

HYPHEN

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1963



"So this is the big dark elevator full of pros."

SPECIAL ISSUE

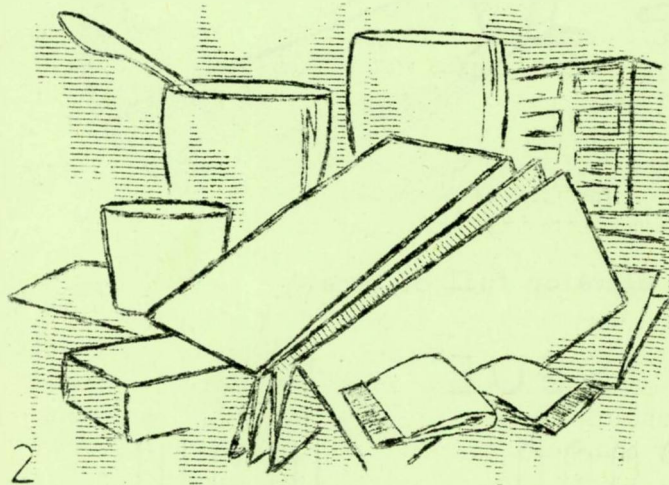
CHICAGO CHICAGO WAW



Thursday/Friday, 29/30th August

As the Scenicruiser threaded its way south-west through New York and its New Jersey environs we saw some fine bridges and terrifyingly complex road formations, but were inspired with awe rather than surprise because these were things we had seen in photographs. Similarly I suppose a first instinctive reaction among fans to live tv pictures of the lunar landscape will probably be how closely it resembles the extrapolations of Bonestell and Pal. What did surprise us was the occasional outcrop of nature and unreconstructed humanity---marshes, dumps, waste ground---which stood out against the metropolitan landscape like a beer can on the Moon.

But soon we were on the turnpike, which is the ultimate so far in man-made environments and seems to bear out the theory that as travel gets faster it gets duller. All you see on turnpike travel, unless the configuration of the countryside is intrinsically interesting, is signs. It's rather like flying by instruments, in that all you know about where you are is the basic data necessary for navigation. Which is as frustrating as making passes at a woman blindfold, knowing only her vital statistics. Similarly two hundred years of American history are inadequately represented by seventeen signs intimating the proximity of Philadelphia, and it's depressing to learn you have missed it altogether by the mere fact that the signs are now heralding Harrisburg. It was, I thought, rather like space travel. You are transported in a sealed container through vast barren distances at speeds so high that any accident would be fatal, intersecting the orbits of exotic places----SIRIUS PLANETS NEXT SEVEN EXITS. ALDEBARAN 73 LIGHT YEARS----but never actually seeing anything but artificial refuelling satellites, Howard Johnston asteroids.



We were far from losing our sense of wonder, but it was being converted into something more hypnotic than hysterical. The first Howard Johnston, for instance, had been a tremendous thrill. These fabulous diners had been one of my clearest memories of 1952, and I delighted in introducing Madeleine to all their marvels---the chocolate malts and orange juice (though both seemed to have got alarmingly more expensive), the rest of the fabulous menus, the little toy cartons of cream, the free iced water, maps and matches, the automatic vendors and all the other fascinating things on sale---and

she was suitably impressed. But as the night wore on I began to feel like the unfortunate Mr. Gall in Peacock's "Headlong Hall", when he tried to lay down the law about landscape gardening.

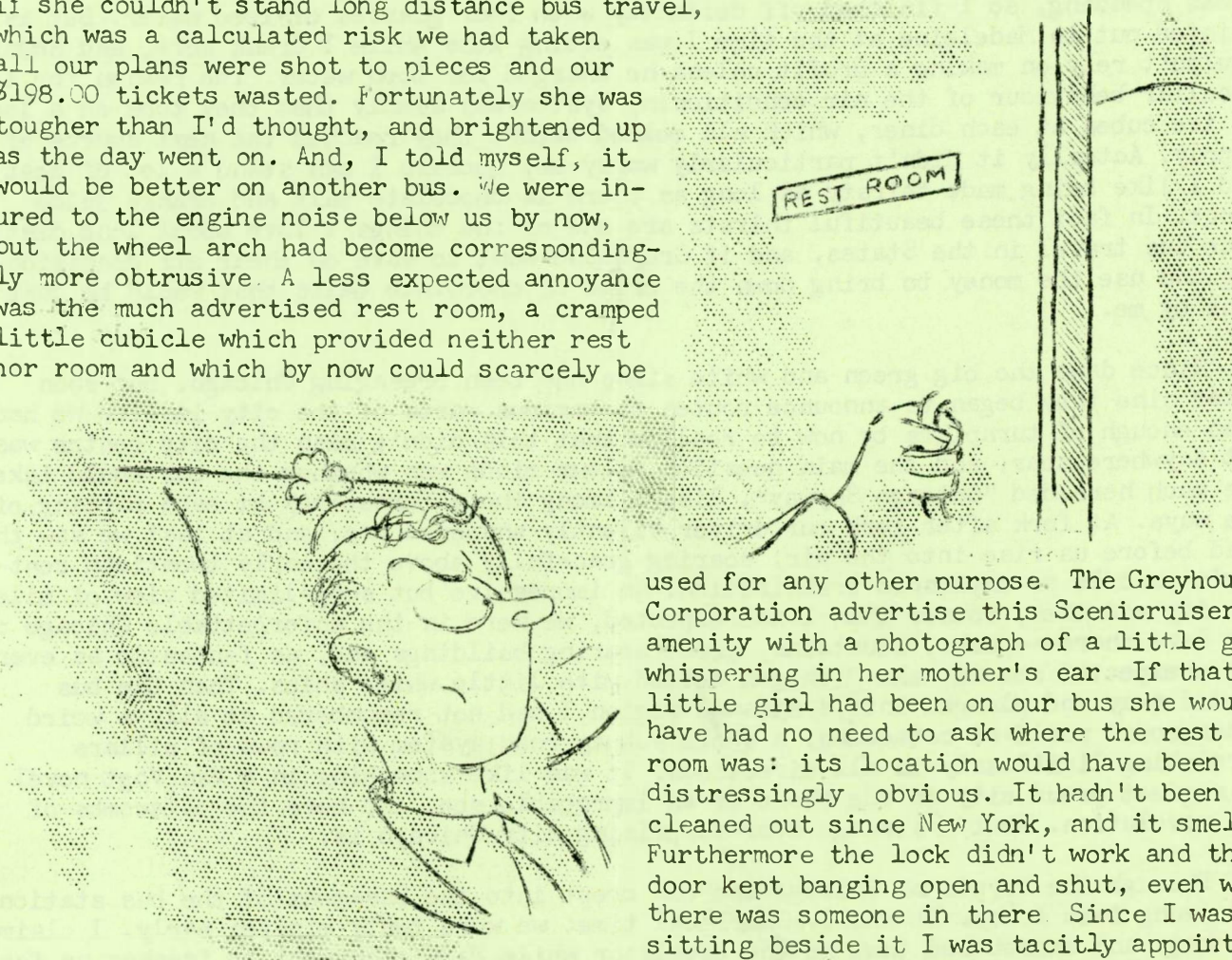
"I distinguish," he said, "the picturesque and the beautiful, and I add to them, in the laying out of grounds, a third and distinct character, which I call 'unexpectedness.'"

"Pray sir," said his enemy Mr. Milestone, "by what name do you distinguish this character, when a person walks round the grounds for a second time?"

For the second diner was exactly like the first, right down to the fellow customers from the other buses, and so were the next and the next. As the night wore on we began to get the dreamlike feeling that there was really only one diner, to which we were continually being returned in some recurring cycle.

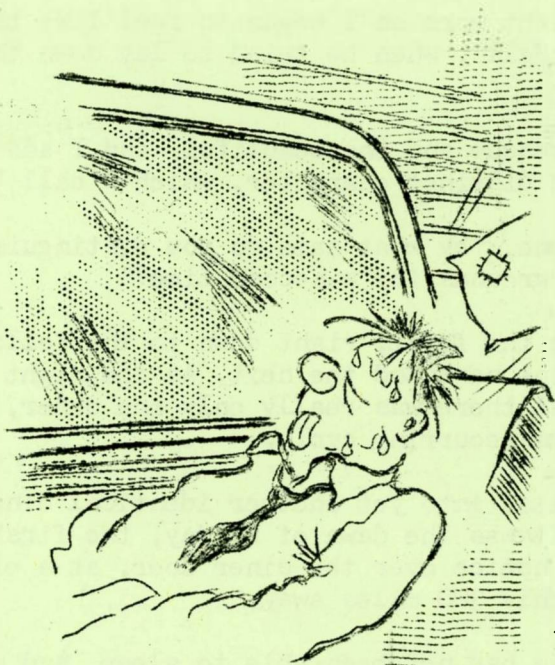
But having stumbled through the darkness into yet another identical diner, we emerged again into unexpected daylight. It was the dawn of Friday, the first day of the Chicon. We were, I found from a tiny notice over the diner door, at a place called Indian Meadow, Ohio. Chicago was only 300 miles away.

But it was a long 300 miles. Madeleine had not been able to sleep and now it was daylight again there seemed less chance than ever of her getting any real rest before the Convention. I was worried about the future as well as the present. For if she couldn't stand long distance bus travel, which was a calculated risk we had taken all our plans were shot to pieces and our \$198.00 tickets wasted. Fortunately she was tougher than I'd thought, and brightened up as the day went on. And, I told myself, it would be better on another bus. We were inured to the engine noise below us by now, but the wheel arch had become correspondingly more obtrusive. A less expected annoyance was the much advertised rest room, a cramped little cubicle which provided neither rest nor room and which by now could scarcely be



REST ROOM

used for any other purpose. The Greyhound Corporation advertise this Scenicruiser amenity with a photograph of a little girl whispering in her mother's ear. If that little girl had been on our bus she would have had no need to ask where the rest room was: its location would have been distressingly obvious. It hadn't been cleaned out since New York, and it smelled. Furthermore the lock didn't work and the door kept banging open and shut, even when there was someone in there. Since I was sitting beside it I was tacitly appointed by the rest of the passengers as guardian of both their sleep and their modesty.



Sometimes in the weeks that followed I felt like publishing a rival Scenicruiser leaflet, from the point of view of the passengers. This would describe the new Obscenicruiser, and would show a little girl holding her nose. The other illustrations, of air conditioning, picture windows and the air-suspension ride, would show sweaty passengers peering exhaustedly through dirty windows at the walls of bus depots, while their 35¢ pillows are being snatched away from below their aching heads.

