prettier than her old man—and after being introduced by Walt (who knows more pretty women than any married fan has a right to), was chonk full of ideas about showing her my fanzine collection etc. as soon as we'd finished eating. Unfortunately, before my big, friendly smile had a chance to warm up, she remembered her father's last words or something, found out she was in the wrong seat, and had fled to the comparative safety of the H Beam Piper part of the table.

For 13 shillings sixpence we had iced cantaloupe melon, soup, roast duck with orange sauce, fruit salad, coffee and wine. I thought that it was a most reasonable price, and they weren't mean with the wine either. It was a very sharp red Medoc, and although I did not care for it with the duckling, it was at least a drink. Connoisseur Willis summed it up pretty nicely. He sipped it, rolled it around his mouth in the approved manner, sniffed the bouquet, and considered his judgement. "Hmmmmmmmmm," he said impressively, "imported."

(This, mind you, from the only wine-bibber in the world who adds three spoonfuls of sugar to a wineglass of Beaujolais before he'll even consider drinking it.)

There were speeches after the meal, but neither Madeleine nor I stayed for them. I wanted to go to bed for a couple of hours and she wanted to sew sequins onto her fancy dress, a front and backover by Atom. (Arthur chalked the cartoons onto a black dress, and then Madeleine carefully sewed tiny sparkling sequins all over the chalk lines.) I went to bed for a couple of hours.

I awoke just in time to go to supper with Walt, Madeleine and Forry—we had ravioli (a favourite of mine and Walter's) at a little Italian espresso bar in Queensway.

We had hardly gotten back inside the hall, when I found myself with both arms full of woman, and myself being kissed from here to hell and gone. Most enjoyable, even though I spent five minutes slurping away before I managed to get my eyes focussed and found it was my Sheila who was so glad to see me. Naturally I was just as enthusiastic about this as she was, and I stood right there kissing back at her until we both had to break for breath. Mal, who had been standing by doing his very best to look blase about such uproarious salutations, sighed with relief when we did finally unclinch, and got a firm hold onto his wife again before we decided to make a habit of it.

A very lovely girl, young Sheila—if only I could break

her of that nasty habit of referring to me as "Uncle Chuck" whenever she sees me.

The fancy dress ball was already in full swing by this time. Madeleine went up to change into her frock, and then (typically) decided not to enter after all. A pity because it was a restrained and clever costume, and I think it would have stood a good chance in the "most fannish" category. Some of the other costumes though were very wonderful indeed, and it must have been a hard job to judge them fairly. I think though that the Dietz's, dressed as a pair of E.T.'s in red and black, complete with face make up and tendrils, well deserved their win. And for that matter, so did the Kyles and John Brunner.

The one that impressed me most of all though was that of Pal Hammett's exquisitely beautiful wife, Joan. It wasn't stefnic—she was dressed as a typical English schoolgirl in a gym tunic and sandals and her hair in plaits—but it was so realistic that most everybody was completely fooled by it, and didn't connect this brat with the sophisticated, groomed Joan that they all know. She had every childish mannerism right down pat—even to the way she tugged excitedly at people's sleeves before speaking to them—and Paul was having a high old time going around introducing his child bride to all and quandry. I offered to baby-sit for him, but he wasn't having any.

There were no prizes for the worst costumes or I guess Peter Reaney in his usual female impersonation would have one it. I'm not certain if Lawrence Sandfield was in fancy dress or not, but he certainly looked ever so gay, darlings, with a ducky wisp of red chiffon tied around his neck.

Pete Daniels, of Liverpool fandom, was leading a dance band, and blows a very hot horn indeed. I haven't danced since I went deaf ten years ago, but I could feel the beat from the way the floor was vibrating, and I badly wanted to try again. Arthur persuaded me that I could, and Little Sister Ethel Lindsay said she'd be glad to dance with me, so I trotted out onto the floor for the next quickstep with her. She was good and patient, and after a couple of false starts, I found my old groove again, didn't tread on Ethel and had myself a pretty big time. Afterwards, for the next ten minutes I wandered around happily asking everyone if they'd seen me, and being reassured that they hadn't missed a single misstep. Truly, I do so enjoy being told how wonderful I am.

Unfortunately, before I could get back for a second helping, Pete Daniels had packed up, and the guitarists had taken over. We left the hall hastily. The others had had a gutfull of Sandfield unamplified, and wanted no part of him and his guitar helped by a microphone. Even Brunner (and he's reckoned to be good) wasn't sufficient counter-attraction, so we fled to the Writing Room.

We sat here for the rest of the night whilst Peter Philips (Famous Author Peter Philips) entertained us with flute,

harmonica, and weird demonstrations of the art of Yogi. He wasn't very good at any of them, and the yogi was spoilt by his odd tendency to topple over as soon as he had one foot securely behind his head, but I thought it a very wonderful performance. He was, of course, on a par with any newt you care to name, and there was some tsk-tsking because of this. Personally, he seemed just the same as he always is to me — comic, gentle, and very captivating — and, stewed or not, it didn't stop him from playing cards later with Bennett, Thorne, and West and taking each and every one of them to the cleaners.

Things got a bit blurry for me too after 4 a.m. I vaguely remember one of the American girls staring at me intently and informing all and sundry that "Chuck has a halo." I made a speech aimed at those who believed the girl to be hallucinated, intoxicated or both. I decried the fannish lechers and degenerates (amidst loud cheers from the lecherous and degenerate audience), informed them that I have now sworn a vow of eternal chastity, apologised to the hallucinated lass who seemed to think that I had decided to promote her from the ranks of the vestal virgins, was ceremonially presented with a placard that read LUNCH-EON on one side, and "Have you got your Wolfendon Licence?" on the other, and then went to bed at 4.45. a.m.

I was hoping to sleep until Sunday afternoon. I was dead beat and could hardly stay awake long enough to get my clothes off.

However, James, Arfer, and lovable Mal Ashworth had other ideas. They had stayed up all night. Just before 7 a.m. they missed me. Instead of doing the decent fannish thing and sending me a "Wish you were here" card, they decided to come up and see how I was getting on. There they were, three happy smiling faces, all enjoying the struggle between fatigue and awareness in the bed before them, and carefully waiting until I was fully awake before saying in unison, "You needn't get up." I reached for Arfer's wrist to see what the time was, and then screamed in agony. It was just 6.45. I had been in bed for all of two hours.

Still, once I'd dragged myself to the basin, splashed water on my face, and brushed some of the garbage from my mouth, I decided I felt okay, and we went out into the streets to search for some tea. It was Sunday so we didn't find any, but it was good to get a breath of fresh air anyway.

