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# **The Harp at Chicon**

**a part of The Harp Stateside**

**“Over There, with Grunch and Eggplant”**

**Walter A. Willis**

*Published by*

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# Notes

*The Harp Stateside* is Walt Willis's account of his legendary trip (sponsored by science fiction fans, mostly American ones) from Northern Ireland to the 1952 World Science Fiction Convention – Chicon II in Chicago, Illinois. This ebook sampler, *The Harp at Chicon*, consists mainly of the first two long instalments of the report published in Lee Hoffman's fanzine *Quandry* #27/28, a double issue, in December 1952. These take Walt from the beginning of his journey to the end of Chicon II. The tale opens with what in the revised, collected *The Harp Stateside* is the second sentence of chapter 3 ("Fits and Starts") and runs to the end of that edition's chapter 16 ("Elevator to the Stars"). The full story continues in Part II, chapters 17 ("Afterthoughts") to 36 ("Epitaff"), chronicling Walt's further travels and meetings with remarkable fans across the USA. The titles *The Harp Stateside* and *The Harp at Chicon* reflect the title of Walt's regular *Quandry* column "The Harp that Once or Twice" – a line from James Joyce's *Ulysses*.

The text that follows is based on the transcription of *Quandry* 27/28 at [Fanac.org](http://Fanac.org) (to which enormous thanks), slightly tidied for easier ebook reading. The running footers reminding readers which day of Chicon is being described tended to fall distractingly in the middles of sentences and are here replaced with such headings as "Chicon: Thursday" in more or less appropriate positions. Book and magazine titles are italicized rather than ALL IN CAPITALS. Some obvious OCR errors have been fixed ("bratty costumes" turned out to be "pretty costumes", and it was a great relief that "the feces of the Committee" were merely their faces) but others no doubt still lurk. Tell me if you find any.

Fanatical bibliophiles should note that, as far as I can tell, *The Harp Stateside* omits this short version's [Postscript](#) (from the very end of *Quandry* #27/28) and the "grunch and eggplant" joke referenced there. This references a fannish catchphrase lifted from Roger Price's 1951 novel *In One Head and Out the Other*, in which a character "had a clever trick of saying any conceivable sentence so that it sounded like 'I had one grunch but the eggplant over there'". The [Post-Postscript](#), looking back over the whole

adventure, is from Walt's column "The Prying Fan" in his own *Slant* #7, Winter 1952-1953.

If you enjoy this extract, you are strongly encouraged to seek out the full version of *The Harp Stateside*. Not only are there many more chapters, as noted above, but even the material presented here was carefully reworked. For example, there's what amounts to a whole new chapter about the outward sea voyage. *The Harp Stateside* is collected with remarkably few typos in the colossal hardback fanzine *Warhoon* #28, whose editor Richard Bergeron tried to bring together every bit of fan writing by Walt Willis and very nearly succeeded. It's impossible to recommend *Warhoon* #28 too highly.

*David Langford, 2017*

# Outward Journey

The last few days were like that spaceship factory in *When Worlds Collide*, except that we hadn't had time to make a schedule to be behind in. And then we found it would take two days instead of one to get to Cobh, where the boat left. It was as if Bellus had sent a postcard on ahead to say he'd be dropping in a day early. But at last all the articles and letters were written, my *Hyphen* stencils cut and mailed off to Chuck Harris, and the debris tidied up. The pressroom hadn't looked so tidy since before fandom happened to it and it thought it was the laboratory. On that last night James came up to say goodbye and we stood on the front lawn talking about how far we'd come since we entered fandom and how far I was going to go.

Next day there began my grim struggle with the transport systems of the world.