But to be fair the seats were comfortable, the windows sometimes quite clean and the air conditioning usually worked. It was just that on this first trip it seemed to give up about twenty minutes before each rest stop, so consistently that Madeleine suspected it was by arrangement with Howard Johnston. If so the stratagem certainly worked on me. That first night

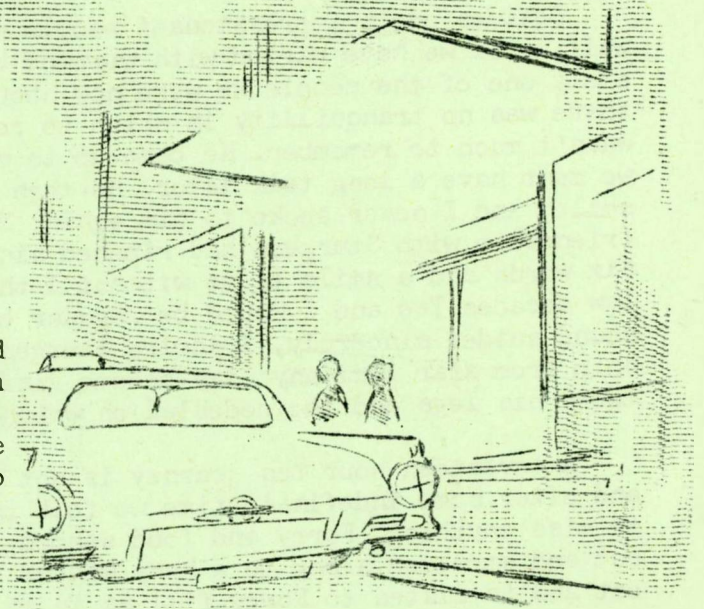
I had two chocolate malts, four glasses of orange juice, one orange drink and one cup of coffee. As you can deduce from that sequence I was getting worried about the money I was spending, so I finished off defiantly with four glasses of iced water. But as I pointed out to Madeleine at the time I was eating less while I drank more, and Howard couldn't rely on making a profit unless he charged for iced water. The reason for the peculiar behaviour of the air conditioning system was simply that they took on a load of ice cubes at each diner, which all melted before they reached the next source of supply. Actually it didn't particularly worry me, because I can stand a lot of heat and I like being made thirsty as long as there is chocolate malt and orange juice about. In fact these beautiful thirsts are one of the things I love about long distance bus travel in the States, and if Greyhound want to save on their air conditioning and use the money to bring down the price of chocolate malts that would be just fine by me.

Since dawn the big green and white signs had been presaging Chicago, but soon after nine they began to announce routes to various parts of the city itself. We had seen enough of turnpikes by now to realise that this didn't mean the city centre was yet anywhere near, and the main question in our minds was whether the bus would take the much heralded "Chicago Skyway", listed among the alternatives at each parting of the ways. At fork after fork our driver silently answered yes, and at last we saw the road before us rise into the air, soaring gracefully above the early twentieth century's muddle of unplanned urbanisation. An impressive but smog-limited view of miles of city and then, sooner than I had expected, we were in the unforgettable Chicago of the lake shore---parks, fountains, great soaring buildings and, as fantastic as ever, the unexpected sea of Lake Michigan dotted with little white ships. Then the bus turned away and plunged into a strange region I had not remembered at all, a weird underground world of catacombs, a whole subway road system with rows of pillars stretching limitlessly in all directions. It was like something in a Van Vogt novel ...a great proud city on the shore of an improbable sea, and here the catacombs of the revolution. What a strange ever-surprising city Chicago is.

Through the crypts of Chicago the bus crept into the basement of the bus station and swung into a bay. It was 9.40am local time: we were twenty minutes early. I claimed the bags and manoeuvred them up the escalator while Madeleine went to freshen up for the second most important occasion of her life. Then we found a cab and I told the driver, "Pick-Congress."

CHICON

I don't remember anything about that taxi ride to the hotel; in fact I doubt if I saw anything, until the big white facade of the Pick-Congress, and the cool foyer all black marble and leather, and strange faces we should be recognising. Until suddenly we were both trying to grab each other's arm and saying "There's Forry!" And there indeed he was, big friendly familiar Forry, a breath of home all the way from MA. As he beamed towards us I thought that of all the ways we had met, London and Belfast in 1951, Chicago and Los Angeles in 1952, and London in 1957, this was the strangest and most wonderful of all.



Talking excitedly to Forry, insofar as it's possible to talk excitedly in the presence of that reservoir of relaxation, we drifted to the reception desk and signed in: and in a moment of sobriety, looked round for our luggage. We saw it being lugged away by an elderly bellboy and, pausing only to ask Forry how much to tip, set after it. On the way to the elevator we met Bob Briggs, whom I remembered from 1952. Then he had told me in the course of conversation that New York would rather be the dirtiest city in the world than the second cleanest, and I had made a note of this epigram and said I would quote it. But somehow it had never found its way into The Harp Stateside, lying instead for ten years on my conscience. I was glad to tell Bob that I would keep my promise, however belatedly. Satisfied, he returned to Washington immediately: at least I never saw him for the entire remainder of the convention.

Holed up in Room 642, in a strange intense mood of mingled eagerness and apprehension, like a rather diffident Napoleon just in from Elba, I showered while Madeleine made up her mind what to wear. Then I paced about the room while she showered and changed. It wasn't a very large room, but large enough to pace in and luxurious by the standards of the hotels we were used to. It had a private bathroom (an awesome convenience we could easily come to regard as a necessity), an air conditioner, a radio-intercom, a dressing-table-desk thing, a double bed, and various other gadgets whose purpose Madeleine was able to explain to me out of the arcane knowledge women have about these things. There was also a television set which I turned on because I dimly remembered that in some previous existence I had wanted to see American television. There seemed to be about eight channels available but how many different programmes this represented I wasn't able to concentrate enough to determine. Suddenly I seemed to have lost every vestige of interest in television.

Showered and changed and as ready for the fray as we would ever be, we took the elevator down again and plunged once more into the foyer. We began to meet people at the rate of about ten a minute. There was Ted Johnstone, who momentarily dumbfounded me by referring to a joke I'd just made in New York, Bruce Pelz looking dramatically different from everything I had expected, Jack Harness in a shirt dramatically like what I had expected, Bjo whom I would have easily recognised from 1952 as a rather paler Betsy Jo McCarthy.... but it would be misleading to give impressions of people now as if I were calm enough to make assessments at the time. Actually to give you the right idea of my state of mind I'd have to employ some sort of 'action writing'

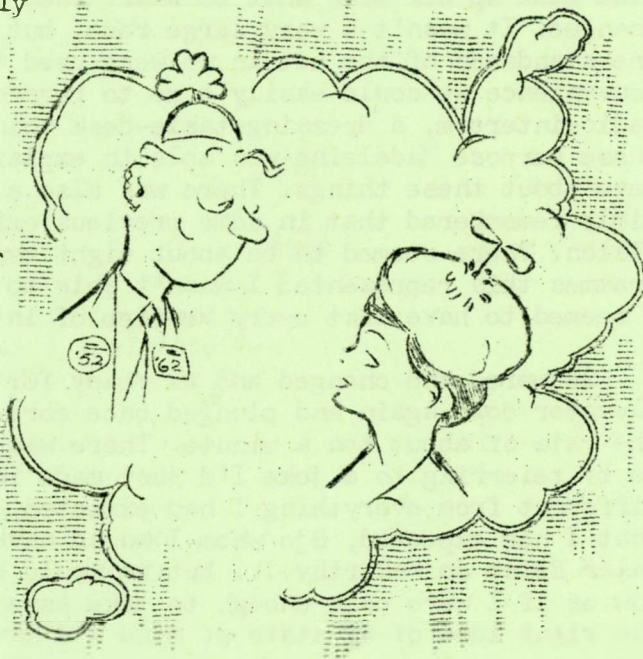
technique, like telling you to tear these pages into fragments and throw them into the air like confetti, reading them as they shower round your head.

Besides one's impressions of people may change as one knows them better, so let's wait until we have parted with them and can recollect them in tranquillity. Unfortunately one of the people we were now about to part with was Theodore Sturgeon, and there was no tranquillity in which to remember him for three days. But then there wasn't much to remember. He came up to me and said how glad he was to see me and that we must have a long talk later. He then disappeared, with a characteristic agonised smile, and I never spoke to him again. Nevertheless I felt that my long standing friendship with Sturgeon had ripened since our last meeting in 1952, when he addressed six words and a smile to me without I think knowing who I was. I felt that in another few decades Ted and I would be regular buddies. I was satisfied I don't mean to sound snide: sincerely, I admire Sturgeon's writing so much I'm quite happy to worship from afar lest any clay become visible on closer inspection of the junction between his legs and the pedestal on which I have placed him.

A seventeen hour bus journey is not the best acclimatisation for a convention, and after some indefinite time we felt the need of some peace and quiet: yet we hated to miss anything. Forry and food seemed the ideal answer, so we separated ourselves out and strolled along to a shop window restaurant. There we calmed down enough to eat and to listen to Forry fill us in on what had been happening in the last few years at the other end of the unbreakable but tenuous line of communication between him and us. This had started when we asked him the time, having remembered the existence of that property of the continuum. He consulted his wrist watches. We asked with interest though without surprise why he wore two, and he explained that he liked watches and since he had plenty of room on his wrist he wore two, one on local time and the other on his publisher's time in New York, usually four hours different. Thus he knew instantly where his publisher was likely to be if he wanted to telephone him. It seemed quite logical to us, and if I had two such nice watches and a publisher in New York I would do the same, but Forry confided that this was one of the things about him which had annoyed Wendayne and led to their divorce. She objected to unconventionalities like this, while he saw no reason to change since he wasn't doing anyone any harm. A woman, he thought, should accept her husband as he was and not try to make him into someone else. They were nice watches, he explained, and indeed he had another dozen strapped to the arm of a statue at home. "I wouldn't wear just any two old watches," he said wryly.

Back at the hotel Forry was instantly apprehended and taken into custody by a movie-house of monster fans. Abandoning him to his fate we turned away and there to our delight was the welcome face of Dick Eney, now ranking as an old friend from back east, and beside him another one from even further east, the tiny but indomitable figure of Ethel Lindsay. That Ethel and I should be together at a Chicago convention was quite incredible, and we both knew it. "You know, Walt," said Ethel, "if I really believed we were here I would just go into that corner and have hysterics. The only thing that saves me is knowing the alarm clock will go off any minute."

"You should worry," I said. "Let me tell

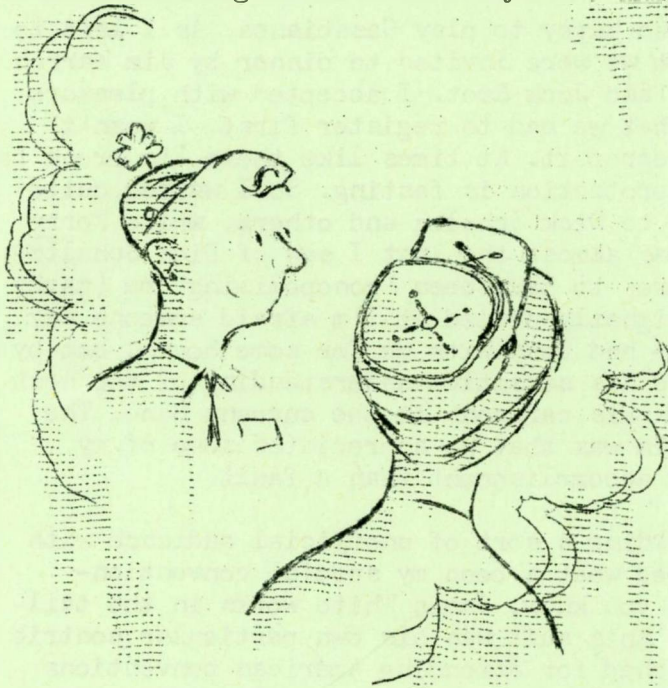


you about this recurring dream I seem to have...."

Just then I almost came to believe I really was dreaming, because I noticed some young women wearing strange name-badges and Eney told me with a heroically straight face that they were Catholic girls. Catholic girls again, it was too much. Instantly I thought of the one person in the world with whom I could properly share the wonder of this, and like magic there she was. "Lee," I said, "there are Catholic girls again."

