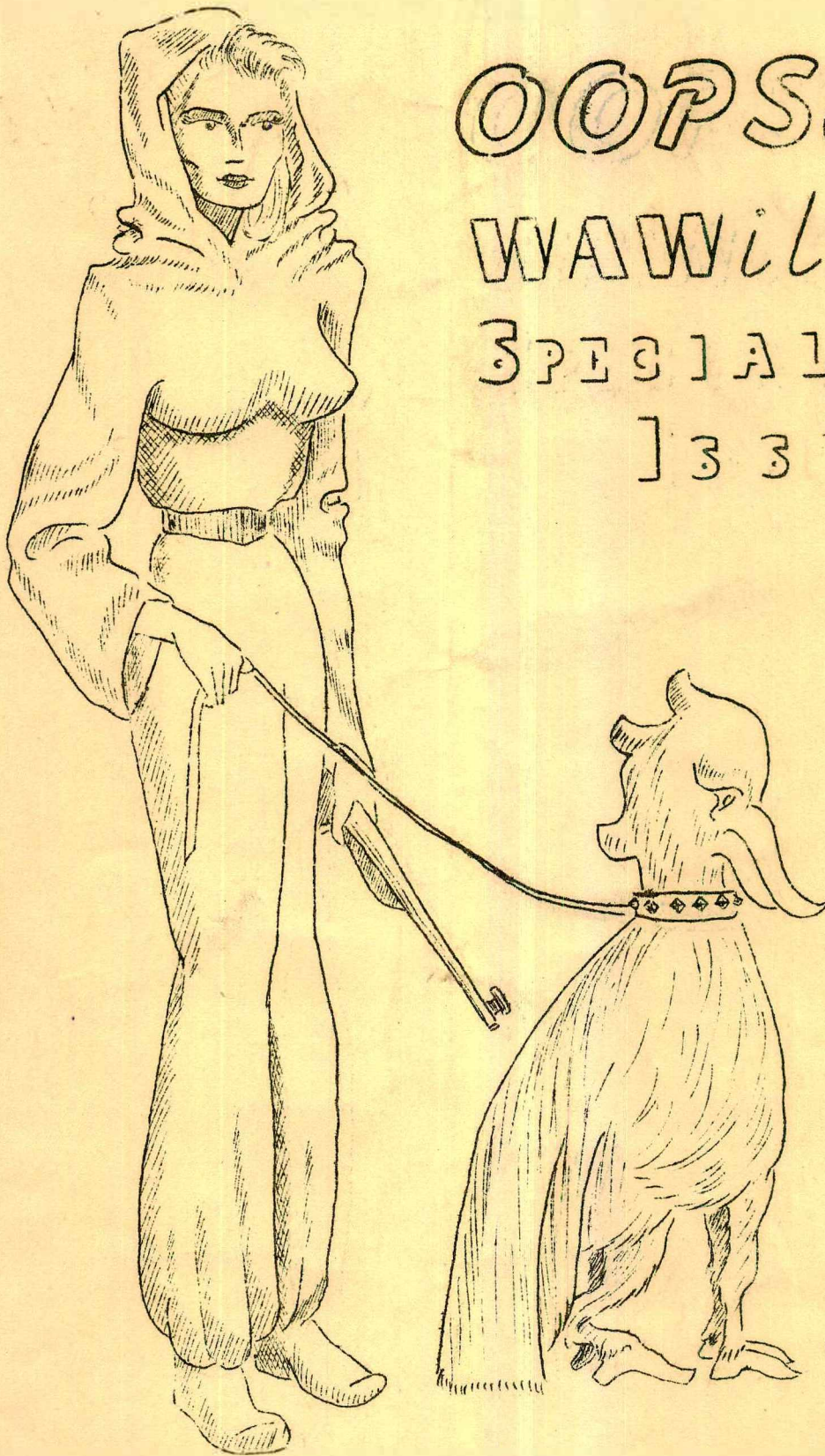


OOPSLA!

WAWILLIS

SPECIAL

[33UE]



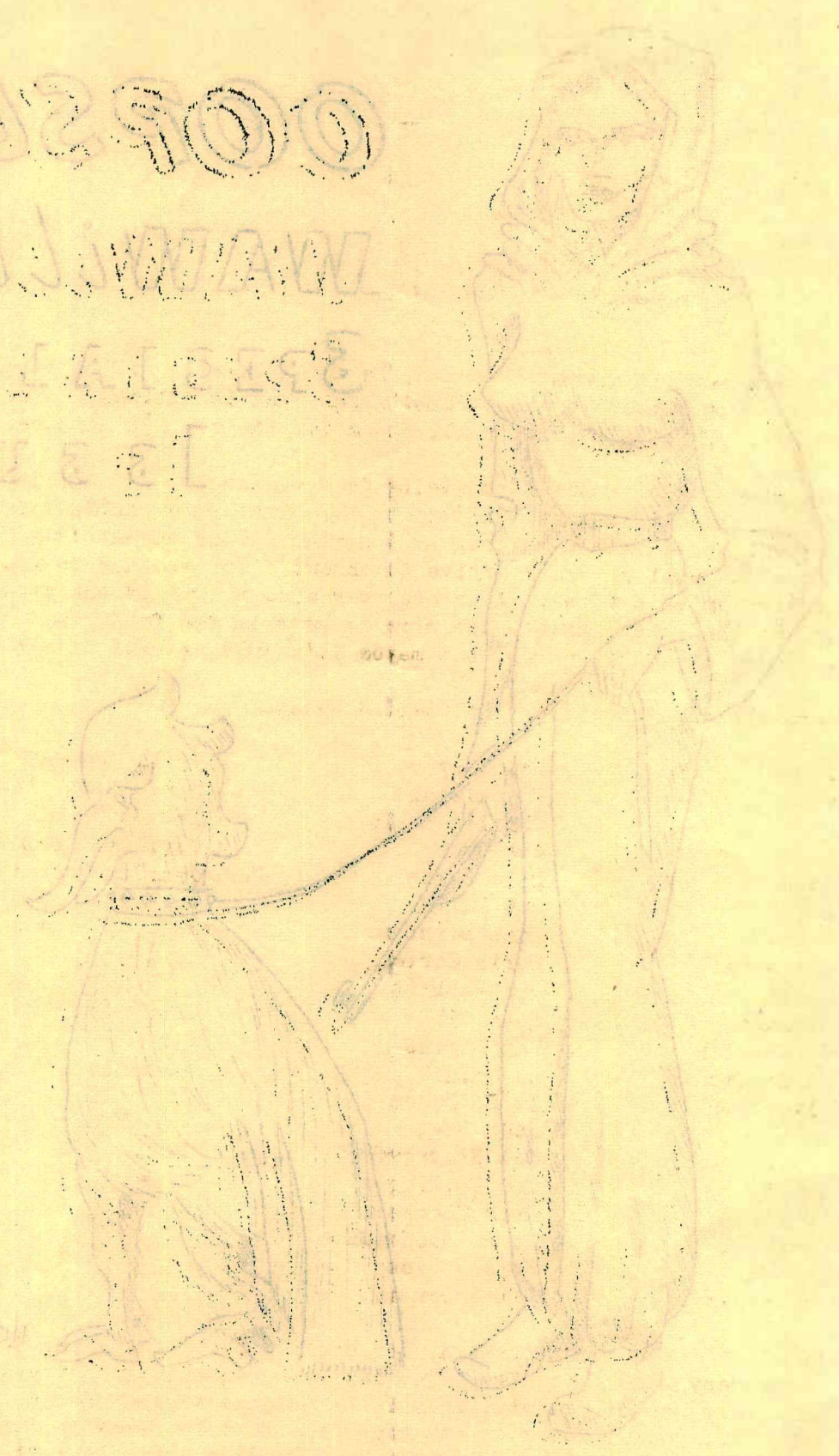
25. NOVEMBER
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JUST

A BIT OF

EDITORIAL

EXPLANATION

This, if you haven't already guessed, is the Walter A. Willis special issue OOPSLA! It is about number 5 $\frac{1}{2}$ and OOPSLA!'s run, but is entirely free from such other fol de rol. This is it. It's all there is, there ain't no more.