Back at the hotel, breakfast was quite a subdued meal. Most everybody else had been up all night, and were going to bed as soon as they had eaten. Even the venerable George Charters had stayed up all night, and had only been driven back to his own hotel by the empty feeling in his stomach. (GATWC, for some reason or other, never stays at the Convention Hotel. He always books at some place elsewhere. He said that this year he was staying at our old Con Hotel, The Royal, but for all I know he could have been sleeping on The Embankment.)

So here we are, all shushed and quiet, and trying to eat breakfast. Wally Weber — I don't think he'd been to bed since landing in England — was so tired that he couldn't even shudder as he drank "the stuff they call coffee over here" and just couldn't summon up enough energy to attack the cereal.

At the other end of the table, Tony Thorne — specially resurrected from the fannish dead along with Bert Campbell — was engaged in repartee (no less) with the waitress.

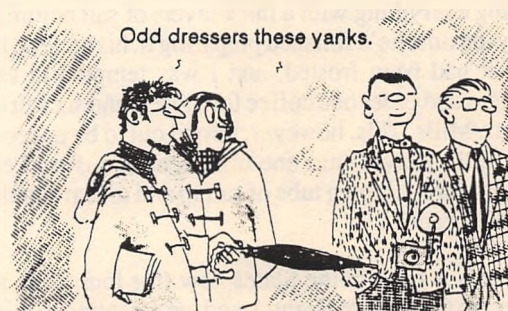
"What would you like for breakfast, sir," she said, "bacon and egg?"

Tony thought for a moment. "Is there any alternative?" he asked.

"Er, I'm afraid not," said the waitress.

"In that case," said Thorne, reaching a momentous decision, "I would like bacon and egg."

After breakfast there was a Musical Interlude. Along the street outside the hotel there came a band of street musicians. These are a fairly common occurrence in London, just four or five musicians and a couple of "bottlers" who thrust collections bags at the passers-by, who are presumably entertained enough to drop in a penny or so. Evidently such goings-on are unknown in the States, and the American fans flocked out onto the pavement to watch as the band shuffled by giving their all to "When The Saints Go Marching In."



The Yanks seemed fascinated but a wee bit puzzled, so I thought I'd be all helpful to the poor bloody foreigners. I turned to the American girl who was standing next to me and said, "They're called buskers, love."

Well sir, I had a heavy cold, and maybe my accent isn't all that it should be, but the lass recoiled in horror just like any heroine in a Tucker story. I was only trying to be helpful: I smiled all reassuringly, and spelt it out for her.

"B.U.S.K.E.R.S. dear,"

I was just trying to be helpful, but she gulped and was gone sharpish as if I'd been demanding droits de seigneur or

something, and I still haven't got the faintest idea whether she understood me or not. I would love to know what she thought I was saying though.

Back in the hotel things were stirring again. We stepped over Ray Nelson — the originator of the beanie as a fannish symbol way back in Fandom's Paleozoic — who was prostrate on the floor of the lounge, completely and utterly absorbed in Knight's *In Search of Wonder*, and made our way to the Writing Room again.

Here Eric Jones had rigged up a couple of Psionics machines. Arthur, Rory and I played with the things, and Arthur got a Definite Reaction. It wasn't until after we'd excitedly filled in a report form, and envisaged all sorts of erudite and weighty articles in *ASF*, that we discovered that the machine wasn't plugged in to the power source.

At lunch time we went back to our ravioli place with Peter Reaney and one or two others. We didn't actually invite Reaney (you guessed?), but he has certain leech-like tendencies and short of pushing him under a bus there didn't seem any way we could dispose of him. Unfortunately, Bayswater is badly served by buses on Sunday mornings. However, once inside the place we picked our tables carefully and left him and his friends to sit at the far end of the restaurant and leave us in comparative peace.

I chose my table with Steve Schultheis and Ellis Mills, and I enjoyed my lunch immensely. Ellis, who has been in European Fandom so long that we all consider him a native, was in strict training for the International Tea-Drinking Contest that was due to take place in the afternoon, and was coating everything with a thick layers of salt before eating it. By the time he'd finished preparing it, his omlette looked as if it had been frosted, and I was tempted to call the waitress and order one coffee for myself and six salt cellars for Mr. Mills. This, however, turned out to be unnecessary when Ellis delved into one of his capacious pockets and brought forth his own tube of salt to add to that supplied by the restaurant.

Ellis is back in the States now (for four years school under the G.I. Bill of Rights), and we are going to miss him badly over here. He is one of the most friendly and unassuming persons that I have ever met, as well as one of the most generous and the most thoughtful. For instance, a non-smoker himself, he knows that most Anglofens have a liking for American brands of cigarettes and, quietly and unostentatiously, he distributes packs to all and sundry as if it were the most natural thing in the world to do so.

And, best of all, he listens, and he laughs.

When I am rich and powerful I am going to hire Ellis Mills as my Chief Appreciator. He will accompany me everywhere, and under the terms of his contract he will be required to laugh at one or more of my whimsies on each and every day.

That laugh is a wonderful thing. It starts as a smile, gets wider and deeper, starts off a muted rumble deep down in the chest, commences his shoulders shaking and then gradually takes over the rest of his body until all of Ellis is laughing, and I get the mental image of his toes flexing and unflexing within his mocassins as they appreciate me too. And of course it's highly infectious. I have a dreadful tendency to laugh at my own jokes already, but I try to be objective about it, and usually I give my poorer witticisms no more than a perfunctory titter. But, when Ellis is around, I feel like Jack Benny and Bob Hope and Tommy Trinder all rolled into one. I am then a helluva wit — albeit a trifle corny — and such heady stuff gives even ravioli a new savour.

Again, back to the hotel, past the street musician aimlessly plucking his battered harp (we'd posed Walter Himself against the thing on our way down whilst Steve took a few pictures of the Harpist that once or twice), to arrive there in time for The Ceremony of St Fantony, staged by the Cheltenham Circle. Walt, Ellis, Ken Slater, Bob Silverberg, Terry Jeeves, Eric the Bent, Bobbie Wild, Rory Faulkner, and several others were inducted as Knights and Ladies of the Order of St Fantony. They each got a parchment, a trophy (an extremely well done replica of a knight in full armour), and a glass of "water from St Fantony's Well" which turned out to be 140% proof white spirit. It was all beautifully produced with the Cheltenham people in fabulous costumes, and apart from the quasi-religious overtones, I thought it very impressive indeed. I guess it will be Sir Walter who'll be sewing sequins on his bloody fancy dress next year.

This was followed by some fine fannish films made by the Liverpool and Cheltenham groups, including the candid camera one made at the last Kettering Con.