"I know," she said simply. "Korshak finally got them out of the Convention Hall."

"Lee," I said wildly, "let's go up on the roof and look for Max. Or go along to Wimpy's and talk to Sam Moskowitz. Nobody else is talking to him these days."



"Walt, you are forgetting something," said Lee. "Rich Elsberry is watching us "

"Well, all right," I agreed "But let's go and have a chocolate malt anyway. I've still got that cow on my shoulder."

"So that's what it is," said Lee, with her uncanny gift for the esoteric allusion "I thought it was the hamburger you promised to wear in your buttonhole."

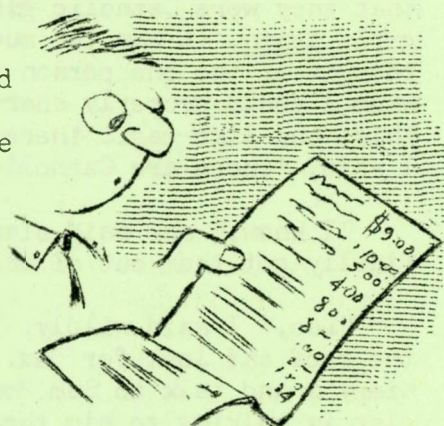
I couldn't match that---why I still can't remember the context in which I wrote it eleven years ago---so I just went over and extricated Forry and introduced him to Lee all over again, as I had done in 1952, and took everybody to the hotel drugstore and bought them chocolate malts.

As we sipped them happily I noticed Lee was already wearing the little harp brooch I had brought over for her, after scouring Belfast for one exactly like the one I brought her in 1952. Curiously, I didn't remember having given it to her yet. I felt in my pocket. I hadn't. There was a brooch still in my pocket, accompanied now by a warm glow in my heart. Why, the dear girl had kept that harp brooch all those years and brought it out for this occasion. I took out the new brooch and silently showed it to her and we just smiled at one another: there was nothing we needed to say.

Conventions and life in general being what they are, this idyllic interlude didn't last long. The next thing I remember is being accosted in a corridor with the gleeful news that Jim Webbert was here and looking for me. But apparently a very different Webbert from the brash youth I had pilloried in 1952. He had changed completely. The new Webbert was adult, mature, strong and had studied Judo and Karate, so that he could

kill a man with one blow of his cigarette lighter. Terrified, I retreated to the protective darkness of the bar, where I cowered behind Bill Donaho with a loyal body-guard comprising Lee, Forry, Ted Johnstone, Andy Main, Dick Schultz and reinforcements which arrived from time to time. Actually I did meet Jim and found him indeed a different person, so that I regretted even more blackening his name on the assumption he had left fandom for good.

The bar was a most peculiar place called The Highland Room. The drinks were served by pretty girls in short kilts and charged for by a strange system which must have originated in Aberdonian hosteleries frequented by rich and guileless English tourists. Every drink ordered at a table throughout a session was put on a single bill which was presented to the last to leave, so that to buy a single round at a time everyone would have had to go out and come in again. I could see that this would make for a quick turnover of clientele but it was singularly unsuitable for conventions.



However on this occasion I was only too happy to play Casabianca. As I left to follow the others to the registration room we were invited to dinner by Jim Warren with Forry, John & Bjo Trimble, Bob Madle and Jock Root. I accepted with pleasure but also with secret relief at the fact that we had to register first. I wasn't hungry, and I knew if I ate now I would regret it. At times like these I'm prone to nervous indigestion, from which the only protection is fasting. So I waited quite happily at the end of a long line talking to Dick Schultz and others, while Forry hovered about impatiently. I think this was almost the last I saw of Dick Schultz. Next morning someone told me he was supposed to have been 'monopolising' me (maybe Rich Elsberry was there) and though I indignantly denied it I'm afraid someone may have said the same to Dick. It was true he had been with me for some hours, but by no means unwelcomely: indeed I appreciated his sensitive understanding of the nostalgic mood of that first day, evidenced in his cartoons in the current Bane. The only criticism I could possibly make of him was that he appreciated some of my jokes more than I did, and that's more an accomplishment than a fault.

It was while standing in this line holding a sort of unofficial audience with various people who came by, that I realised what a boon my special convention-attending suit was turning out to be. As you know, James White works in the tailoring department of a multiple store, and this suit was his own particular contribution to TAWF. It had been specially designed for attending American conventions, being of a strong but light-weight Terylene mixture and having no less than ten pockets. Including one for holding American size fanzines, unfolded, one for the programme booklet, one as a sort of quick-draw holster for a notebook, and one in the waistband of the trousers for an American size billfold, so strategically placed that anyone wanting to pick my pocket would have had to seduce me first, and at least I would have got something for my money. This last pocket was quite a contribution to my peace of mind during the trip. In 1952 I had carried all my money in my hip pocket and for years afterwards I found myself in moments of stress tapping my bottom with the knuckle of my thumb to make sure it was there. Which of course it wasn't, and I hate to think of the effect on my subconscious of these multiple shocks.

But the use I was making of the suit now was one neither James nor I had envisaged. When you meet someone you have been looking forward to meeting for years, there is so much to talk about that you sometimes don't know where to start. There can actually be incredible frustrating moments of silence while each searches for some

remark not too unworthy of such a climactic occasion. It helps to have something trivial, but immediate and comprehensible, to start things going. I broke a lot of log-jams with that tweed ice-breaker.

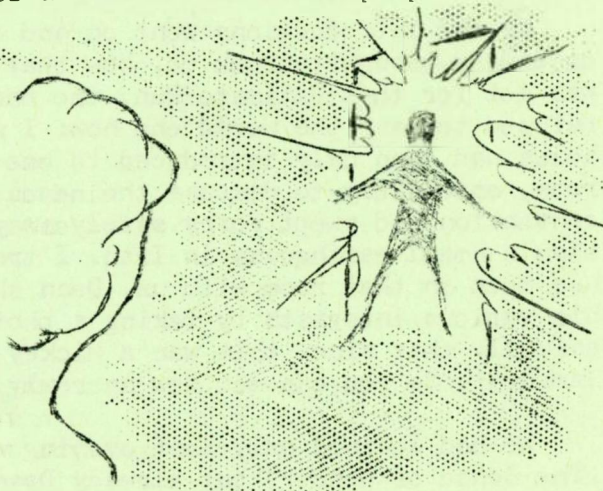
After half an hour or so Forry lost patience and following a whispered discussion with members of the Convention Committee at the registration table brought Madeleine and me to the front of the line, and when we had registered started to shepherd us in the direction of the dining room. But there was one little thing I had to do first. I pinned on my name badge, and then took out of my pocket something I had kept for sheer sentiment and could now, incredibly, use again. I pinned on the other lapel my 1952 name badge.

In the dining room I realised worriedly that I still wasn't hungry, though it was now quite late. But I couldn't sit there and fast, with such a congenial host and such pleasant company. And maybe I would be all right by the time the food arrived. So I ordered. But the service was too good, and now I faced an even worse problem. I couldn't leave the food my host was paying for, and it looked so delicious, and maybe I could chance it. So I did, only to realise almost immediately I had made the same mistake I had made with a certain hot nut fudge sundae in Los Angeles ten years ago. I listened dully to the scintillating conversation going on around me, wishing I could join in. But all I could do was sit there like a Buddhist monk contemplating my navel, or what was going on beneath it. John Trimble was wearing a badge saying "Repeal the 19th Amendment", the effect of which would be to strip women of their franchise, and outlining his programme subsequently. Forry advanced a rival slogan, "Repeal the Liberty Bell." It was, he explained innocently, not all it was cracked up to be.

At this point I whispered to Madeleine to apologise for me, and left hurriedly. I had of course been exposed to Forry's puns before, so I knew he wouldn't feel guilty. By the time I got to my room the wave of nausea had receded, but I knew it would be back. I tried to make myself sick, but failed miserably, so I lay down to see if I could sleep it off. But neither my stomach nor my mind would settle--- here in Chicago I couldn't just lie there---so after a while I got up again. I had a shower and felt a little better, so I went downstairs again and found the dinner party over but Madeleine still bravely flying the family flag in the corridors. We met the Busbys, the Grennells and Boyd Raeburn, who had just arrived. That alone seemed achievement enough for one day, and we decided to go to bed and conserve our energy. It was only about half ten, but after yesterday in New York and the night in the bus and the sort of day we'd had since, it seemed to us we must be exhausted if we only had the sense to realise it. So we stole away to our room and found it was so, and drifted off to sleep thinking happily of all those wonderful people around us whom we were to see more of tomorrow.

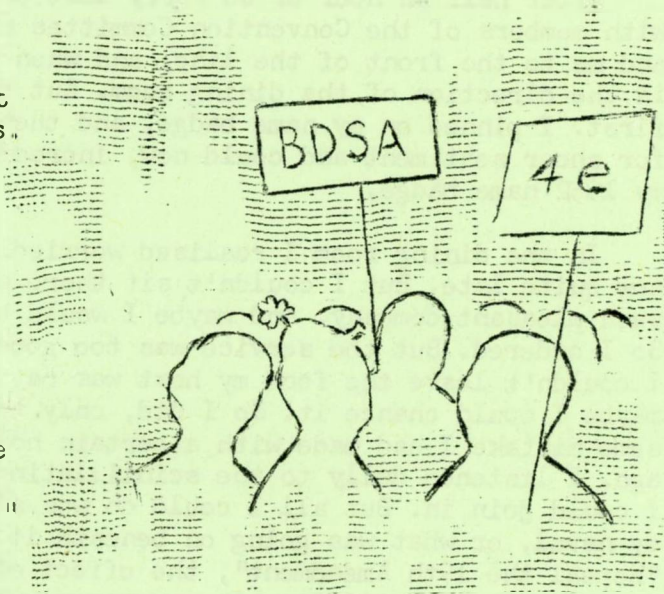
Saturday 1st September

So we were up bright and early next morning at the crack of 9.15, winding up slowly for the day buying postcards in the hotel drug-store and strange American breakfasts and endless cups of coffee with the few others who were alive at this hour. This peaceful prelude ended when I caught sight of the man whom some of you know as Robert Bloch. I whispered tensely to Madeleine, "There He is." The brave girl tidied her hair,



adjusted her clothing and we went to confront him. I must say he rose to the occasion with all the old world gallantry one would expect from a member of an older generation. He gave Madeleine a lecherous look, whispered his room number in her ear and added as a further inducement that he knew what I had done with Max Keasler. "How are you going to ditch your husband?" was the way his suave advances continued.

Fortunately the Programme was now about to start, with the Introduction of Notables. As we passed the sign to the Florentine Room where this was to take place Bloch commented that they mustn't know yet what fans were like, or they'd have called it The Quarantine Room. Inside we sat about two thirds of the way up on the right hand side and looked round us. We had, I found, Forry Ackerman on one side and Dean Grennell just behind us. It seemed too good to be true, but... "Forry," I whispered, "have you ever met Dean Grennell?" He shook his head and looked around interestedly. "Dean," I said, in quiet triumph, "may I introduce you to Forry Ackerman?"



What greater honour could fall to a fan all the way from Ireland, I thought, than that of introducing Grennell to Ackerman? As if in answer, Doc Smith asked for my autograph, an accolade marred only by my good memory... I knew he collected autographs for his daughters. As I passed the book back I noticed the man directly behind me was wearing a name badge saying he was Harry Stubbs. I introduced myself and told him how James White had regarded it as the ultimate in egoboo when he was recently compared to Hal Clement. On behalf of Clement, Stubbs said he liked James' work too, and I fixed the last three events firmly in my mind. All in all it was a couple of minutes guaranteed to impress the striped pants off James.