To those of you who expected something in more length, let me explain a bit. For one thing, I expected an original bit by WAW himself for inclusion herein, but it didn't arrive, and I waited as long as I could. Which is why this is so late. (The stuff from WAW will no doubt arrive tomorrow!) For another thing, I'm losing money like a fish on this thing. I turned over almost 100% of the receipts from this for WAW, so the less I print, the more he gets in the fund. And that's the way things are. Sorry it isn't longer, but maybe it's just as well it's this short.

These are the ones receiving the OOPSLA! WAWish.

Myself (2)
Willis (2)

GM Carr
H. Reed
Ron Smith
Rich Lupoff
Dave Stone
Rich Bergeron
Alan Davis
Bob McNamara
Robert Wheeler
Sheldon Deretchin
Bob Silverberg
Max Keasler
Ian Macauley
Terry Carr
Russ Watkins
Doug Mitchell
Ray Capella
Richard Billings

Hal Shapiro
EW Calkins
Charles Wells
Joe Green
Dale Smith
Bob Fultz
Ivan Bernbach
Doris Carter
Jim Webbert
Dean Hill
Ron Levine
Al Mulaik
I. S. Busch
Redd Boggs
Bob Peatrowsky
Joe Fillinger
Dick Clarkson
P. H. Economou
Shelby Vick
Peter Graham

W. W. Houston
Mrs. C. A. Vick
Lee Hoffman
Forrest J Ackerman
Charles Harris

and, of course, one each
to

SOL
MAD
FANTASIAS

Exactly fifty copies were printed, and exactly fifty are going out as of July 15, 1952. Many many thanks to all of you for your support, and I personally hope that each and every one of you will make it to Chicago to see the man you brought over. At any rate, you'll not miss his wonderful contributions to fandom in his many con reports. You're a bunch of great guys to do a thing like this.

Meg

THE

LEE HOFFMAN.....

HARP and Q.

QUANDRY was in the early throes of being a fanzine when Walt Willis first came across its name and my address somewhere, most likely Rog Phillips' fanmag reviews. WAW sent a copy of SLANT #4 to the Hovel with exchange? marked on it. This common sort of occurrence marked the beginning of QUANDRY's rise to fame.

You see, when I read that issue of SLANT I was overwhelmed. In a few sentences the man packed a tremendous quantity of whimsy and humor. So much in fact, that I couldn't tear myself away from the mag. I took it to classes with me the next day and impressed my instructors with my eagerness to read silently in my spare time, and my apparent enjoyment of the reading matter. How could they know that neatly folded inside of Plato's REPUBLIC was Willis' SLANT?

Once again home from the grind of classes, I settled me down to a typer and wrote what I hoped would be an impressive letter to the Irishman. Altho awed by his wonderful personality, I dared venture the hope that "if ever he someday might please write something for QUANDRY???"

I was practically floored when he replied suggesting that he might do a regular one-page column for me. When I came back down to typer level, I wrote back, accepting his kind offer with enough enthusiasm to raise the room temperature five degrees.

The first Harp came soon after, and Harps have been coming ever since. And, since that time when I discovered Walt Willis by his seeing my name somewhere, the Harp has skyrocketed to a place of great favor with readers. Even persons who aren't particularly interested in the phase of fandom represented by QUANDRY are captured by the man's wit and humor. And his reports of the 1st London Convention in May of 1951, which ran for three lengthy installments, is one of the finest pieces of con-reporting ever done. Fans and pros alike, both on this side and in Britain, acclaimed it.

The greatest portion of Willis' humor is never published, however. Anyone who has ever corresponded with him, and delighted in his marvelous letters, can sense what an experience meeting the Irishman must be. Snatches of dialogue between WAW and his fellows-in-crime, Bob Shaw and James White, recounted in epistles, are enough to send most Willis fans into fits of ecstasy. One can only speculate about the exquisite torture of hilarity that an afternoon behind the presses at the Oblique House must be.

But if fandom comes through for WAW With the Crew in '52, those of you who attend the Chicon will have the opportunity of meeting the Tall Man. And, think of the addition to fan lore and literature that WAW's account of being Big Poned, and his Chicon Report will be.

WAW With the Crew in '52!

The Harp That Once
or Twice.....

The Immortal
Seacup

Lee
Plinth
The Harp du England

THE HARP IN ENGLAND

WALTER A WILLIS, HSC

On the 8th of May the entire fan population of Ireland migrated to England for the First International Convention. One fifth of it flew over, but the other four--James White, Bob Shaw, my wife and myself--all of whom suffer rather badly from hand-to-mouth disease, went steerage on the boat. When we had found our berths and got over our relief to find that this part of the ship wasn't called 'steerage' because of the cattle kept there, we all gathered on the poop deck, keeping an eye open for poops and making puns absentmindedly as the lights of Belfast faded in the distance. Bob said the Captain must have found out he was a science fiction fan, because he had given him a wide berth. James said his theory was all bunk. There was a short silence while I vainly tried to work in a rather clever one about berth and confinement and mal de mere. It's a terrible thing to work with people so uncultured as not to understand puns in French. We behave like this all the time at home, you know. Stray visitors have been known to go quietly outside and shoot themselves after half an hour of it.

By this time we were almost sure we were not going to be sick, even with the puns, though we all had plans worked out to deal with the problem if it came up. I favoured spinning around rapidly on my heel, using the principal of the gyroscope, while Bob planned to compensate for the movement of the ship by holding two spirit levels in his teeth and balancing himself so as to keep the bubbles centered. However I was shortly able to announce

that according to my reckoning we had already passed the point at which we should have been sick, and though my reckoning must have been dead at the time, we all agreed it was probably accurate enough. We decided we must be a viable mutation designed for sea and space travel, or that sea sickness was a mere affectation. And so to

bunk. We slept well, too, although there was a gale blowing. The engine kept knocking, but no one let it in.

On the day before the Convention we went to the Festival Exhibition on the South Bank of the Thames. About this I'll just say that of all the works of man on this planet, this is probably the most worth seeing. Incidentally I saw the egoboo machine I mentioned a few months ago in Q. It was working, too. They had it slung on the back of a big statue of the White Knight from ALICE and there it was, patting and praising at a tremendous rate.

In the evening we made our way to the White Horse, a tavern where the informal pre-convention meeting was to be held. As we walked toward it from Fleet Street, I thought to myself that this was the first London building I had seen with concave walls. The walls returned to normal when I opened the door, but 17 fans flew out and lay gasping in the sidewalk. Trampling them underfoot--they were only letterhacks--I plunged into the throng. It absorbed me greedily, like an amoeba, but since my feet left the ground almost immediately, I could make no independent progress. I carried on a series of short conversations with everyone whose ear I happened to find in my mouth--Ted Carnell, Peter Ridley, Arthur C. Clarke, Derek Pickles--and eventually a sort of Brownian movement swept me to the far side of the room. There I was

The Harp In England. II

ejected into a little backwater inhabited by a suntanned young Americal soldier. Remembering that there was only one GI fan at the Convention, I made a masterly decuction. "Lee Jacobs?" I gasped, "Fan Mathematics, SPACEWARP?" He was very pleased, and when I told him his article had been immortalized in FANSPEAK—it's amazing the amount of egoboo that lies around uncollected—he was so delighted that he swore he had heard of SLANT. I promised to lend him my copy of FANSPEAK—he hadn't received one himself so he must have been a member of N3F—and we sat on the stairs leading to the 'Gents' and talked about FAPA. It was an interesting discussion, though interrupted by the necessity of remembering whether to stand up to let people pass or not. There was only one lavatory in the place and because of our strategic position we got the job of preventing it being a 'Ladies' and a 'Gents' simultaneously.