When I saw some of the situations which had been filmed without the participants being aware of it, I was rather relieved that I hadn't been present myself. I'd hate to be caught like Shirley Marriott, for instance, shown helplessly drunk on the floor, beaming vacuously whilst somebody near drowns her with a soda syphon. On the other hand, I would have loved to have held the camera, my breath, the crowd back, anything, whilst they filmed Ina Shorrocks in her bath. This, brother, was stupendous, terrific, colossal, and in glorious technicolour too. Ina is a dish at any time, but clad in nothing but a little LUX lather she's enough to make strong men scream, and even George Charters and the rest of the Oldest Guard lean forward and quietly bite chunks out of the seats in front. I tried to ask Norman Shorrocks afterwards what happened to the pieces he must have clipped from the film before showing, but he was vague, non-committal, and not interested in trading for a mint set of *Galaxy*.

The only thing that marred the afternoon for me was the ever-present Peter West and his bloody camera. I thought it was stupid and dangerous to wait, as West did, until the hall



They say he had some fuggheaded idea about proposing Brussels.

was totally darkened, and then to stand up and let loose at the audience with a high-powered electronic flash. If this is the sort of irresponsibility we get from the "Official Convention Photographer" then I think we'd be a bloody sight better off without him in future.

The camera maniacs seemed to have turned out in full force for the Con, and even Campbell's speech was spoilt by some weirdie who writhed and gyrated at the side of the stage in a sort of Presley imitation before reaching the orgasmic stage of shutter-clicking. I know that photographs are a Good Thing and I'm all in favour of them within reason, but if the Dietz's, Schultheis, and Weber could show camera courtesy, I don't see why the others couldn't do so too.

Somewhere around here I was introduced to Eric Frank Russell. I was a bit tongue-tied, but I managed to ask him where William Pugmire was. He grinned, but it seems that friend Willie the dirt-Christian hadn't been able to make the trip down this year. Rory Faulkner reminded him that he'd promised to throw her down and assault her if she was able to make the trip. Eric glanced around uneasily, and said it was a bit too public.

"Hell," said Rory, as she came back into the hotel, "Five Thousand miles I've come under false pretences."

Anyway, I thought EFR looked like a Big Name Pro. He's not quite nine feet tall, but he's well over the six foot mark, and has a build to match. He doesn't act the Big Name though. He was nicely approachable and seemed genuinely glad to meet people. Too bad he had to warn Erika about us though.

On Sunday night I came home to sleep, but I was back at the hotel in time to talk with Walt, Madeleine, and the insomniac Weber whilst they had breakfast. Dave Newman came past our table sporting only one half of the luxuriant moustache with which he'd started the convention. We looked at him blearily but sympathetically. "Tough luck, bhoys," I said. "These bloody souvenir-hunting Americans will whip anything that isn't nailed down."

Along with 21 other early risers we managed to make the Business Session at 11.00. The first item was the election of two new directors to the WSFS, the organization which runs the World Conventions. Belle Dietz and Arthur Kingsley (N.Y.) had already been nominated, and Bob Madle then nominated David Newman. Belle, of course, was a stone-cold certainty, but I was surprised when Dave was elected to the other vacancy rather than Kingsley. As Joy Clarke pointed out, Dave, living in England, could never be much more than a figurehead, and she was agin the proposal. So was I, but he was still elected by one vote.

In a way, the Big Thing of the Business Session was a bit of an anti-climax. We'd gone there determined to make it South Gate in '58 or die in the attempt, but it turned out that everyone else had the same idea. South Gate was the only site proposed, and voting for it was just a formality. It was fun though to see every hand in the hall thrust up for it, and all the heads turning round to see if anyone had the temerity to dare make it anything but unanimous. And (even though I shall never go) to scamper down the passage afterwards to try to be the first to register Convention membership for next year. (We weren't first, but at least we tried to be.)

After lunch, 4e, SaM, and Bob Madle put on a little quiz show of their own. It was a three-cornered contest with each of them out for blood, and deliberately making the questions as hard as they could think up. Truly, it staggered me at the way they did find the answers, but it would be unworthy to suggest that it was cooked up before hand. Anyway, cooked or not, I don't think that I shall ever forget Forry rattling off the titles and dates of all the Frankenstein films in sequence, or SaM, carefully and methodically giving title and place of publication of every Weinbaum story ever written...and after about six minutes, getting down to those that were published in fanzines.

It finished as a draw, 9-9-9 points each, and I'd love to be around if they ever hold a return match.

Campbell's talk on psionics followed this, but I couldn't stay for it. My Convention was over and I had to go home. I collected my bag, said a few good-byes and left the hotel for the last time. I was dog-tired, I still had my cold, and I'd spent far more than I intended, but it was worth it. It was my first world con and I'd enjoyed all of it. I'd met people who had been nothing but names to me before, and I'd made new friends. As I said to Forry before I left, "It was a bloody pleasure, mate."

And, it was.

JUNE WEDDING

(A Creative Random History Column)

I don't get lost in Dartford now: M1—M25 door-to-door in 1 hour, 55 minutes, 8 seconds (incl. 1.3 minutes for a pee at the Toddington Service Area). Unload gourmet noshery, give Ving traditional fannish greeting: "So where the fuck is everybody?"

Woe! Calamity! Arf ((Arthur Thomson)) has a hole in his radiator and will be a couple of hours fitting a replacement. Avedon, Rob, and Pam Wells are lost in transit. I am determined to see my long lost daughter today even if I have to search every bloody street between Welling and East Ham. Pausing only to put soothing note on front door announcing our imminent return and fit trembling native guide (with clipboard) in passenger seat, off we go to Woolwich to see if they had come across on the ferry.

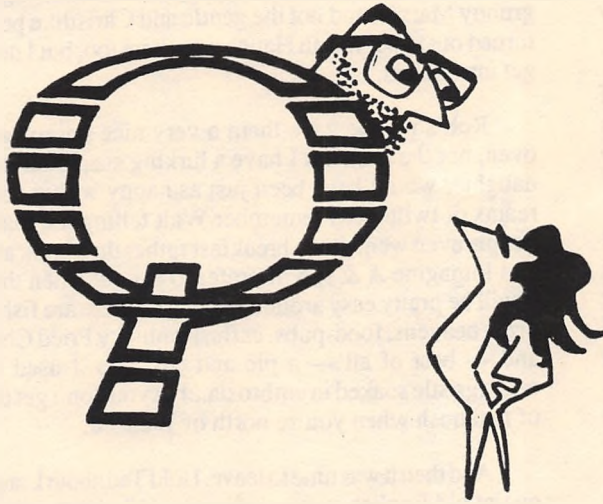
And Jophan found that it was so. I spotted Rob alone in the Mitre (a pub-joint) carpark. He was so pleased to see us that — image momentarily forgotten — he smiled and waved his hand. Wow!