At 11.50 Dean McLoughlin and Howard Devore began to perform their own introduction of notables, taking the fans and pros neither respectively nor respectfully. Larry Shaw, introduced among the pros, stood up and said simply "I'm a fan", for which I admired him all the more. Many of McLoughlin's more willing candidates for professional honours were not there, including Fred Pohl and Cele Goldsmith. Nor was Vernon Coriell, though I carefully examined the chandeliers.

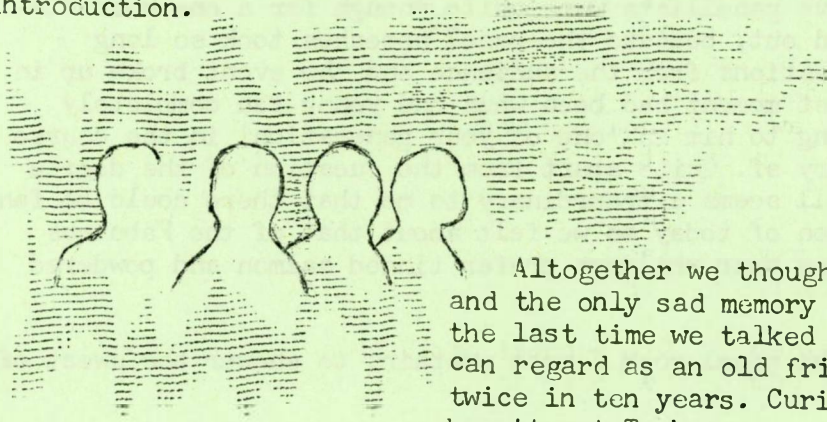
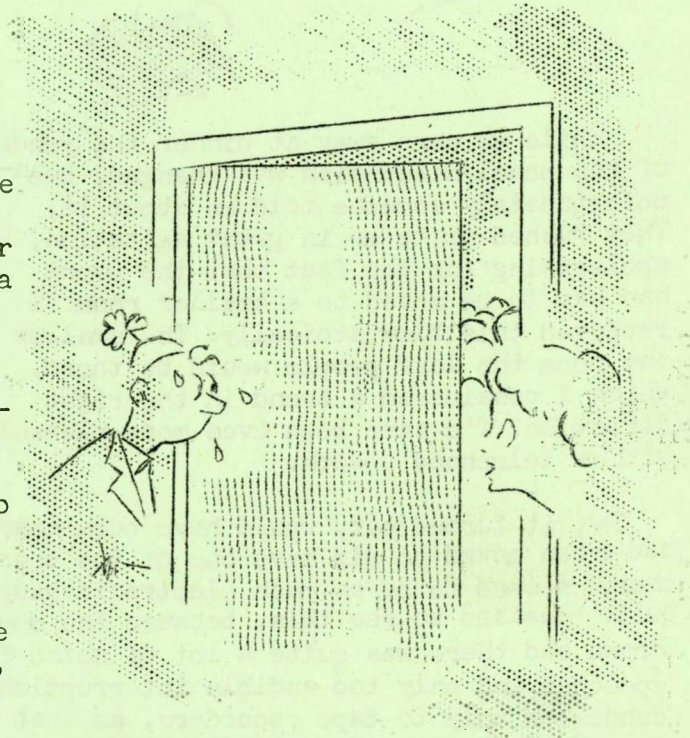
As the introductions went on and on and my hands got too sore to clap any more an uneasy thought struck me. Now that I had introduced Grennell to Ackerman the stage was set for that Ultimate Pun, the one which would bring the world to an end. But I refused to have the world end now: I was enjoying it too much. So after all the notables had been duly introduced to one another we whisked Dean & Jean up to their room, ostensibly to discuss the panel that evening. The centrifugal forces of the convention had swept Forry safely away, so nothing worse occurred that afternoon than a small earthquake in Iran. I tremble to think what might have happened if Forry had been in that room with us. Dean showed us one of his guns and then combined all his various interests by taking a photograph of Madeleine holding it and by saying casually that since this was a Mickey Spillane type shot he would take it with "Mike Hammera". So you can see how narrowly the world escaped extinction.

We had learned only last evening what the subject of the panel was going to be (The Sense of Wonder) but already Dean had a Chairman's introduction all typed out,

and said the rest of us were supposed to make short speeches too. This rather shook me because I had optimistically assumed that all a panel had to do was answer questions, so I borrowed Dean's typer and tried to compose something and myself. But I found I couldn't write with other people present (I have these incantations to make, you see, and that cockerel bit makes rather a mess) so I went back to our room while Madeleine went downstairs to see if we could offer any help, material or otherwise, with the arrangements for the reception. She came back to report she'd been told just to run along and get ready, and this she proceeded to do while I finished my speech. (I don't mind writing speeches: maybe Sam Moskowitz and I should go into partnership.) She was pretty nervous, but managed to pull herself together, after which I zipped her up. We arrived at our reception only two minutes late.

I had never been the recipient of a Reception before, but I didn't find it all that different from the rest of the convention. The difference was to everyone else. Sometimes the nicest people you could wish to meet don't introduce themselves for fear of pushing themselves forward, and the idea of setting aside a time when they're supposed to push themselves forward is a wonderful one. Whoever conceived it---Larry & Norcen I think---deserves an Award, and already has our undying gratitude. It is not only nice to meet people, but a relief to know you haven't missed anyone who wants to meet you.

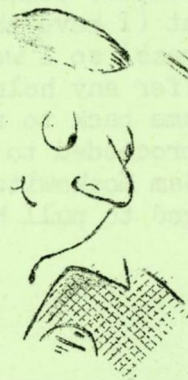
Someone had had a little piece printed up about us, which had been issued with the program booklet. I glanced through it then, blushed furiously, and haven't dared to read it since, though I think Madeleine knows it by heart. The Shaws and the Lupoffs were making Pepsi-Cola flow like water. Dean Grennell had made us a little plaque reading "Oblique House: Chiacgo Wing" which I put on the wall. Robert Bloch made a welcome and typically thoughtful appearance at the beginning and the end to lighten the load. Bob Tucker manifested himself at the Convention for the first time right in the middle of it, escorted by Lee Hoffman, and was immediately swallowed up in the throng. But not before he was noticed by Ted Johnstone, to whom I was talking at the time. "Is that Tucker?" he asked wistfully. "I've always wanted to meet him." So I pushed my way through the crowd with Ted, asked Lee "Is this where you get to meet Tucker?" and performed another notable introduction.



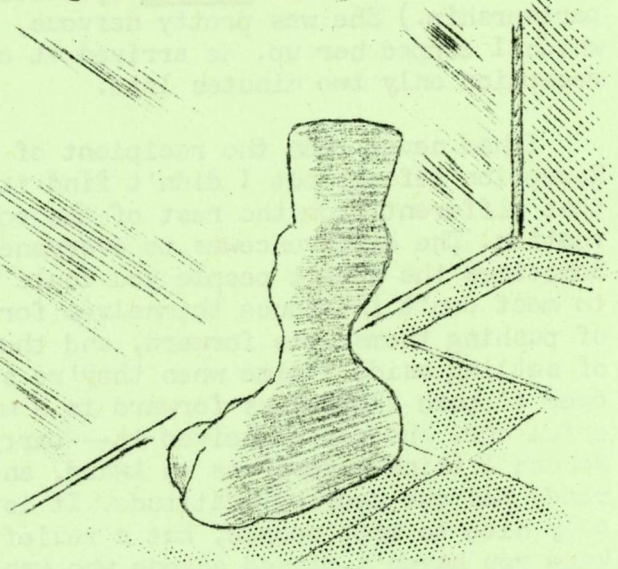
Altogether we thought the reception was wonderful, and the only sad memory of it is that it was virtually the last time we talked to Tucker. It's curious how one can regard as an old friend someone one has met only twice in ten years. Curious, that is, to anyone who hasn't met Tucker.

Quite suddenly, it seemed, everyone had gone and so had the whole afternoon. Exhausted but happy, we went out to dinner with Ethel, the Lunoffs and the Grennells.

On the way Dean saw in an art shop window a plaster statuette of the head and bosom of an Egyptian princess, and said he was going to buy it for the National Fantasy Fan Federation. It was, he understood, a girl called Neffertiti. I agreed this was a good idea; in fact I'd heard they were expecting a bust in the N3F.



While we were away at dinner the venue of the panel discussion was changed, but unfortunately someone told me about it. They rushed up to me in great agitation, apologising for the fact that the event had had to be moved to a smaller room. I received this blow stoically. The smaller the room the less people would be there, which I considered a trend in the right direction. I'd have been even more pleased with a telephone booth.

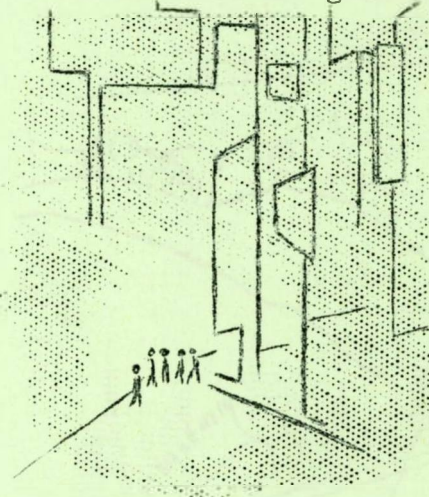


So, it turned out, would have been nearly everyone else, and indeed the room we had been moved to did have one of the characteristics of a telephone booth, in that there seemed to be as much electronic gadgetry as people. Initially everyone was quite pleased to see this, because the doors couldn't be closed on account of the crowd and there was quite a lot of noise from outside. But after some inaudible speeches and only too audible interruptions it emerged that the microphones were connected only to tape recorders, so that the only people able to hear everything were Frank Dietz and posterity. It was rather like one of those fake events arranged solely for television, in which the live audience is a mere backdrop. However the confusion over the microphones had one extraordinary result: there was no microphone near me so I didn't rely on it, and was one of the more audible speakers. Altogether I was reasonably satisfied with my little contribution---I even got laughs with both my jokes---and sat back almost happily to await the questions. And then some loud-voiced character got up and said, "I would like to ask Mr. Willis to make another 3 or 4 minute speech." Quite taken aback I just said "Tomorrow", meaning the banquet. I thought the implied criticism, or so I considered it at the time, was unfair, because four minute speeches by five panellists were quite enough for a one hour discussion program. And so it turned out, because the panel speeches took so long there was time for only a few questions from the audience and the event broke up in general frustration. The brightest moment had been when one young fan completely dumbfounded Dick Eney by referring to him as "one of your generation" in the course of some remarks about contemporary sf. Quite apart from the question of the degree of senility of Dick Eney, it still seems extraordinary to me that there could be fans who feel about the science fiction of today as we felt about that of the Fabulous Forties. It is rather like finding your children prefer tinned salmon and powdered eggs.

Making a rapid escape from the panel room I went upstairs to shower the sweat off.