After a while the place began to get really crowded, and from where we sat we had a fine view of the top layer of fans. Through breaks in the clouds of smoke, we could see as far as Alan Hunter of NEW WORLDS and PHANTASMAGORIA. On the outer fringes of his beard was Ben Abas from Holland. Both were strenuously praising each other's artwork, and though Ben was at somewhat of a disadvantage because Alan had only one sketch with him against his own 20, he did such a good job in that one sketch that it blushed visibly. Just beneath us Bob Shaw and James White were carrying on an extraordinary conversation with Sigward Ostlund from Sweden. James was doing a magnificent job of interpreting, considering the fact that he didn't know a single word of Swedish. It was pathetic to see poor Sigward. All his life he had been learning standard English to be able to talk with the people he was going to meet in England, and the first one he comes up against is Bob Shaw. However, every time Bob said something in that armour-plated brogue of his, James would repeat it very loudly and clearly and some vestige of the meaning would seep across. In the middle distance, Derek Pickles was telling people what he thought of the London Circle. Not far away the London Circle was saying what it thought of Derek Pickles. Weird electrical discharges leapt between the two clouds of blue haze.

It was a wonderful evening, at least for the ones on top. Finally, however, all were shovelled out into the street. I wondered for a moment what the funny smell was. It was fresh air.

Next morning at the crack of 10 am I went down to The Epicentre. This is the name of the apartment where Vince Clarke and Ken Bulmer camp among the debris of 15 years of fanactivity. They call it the Epicentre because it is supposed to be the centre around which English fan activity revolves. I have been unkind enough once to refer to it as the dead centre, but I must admit that when anything is done by London fandom, it is done here. I had never really believed that fandom could be a way of life until I saw this place. It is a fan's paradise and a housewife's nightmare. Books, prozines, fanzines, letters, typewriters, mimeographs, stencils, artwork are heaped about in great mountain ranges. Behind them are presumably walls, but rumors that a floor has been seen once or twice must be discounted. Archaeological expeditions have definitely established that the Epicentre is built on a solid foundation of old fanzines, stretching from strata to strata down to the eternal fires of VOM.

On this morning I followed the dangerous trail into the inner fastness of the Epicentre with the idea of helping Vince Clarke to finish the Official Programme. I found the Official Programme had nearly finished Vince. On the kitchen table was the big rotary duplicator (mimeograph, to you). It had stopped working. On the floor was a smaller rotary duplicator. It had never started working. In the next room was a flatbed mimeograph. It had never worked. It was like The Revolt of the Machines. On the left of the door a gas cooker was going full blast with the oven door open. Apparently none of the duplicators can be even expected to work unless the temperature of the room approaches that of the centre of the sun. On the right of the door half way down a dangerous slope of fanzines, were a few battered stencils. That was

The Harp In England, III

the Official Programme. Amid this chaos crouched Vince Clarke, trying to intimidate one of the mimeographs with a screwdriver. Knowing nothing of mimeography I could do nothing for some time but hover about making encouraging noises. This I did to the best of my ability until I saw what Vince was trying to do and offered to take one of the machines into the other room and grapple with it.

At this point I walked two stalwart Liverpool fans, masters of mimeography. Subduing the great rotary machine with one terrible look, one of them made a few mystic passes over it, and turned the handle. Paper began to pass through it and emerge on the other side bearing decipherable marks. I hastily revived Vince by waving a copy of AMAZING under his nose, and we all went into production. Although the Convention had already started, we had 200 copies of the 12 page Programme run off, collated and stapled by lunch time.

Meanwhile Ted Carnell had declared the Convention open. He began by introducing the more distinguished guests, keeping the most distinguished 'till last. Finally, after some unintelligible remarks about ointment and flies, he introduced me. Of course I wasn't there. Anyone who says that the round of applause came after that fact was noticed is a dirty liar, and probably in the pay of Ken Slater. I hope to have signed statements to prove it when my friends get the bandages off their fingernails.

Walter Gillings, ex-editor of FANTASY REVIEW and SCIENCE FANTASY, then started off the proceeding with a whimper. He was billed to speak on the growth of British sf, but apparently he could only think of a malignant growth. Change and decay in all he saw around. Science fiction ran in cycles, and we were now freewheeling into the seven lean years. Only apparently this lot was caused by a surplus of corn. The British market was being swamped with trashy pocketbooks. America could afford to maintain honourable magazines like ASF and GALAXY, but evidently Gillings thought that honour was without profits in his own country.

Having thrown the convention into a fine state of dejection, he brightened everyone up again with the assurance that Bill Temple was bound to disagree with him. Just to make sure, he insulted him two or three times, and then sat down, amid loud applause for a brilliant if depressing speech. The English love to take their pleasure sadly.

However, it was the last depressing note in a convention which in retrospect seems to be the most heartening event in the history of British sf, and possibly the most important Convention ever held. Certainly it was brilliantly successful, and a large part of the credit for this goes to the next speaker, Forrest J. Ackerman.

The Convention Hall turned out to be in a long wide street in a rather pleasant area of London. There was a large square nearby, the centre of which was laid out in a little public park. Here during the intervals the Convention delegates would sit in the sunshine, recovering from the shock of finding out what their correspondents looked like. From the side of this park an enormous Hotel stretched into the infinite distance, like a building in a van Vogt novel. About two hundred yards along was the main entrance, which the Convention Committee warned us we were not to use. Here among the potted palms and plate glass there stood a resplendent commissioner, provided with a forty foot pole for not touching science fiction fans with. The further along from the park you went, the lower the tone of the place sank, until in the sordid distance you found a non-descript door, evidently disowned by the hotel, which was the entrance to the Convention Hall. There was a notice "International Science Fiction Convention," an entrance foyer, and then the Hall itself. This was a long low room, with a speaker's dais along one side facing about a hundred chairs grouped in a semi-circle. Round the walls were paintings and drawings and tables filled with books and magazines.

The Harp In England, IV

I arrived on the scene during the Lunch interval. The Convention carried on as if nothing had happened--it was almost as if nothing had. I had come by subway, escorting the two Liverpool fans with all the savoir faire, and sore feet of a subway traveller of two days standing. And I do mean standing. Vince Clarke and Ken Bulmer brought up the rear in a van, an extraordinary vehicle which the automobile industry has begged me to refer to as a horseless carriage. Personally I think it was a late model sedan chair with the arms broken off and a hole cut in the floorboards. We handed out the Programmes to those fan who had already arrived back from lunch, or who just didn't eat. They were all very pleased to find out what they had been doing all morning.