Avedon and Pam were inside taking a cure for seasickness but erupted out onto the pavement to prove once more that it's a wise child that knows its father, or vicky werkey, and how clever I am with its and it's. Ever since I was raped by that supposedly nymph-like German lady who turned out to be Hackenschmit in winter-weight knickers, I have been wary of these moments of truth because the

fantasy image must invariably differ from reality. It did too...but that was okay...how could I relate to a long-haired blond elegant in Beardsley leather or a short-haired girl sitting in the Tun or the blurred and misty photograph of Arthur C. Clarke that Rob flaunted at me during Novacon? She is small — but perfectly formed — with enormous brown eyes that are almost black in some lights, long jet-black wavy hair and such short tiny arms that her fingertips barely meet when she encircles my slim boyish figure. She might be a fraction shorter than Teresa Nielsen Hayden. I reckon it would be no problem to tuck one under each arm and carry them off to my lair — they could cut stencils, Ving could turn the handle, and I could open the incoming mail.

Seriously though, I shall have to stop this fascinating habit of embracing every girl I meet.* It's becoming a reflex. Even Pam Wells who at this time barely knows me (and who has lovely little freckles...and you know what I'm like for freckles and/or red hair) gets enfolded and kissed. Sooner or later somebody is going to misunderstand motives and take a swing at me and I'll go gafia in disgrace again. And don't say I've always been lecherous and on the make. True, I am off the Relaxogelds at last (I think Sue is

* This is bullshit. I haven't the slightest intention of stopping.



crushing them up and sprinkling them on my All Bran, though I haven't been able to catch her at it yet), but satyriasis is just a wishful dream. (I'm working on it.)

Anyway, there we stood hugging each other in mutual delight and eventually broke off to go back to Welling. Rob and I nipped off to the local off-licence and then came back to find Arf had arrived complete with anatomical drawings. We had a jolly interesting discussion about his religious mutilation. It isn't everyone whose foreskin ends up in a royal reliquary in Westminster Abbey. Mr Hansen — who still hasn't shown me his credentials — assured us that "nobody ain't done peeled" his "banana" either and for one second I thought that his faulty zip combined with a touch of the Greystokes...but modesty prevailed.

We moved over to the fan photos. Avedon found a good picture of Walt with his hands about 18 inches apart. "The Rob Holdstock Joke?" she inquired.

Trouble is, this sort of afternoon flies past before you know where you are and it's time to go home. I suggested that I drop Avedon, Rob, and Pam off on the way. Usually I go through the Dartford Tunnel but Arf said the Woolwich Ferry would be much better. I am not a cool hand with ferries. At Newport (Isle of Wight, not Noo Jersey or Gwent) I lost an exhaust because the gangway formed a steep V with the jetty, and on the Holyhead Ferry I was glad to let Sue take it aboard because it helps if you can hear, whilst slipping the clutch up and down the inclines. So when Arf starts offering solicitous advice about checking that the planks are the same distance apart as my wheelbase, I can only be 90% sure that he is piss-taking again.

It turned out to be a great time-saver. We were in mid-Thames within 10 minutes of leaving Welling. Floating dock, no trouble, no planks (fuck you King Arfer), no

charge, last car allowed on board, view of the Thames Barrage a little way upriver, and enormous sparkly-clean dish aerials on the North Bank where Rob says all the satellite communications are received. A bit bemused that the Welsh wetback and my Ammurrican daughter are now far more *au fait* with London than this born-and-bred Cockney from the Whitechapel Road.

Ten minutes through Dockland and then we are at Greenleaf Road. I was prepared for a sort of igloo chiselled from the eternal ice but really it's a lovely flat, all shiny paint and clean walls. There's a lot of bookcases — well, there *would* be — big rooms, good light, nothing at all like the Epicentre. It's right in the middle of (I think) an Edwardian terrace and shouldn't be a problem to heat. It's the upstairs flat. This is always a bonus because the heat the people downstairs pay for seeps up to you as a freebie.

The Wedding...

Avedon wore her Good Black costume and a ruffled blouse. Rob wore a grey suit and a slight air of apprehension. The weather...ah, the weather. It pissed down, of course. Any girl choosing the summer solstice for her wedding day (the first day of summer, the first day of Wimbledon, heat-wave weather from time immemorial) could at least hope for clement weather. Instead it had been drizzling and miserable since dawn. Obviously, God is on Their Side — another recipient of Joni's Peach Preserves — and Lo! He chastiseth us with Torrents.

Not that the Happy Couple — and yes, they were, and yes they looked it — gave a faint damn about the weather. They looked young, happy, and smitten, and when we came to the 'you may kiss the bride' bit I felt that we should all stand, clap hands, and shout "Encore! Bravissimo!" Avedon evidently thought so too because she eventually broke off to kiss the registrar, who, going through life as a simulacrum of Marty Cantor, doesn't get this sort of gratuity very often.

I've never been to a civil marriage ceremony before and I must say I quite enjoyed it. I guess there were about 25 of us there. R & A were on a bench at the front together with Greg Pickersgill and Hazel Langford. Behind them were 5 Hansens, 2 Carols, and Trufen of varying degrees ranging from Chuch Harris and Ted White Incarnate to Alexis and Dolly Gilliland. Also Dave Langford (who named a nuclear physicist after my golf club in *The Leaky Establishment*), pleasant little Malcolm Edwards in his red leather tie, Chris Atkinson in a Boy George hat and Colourful Ensemble, Pam Wells, Anne Warren (now Hammill), and all the fan paparazzi with an abundance of expensive cameras. (I could hardly wait for the ceremony to finish so that I could edge Rob to one side, get my arm around Avedon and pose like...well, like a poseur, I guess.)

Afterwards we walked to the tube, pausing only for Dolly to buy roses as a gift for Avedon, and went back to the

flat for a drink. I'd chickened out of taking the car down to London and went by train instead, so it was a quick beer, reassurance about the reception at Reading, and then away to Euston to get the train back to the Midlands.

The next day I drove down to Reading, dropping off Sue and son Sean — they were attending an aged uncle's 80th birthday — and got to the Langfords' just a little way ahead of Arf and Vincent.

Embraced daughter — this is something I never tire of (but I notice Pam Wells, after her traumatic experience outside of the Mitre when she got swept into the action, now tends to put distance between herself and a newly-arrived Harris) — said "Hi" to John Harvey as I edged round him to get to the beer tap (Eve was rumoured to be present but I never did see her), and then up, up up to the library on the first floor.

"Christ Almighty," I said to A Vincent Clarke. "Ditto," said A Vincent Clarke to me. It's a very very good Collection and I find it incredible that he's gotten so much in such a short space of time. Apart from the SF there's a lot of top mundane stuff too. A fair amount of crime novels, lots of mod humour, some poetry — I saw a lot of Auden but never spotted Dylan Thomas which must be in there somewhere. A professionally bound copy of *Performance: Fanzines in Theory and Practice*. All the Travis McGee pbs and *Wine of the Dreamers*, which must be quite scarce now. The Dorothy Dunnett Macbeth opus, but none of the Lymond series: a hulluva lot of stuff. Vinç and I were crawling around the floor checking titles, happy as pigs in shit.