Then I zipped Madeleine into her blue ball gown and we went downstairs to see the fancy dress. In the big room there was a huge crowd seeming to consist entirely of strangers and photographers, in the middle of which we caught an occasional glimpse of people in fancy dress shuffling around in a solid circle, as if trapped on a congested turntable. It was, apparently, supposed to be a parade, but there was nowhere for them to parade to; all that happened was that more fancy dressers crushed into the circle and none got out. Finally we gave up the chair on which we had been standing to yet another photographer...this seemed to be another fake event staged for posterity....and retreated to the outlying regions. There we met Bob Madle, who abruptly asked me if I ever kept the sf magazines I used to buy in the Thirties. I couldn't honestly say I did, because my mother kept throwing them out under the mistaken impression that they were not great literature, but after more interrogation Bob elicited an admission that I had held onto a couple of science fiction books. He then told me that as an old-time Collector from way back I was qualified to attend the First Fandom Party, and was hereby invited. Proud and kind of humble as I was to receive this fatted calf from ancestral fandom, it was quite a shock to absorb the additional information that I was in fact two years older than father-figure Bob Madle himself.

By now various entrants from the fancy dress parade had been expelled from the melée like pins from an orange and were mutely challenging people to guess who they were...a particularly testing task for us, who had barely learned to recognise them in their normal guise. The most remarkable transformation was that of Bruce Pelz, who had performed the notable feat of wearing fancy dress throughout the Convention until he looked quite normal in it, and had then changed his clothes, shaved off his beard, had his hair cut and left off his glasses.



The judging apparently over, a very loud dance band started to play and conversation became impossible within the blast area. We stayed for a while watching the twist session in which only about a dozen people were participating, half of whom seemed to be Boyd Raeburn, and then fled to the back of the hall carrying the fragments of our eardrums. Bruce Pelz and Jock Root with great initiative pulled across a folding and partly soundproof partition and we talked with them and various others until nearly 2am. Then we went out with Ted White to eat, roaming the warm and brightly lit streets of Chicago happily until Ted found a place to which he thought he could entrust us.

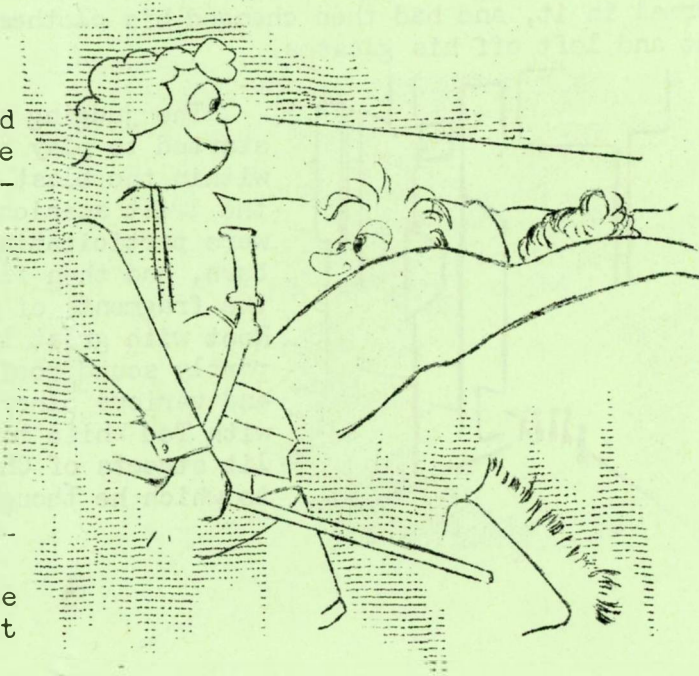
Back at the hotel Ted went to bed, and we thought that before we went to the First Fandom Party we would take up a couple of other invitations we'd been given the night before, from Marsha Brown and Don Ford. At Marsha's we sat for a while on a bed listening to Jerry Pournelle and H. Beam Piper singing obscure Scottish folksongs at the top of their by no means obscure voices, and to Jerry castigating some other folksinger who had apparently struck it rich and was driving about in foreign cars. "What's so folksy about a Ferrari?" he roared indignantly.

On the way out we were invited to breakfast at the Playboy Club and regretfully declined, on the grounds that we'd just had dinner, or something, and had two more invitations to take up. But on the way to Don Ford's room we met Don himself, with Lou Tabakow and Stan Skirvan, and he told us the First Fandom Party was over. We sat in Don's room talking quietly and congenially for a while, and then in came the man who had asked me to make another speech. It turned out his name was Fry, and he was still asking questions. He wanted me to expound further on the Sense of Order, and also to explain to him just why I didn't want to speak in public. At the time, for some reason, neither of these subjects was irresistibly attractive to me, and anyway it was obvious that Don had intended to go to bed soon, so I side-stepped the argument and we left. We found ourselves in the empty corridor again, with nowhere to go. It seemed all wrong somehow. To be at the Chicon with no one to talk to was not only anti-climactic, but after those two crowded days almost incredible. We realised we had gone to bed early the wrong night, but there was more to it than that. Emotionally of course my subconscious was convinced that people just didn't want to invite me to their parties, but intellectually I surmised the reason was in one important difference from 1952 which I had overlooked. Then I had come by myself, and was always with some in-group or other. But this time Madeleine and I constituted a little ingroup of our own. It had meant we could get away from it all without being accused of being stand-offish or monopolising each other, but it also meant that, as now, we couldn't always get back to it all again.

So, rather mournfully, we just went to our room and to bed.

Sunday 2nd September

At ten next morning, wakened unintentionally by the cleaning woman, we dashed down to the Florentine Room just in time to miss the intentionally scheduled Business Session. However on the way back to coffee we were solemnly assured by Bob Silverberg, one of the early bergs, that nothing sensational had occurred. ...except, of course, that the next Con had been voted to Belfast. For once he was unable to create a willing suspension of disbelief and we continued breakfastwards comparatively unshaken. I had a vague idea there might be some sort of intelligence test going on somewhere about this time, but lacked even the intelligence to find it. In any case I had this deep instinctive feeling that

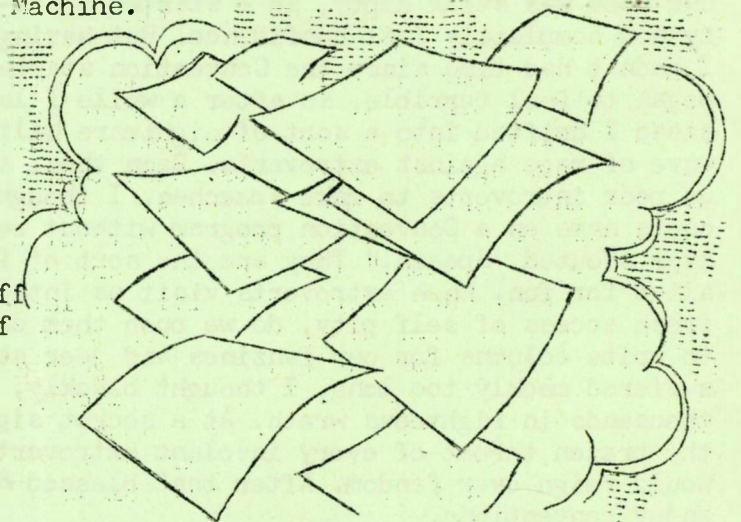


at this time of the morning the most intelligent answer to this test was to be in bed.

I felt better after coffee at the hotel drugstore, with Lee Hoffman, Ruth Kyle & Sid Coleman, a varied but congenial group. I just had coffee, because we had a very important lunch invitation and I wanted my stomach to accept it too. At Madeleine's suggestion I visited the N3F room after breakfast, but found it apparently not at its best. There were only two people there, both so uncommunicative as to be obviously members of the Unwelcome Committee. So I rejoined Madeleine at the Art Show and browsed there happily for a while marvelling at what these arty fellows could get up to. Until Bjo came along and started to explain something, so tactfully that at first I didn't realise I was being chucked out. The room was being closed for the judging, she explained charmingly, though of course if we wanted to stay... I didn't want to be in the way, and I had the vague idea that we mightn't be allowed to leave during the judging, like fake cardinals in the Vatican. Rather than be a wet blanket on the smoke signals we left after thanking Bjo sincerely. I tell you, being thrown out of a room by Bjo is an uplifting experience.

At 12.30 our host, Algis Budrys, collected us outside the dining room, brought us to a table and then, in the course of what seemed inconsequential chat, quietly dropped a depth charge into my life. He was, I realised, quite seriously suggesting I write a book for Regency, for which he would pay money. I was so taken aback as to be quite unable to face the idea at the time, so I just said I'd think about it and changed the subject. People had suggested professional writing to me before but I'd always dismissed it as persiflage. But now someone, and a real live publisher at that, had actually invested real money, to wit the cost of two excellent lunches, thereby raising the concept to an entirely new level of reality. It was like hearing that Imperial Chemicals have bought a Hieronymous Machine.

The next thing I remember after the traumatic experience of being Taken To Lunch By My Publisher is listening to Marvin W. Mindes discoursing on Science Fiction, Mental Illness and the Law. A wide field, as he disarmingly admitted. "The nature of ultimate reality," he said cheerfully, "I will take care off in passing." He went on to take care of psionics in what I thought was a less guarded assessment than one would normally expect from a lawyer. The Dean Drive, the Shaver Mystery and Psionics, he affirmed categorically, were all instances of the legitimate science fiction field being taken over by nuts. In answer to sporadic protests he conceded that



some subjects like the Rhine experiments might be legitimate fields for speculation, but they had been invaded by nuts. Valid scientific territory was being polluted, and hypotheses being perverted into cults. The job of those of us who could differentiate between science and a lunatic craze was to nail the nuts.



Despite the absence of John W. Campbell and other prominent

figures in the unnailed nut world, it was an entertaining three quarters of an hour, and after it even Frank Robinson's talk on science fiction in the men's magazines seemed to lack dramatic impact. Madeleine whispered she had a headache and slipped out, and after a few minutes I followed her to see if she was all right. I left by an unused side door near my seat, and found myself in the world of an UNKNOWN story.

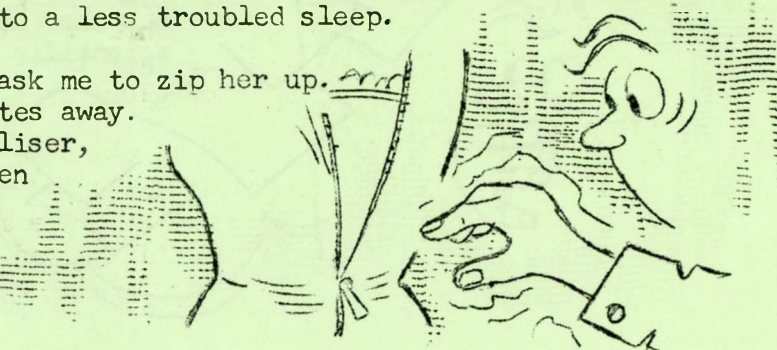
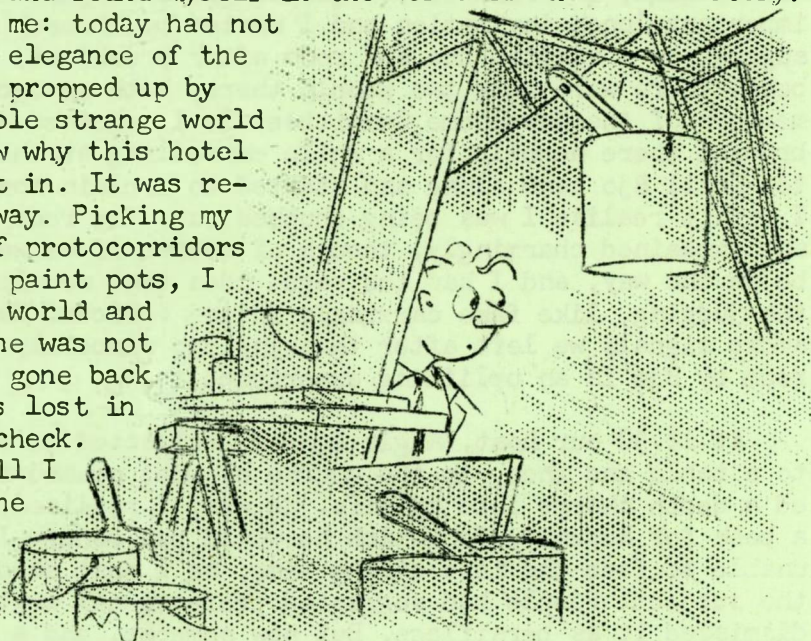
The little men were not ready for me: today had not been finished here. The marmoreal elegance of the hotel was, I found, a mere facade propped up by scaffolding behind which was a whole strange world of chaos and confusion. Now I knew why this hotel was so hard to find your way about in. It was rebuilt every night in a different way. Picking my way through endless dim regions of protocorridors thronged with planks, plywood and paint pots, I eventually emerged to the surface world and found my way to our room. Madeleine was not there. I thought she had probably gone back to the Convention Hall while I was lost in the labyrinth, so I went back to check.