When we arrived back from our own lunch, Forry Ackerman was just about to start speaking. Most of us had already met him at the preliminary sessions, but this was his first public appearance, and here seems to be the time to say what we thought of him. Briefly, we were impressed. I remember reading somewhere a criticism of Ackerman by Laney or someone, the gist of which was that although FJA had produced some very fine fanzines, in fact some of the finest in fan history, he was still a man who had failed to realise his potentialities. His zines lacked personality, that indefinable character that a good fanzine has, which makes it not just another amateur magazine, but a sort of reader-editor symbiosis. Something that makes you feel not only that you want to continue reading the zine, but that you would very much like to meet the editor. Something that QUANDRY, for instance, has to the nth degree. Not that Ackerman's zines didn't have personality of a sort. The point was that the personality wasn't the interesting and agreeable one of Ackerman himself, but some synthetic and comparatively unsympathetic one which Ackerman had invented for the occasion. His idea of what an editor should sound like, much in the same way that some people have a special voice for the telephone or public occasions.

I never realised how just these criticisms were until I met Ackerman myself. From his articles and letters I had formed quite a clear mental picture of a thin dark and neurotic type, eccentric and egocentric in his ways, quick and impatient in his speech. Recently I had come to know him better through his letters. He had, for instance, taken the trouble to write to Manly Banister, thanking him, as it were, on behalf of fandom for donating the printing press to SLANT. It was a sincere and thoughtful gesture which both Banister and I appreciated a great deal. And then recently I was quite moved by Ackerman's defense of his fan record in FAPA. He had just resigned from the organization, and apparently Harry Warner had started running obituaries of all the old fans who do this, summarizing their fan record and appraising their achievements. Apparently his reasoning is that since FAPA is a Home for Retired Fans, fans who retire from FAPA must be considered to have finally died. His obituary of Ackerman questioned his right to be known as No. 1 Fan. This evidently hurt Ackerman, because he replied with a long letter about his fan life which is just about the most sincere and moving document I have ever read. I realised almost with a shock that FJA is a true fan in a way that most of us don't come within a mile of being. He really believes in fandom, and he has maintained his faith through twenty years of frustration and disappointment. He still insures his life for \$5000 every time he sets out for a Convention, in favour of the Convention Committee, so that if he is killed by some travelling accident on the way, he will be worth more to the Convention dead than alive. (From what I saw of what Ackerman did for our Convention, \$5000 wouldn't be nearly enough.) His will still provides for his priceless library to go to fandom. It will be inadequate compensation. There are two things that every neofan learns even before the Eva Firestone stage. One is that Campbell is the editor of aSF and the other is that Forrest J Ackerman is #1 Fan. For my money, Ackerman's position is infinitely stronger. I am sold on Ackerman.

Though I had recently revised my estimate of him, his appearance came as a great surprise. I found a big easy-going giant of a fan, quiet spoken and gentle mannered,

very different (if I may dare to say so) from some Americans abroad. There was no loudness or ostentation about him at all, and he was very easy to talk to, once you got used to a disconcerting habit he had of going "Mmmmmmmmmmm?" with a rising inflection whenever you paused for his reactions to what you were saying. Maybe everyone does this in California, but it certainly derailed my train of thought the first couple of times. I did, however, have several interesting conversations with him, though, as is usual at times like these, you only remembered what you had really wanted to say when it was too late, and someone else had snatched him away. Though Ackerman was first there every day and last away, as enthusiastic as a neofan from a small town, there never seemed to be time for a proper conversation. This Convention was not like an American one, of course. Everyone went home or to their various hotels each night, and there were none of those all night sessions which seem to be the main thing in American Conventions.

I think Forry came as a pleasant surprise to everyone. Certainly you could feel the moment he started to speak that the audience found him easy to listen to; you felt they would have listened with pleasure if he had been talking about seaweed. Actually he didn't talk about seaweed, but about American sf publishing. However, he began his remarks with the usual ones about how glad he was to be here. (He was nearly not going to be able to come on account of some peculiar mix-up in the arrangements for his passage, over which there were some wild recriminations among the London Circle.) He mentioned that he was sorry that his severest critic in England, D.R. Smith wasn't among those present, and in his absence he called upon Severest Critic No. 2, a Mr. Youd, whose name was a very big one in prewar fandom. Whether Mr. Youd was annoyed at being relegated to the position of second severest critic, or whether he was taken aback at being called so suddenly out of his retirement, I don't know, but he dashed redfaced to the microphone and bit out something about how he noticed that Mr. Ackerman was still murdering the English language. I hadn't noticed any corpses laying around, except the walking dead of extinct fans, but everyone laughed tactfully so that Mr. Youd wouldn't retire hurt. Forry then went into his commentary on American sf, delivered in a pleasant California drawl. He gave a lot of news which was interesting at the time, but which is common knowledge now, and he also read a cable-gram from Anthony Boucher hotly denying a rumor that F&SF was going to fold. Since no one in the audience had yet heard the rumor, their feeling at this point was rather mixed. They looked a bit like an audience of Catholics who had suddenly been informed by the Pope that he was now pretty certain that God did exist after all.

Next William F. Temple was billed to speak on the technique of writing serial sf. Fortunately he did nothing of the sort, at which no one who knew him was in the least surprised. He seized the opportunity to strike a joyous blow in the Temple-Clarke feud which has been amusing British fandom for some 20 years. Arthur C. Clarke, incidentally, is a thin fair-haired nervous sort of chap, with a dashing manner. At least, every time I saw him he was dashing somewhere. I expect one of these days when he gets particularly excited he'll reach escape velocity and that's the last we will see of him. He is renowned for his allegedly colossal conceit or egotism, on account of which he is nicknamed "Ego." Temple, on the other hand, is a small dark plumpish chap, very quiet spoken, and with a dead pan style of humor. The only flashes in the pan were when he looked up over his heavy glasses to see how some of the more subtle witticisms were going. Usually they went very well, especially when he touched on dianetics with a mention of "a womb with a view." I assure Rory Faulkner, who as far as I know first used this crack in Vernon McC in's WASTEBASKET, that Temple undoubtedly arrived at it independently. In his day the man was the most brilliant of fan journalists, and he could be so again today if he wanted to.

Temple's contribution took the form of a synopsis of a serial about the first space flight. The Government, having been badgered and chivvied by Clarke for years,

The Harp In England, VI

and finally built a spaceship in a desperate attempt to keep him quiet. The crew consisted of two men, one of whom was Temple for the sole reason that even Arthur C. Clarke couldn't be both of them. Besides, someone had to do the housework. After a beautiful parody of the Arthur C. Clarke first-step-on-man's-journey-to-the-stars style, Temple described how when the rocket cleared the earth's atmosphere it came to a dead stop. Apparently Clarke was wrong after all--in spite of all his arguments and proofs rockets do not work in a vacuum. There's nothing for them to push against you see. The two intrepid astronauts are never seen again. The story carries on with their descendants. Clarke 2 is an even bigger bore about space flight than was his ancestor, but no one will listen to him since the rocketship fiasco. At last, however, he happens upon the lesser known scientific fact that mitogen rays emitted by certain growing plants have a small but definite pushing power. From this it is but a matter of time 'till he breeds a plant in which the rays are so powerful that they can be used as a space drive. The second space ship is therefore an enormous onion, with a small hole scooped in the middle for the crew. This consists of a Temple and a Clarke again, for the same reasons, and again there is something wrong with Clarke's calculations. In accordance with a well-known precedent, they miss the moon and hurtle on to Mars. Since they haven't enough food for such a long trip they are in a terrible plight. Finally they are reduced to eating the ship.

There was lots more of this--how they are saved from a hideous death by the discovery of some breath cachaous, how they fall on Mars amid a colony of vegetarian monsters, etc, etc--but some of you will be able to read it yourselves before long. I was onto Temple for first fanzine rights as soon as I could get to him. But Lee Jacobs (curse him) got there first and it will appear in his FAPA zine.