The first skirmish was quite mild, just a matter of the train being full – there'd been some motor races in Belfast I hadn't heard about – and my having to wait three hours in a queue while the railway people scoured the country collecting coaches for a special train. They must have put completists on the job, because that train was the longest I have ever seen. I think they were charging the people up front half fare. It was also the slowest. I don't know what devious route it took to Dublin, but I know I never heard of any stations called Omsk or Tomsk, or even Nijni-novgorod, on the Great Northern Line. About midnight I got into Dublin, found a hotel tout who sent me to an Unapproved Hotel (I didn't approve of it either), and passed the night in such a Terribly Strange Bed I felt like Wilkie Collins getting between the covers of an anthology.

The next day, Sunday, there was another slow train journey to Cork through stations with quaint names like Sallins, Borris in Ossory, Ballybrophy, Gentlemen, Clonoulty, Ballagh, Saloon Bar, Knocklong, Gentlemen, Buttevant, Mallow, Blarney, Refreshmentroom, and finally Cork. It was now 4.30 and I had to report to the shipping agents in Cobh at 6.30. Still innocent of the fate that was dogging my footsteps, I asked what time was the next

train to Cobh. 6.30. I went to the bus stop outside the station looking for information. The queue was eager to help. Regretfully, they couldn't offer me a bus to Cobh direct, but they went into conference under a huddle of umbrellas and shortly issued a statement to the effect that I could get a bus to Monkstown on the other side of the bay and take the ferry across. Would get me to Cobh in half an hour, they announced confidently. One hour later I got off the bus at a windswept huddle of cottages and looked around for the ferry. All I could see through the driving rain was a little stone jetty running or rather tottering out to sea, and a small boy sheltering from the rain and spray in a tin hut. I asked him where the ferry was and he pointed out to sea. At first I couldn't see anything but more rain and spray, but then suddenly there it was. Lifted briefly into view on the crest of a tidal wave was a tiny rowing boat manned by two small boys. I stared at it as it bobbed in and out of sight. "That's the ferry," I said. It wasn't a question. I just *knew* it was. "Yes," said the small boy, "that's the ferry."

I looked at the ferry for almost ten minutes, but I still couldn't make up my mind about one little point. "Is it coming or going?" I asked finally. "Coming," said the boy, "it'll be here in about ten minutes." He seemed to feel that some sort of an explanation was due and added comfortingly, "The regular ferry gave up when the storm started and these fellows don't know much about it." I felt that explained a lot. "A bit rough today," I said casually after a while. "Yes," said the boy, "This'll probably be their last trip." I thought so too, but I wouldn't have been so callous about it.

However there was always the chance that they would make it and I thought I'd better get my bearings. "Is that Cobh?" I asked, pointing to three whitewashed cottages on the far shore. It seemed very small to be a port of call for transatlantic liners, but then nothing surprises me in Ireland. "No," said the boy, "Cobh is four miles further down. But you can get the train there." I saw it coming, but I let him read his punch line. "What time is the train?" I asked, as if I didn't know. "It leaves Cork at 6.30," he said innocently.

Thinking regretfully of another probability-world in which I was waiting for that train in a warm bar I turned back to the ferry. For a long while I could have sworn the boys were losing ground and I was expecting them to turn

back. I was hoping they would turn back. I was praying they would turn back. I do hate to see people drowned, especially someone as near and dear to me as me. But at last they reached the jetty. One of them held onto it grimly and looked expectantly at me. I threw one suitcase down into the boat and lifted the other one up onto it. Then, catching the boat on the way down again. like an elevator, I lurched in and sat-down. As we got out of the comparative shelter of the jetty I put my feet on the cases to stop them falling overboard and held onto the sides of the boat. It wasn't a very long journey, if you didn't count the distance, we went up and down, and to my surprise we arrived on the other side. I'd even managed to keep my head from dipping in the water when the boat rolled. They asked sixpence for the fare (about a dime). I reflected that life was cheap in these parts and gave them a shilling. I wouldn't have gone through that again for a thousand pounds. This is one Irishman who doesn't believe in ferries.