But she still wasn't there, and all I saw was Ted Sturgeon denouncing the common assumption that sexual excitation was somehow wrong. I agreed, but at the time the subject was of merely academic

interest to me and I didn't feel like sitting on a hard chair, even listening to Sturgeon. I was worried a little about Madeleine too, so I went upstairs again. Our room was still empty, so I started to re-write my banquet speech, in which I had by now completely lost confidence. But having started to brood about the banquet... I hadn't had time since the Convention started to get in any serious brooding. I began to feel terrible, so after a while I lay down and tried to sleep it off. Instead I drifted into a sort of nightmare halfworld in which I was swept by a great wave of rage against extroverts. Damn those smiling loudmouthed bastards who force us poor introverts to make speeches, I thought. Damn everyone who has ever put anyone's name on a Convention program without being asked to. Damn everyone who has ever shouted "Speech." They are the sort of fiends who would bury claustrophobes alive for fun. When extroverts visit us introverts in our studies, I thought in a fresh access of self pity, do we push them down in front of typers and command them to write columns for our fanzines and jeer at them for not writing enough? We have suffered meekly too long, I thought blackly, it is time for us to rise in our thousands in righteous wrath. At a secret signal let every introvert rise and slit the brazen throat of every insolent extrovert. What a wonderful peace and silence would reign over fandom. After that blessed St. Bartholomew's Day, how much we could enjoy conventions.

A thing which, I realised, I was hardly doing at the moment. I must pull myself together. I got up again, found the tranquillisers Dean Grennell had given us and took one. After a while I fell into a less troubled sleep.

Madeleine woke me at 7.15 to ask me to zip her up. The banquet was only fifteen minutes away. Both of us took another tranquilliser, Madeleine because she had just been told she would have to "say a few words" too. She kept suggesting little jokes she might say and I kept telling her, out of my



vast experience of public speaking, that they wouldn't do. One thing I did know was that, public speaking being a medium of communication so vastly inferior to the printed word, jokes have to be simple. While I was still in the shower Ethel called for us to give and get moral support, and we all went down to our fate together.

We were shown to a table just below the speakers' dais, and found we were sharing it with Mr & Mrs Marvin Mindes, Mr & Mrs Ed Hamilton and, of all people, Bill Hamling. This was his first appearance at the Convention, so I hadn't seen him since September 1952, when he gave me a cheque for \$50.00 and a frozen daquiri. He remembered me, but evidently not the circumstances of our meeting: nor did he seem to know the circumstances of this one....

"Have you come over specially for the Convention?" he asked friendly.

"Well, yes...." I said.

"Do you hear that?" he said enthusiastically to Hamilton. "All the way from Ireland to attend our Chicago Convention. And he did the same in 1952. Such loyalty!"

"Well," I said, "it wasn't just... Well, you remember--"

"Say," he said, "didn't you have a beard last time I saw you?"

"No," I said, "it was a frozen daquiri. Don't you remember you---"



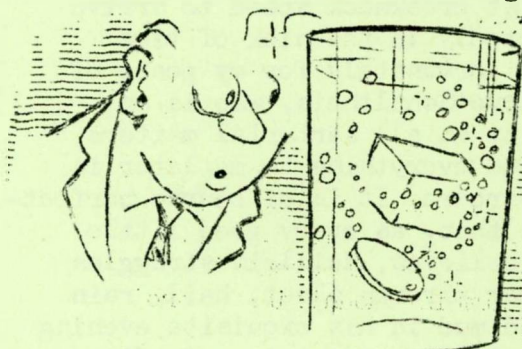
But at this moment Bob Tucker came by to tell us to keep our speeches short because Ghod was due to appear unexpectedly at exactly 9.45: in fact we needn't even go up to the dais. While Ethel and I were discussing the implications of these three statements Hamling got involved in conversation with his neighbours across the table and I never did get the chance to tell him how much that \$50.00 had meant to me in 1952. I looked for him after the banquet but he had disappeared again.

By the time the food arrived I had assessed what my first tranquillisers had done for me, and was not impressed with this miracle of modern science. True, I wasn't nervous any more, but then neither is a man who knows he is about to be hanged. Nervousness implies some sort of hope. I felt even less fitted to make a speech without my reserves of nervous energy. Maybe the food would help, I thought, if I could trust my stomach. I took out a precautionary Alka-Seltzer and dropped it in the glass of iced water. It fizzed reassuringly round the ice cube. What confidence it inspired,

I thought, that powerful chemical reaction. It was doing me good already. "It's a form of fizziotherapy," I confided to Ethel.

"What is that you're drinking?" asked Mindes.

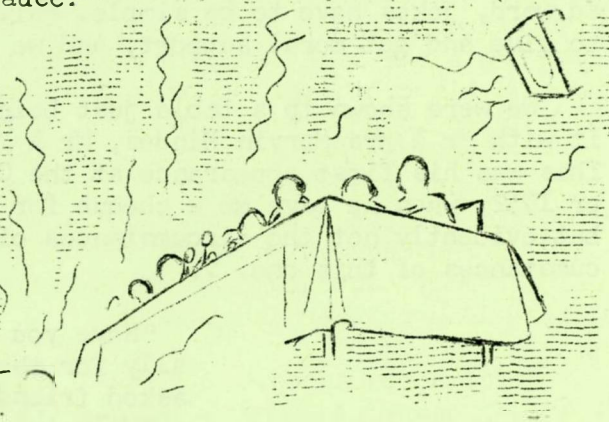
"Iced Alka-Seltzer," I explained, and held up my glass in a toast. "The American Way of Life."



We had opted for turkey because it is a luxury at home, and were the only people at the table who had done so. I thought I had made a mistake until I found everyone else thought the same

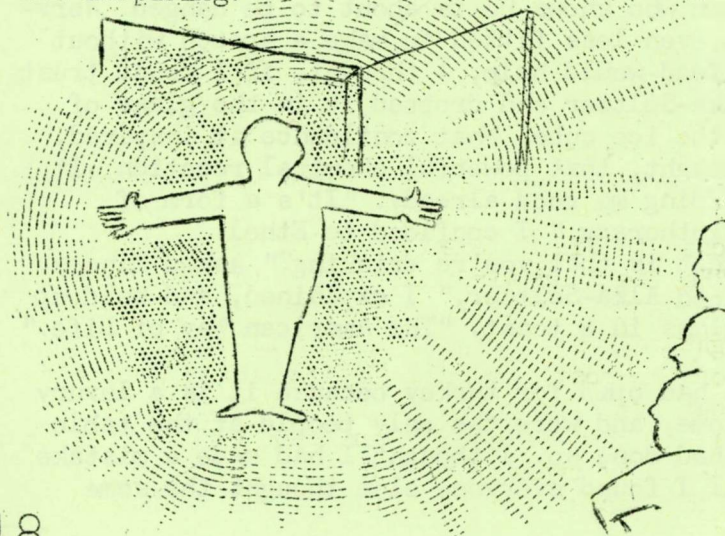
about their beef. "Have some of this red stuff," suggested Madeleine. "Diane says it helps John's appetite. It's called Cram-Berry sauce."

During the meal, Sturgeon announced portentously, we would be privileged to hear a recording of the original Orson Welles broadcast of The War Of The Worlds. But after a few minutes the invading Martians were routed by several hundred hungry conventioners armed only with knives and forks, and their sponsors conceded defeat. Hush fell only when the banquet was over and the presentation of special awards began. I claim the honour of having lead the standing ovation to Bob Tucker.



When our turn came we decided to go up to the dais so that at least we wouldn't be invisible as well as inaudible. Having arrived at the microphone I made to feel in my pocket for my notes and pulled out a couple of pieces of lettuce I had taken off my plate for the purpose. But this little throwaway gag was half hidden by the high lectern and noticed only by one fan with good eyesight and an even better memory, who giggled perceptively. However the rest of my bit went over quite well, so that I began to think I might get the hang of this speechmaking business if I didn't hate it so much. Then I waited while Madeleine said her few but sincere words of thanks and escorted her back to our table. There we relaxed, ready now to enjoy the best of the banquet, the Sturgeon.

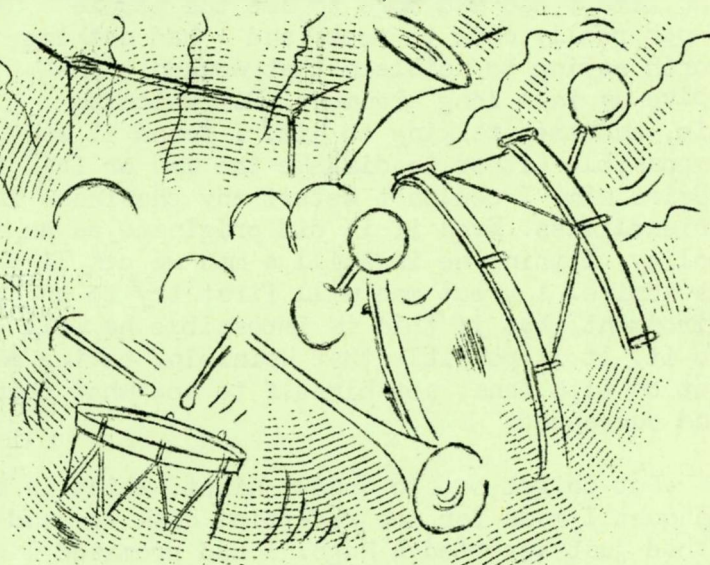
We did, though I thought the business with his wife's book a little chi-chi, and its spontaneity suspect. But it was a remarkable performance, not only in content but in structure. Being of a cynical turn of mind as far as speechmaking pros are concerned, I had conjectured that the imminent Ghod would be Heinlein, and listened attentively from this point of view as the thread of Sturgeon's discourse unraveled. Sure enough, at exactly 9.45 he reached the exact point at which Heinlein's name should occur. It did, and I looked expectantly at the door. But nothing happened. Sturgeon carried on without the slightest hesitation, and half an hour later had again reached a point where Heinlein's name naturally arose. Now to write a good speech is not difficult for a man who can write like Sturgeon. To be able to deliver it so well is an added gift that seems almost unfair. But to be able to take a speech apart in mid-air and reassemble it, and to do it so well that people afterwards who don't even know he did it praise the speech for its structure, is quite awe inspiring.