Next came a "radio play" by Milt Rothman--that is, a play read over the PA system. This has already been done at an American Convention, so I won't say anything about it except that I thought some of the commercials were quite good. Like: "Why smell like a human being? Use ARMPITTO and smell like nothing on earth."

After the afternoon tea break the organisers put on a recording of a discussion on stf between some authors and journalists. I don't think anyone listened to this except a fan called Terry Overton, who asked Clarke why he had said THE MOON IS HELL was such a lousy book. There is a great disagreement among the Irish contingent as to what actually was said at this point, but I could have sworn that Clarke was so annoyed with Campbell he said he wasn't going to send him any more stories. But I must have been wrong, because nobody else remembers anything of the sort. Maybe Clarke said that Campbell would no be so annoyed with him that he wouldn't accept any of his stories.

After that came the auction and then the buffet, which was a bit of a sell, too. According to the dictionary a "buffet" means a slap in the face, and that's just what this one was to us poor Irish immigrants who had been relying on it to help us live in London. Last time I was in London I lived on spaghetti because I found you could get much more of it for your money than anything else. I ate so much spaghetti I came home with an Italian accent. Unfortunately I couldn't find any spaghetti dives near the convention Hall, but in a way the buffet did save us money--after one look at it you never wanted to touch food again. Mind you I'm not saying a word against the catering arrangements at this hotel. It's just that it's the first one I've seen where they have a fifth place of the cruet stand for a stomach pump.

After the buffet, all the fans who were still alive were propped up on chairs to listen to John Keir Cross talking about his troubles in trying to put sf over on the British Broadcasting Corporation. It was so complicated it sounded like the World of Null-BBC. Mr. Cross was so eloquent, and the spirits of the fans were so cowed by the buffet, that no one asked how come that Mr. Cross had made such a lousy job of

The Harp In England, VII

the sf serial he was allowed to produce on the air. THE OTHER SIDE OF THE SUN, this was, and the author, Paul Capon, was down to speak as well as Cross. Evidently he didn't think he could do it, for he mumbled some words the only one of which was distinguishable was 'laryngitis' and sat down again. I was furious about this, since this was the only way I could think of getting out of making a speech myself, and now Capon had spoiled it.

I left at the end of this, and missed a talk by Arthur C. Clarke on television and sf. I'm told he was very good, and I can well believe it. The man is a genius. In fact, he has been heard to admit as much himself.

When I got back, feeling a little better (I think the trouble may have been something I didn't eat), there was a film show going on. There was supposed to have been a guest author's session at 8:30, but things were running so late everyone had forgotten there ever was such a thing as 8:30. Besides, there were no guest authors, which would have made things a little difficult. The show was of a silent version of THE LOST WORLD, a film about prehistoric monsters. It was a bit of a prehistoric monster itself. However, parts of it were quite good. For instance, there was a terrific battle between two great monsters who must have been all of 18 inches high. It was awe-inspiring. At one moment I thought one of them was actually going to knock a piece of plaster off the other. In the corner Arthur C. Clarke was busy jockeying discs for incidental music. Occasionally the reins slipped and the music sounded more accidental than incidental. A wild elephant stampede loses something of its effect when accompanied by a Viennese waltz.

Nothing more of interest happened that night, except that on the subway home my wife, Madeleine, was left behind in the crush and got carried on to Shepherd's Bush. I went over to the down platform and hardly had I got there when she got off a train. It was like a matter duplicator. In fact, I still have an uneasy idea that there is another Madeleine roaming helplessly around Shepherd's Bush.

At about 11 the next morning, Convention Time (this is about half an hour behind ordinary time and gets progressively later) Ted Carnell got up to speak about NEW WORLDS and its future. Perhaps it was not his fault if he had to begin by talking about Walter Gillings and his past, but certainly the ghost of Gillings haunted the proceedings like an absent fiend. Gillings, as you know, was the editor of the other British prozine SCIENCE FANTASY until he recently resigned for what were supposed to be reasons of health. There has always been, it seems, a certain amount of what we might call rivalry between Gillings and Carnell, even before the disagreement as to which of them should have gone to America under the Big Pond Fund as representative of British Fandom.

Ted started by saying how sorry he was that Gillings wasn't there, and you got the impression that his grief was mainly due to the fact that there were a lot of things he wanted to say to his face that he didn't like to say behind his back. However he managed to overcome this handicap pretty well. All that was missing was a little wax image of Gillings. First he contrived to make it quite clear that Gillings' resignation was not due to illness, unless you think bad blood is an illness. Then he announced that he himself was taking over the editorship of SCIENCE FANTASY. The magazine had apparently been losing money like a fanzine, but nevertheless he paid a glowing tribute to Gillings' work on it. Obviously Gillings had every quality of the ideal editor except ability. There was absolutely nothing wrong with SFY that a complete abolition of all traces of him wouldn't cure. The format was to be changed to conform with that of NEW WORLDS, not one of Gillings' backlog of stories was to be used, and the vestigial remains of the old FTS REVIEW were to be purged.

This last fiat brought a gentle reminder from Fred Brown, the well-known coll-

The Harp In England. VIII

ector and reviewer, that the mag was after all a co-operative fan enterprise, and not Carnell's exclusive property. He deplored the abolition of book reviews and pointed out that American mags like ASF and GALAXY, miserable rags as they were compared with NW and SFY, managed to run book reviews and keep their heads above water. Carnell was charmingly generous in his reply, offering no less than three mutually contradictory explanations. Blinded with science, Fred Brown remained silent. The audience sat entranced with this exhibition of multi-valued logic, and Carnell took the opportunity to sound off at some British authors who in their unholy greed for dollars sold their stories to American zines instead of to him. Since it seemed to be the fashion to jump on Arthur C. Clarke, he did so. Apparently after Carnell had been pestering Clarke for several months for a story, Arthur would dig something out of an old trunk that had been written in capitals on a child's exercise book and sent it off magnanimously to Carnell. When it was returned he went around telling everyone that he had been rejected by NEW WORLDS again! I can see that this must be very annoying, especially the last part. The implication is that being rejected by NW is the sort of thing a big name author can afford to laugh about, as if it were Botticelli telling with relish the story of how a schoolboy caught him with Fools' Mate; or that being rejected from NW is a sign that a story is good, as for instance when PEON gives a "Rejected from MARVEL" Certificate of Merit to one of its stories. Curiously, Carnell laid himself wide open for a crack like this, by mentioning innocently that the stories he liked best always finished at the bottom of his ANLAB and vice versa. I half wished Gillings had been there to point the obvious conclusion. Incidentally, it was a curious thing about this part of the convention that although there were a great number of very controversial points raised, there was no acrimony at all. The reason was of course that Carnell has great personal charm and tact, and his conduct of the Convention was so competent and friendly as to disarm all criticism.

Towards the end of his speech he revealed that as an experiment in crass commercialism the next NW was going to feature a Beautiful Unclad Maiden on the cover. This threw the audience into a state of excitement bordering on torpor. Clarke got up and made a short and pungent speech to the effect that all this trying to pass sf off under a phony sexy front was all wrong. Were we or were we not trying to sell sf as sf. The time had come for us to stop apologising for sf and take it to the people. This speech of Clarke's, while silently applauded by all true fans present, was the signal for a counterattack by the dealers and business men. One after another they got up and said that sexy covers sold magazines and that we would never get anywhere without them. It was fascinating to see a hundred fans who had probably spent the better part of their fan life pasting Earle Bergey, gradually come around to accepting the idea of having that hated type of cover on their own magazine. The final note was struck, and held some twenty minutes, by an elderly gentleman called Hill whom no one had ever heard of before. With a strong Austrian accent and a wealth of gesture he told the audience that the only thing an editor had to go by was his net sales, that the audience was not representative readers, and that their opinions weren't worth a damn. The audience applauded him vigorously to show how well they could take criticism, and then filed out for lunch, picking their way carefully among the fragments of Gillings's shattered reputation.