Really, I've seen little to compare with it. Fred Brown's wasn't as extensive and his taste wasn't half as catholic and was aimed as more of an investment than a working library. I would love to see a really big US collection sometime: 4e's or Julius Unger, or somebody like that.

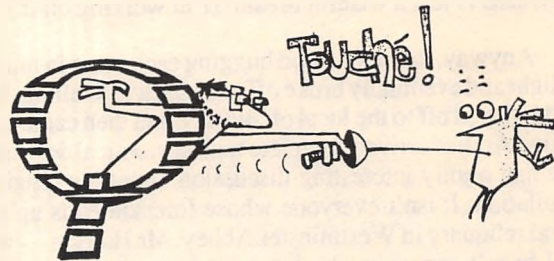
The set-up was impressive too: floor to ceiling shelves on all walls of the large room with more shelves bisecting it across the middle. Then, just as we were preparing to go downstairs again, Dave opens a door...and there's another room full of books. I never did see the fmzs...I'm wondering if he'd care to ask me back for my two week summer holiday.

Downstairs for food. Hazel had ordered curry for fifty. No sweat, no fuss — breadbins full of boiled rice, cornucopias full of curry, platters of king-sized communion wafers, heaps of hot pitta bread. Even Arf — to whom anything lacking Bisto is immediately classed as Foreign Muck was scoffing away at an enormous plateful and thinking about second helpings. (Mind you, the Arfer appetite was somewhat stimulated by toking up with Ted White and Abi Frost out in the garden. The roach — supported by Abi's bra-strap pin was another experience I never got to.)

Arf introduced me to Joe Nicholas, who was nothing like I expected. I would have thought him a thrusting, tough, grubby Marxist and not the gentle and Christlike person he turned out to be. Judith Hanna was there too, but I never did get introduced.

Rob's people gave them a very nice microwave (the oven, not the fnz), but I have a lurking suspicion that dear daughter would have been just as happy with a couple of reams of twiltone. I remember Walt telling me that in LA people even went out to breakfast rather than cook at home, and I imagine A & R will prefer to eat out when they can. It will be pretty easy around there, too; there are fish shops, pizza heavens, food-pubs, caffs, Kentucky Fried Chickens, and — best of all — a pie and eel shop. I used to love eels...gristle soaked in ambrosia...but you don't get that sort of real nosh when you're north of Watford.

And then it was time to leave. I told Ted about Langford's quaint old English custom of letting US visitors choose up to 10 books from his shelves, and cautioned him not to dream of trying to thank Dave because he was easily embarrassed, and then off to pick up the family and drive home again.



Looking back on it, I was so pleased to see them married. I even had rice in my pocket and only forbore to throw it in case someone wrote me off as a crazed loon practicing eldritch (this word used courtesy of D. Langford esq.) fertility rites. As I get older I get even more sentimental and magdalen. I am a sucker for happy endings. I feel that the late lamented Greater London Council should have installed an organ in every Registry Office so that it could crash out a triumphant 'Here comes the bride' after the ceremony. This is an odd outlook because I will never be 101% convinced that monogamy, for all its joys, will ever be half as much fun as the hurly-burly of the chaise longue.

MEXICON II

(A Creative Random History Column)

The day started off marvelously. *Chuch: The Fanzine* arrived just as I was getting ready to set off for Birmingham and the MEXICON, and you just couldn't think of anything that would please me more. I've always secretly hankered for something like this. I could hardly produce my own *Chuch Harris Appreciation Society Magazine*...altho I did wonder if I'd get away with *Chasm*...and anyway, like the massage parlour, it's a hell of a lot more fun when somebody else does it for you.

The weather had been pretty bad up here so we revised the original plans. I phoned Pam on Friday night at the Angus but the hotel was booked out and we couldn't get a room. Vinø was happy enough to let Arfer and I sleep on his floor, so it didn't seem to be much of a problem. He was sharing a twin room with Wod and so there was plenty of floorspace.

Arrived, found Vinø and Arfer. Arf is on the steroid tablets and looks wonderful. Nobody will ever kick sand in his face again. He reminds me of one of those dreary, worn out tyres that come back all sparkly, clean-cut and new-smelling after they've been away for a re-tread. It's a veritable transformation — all chubby cheeks, tight belly button and a little hint of a paunch again. Of course, the tablets will shrivel his balls to pinpoints in another three weeks, and he'll finish up wearing a Maidenform 36 D-cup before Easter, but right now he looks terrific. I think that if I was his wife I'd have him simonised now and pop him on

the mantelpiece (or wire him up to a 12-volt battery as a kingsize vibrator).

The other outstanding thing about him is his fame. I could hardly believe it. All sorts of perfectly respectable young people come up all the time to chat about his Artwork, beg originals ("Do you think you could autograph it on the back, please?") and look through his (excuse the word) portfolio. To tell the truth, I've always thought of him as fandom's leading exponent of my favourite art-form — the captioned cartoon.

I like his Other Stuff — some of the space debris stuff is superb — and that strange shell-shaped transportation full of those gentle black buggers from the Asteroid Belt — but I'm still quite sure that the top price at Southeby's in 2086 will be for the *Hyphen* cover originals rather than The Artwork.

It's a little worrying that a great many younger fans disagree with me.

Vincent, I think, was simonised long ago. He never changes, never looks a bit different — delighted that Arf and I had made it, concerned, solicitous and quite happy about handing over his room key every two minutes so that we could pop up for something we'd forgotten. The thing I like best is the automatic reflex that makes him reach for a pen and scrap pad as soon as he sees me. I don't think he puts

them down once until it's time for me to leave. Ving and Arf field the questions, warn the newcomers, and try to keep me au fait with what's going on...and finally have their notebooks stolen so that I can write pieces like this one.

Naturally, as soon as we arrive we immediately go out again to eat — and to recover my car which I'd parked in a fantastically expensive multistorey on the other side of the town. I have never liked Brum ever since I fell down the stairs at the airport when I flew back from Belfast years ago. (I broke my ankle but not the Waterford crystal bowl that I was carrying.) (I still have the bowl and the ankle to this very day.) Anyway A & V also think it's a bloody horrible town. There are no fast food outlets, no nice shops, no restaurants, no night life and even the whores were on Cheap Lay Returns from Coventry. There was one woman at the Con wearing a T shirt with "I LOVE BRUM" on it and every time I looked at her she seemed to be frothing at the mouth.