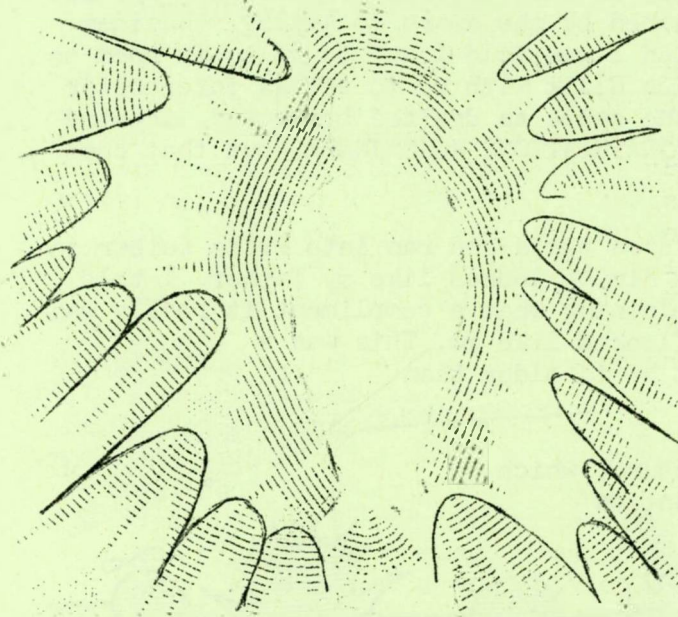
Heinlein's entrance was certainly dramatic, but I thought his white dinner suit almost too theatrical for a man who had travelled vast distances at breakneck speed to arrive unexpectedly in the nick of time. However fortunately for my peace of mind Steve Schultheis, who is an authority on all sartorial matters, explained everything to me later in Santa Barbara. It is of course perfectly true that, as every good little neofan believes, Heinlein struggles each year through sleet, hail, rain, snow and mud in his exquisite evening dress, climbing mountains, fording

rivers, scrambling over fences, trudging through fields, hacking his way through undergrowth and fighting his way along alleys, in his desperate efforts to get to the Convention on time. And it cannot be denied that in the course of these heroic journeys even a man like Heinlein must occasionally be in danger of getting a speck of dust on his clothing. But what I had not realised is that he is not alone. He is closely followed, Steve revealed, every step of the way by a devoted retainer who used to be a batman on Heinlein's aircraft carrier and thus acquired the ability of intercepting every speck of dirt before it reaches his master's person. He ceases from his dedicated task only at the very door of the Convention Hall, where he waits humbly clutching the well-worn little long leather Hugobag.

These appearances of Heinlein are becoming one of the most charming traditions of fandom. They remind me of a series of faan-fiction stories I once started based on the theory that conventions are becoming more and more stylised, and will eventually develop into something like carnival or circus, or the British Christmas Pantomime. The Heinlein Manifestation would make a fine conclusion to any such performance. The distribution to the audience of favours and of gaily coloured but inedible food symbols would be the prelude to a series



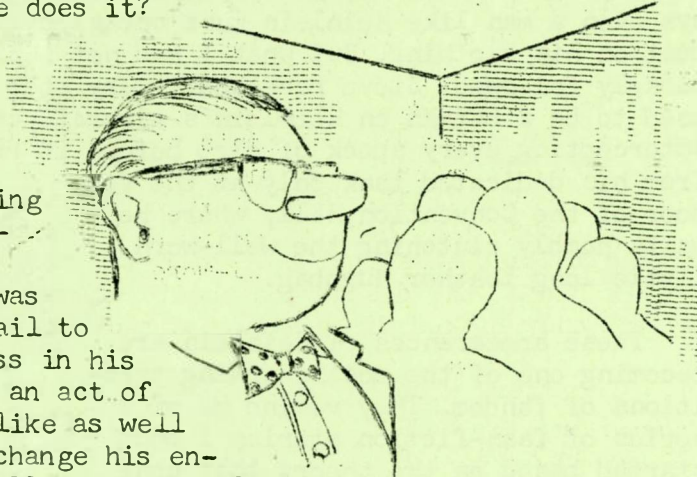
of ritual incantations before a number of silver spaceship shaped objects, which would culminate in a blinding flash and the miraculous apparition of The Heinlein in a technicolour tuxedo. After the Bob-Up, as they call it backstage where they operate the trapdoor, there would be a knockabout comedy turn involving other traditional characters like The Doctor and The Surgeon and The Tucker and The Clerk and The Farmer, and then The Heinlein would wrest one or more of the silver objects from them and disappear with demoniacal laughter in another flash and puff of smoke. The children will love it, and indeed The Heinlein does re-appear for them later in a number of smaller tents simultaneously, like Santa Claus in department stores, where he gives autographs to those who bring serial wrappers



Next morning over noon coffee I mentioned to Sid Coleman that I'd heard Heinlein was up already receiving visitors again. "He isn't up already," said Sid, "he hasn't been to bed already." We contemplated for a moment in silence the thought of Heinlein after that long journey sitting up all night talking to fans, and still at it. "You know," said Sid, "it's possible that one of the most admirable things about Heinlein is his insincerity." He went on to point out that for years Heinlein had had, literally and metaphorically, no time for fans; and that we have never been informed as to what brought about his sudden conversion. A nasty cynical person might speculate it was because he had suddenly realised that the acclaim of fandom might be of some

practical advantage to him. But, Sid pointed out, if this cultivation of fans was coldly deliberate, how much we should respect him for his strength of will, and how much more for the perfection with which he does it?

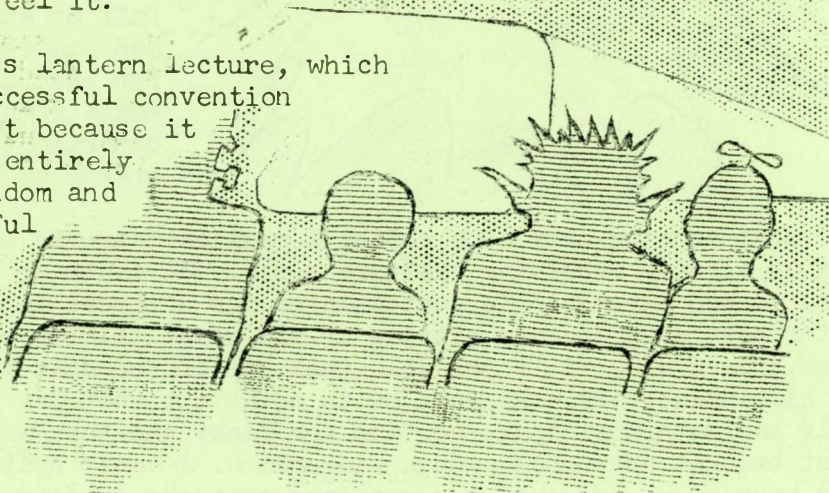
After this conversation with Sid I decided to go up and judge for myself. I hadn't meant to, because I needed all the time I had and more to see the people I had really come to meet; and I had nothing worth saying to Heinlein that wouldn't involve us in a long argument. But watching him, and then talking to him, I found it was impossible either to dislike the man or fail to admire him. I couldn't detect any phoniness in his friendliness. Even if it did originate as an act of policy, I think he is still a man we can like as well as admire. A great man will first try to change his environment, but if this is impossible he will adapt himself to it. It is possible that Heinlein, having made up his mind to get on with fans, set himself to see what there was in us to like, and succeeded.



But to get back to Sunday night, which is still young. After the banquet I made for the reception desk to send a cable to Brian Aldiss, on whose behalf I had just accepted a Hugo. I had promised Ian McAulay, Ph.D., whose scientific soul had been seared by the concept of interplanetary cobwebs, that I would boo and stamp my feet if the Hothouse series got a Hugo, even in the very act of accepting it, but my own spirit of justice had already been crushed by the award to Analog (Besides secretly I rather liked Hothouse.) At reception I was told I had to go to my room to send a cable by phone, so I did that taking Ron Ellik with me to act as interpreter between me and Western Union. As I remember the cable as drafted by me and dictated by Ron Ellik said simply and economically CONGRATULATIONS HUGO WINNER, but that complex English address cost the earth.

That pleasant chore accomplished we came down again and ran into Fritz Leiber in a corridor. He said everyone had been telling him he looked like my father. I told him I appreciated the compliment, without explaining what a compliment it really was ---ten years ago everyone had been saying he looked like me. This was a great comfort to a fan who has just found out he is older than Bob Madle, and is beginning to feel it.

Then we went along to Bloch's lantern lecture, which was both the oddest and most successful convention turn I have ever seen. The oddest because it was aimed simultaneously at two entirely different audiences, monster fandom and sf fandom, and the most successful because Bloch scored direct hits with both barrels. Even in the dark you could detect quite clearly the patterns in which the two groups were seated by the scattering of the laughter, like radar echoes.



We stayed for a while to see Emsh's Danse Chromatique, solely on Les Gerber's recommendation, and then went up to the party in the Shaw/Lupoff suite. We were still in time to see part of the recorded panel discussion on tv in which most of the Convention pros seemed to be appearing, but somehow we weren't able to concentrate on it. There were so many people here I had been wanting to talk to. Boyd Raeburn, for instance, whom I had been almost ignoring up to now for the most peculiar of reasons. There were lots of people I had been ignoring because I would see them after the Convention and I had just realised I'd been subconsciously including Boyd in the same category. Not because I had any plans to go to Canada, but because he never seemed to have left Belfast. He had fitted so naturally and congenially into the life of Oblique House that here he seemed a familiar friend from home. Breaking to my subconscious the sad news that Boyd didn't really live in Belfast, I sat down beside him and we had a long discussion about all manner of things, so congenial that we actually not only risked discussing politics but agreed on something.

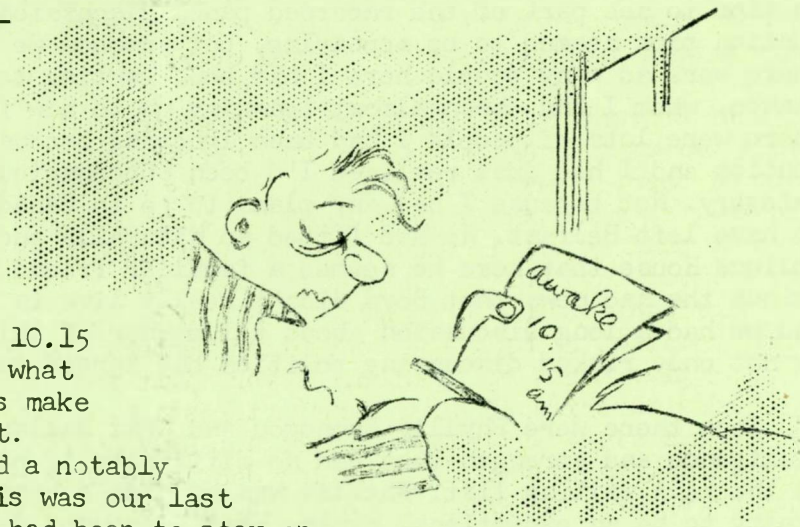
Then there were Phyllis Economou and Wrai Ballard, a combination of beauty, intelligence and strength that had no difficulty in persuading me to put my name back on the FAPA waiting list. Phyllis was so nice a person she didn't need to be half as pretty to be an exceptional woman. Wrai I thought deserved the sort of adjectives like strong and kindly and good that seemed too corny for anyone with his sense of humour. There was also Marion Bradley, whom I had already met one and a half times. There was the night she arrived, when someone pointed her out to me and I rushed along and introduced myself. She looked through me and walked on. Someone explained she was just tired and I gave this a 55% probability only because I couldn't think of anything Marion could be cross with me about except a little argument we had in FAPA many years ago about tornadoes. I know someone was castigated once for speaking disrespectfully of the Equator, but that was in the narrowminded Nineteenth Century I worried about it a little, when I had time. Then at our reception Marion came up and said, "Since you're a much nicer person than I am I'm sure you will forgive me for spreading malicious gossip about you." I said sure, sure, feeling rather like someone who has been wakened in the middle of the night and told he has been sentenced to death and unexpectedly reprieved. I hadn't heard any malicious gossip. So when I saw her for the third time sitting on the bed in the other room I thought, oh well, two falls out of three, and went over. And found her a very agreeable and interesting girl. I still don't know what that business was all about because I didn't ask. If Marion was willing to forget it I was happy never to know it. I liked this attractive blonde girl that mature Marion Bradley had turned out to be.