After lunch came the International Discussion. "Our overseas guests tell us of the state of sf in their countries." While the guests were being called to the rostrum I cowered in the shade of Derek Pickles, making a noise like an old overcoat, but Carnell mercilessly penetrated my disguise and summoned me to join the row on the dias. To give the man his due, he had warned me about this a couple of days ago. The prospect had been weighing on my mind ever since and I had been hoping it would fall through. I had pleaded with Carnell that I was terrified of public speaking, but he was quite adamant about it. (Incidentally, I wish he would use tastier boot polish.)

The Harp In England. IX

Reflecting that there was always the hope that an atomic war would start within the next hour, I sat and listened to the other speakers, mentally discarding every note I had made as I saw the way the discussion was going. The symposium was opened by Lyell Crane, whose interest in international fandom is so intense that it might almost be called vested. He began by informing the audience that he had an absolutely open mind and was willing to change it at any time. With this reassurance, he went on to tell the audience how important they were. Fandom, he said, had built up the prozines of America to their present standard and kept them there. Fandom was directly responsible for *aSF* and *GALAXY*, and for the prozines in other countries. But for fandom, etc, etc. Fandom, in the person of one fifth of it gathered in the Convention Hall, received this accolade in pleased if incredulous silence after the cold douche administered by Mr. Hill. Crane then produced copies of each issue of *INTERIM NEWSLETTER*, one for each hand, and semaphored them at the audience. Still fanning furiously, he told all out-lying fans who were pure fans and not pros, to get in touch with him. With a final flourish of *INTERIM NEWSLETTER* he sat down, having almost accidentally revealed one item of interest, that his co-editor, Julian May, was a girl.

The next speaker was Ackerman, who delivered another of his pleasant and intimate talks. Like everything Forry said, it was listened to with pleasure and interest.

To my relief, Carnell then jumped right across the Atlantic and called on Georges Gallet from Paris. Georges brought a sheaf of notes to the microphone, and apologised for reading from them; he couldn't speak English very well. He talked about the French reprints of various American sf books and about his own projected French prozine.

Next, Ben Abas brought a sheaf of notes to the microphone and apologised for reading from them, but he couldn't speak English very well. He talked about a Dutch prozine.

Next, Sigward Ostlund brought a sheaf of notes to the microphone and apologised for reading from them, but he couldn't speak English very well. He talked about a Swedish prozine.

Carnell then called on me. Having failed to similarise myself through the floor, I toyed desperately with the idea of bringing a sheaf of notes to the microphone and apologising for not reading from them because I couldn't read. But in this probability-world I tottered to the microphone and told the Convention about the recent pocket-book in Gaelic. It didn't take very long, but I salved my conscience with the thought that the proceedings were already behind schedule. No doubt the audience would think I could have made a brilliant oration lasting some hours if it hadn't been for my thoughtfulness and unselfishness. I sat down mid applause, some of which, I'm afraid was left over from Carnell's introduction. My best friends tell me the speech was very good, but too short (bless their loyal hearts) and that it came over the PA system with a strong Irish accent. Since I have no trace of any accent at all I find this very difficult to understand, but my English friends (all of whom have atrocious English accents) say I always sound that way to them.

The convention rallied, and survived. Speeches by Wendayne Ackerman, Ken Paynter, Lee Jacobs, and Frank Edward Arnold, were listened to attentively by everyone except the last speaker who was still swimming around dazedly in a pool of his own sweat. A discussion followed, centering mainly around two points, one as to how many fans were scientific workers or vice versa, and the other as to how many of them were women. On the first, Clarke said that he used to send copies of *aSF* for circulation among the people at Harwell Atomic Laboratory, and he never got any of them back. Since this is the normal experience of lending magazines, the point seemed

The Harp In England, X

rather inconclusive. It was finally decided that some scientific workers were fans and some where not. On the second point, Forry thought that the number of fem-fans was increasing. He instanced the proposed STAR SCIENCE FICTION, a mag that would have been aimed at women if someone hadn't dropped it. Derek Pickles stood up and deftly inserted a neat little plug for N3F, giving statistics of how many members had been found on superficial investigation to be female. Incidentally, this seems a good place to mention that not only were there quite a crown of fem-fans there, but that the standard of looks was very high. Apart from my own wife and Alan Hunter's, there was a chap called Robert Conquest (a well-known poet who recently managed to get into THE LISTENER, the BBC's literary review, a really excellent poem plugging sf) who had a really stunning wife with him. Not only was she extremely attractive, but she was a Bulgarian, which Alan and I thought wasn't quite fair. And of course there was Audrey Lovall. She is attached to the London Circle, and they are crazy about her, too.

Lyell Crane then closed the discussion. He got up and solemnly announced that he had changed his mind. The audience silently approved this decision, but didn't notice any appreciable difference. He also said he learned a lot from the proceedings, but he didn't say just what. Finally he gave his name and address very slowly and clearly for the benefit of the wire recording, which happened ungratefully to be out of action at that point. It was an interesting tableau: the recording engineer desperately trying to insert a new spool, and Lyell speaking very deliberately and obviously wondering what the audience was gesturing about. Eventually Lyell tumbled to what was going on, and contented himself with hanging up a notice. I'm sorry, by the way, if I have seemed a bit sarcastic about Crane. He is a worthy chap, but just a little inclined to take himself and fandom a bit too seriously.



There followed one of the most important evenst of the Convention, the presentation of the International Fantasy Award for the best work in the field during 1950. This is the first of a series of annual awards sponsored by the London Circle, and if sufficient funds are available in future years the range will be considerably extended. The award itself is a beautiful thing. It was designed by a London fan and consists of a desk ornament in the form of a silvered spaceship on an inscribed plinth with a globular cigarette lighter. The lighter works, too, though through some slip-up or other it is not atomic. The awards for 1950 went to George Stewart for EARTH ABIDES and to Ley and Bonestell for CONQUEST OF SPACE. The actual presentation was made to Forry Ackerman on their behalf. He made a short and graceful speech of acceptance, and mentioned ~~that~~ he felt very jealous. American fandom had been talking about this sort of thing for years, and British fandom had gone ahead and done it.

After a break for afternoon tea, Wendayne Ackerman gave her talk about dianetics. It was listened to quietly, almost somnolently. This was mainly because Carnell when introducing her had explained very clearly and firmly that no discussion whatever would be allowed. The principal anti-dianeticians had already been warned about this and I suspect that some of them had had to be bound and gagged. Carnell gave one final glare around the Hall and then sat down on a box of tear gas bombs.

Mrs. Ackerman, an attractive creature, began by reading a letter from Ray Bradbury to the Ackermans which if it is ever published, will ruin his reputation. It was a horribly fulsome and slushy epistle, but no worse than I expected. I happen to know the truth about Ray Bradbury. In the course of negotiations between PROXY-BOO LTD and VERNON MCCAIN INCORPORATED, McCain revealed: "I do a bit of work for a chap named Bradbury who lives down in California and wants oh so badly to be a writ-

The Harp In England, XI

er. He just hasn't what it takes, but I haven't the heart to tell him so. So I have him send me each story he writes, do a complete re-write and polish job on it, and then for 10% commission I allow him to sell it under his own name. Not exactly ethical perhaps, but I like the boy. However, I do have trouble, since he has a remarkable lack of ingenuity in devising plots for his stories. He's always coming up with the same old thing. I've burned much midnight oil trying to put a new slant, some original viewpoint on that old "deserted on Mars" plot he keeps sending me.