I set off along the road to Cobh, determined to try my thumb at hitch-hiking. I was well pleased with myself for stopping the vary first car that came along, but it turned out to be a taxi. However it got me to Cobh five minutes before deadline, and the gent even put me onto an hotel which had room available in the middle of the holiday season. I found out why. It was an incredible place, even for rural Ireland. In the lounge there were not only the usual antimacassars, aspidistras and photographs of dead relatives who looked it, but also 37 vases – I counted them –, about a million other pieces of highly breakable bric-a-brac, two stopped grandfather clocks, and an acoustic gramophone with a pre-electric recording of John McCormick singing “Silver Threads Among The Gold”. I didn't play it. It wasn't that sort of place. I felt that that record had probably been played only once and that half the family had probably died from the excitement. When she was showing me my room the old women who owned the joint asked me did I *drink*. Being short of money I said no thanks. “That's good,” she said gravely, “because I *draw the line at drink*.” She seemed to draw the line at and under almost everything. She came into the lounge that evening at 10.30 and told me it was time to go to bed. I'd advise Cobh fandom to look elsewhere when they decide to hold a Convention.

Next afternoon I was in the big customs shed looking curiously at all the other passengers. It seemed there were other people going to America too.

Most of them seemed to be returning Americans, and many of them middle-aged women. By the expressions on their faces, and some of the ones they used in speaking, some of them seemed to be disillusioned about Ireland. Looking round, I thought you could hardly blame them. It was still raining, and the Customs shed was cold and dreary, with the atmosphere of guilt that always hangs around those places. Outside was the shabby town of Cobh and the raffraff of souvenir sellers and tip-hungry porters that infests tourist spots. I began to feel a little ashamed. After all, I thought, what has Ireland got that people should travel thousands of miles to sea. Just rain, ruins, and a lot of wet scenery. I resolved I wouldn't ask anyone what they thought of Ireland so as not to put too great a strain on their politeness. And then the old country made a comeback. It was totally unfair and unreasonable, but Ireland somehow managed to redeem its reputation with one casual gesture. A strolling musician with an accordion found his way into the locked customs shed and began to sing "Come Back To Erin". The place was suddenly full of music and everything was changed. It wasn't just a nondescript customs shed any more, it was Ireland and we were all leaving it. Some of the women began to cry quietly and the customs officials stopped trying to behave with English efficiency. If the entire resources of the Irish Tourist Board had worked for years to produce this flood of sentiment they couldn't have done better, and yet it was characteristic of the country that it was all done in spite of authority. I asked the musician later how he'd managed to get past the guards and he said he'd had to pretend to be drunk. This may not seem a particularly cunning ruse, but it is a fact that in Ireland a drunk man is treated with far more consideration than anyone unfortunate enough to be sober.

The tender that was to take us out to the Neptunia was over an hour late starting and when we got to the rendezvous out at sea the Neptunia wasn't there. I was coming to expect this sort of thing. Eventually a speck on the horizon developed into a big and rather shabby-looking old ship. We went up the gangplank into a couple of hours of utter confusion, caused partly by the fact that the company seemed to have sold half the berths in the ship twice over, and partly by the fact that ship time was an hour and a half behind ours and nobody had thought to mention it. The dining rooms were full of starved and angry passengers looking for food, and non-English-speaking stewards perplexedly turning them away with shouts of "zu fruh!" The ship was supposed to be Greek though it was built in Holland and registered in Panama

(because apparently you can get away with anything there) but the crew were almost all German. The passengers were about equal parts German, American, Irish and miscellaneous British. I was too thrilled to settle down anywhere that day and spent the rest of it trying to find where everything was, principally my cabin. Every time I let it out of my sight it would nip round to the other side of the ship, but after a while I wore it down and retired victorious.