We were hoping to find cards for absent friends, but the shops don't stock them. This is probably because there is nothing in the whole damn place deserving immortality on a picteur pocsard.

We finally found a greasy spoon called The Lite Bight peddling those nasty little oblong pies full of gristle, salmonella and E numbers. They invariably make me feel queasy and ill so, of course, I had one. We could have eaten cheaper and better in the hotel, but it always seems foolish to travel away to a Con and then not venture out of the hotel.

Collected the car — £ 1.25 for 2 1/4 hours!!! — and left it at the freebie Angus carpark instead.

Off to meet people. First, Linda and Pam — predictably manning the registration desk. The thing I like best about the women today is that they all seem so genuinely pleased to see me. I get kissed and hugged and I really get a big lift out of it. I have always liked women. I understand them better and find them kinder and (usually) witty and bitchy, and I wouldn't mind in the least if all the men (except Arf and Ving) stayed home. It certainly seems as if the women do a better job in staging conventions than men. Especially Linda; she is Earth Mother to the London Mob and I think the whole group would fall apart without her. You never see her — or Pam for that matter — sitting around gabbing or drinking. The NOVACON people could have learnt a lot about how to run a convention if only they had bothered to attend.

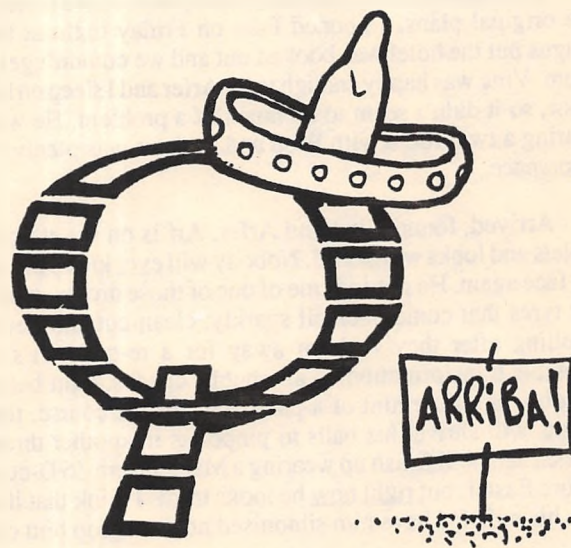
Found Avedon for a quick word about *Chuch: The Fanzine* but broke off when she introduced me to Bill Gibson. I thought a lot of *Neuromancer* and hope that he holds the level in his new *Count Zero*, but left him more or less in midair because there were Dave and Hazel Langford and I wanted to tell her that the language lesson was the best bit in the new *Ansible* (I wonder if these would ever collect up as a sort of *Meaning of Liff* type book or do we find them fascinating as a sort of cult thing?), and seek confirmation

that Dave wooed her with the Snark. (Personally, my rival for fair Susan's hand (and everything attached) was a nasty little bit of work called Donald, so I was able to invoke that lovely Belloc thing "Lines to a Don." I still rather hope that she imagines I wrote it.

Dave was distracting me with offers of free drink, but I thought I'd save him till later. I had a bottle of gin in the bedroom, but I was being careful this time. Teresa wasn't there to put me to bed. I'd brought two sleeping bags to share between me, Arfer and D. West. I didn't want to wake up on Sunday to find D. asking if the earth moved for me.

I never did get another chance to see Dave and I'm not too sure about Hazel. I have long suspected that she drops him off at Conventions, does her own thing for the weekend and then comes back to collect him late on Sundays, but I think I saw her again late on Saturday night. If it was Hazel she was all elegant and soigne — I'm not sure about soigne but I'll look it up when I go downstairs — in a long and very expensive looking black dress. Real top of the shop stuff: none of your cheap tat out of the window. Looked really nice too, altho knowing my tunnel vision it will probably turn out to have been Joyce Slater or Malcom Edwards.

A lot of the girls wore long dresses in the evening. Well, three or four of them. Including my lovely Kate Solomon in black velvet. I have always fancied fair-skinned women in black. Or any women. Sue thinks I am a sex mad adolescent who needs another Relaxogeld and was deeply suspicious when I bought that black lacy wisp to replace the striped rugby jersey she insists on wearing to bed. She says I am only trying to involve her in smutty sex fantasies. (And what the hell is wrong with a smutty sex fantasy when my dotage is due to start at 10.30 am next Wednesday?) Honest,



sometimes I get this odd feeling that I'm having it off with Bill Beaumont. Please, please help me Aunt Agatha. The studs on her rugby boots are playing hell with the new duvet cover.

Next Jerry Kaufman and Suzanne Tompkins. I didn't connect Suzanne until later when I read the fanzine and realized that it was Suzle, but everyone expects far too much of me and what the hell was she doing with a dud badge anyway? I don't go around flaunting myself as C. Randolph Harris, so why does everyone else piss about so that I have to write to them afterwards and say what a dreadful pity it all was.

"It's about time we go out for our traditional curry," says Arf. At NOVACON it was an innovation. Now it's a tradition. We consulted Dave Rowley who recommended The Houseboat Tandoori. We immediately decided to shun an establishment with such a low class clientele and went to the Kohinoor.

This was a serious error.

We asked BoSh if he would like to come but his fanclub was about to wine and dine him after a photo-session in the lobby. He looked very much the Pro-Author in a bespoke camel overcoat, rather like Orson Welles. (But more lifelike of course.)

Anyway, off we go to the Kohinoor: £ 1.20 in the taxi plus 20p tip. Arthur does the ordering because I'm not very fluent in Gujarati. We have tikka chicken — which was nice — and then Chicken Biryani. I didn't like this very much but at least it was better than Arthur's King Prawn Biryani (we all had a taste) which was vile. I hate those ludicrously named King Prawns which look like tiny maggots embalmed in Bisto, and I swear I will never eat another. For me, prawns are noble crustaceans from the icy Northern seas, not suspicious warm water fleas from the mouth of the Ganges.

Back to the hotel. Minicab with Indian driver and no meter. £ 2 plus 20p, but we were too disheartened to argue about it. We've all got to make a living somehow.

I hadn't been feeling right all day. I got a couple of aspirins from Arthur and then went downstairs again to see Mal and Hazel Ashworth. Hazel had a plasticine sculpture she had made for the Best Steenkeen Gringo Fanzine Award that was really good. She's a little bundle of talent and has previously sculpted an obscene figurine for D. West. If I were Mal I'd give her a limestone boulder for Christmas and see if she turns into Barbara Hepworth. I think I met Nigel Richardson about here, too. Or maybe not. I am always impressed by the Leeds talent though — The Ashworths, D., Ounsley, Richardson — the best fanzine writers in Britain today and then all that team behind them who run the Conventions.