Wendayne then started on dianetics. This part of her speech went over most people's heads, mainly because their heads were practically on the floor. These were the anti-dianeticians who had to be silent but believed that sleep was a form of criticism. Wendayne paid a tribute first to Elron Hubbard, whom she described as a "masterful personality." I had little difficulty in equating this description with Laney's of him as a "loud mouthed braggart." Mrs. Ackerman compared him with Louis Pasteur, on the grounds that both were described as quacks. Reports from France later spoke of a strange whirring noise from one of the Paris cemeteries. After the Convention, the Ackerman's went to France: they haven't been heard of since. As a sort of "before-and-after" advert for dianetics Wendayne instanced the case of AE van Vogt. Before dianetics, she said, he was a quite shy sort of chap whom no one ever noticed in a crowded room. Since dianetics it appears he has come right out of his shell and is a "masterful personality" like Elron, the sort of person who can make a room crowded all by himself. Of course I know I'm queer, but I can't help thinking I would rather have liked the old van Vogt. ((You just need auditing. I

Immediately Wendayne had finished, Carnell stood up with almost indecent haste and announced the second auction. This was the part of the Convention which left gaping wounds in the hearts of collectors who had no money and in the bank balances of those who had. Forry Ackerman donated to the Convention many priceless books and magazines, and despite warnings from everyone who knew just what an impoverished low English fandom was, put them all into the auction without reserve. The result was ghastly. If I were to give only two of the prices that were fetched there would be a wave of mass suicide among the readers of FANTASY ADVERTISER. I will cut Roy Squires' circulation only by half, and reveal that van Vogt's own copy of THE WEAPON MAKERS, containing copious revision notes in vV's own handwriting went for \$13.00. My heart bled for Forry Ackerman and for the artists whose original paintings and drawings were going for less than a dollar each, sold in lots. Pausing only to notice with interest that Arthur C. Clarke's autograph was apparently worth 75¢ I stumbled off to the bar. There I found Walter Gillings, a very small man with a very large beer. He had a sombre look on his face as if he was thinking about Ted Carnell and had decided to jump in and end it all. I wondered had Gillings been there all the time, having been driven to drink by his own speech. But no, this was more or less his normal expression. He stood me a drink on the strength of an article I wrote attacking Ken Slater for attacking him. We had a long conversation about that and that, principally that. We discussed a former sf publisher and writer who had gone into the pornographic literature business in a big way. I must say I liked Gillings a lot. We got on very well, but after a while I thought of all you people and the Report I had to write, so I went back to the Convention.

There was a second radio play going on by that time, which was rather better than the first if only because the entire original cast was too drunk to go on. After that, the last item was another film show. The first one was on experimental rocket ships with a running commentary by Arthur C. Clarke. Both were very good indeed, though I recognized one of his gags as having been lifted from a NEW YORKER cartoon. The rest of the films were Forry Ackerman's own. They were good, too, but I gather they've been shown at American conventions, so I don't suppose I need bother describing them.

The Harp In England, XII

When everything was over and everyone was saying goodbye to everyone else and trying to remember who they were, Ackerman invited some of us to his hotel room. I was thrilled. I felt that I was now really at a convention. Not only had I talked to Forrest J Ackerman, actually and literally, but I was going to a fangab in a hotel room! On top of that I had just had the ultimate piece of egoboo. I was asked for my autograph! I don't know who it was, but it was probably someone who could trade ten of mine for one of Redd Boggs.

The group that finally set out for Forry's hotel room consisted of Forry, Bill Temple, John Benyon Harris, Lee Jacobs, James White, Bob Shaw, myself, and some unidentified stranger whom no one seemed to know and who never said a word the whole time. We refer to him as Yehudi because Bob can't remember him being there at all. But he must have been, because when we were going into the hotel Forry asked the waiter to bring up eight cups of tea.

Lee Jacobs, ignorant of the London licensing laws, paled visibly. You could see he didn't believe his ears. "Beer," he said quietly, just so there would be no silly mistake. The waiter explained that beer was not available. Lee seemed to regard this as a joke in the worst possible taste. With the air of a minister of religion reproving levity on some sacred subject he said again, firmly, "Beer." The waiter mumbled something about it being against the law to serve beer at this hour. Lee seemed unable to take this terrible news. A hideous jest, of course. Ha ha. "Beer," he repeated again with determination, holding fast to his one sheet-anchor of sanity in this suddenly crazy world. He said it in such utterly reasonable tones that it seemed that the waiter must now surely come to his senses. But the nightmare continued. Beer could not be served. Lee aged before our eyes. A Convention and no beer. Could such things be? He decided to compromise. "Seven teas, one beer," he suggested, as one reasonable man to another. "No beer," said the waiter, a man of inflexible will. Lee was suddenly a broken fan. Obviously THEY had struck. "Seven teas," he muttered, and started to reel up the stairs. He had the look of an aristocrat climbing into tumbril, his world crashed into fragments around him. The waiter, like Mrs. O'Leary's cow in the Great Fire of Chicago, obviously felt dimly that some terrible catastrophe had occurred for which he bore some responsibility. In the only way he knew, the wretched man tried to make amends. "Do you not want tea, sir?" he asked. This was too much for Lee. This was the last ton of straw. His mind snapped under the strain. "Tea!" he screamed hysterically. "Tea. Ha ha ha," he laughed maniacally. "No! I'm a tea-totaller. I'm a tea-totaller. I'm a tea-toaller!" And so on up the stairs. Poor Lee. We shall not look upon his like again. Until the end he was faithful to the great Ghod Bheer. May we adherents of another faith be capable of such devotion to Roscoe.

In Forry's hotel room we made Lee as comfortable as we could and distributed ourselves about the chairs and beds. I don't remember much of what we talked about and indeed there wasn't much time because Bill Temple and us three had to leave very soon to catch the last subway train. We were perfectly willing to walk the 5 or 6 miles to where we were staying, but we hadn't the slightest idea of how to get there. In London we would go underground at one subway station and come up at another, and then we were all right, but we hadn't the slightest idea what direction we had come from, nor what lay between.

I do remember all the same discussing with John Benyon Harris the retitling job done by Wollheim on his story, NO PLACE LIKE EARTH. Wollheim had changed this to TYRANT AND SLAVEGIRL ON PLANET VENUS. I'd wondered what on planet earth Harris had thought about this, and apparently it wasn't much. I remember, too, that Forry nearly disrupt the SLANT staff by throwing on the bed between James White and Bob Shaw a Dollens Portfolio, "for the SLANT artist." Since they were both artists an ugly scene was only averted by my generously taking custody of the portfolio myself

The Harp In England, XIV

most intelligent fans we have met yet, as well as two of the nicest. They make a wonderful combination. Ken (editor of NIRVANA) is dark and impetuous of manner, with a wonderfully wacky sense of humor. I remember the time he invented the steam engine. We were all sitting in the kitchen before supper when the kettle started to boil. The lid jumped up and down at a tremendous rate. Ken looked at it for a while and then said thoughtfully, "You know, there must be a way to harness all that energy...." But probably that would only sound funny if you had been there. Vince Clarke is tall and fairly thin, with a very round head. He looks like a rather distinguished toffee apple. He talks with a slow drawl but on paper he is pungent and brilliant. His fanzine (SF NEWS) contains some of the cleverest writing in fandom, very subtle and elusive, rather like my own stuff at times, only better.