There was also Buck Coulson, who was just as solid and sensible and likeable as I had expected, and Betty Kujawa who was more of everything than I had expected, and many others who even in that long party I didn't get to know as well as I would have liked. I was so engrossed that I only gradually became aware that some of our hosts had gone to bed, that they had been trying to restrict the party and that maybe we should go to bed. So we left, and went down to the main lobby again, which you seemed to have to do to get anywhere in that hotel, and found a sight the like of which for sheer poignancy I had never seen since Lee Jacobs was refused beer in an hotel in London at 10.30pm in 1951.

There on a sofa in the great silent hall sat Don Studebaker and four other young fans, like sparrows in a sepulchre. They were drinking tea. Tea. When they saw us they sprang up eagerly and asked us if we knew where there was a party. It was heartbreaking to have to tell them that we didn't, and watch their



faces fall, and see them flutter sadly back to their perch. Averting our eyes from the mournful sight we went ourselves to the elevator and pressed the final fatal button to end it all for the day. It was five am.



Monday 3rd September

I know we got up next morning at 10.15 because I made a note of it, but what I seem to have forgotten to do is make a note of why I made a note of it. Probably the way I felt it seemed a notably valiant thing to do. But then this was our last day. Our original well-laid plan had been to stay on in Chicago until everyone had gone, and then stop off at Fond du Lac on our way to Seattle in time to catch Dean Grennell between business trips. But Dean's schedule had been changed, his day off was to be Tuesday, and if we were to visit Fond du Lac post office with him we had to leave today and come back to Chicago Wednesday. The inconsiderate action of that Fond du Lac furnace company was to inconvenience a lot of good people on the West Coast, but at the time it seemed to me the only real waste of time would be the four-hour journey back from Fond du Lac. And I was determined to come back, to see more of Chicago than the glimpse I had caught in 1952. I hadn't yet realised that Conventions had got longer at both ends since 1952 and that many people were staying over Monday night.

After a daring breakfast of waffles and syrup with Sid Coleman and Charles Wells, the latter almost unrecognisable from the rather stiff young fan of 1952, we went up with Robert Bloch to see Heinlein in his morning shift. Not that he was actually wearing a shift, but the informality of his habits was reminiscent of those of the French aristocracy who held court in their bathrooms. Bloch was amused. "Ghod," he quasi-quoted, "in a clean bathrobe." Maybe, I thought, this was the garment known as a Mother Hubbard. Outside again, Bloch invited us to lunch and en route to the dining room we were joined by Mike McQuown, an unexpected privilege. One had to admire the authoritative way in which he said "Four, please" to the Head Waitress, and he was a great help in filling up the embarrassing pauses which tend to occur when you are trying to make conversation with a man as dull as Bloch.

The rest of the afternoon was all partings, some for days, some for years and some, perhaps, for ever. But we steadfastly refused to acknowledge the existence of this last category, holding pathetically to the belief that the entire Convention membership would be transported bodily to London in 1965. It was sad enough to leave all these old and new friends without feeling the parting might be permanent. And it was only now we realised how many people we had barely met. Our only consolation was that we had tried. Except for the bare minimum of sleep we had spent the entire three days talking to fans, much of the time separately. Every now and then I would look over the heads of a crowd and see Madeleine talking animatedly to a group of people, positively radiating happiness. I felt quietly proud of this girl who hadn't known what she was going to say to all those people. I can't honestly say I enjoyed the Convention so thoroughly myself. Parts of it were ecstatic, parts of it were miserable; in fact it was rather like life. And like life, I wouldn't have missed it for anything. The fact is that I've never wholly enjoyed a convention since I became a celebrity. But even if I'd hated every minute of it I'd still have been glad I came because Madeleine enjoyed it so much.

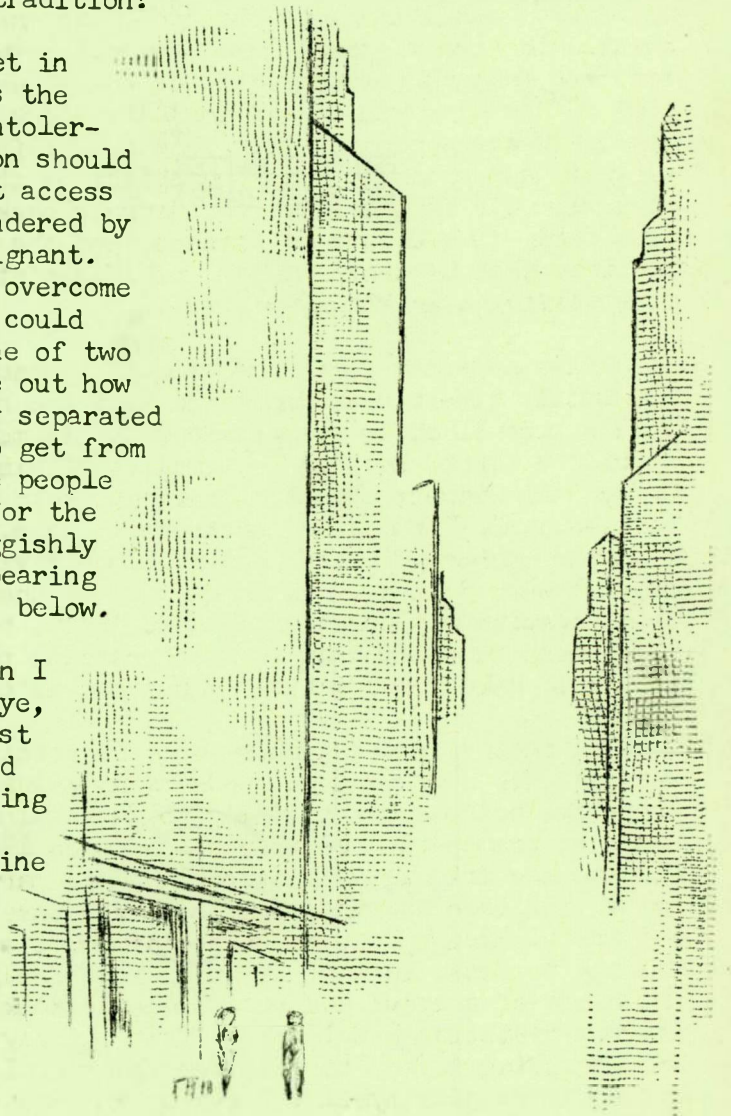
As for the Convention as a Convention, it was so full of contradictions I found it hard to assess. Finally I came to the conclusion that it was like the old paradox of the irresistible force and the immovable object. Simply, it was the best Convention ever pitted against the worst hotel ever.

The Convention was fabulous not because of the program, though what little I saw of it was excellent, but simply because the people were wonderful, and there were so many of them. Everyone was there. But big conventions are always frustrating because you meet so many people you'd like to know better. I remember in 1952 Vince Clarke used to pull my leg because nearly every time he mentioned the name of an American fan I would say "Oh yes, he/she's nice," and this time I find myself equally limited in describing dozens of people. It would be nice to be able to give penetrating character analyses of half the Convention membership, but the number of thumbnail sketches I could give might be counted, as you might say, on the fingers of one hand. Nor can I express surprise about the characteristics of American fans in general, because I've known since 1952 that they're not Ugly Americans. But there was one thing I noticed more than ever through having Madeline with me: how very polite and considerate they were, even the youngest of them. In fact I might even say especially the youngest. Whatever happened to the brash neofan of tradition?

With so many interesting people to meet in so little time, physical obstacles such as the hotel so determinedly interposed became intolerable. It was bad enough that the Convention should be split into two separate buildings: that access from one to the another should then be hindered by defective elevators seemed positively malignant. But even those handicaps could have been overcome if there had been one concourse where you could find people. As it was they could be on one of two or three public floors (I never did figure out how many there were), or one of several widely separated public rooms, or merely just struggling to get from one place to another. In fact you met more people in transit than anywhere else....waiting for the elevators or in them as they ascended sluggishly from the depths like great Mohole borers bearing fossilised samples of life from the strata below.

Shortly before five that last afternoon I felt I couldn't bear to say one more goodbye, and stepped out onto the sidewalk for a last look at the hotel before we left. It looked smug and menacing but I couldn't help feeling love for it too, and a premature twinge of nostalgia. It was in spite of itself a shrine for many happy memories. Like the Morrison in 1952, which we thought dreadful at the time. How we had wronged it, I realised: compared to the Pick-Congress it had been perfection. Looking across Wabash Avenue towards the Morrison I asked myself an old question.

Why did the Chicon cross the road?



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Let Dick look off

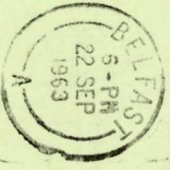
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OUTSIDE COVERAGE WALT WILLIS

They say everyone reads the back cover first so this is the place to reassure you that you have not suddenly shrunk. You have nothing to fear from giant spiders, it's just that Hyphen has gone large size. Partly of course to attract advertising from the Republic Aviation Corporation and get ourselves confused with the Scientific American (as if we weren't confused enough on our own) but mainly because I had 22 American size stencils on my hands. I cut them for Axe last spring, and when that fmz unhappily folded we decided to publish them ourselves so as not to lose any more time. Strange, the last thing I published on this size paper was The Harp Stateside, when a previous publisher got married and went gafia. He got divorced ten years later, which just proves it's safer to stay in fandom.

We're thinking of staying Statesize if you don't object too strongly, but next issue the contents will be back to normal (I use the expression loosely of course) with lots of brilliant readers' letters such as only you can write, Bob Shaw and baquotes. In fact the last two are such a part of Hyphen I think I'll squeeze in a BoSh baquote just for tradition.

"He squeezed me so hard he left marks of every one of his fingers," she said tententiously.

By the way in case you're wondering, I wrote about 25000 words of that book mentioned on p.15 and it was accepted so enthusiastically we practically moved house on the strength of the \$2000.00. And then it turned out to be another casualty of the Trouble At Regency. So if any of you can think of a US market for an unusual kind of travel book (nonfannish though you've seen parts of it in The Harp Stateside, Axe, Warhoon & here) I'd be grateful. It seems a pity to waste all that work and besides it would be nice to get a bit of my own back on Greyhound. They found one of our suitcases in May, you know, wrote that they were sending it to us: and promptly lost it again. I just can't think of any comment on that I could put on an outside cover.

waw

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