We went into the Fan Room to talk quietly with Avedon. At least it started out like that but Arthur wound her up on Feminism and the rest of us just sat back and enjoyed the fireworks. She knows quite well that Arthur is setting her up and it's more bicker than fight. She doesn't take him apart and inspect his innards for auguries like she did with Ted Tubb.

Rob had just told me that Teresa had a small heart attack but was progressing okay and out of danger. We were talking in general and I happened to mention this because all of the others already knew about it. Except Kate Solomon who went white as a sheet, reared back in her chair saying "No, No," as if I'd smashed my fist in her face. I was sorry I'd been so clumsy, and Rob reassured her that she was really getting better, but it was touching to see how the people we like in fandom are the people who care.

By this time I felt so ill that I thought I'd better go home rather than sleep on the floor. I didn't have my tablets with me and was getting a bit worried. I didn't want to spoil everyone's evening so I told Vincent quietly, said I'd be back in the morning, and went down to the car park.

I was sober enough — I value my driving licence — and after I'd negotiated Spaghetti Junction and found the M6 just where I had left it, I pulled in onto the hard shoulder and threw up the bismati rice, the chicken biryani, the poppadums and the nasty coffee and felt a lot better. There's nothing like a good upchuck, Chuck.

Got home about 2 am and found I had a garage key but no front or back door keys. Some time ago I knocked a wall down in the groundfloor loo and put a door in so that I could get into the garage without walking outside. (This is strictly verboten and the Council will insist on fire doors and God knows what if they ever find out.) There's no lock but I put a bolt on it so that it can be bolted overnight. I didn't want to wake the whole house by knocking at the door so I reckoned that if I pulled really hard at the door the 4 little 3/4" screws that held the bolt would pop out so that I could get in.

And it was so... Except that I hadn't reckoned on Ziggy yapping her head off or Sue on the other side of the door with a cricket bat prepared to sell her virtue dearly. And yet, well, she was really glad to see me. Absence makes the heart grow fonder and all that. I am seriously considering staying out late one night a week from now on and then breaking into my own house early in the morning.

Back to Brum the next morning, but I was still subdued and wretched. I did so wish I wasn't like this; I wanted to zip around and giggle and laugh and chat instead of feeling sorrowful and useless like a spare prick at a wedding.

Anyway, back into the fanroom. There were about 300 or 400lbs of old fanzines — all free for the taking — and I wanted to check them over. I would have liked you all to see

these. They completely refute Walt's axiom about never destroying a fanzine. They were garbage. I was checking by contents, not titles, and they broke my heart. A large part of them were University zines: utterly worthless and deserving nowt but a sack and an incinerator. Trees have a lot to hate fandom for.

Looking back, the programme was mostly fan-orientated stuff and zipped along nicely. I don't think I have ever seen quite so much of an official programme before. Avedon, Greg and Ted White spent a lot of time on the platform. Linda ran the desk and kept the hotel sweet, and Pam ran just about everything else. It was a very good hotel — friendly tolerant staff and a management who were happy enough as long as the money poured into its pockets. They almost ran out of beer on the Friday night and had to run in special deliveries for the rest of the weekend.

All in all, the MEXICON was fine and we got a handsome Farce From The Past certificate for *Hyphen*. A pity I wasn't my usual incandescent self. These Relaxogelds are ruining my fanac and I could barely manage a leer for Ms. Ashworth and Solomon. I tell you, male menopause is hell.

After the debacle I thought I'd get Professional Advice so I took an hour off work to see Doctor John Justice. Not that he was sympathetic or understanding. "35 is much too

young for the male climateric," he said. I told him that I'd always been precocious. (I wrote *Through Darkest Ireland* when I was 3 years and 5 months old.) "Rubbish," he said (and I must say I agree with him although it did get some pretty good reviews at the time.)

"Doc, I mean I can't..."

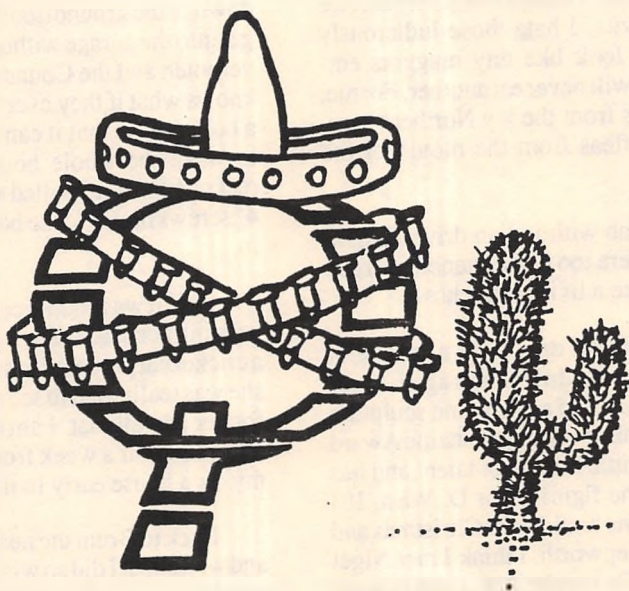
"Not at all?"

"Well, not as much as was usual, not once since Saturday..."

"Mr. Harris, this is perfectly normal. It has nothing to do with Relaxogelds. **THERE IS NOTHING WRONG WITH YOU. YOU ARE BECOMING OBSESSED ABOUT ALL THIS.** Try to find other interests. Play more golf (there's a foot of snow on the course), take long walks (...huh...) think of other things."

"Okay, Doc, I don't want to be silly about this. I'm sorry I bothered you. Er, in *Stud* magazine it says about this cantharides lotion...do you think...?"

No, he didn't think, but I'm thinking about changing him for a more learned counsellor. I haven't seen him so angry since I asked his professional advice about bute. I bet he wouldn't dare speak to Dennis Thatcher like that.



UNACCUSTOMED AS I AM...

"Dear Chuck," said M. Tudor, High Honcho of the Conspiracy Fan Programme, "We've had this Great Idea. BoSh has agreed, Vincent has agreed. Atom. Avedon and Teresa have agreed. Just as soon as you and Walt agree we will feature 'TEAM HYPHEN—The Wheels and Hubcaps of IF—the HYPHEN PANEL'."

Free drink...No less...No shit...Get the show on the road. Zowie...Free drink...Wow.

Now, it is one of the cornerstones of our universe (so okay, your universe lacks cornerstones) that neither Walter nor I appear on platforms. Never. Not ever. We don't do it. No double exposures, blush unseen and all that. Walter is the world's most hopeless introvert and I'm the runner-up because I'm far too deaf to be able to follow any conversations or take part in any panel.



Trouble is Tudor is a Mate, and happy to offer his bottle to a fan in need. What to do? What to do?