But I'm getting nostalgic, as I usually do when I think about the times we had at the Epicentre, and anyhow Ken and Vince will be over here later in the summer. There will be quite a lot of activity in Belfast this year--Forry Ackerman and Paul Anderson are also expected--and probably you'll hear something about all that later. In the meantime I've now come to the end of this Convention Report. We all had a grand time. Sometime it might happen, though I don't see how, that I might attend an American Convention and see how it should be done, but even if yours are only half as much fun as yours you'll find it very worth while. Go to the NOLACON and see. I only wish I could be there, too.

—Walter A. Willis.

H O W N S OF WILLISTUFF FROM
HERE & THERE

The unit of ink is the smidgin. The table is: 3 nyimfs--1 smidgin, 5 smidgins --1 dirty great dollop. The British Standard Smidgin can be inspected at Slant House. Printers ink has most of the qualities of vV's perfect paint. It is impossible to go within five feet of a tin without getting covered with the stuff. As we say, "I was inking my hands and got some on the press." There are solvents, of course, but the only real solution is to wear black clothes. No need to buy them specially.

From "The Amateur Editor" in SLANT #6

FLASH! I am now able to reveal that the recent annexation by aSF of GALAXY's cover style was only the first step in an incredibly daring plot by Street & Smith. With the next issue, aSF is going to change its name to GALAXY and adopt an identical format and layout. Furthermore these audacious publishers have, through their spies in Gold's offices, stolen copies of all the stories and artwork in the coming GALAXY and intend to print them in the disguised aSF. To make the deception absolutely complete, they have made Campbell change his name to Gold, alter his contents page accordingly and write a Gold type editorial. Finally, they have changed their name to "Galaxy Publishing Company."

This puts Gold in a very awkward position, because he can't get the real GALAXY out in time to forestall Street & Smith. When he heard about the plot from Rich Elsberry, correspondent of FANTASY TIMES, he had several conferences with the publishers behind closed doors and it was finally decided that there was only one course open to them. Accordingly the original Galaxy Publishing Company is going to change its name to Street & Smith and will from the next issue produce a magazine almost indistinguishable from aSF.

Only you who have read this column will know the real truth.

From "Plinth" in CONFUSION #5

Let us hope...selfishness will not lead...editors to take an unfair advantage of their brothers by printing good stories and similar underhand tricks.

From "Love in the Cornfield" in SPACESHIP

The Harp In England. XIII

and promising that they could both look at it as often as they liked. Such is my selfless devotion to my staff. I want SLANT to be a happy magazine.

Far too soon we had to make a wild rush for the sub way station. It was unlit when we arrived, the ticket booths were closed, and the elevators weren't working. However, the stairs were, and we dashed down them faster than light, hoping to go backwards in time. All that happened was that my suitcase acquired infinite mass, but finally we arrived at a dim platform in the bowels of the earth. Not a motion was to be seen, only a dark figure pacing up and down in the distance. After ten minutes James decided to ask him if there was another train tonight. We saw him approach the stranger and engage him in animated conversation. After about twenty minutes he came back and told us that he didn't know. Apparently however, he had told James the story of his life--people have a habit of doing this with James--and it turned out he came from Iceland. Bob said it was no wonder he was so familiar with James--he must be the one who has been getting all our mail. We once had a letter redirected from Iceland, you know. It was stamped "Try Ireland." Stamped, you notice; it must be happening all the time.

Eventually a train came along. It must have been the last train very late or the first train very early.



The next night there was supposed to be a sort of hangover session at a pub in Holborn, but most people had already gone home very few turned up. Torry Ackerman was there of course, and us three, and Derek Pickles and Alan Hunter of PHANTASMAGORIA, and Vince Clarke and Ken Bulmer and JM Rosenblum. All the chronic fans. I got some material from Rosenblum for my forthcoming history of British Fandom, THE IMMORTAL TEACUP, and I had a long talk with Pickles about faneds' problems.

Just before closing time we bought some bottles of Guinness and beer and soda water and took them up to the Epicentre. The soda water was for James, who made a beast of himself with the stuff in London. Glass after glass of the raw liquid he would toss down with wild abandon. I pointed out to him what dangerous stuff it was--after all, carbon monoxide will do for you in five minutes, and it's only CO. Soda water is CO₂, twice as bad.

When we got in we had a job at first to pry Bob away from a book he had found--OF WORLDS BEYOND, "The science of science fiction writing." However he was forcibly restrained from dashing off a 100,000 word novel in van Vogt's recommended 800 word episodes, and we talked well into the morning. It's funny, but of all that I can only remember one piece of dialogue.

James: "Have you got your article for PHANTAS ready to see yet?"

Bob: "Only in crude and unintelligible form."

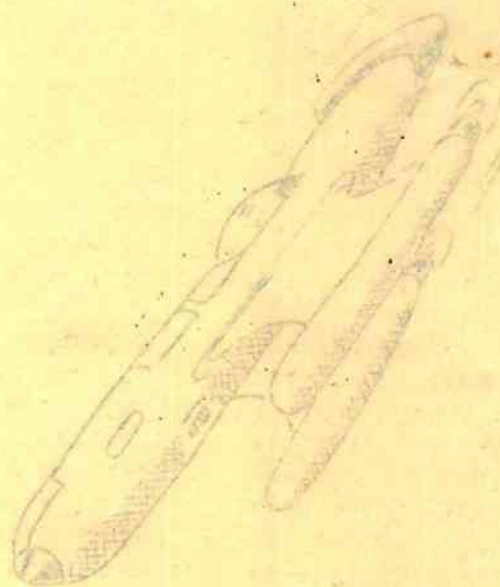
James: "Well, they printed it that way last time."

For some reason this seemed very funny at the time ((possibly because of the Guinness, beer, and soda water--LH)) partly because Bob didn't get the point at all, and partly because it was so unlike James. He is usually the straight man in the trio, a big quiet chap, though occasionally he does come off with some devastating remark. The three of us seem to have acquired somewhat of a reputation for wit at the Epicentre, though when we did say something we thought clever it never seemed to go down as well as the ordinary give and take of a SLANT editorial conference. The truth is that we are not clever at all, but that this Irish accent we are supposed to have gives us a flying start. A tually Ken Bulmer and Vince Clarke are about the two

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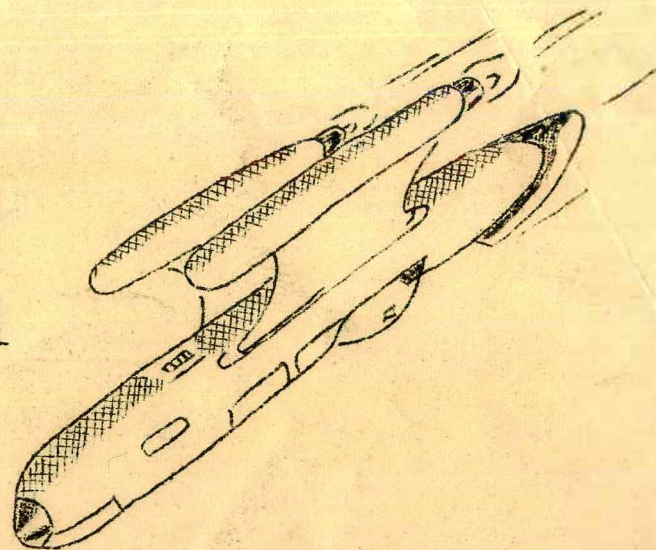
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