"Dear Martin, It's certainly a Great Idea. I am desolate I can't take part. I am so deaf I just couldn't keep track of what the other panelists were talking about. I'm sure you will be even better without me..."

"Dear Chuch, No problem. Teresa will sit next to you with an Amstrad and will type the conversation onto the screen as it's spoken. Terrific, eh?"

"Dear Martin, No. I have this liver thing too. I must avoid stress. I must cut down on gin, women, or breathing. When faced with reality like this there didn't seem to be much choice at all. I found it almost impossible to drink while holding my breath, let alone achieve orgasmic ecstasy. I have had to choose between bliss and booze and of course bliss won hands down as you might say. I had to make the ultimate sacrifice and transferred allegiance from Gordons to Highland Spring Water. I'm fairly sure it's rotting my innards — my heart's in the Hielands, my heart is not here — and although I am allowed the odd medicinal gin and tonic, I have given up chain-drinking for ever. How on earth could I get through a panel on one drink? Disconsolately, Chuch."

"Dear Chuch. No problem. For one drink we take a pint beer glass, add one ice cube, one lemon slice, a tablespoon

of tonic and top up with gin. Perhaps two lemon slices if you want to be really prudent."

I know when I'm beaten. "Dear Martin. Well all right. But two ice cubes... Avedon, who will orchestrate my appearance, points out that the rest of my entourage will feel slighted if they don't take part. To begin with, I will definitely need support from Linda and Pam. They will stand directly behind me, running their fingers through my hair, whilst making low moaning sounds of desire."

"Dear Chuck. Fab. Terrific. Yeah."

"Dear Martin. I will definitely need my cheer-leader group—Hazel Ashworth, Hazel Langford, Sherry Francis, Judith Hanna and Kate Solomon as end pivot. The girls will do their little dance routine, shake their big blue pompom things and generally distract attention from the boring old farts sitting at the table with me. Whenever James White attempts to speak they will adulate like crazy, working up to a crescendo "England's Winner. Chuck. Chuck. Chuck." On the last "Chuck" they will high-kick, pirouette and then bend over to display large letters spelling "Chuck" on their pants. (This is all very tasteful, decorous and inoffensive: nothing sordid or nasty. Avedon choreographed it and based it on a Rockettes routine from Radio City. You have nothing to fear from the Watch Committee.) Kate, at the end of the line, will display either H or K depending on whether I am Him Ancient or Modern, on the day."

"Dear Chuck. Fantastic. You will be the toast of fandom."

"Dear Martin. Yes. From time to time during the Spectacle frenzied groups of female fandom will no doubt invade the stage, trying to embrace me or tear off articles of clothing for souvenirs. I shall accept this with my usual resigned tolerance—the price of fame and all that—and I really love my fans Martin (though not so often as in the past), but you will have to provide a Heavy Mob in case things get out of hand again. It was a damned close-run thing last time. Big Joy got right down to my Heavy Metal designer shorts, read the logo..."Grand Pull Out Surprise Inside" and almost made the exposure of the century before Arthur, quicker than the flash, knocked her cold with a Dave Bridges fanzine he happened to be holding.

You'd think the sexual harassment would grow less over the years, but it doesn't Martin, it certainly doesn't. Perhaps it's my enormous charisma..."

"Dear Chuck, Yes, yes, yes. Terrif. Hyper Fantastical. Let's do it."

* * *

Comes the dawn. Comes the rude awakening. Comes the card from Vince showing the Brighton Centre—acres and acres of red plush sets stretching away to infinity.

"Relax," he says, "all you have to do is fill this. And make 'em laugh."

Seek reassurance. Find Master Orator D Langford having a quiet drink, and lie down beside him. "Never worry," says the Master, "You are held in awe and reverence. Give them your blessing and they will fall to their knees rejoicing."

It seemed unlikely. Make fifth visit to the jakes, wash the cold sweat from my face and search for Teresa.... "Now," she says, all bright, shiny and newly minted for the morning, "let's look at your notes."

"NOTES!!!" I said. "This is a panel...extempore...off the cuff...stream of consciousness. Notes, woman? This is the Real Thing...a conversation piece...repartee, no less, a group of old friends talking up a storm, taking leave of their reminiscences."

"You really believe that?" she said doubtfully. "Every friend you've got in fandom will be out there in the front row and all everyone else crushed into the 35 rows behind. I shall type out all the dialogue on the screen. All you have to do is stay reasonably coherent, and try not to look a nessie. A couple of anecdotes and one-lines might be a help if you get stuck."

"You mean like Walt going up to Bertie McAvoy and her wild harp and saying "Hey, wanna pluck?"

"No...forget it...no time left...they are all going in now."



Too late to run and hide. I am truly petrified. In all my time in fandom I have never done anything like this before. I'm about to lose my fannish virginity and it's too late to back out. I get reassurance and encouragement from just about everyone in the world. I despise myself for such foolishness but I'm still shaking. Teresa and Avedon, hardened old platform pros who've done all this dozens of times before, gentle me towards the platform as if I were a

horse. If I'd had withers they would have patted them. Linda arrives with a drink to top up my tankard. Resolve not to touch it after huge absent-minded gulp to lubricate my dry mouth. If I'm about to make a bloody idiot of myself I'd rather be sober whilst I do it.

Teresa almost disappears behind huge headphones and the screen in front of us lights up in glorious technicolour. Avedon picks up her mike and begins to introduce the panelists, and as fast as she talks the dialogue appears on the screen. Fantastic! A different colour for each panelist and no timelag because of slow lip-reading or hastily written notes. I forgot the stagefright. I forgot the panel. This was so engrossing, so captivating that I missed my first cue. Not that it mattered — James and BoSh scooped up the loose end and away we went into ghoddminton stories.

Easy, easy. I wondered what I'd been silly and panicky about. I watched the screen for my next cue and I said something. It seemed a bit lame and contrived, but I could

see people laughing out front and suddenly I was loving it. After all those worries I wasn't going to faint or fart or wet myself, and the audience were clearly understanding and rooting for me...big sigh of relief and share a conspiratorial grin with Teresa. Another easy cue from Avedon about werewolf stories and I'm so startled at the way the audience react to my answers that I laugh back in delight, forget what I was talking about and dry up in mid-sentence. Arthur moves in to save me with the daftest werewolf story I ever wrote... "The family were changing for dinner"...and suddenly time ran out just as we were starting into old "..." bcover quotes.

And everyone clapped like crazy and I loved it. Teresa climbed out of the earphones and we hugged each other in mutual esteem and relief. Jon Singer came up to say "Boy, that was some panel," and I thought "you can say that again squire." Avedon asks if I was okay and would I do it again — Yes yes yes, now if you like — and Arthur in that affectionate mocking way says "Wow! a star is born again..."