Next morning the weather cleared up and I just wandered around looking at the sea and thinking. It was the first time for weeks I'd been able to sit down calmly and think about the trip itself instead of editor's deadlines and timetables and tickets and documents and money. That was all over now and I was actually on my way to America. It was still incredible, but it seemed to be happening. Sometimes I felt awed at myself, as if I was somebody else. Sometimes I felt wonderfully elated. Sometimes I just felt like jumping overboard. But there's something very soothing about a world consisting entirely of sea. For all you know the land world might have ceased to exist, and anyhow it all seems less important in a planet which is, you realise, mostly water. You look at the Atlantic beneath you and think that's been there unchanged for millions of years before man, and maybe no one has ever been over that particular bit before. Day after day there's nothing to see but all that hydrogen cunningly mixed with oxygen. You forget everything but the ship.

It wasn't a bad ship as ships go, though this one didn't go very fast. It had about the same cruising speed as a bicycle. I didn't mind though, I loved everything about the voyage and as far as I was concerned it could go on for ever. I made some friends, mostly a Canadian girl who'd been hitch-hiking in Europe for six months and an English intellectual going to New York to work in the ballet. There was also a group of what the Englishman persisted in referring to as "culture-hungry Americans", all arty types on their way back from Paris and all as intellectual as they fake them. They asked me what I did and why I was going to America, the way people do on board ship, and in a reckless moment I told them I was a pulp author going to the States on his dollar earnings, which was the nearest I could get to the truth without going into a long and complicated explanation involving fandom, fanzines, conventions and Shelby Vick. I defy anyone to explain any of these

phenomena in a voyage lasting only eight days. I affected to regard my “work” with humorous contempt, but they had such an awed respect for anyone who actually *made money* by writing that they would stand around asking me humbly how I wrote and thought up plots and so on, and I would give them cynical dissertations about markets and rights and word rates and everything. It was fun. Towards the end of the voyage they asked was anyone meeting me and I said, quite truthfully, “Just a few fans.” Haw. I wondered sometimes what I’d do if there turned out to be another science fiction fan on the ship, but I figured it was pretty unlikely. Admittedly I’d noticed a young man in the lounge reading Lovecraft, but that didn’t mean anything.

It did though. I met him again in Los Angeles and it was Allen Hershey, leading *Outlander* and past President of the LASFS.

# New York

Time went drifting by in a dream, like the sea, until one morning there was a notice on the bulletin board: LANDING IN NEW YORK 5.30 AM TOMORROW. I went up to the sharp end of the boat, as we sailors call it, and kept watch all afternoon. We weren't going to sail on past America if I could help it. Round about four o'clock land appeared on the left, a long low strip like a cloudbank. And I was the first to see it; I guess maybe the poor old Captain thought it was a cloudbank – we can't all have eyesight like mine – because he didn't evince any interest until some more land appeared an hour later in a different place. It didn't look quite so much like a cloudbank, and soon it filled the forward horizon and the sea was dotted with ships. As darkness fell we were gliding very slowly towards the entrance to New York harbour. Straight ahead was a tiny Statue of Liberty, and on the left the many coloured illuminations of Coney Island. All around were the fast moving lights of car headlamps. Up among the faint stars the lights of downtown Manhattan shone dimly through the heat haze. The water was very calm. Bits of garbage sailed majestically past. The ship slowed to a stop and dropped anchor.

In the sudden silence the Americans could be heard excitedly pointing out landmarks and calculating how long it would take them to get home and just what they would have to eat. The British, on the other hand, were strangely quiet. They stood around as if they were lost. The foreign ship, this immense country that these people thought of as home, it all made them entertain for the first time the incredible idea that *they* were foreigners. It was all too much for them.

In the bar that night it came to a head. Every other night the bar had been taken over by the Irish with Ceilidhe music and Come-All-Yez or by the Germans with their oompah music and yodelling. The British and Americans had just sat around and watched their antics. But on this last night the Americans got together and began to sing – Stephen Foster tunes and cowboy songs and the Whiffenpoof song and modern dance numbers. As far as the English were concerned this was the last straw. A small group of them at the

other end of the room began quietly but defiantly to sing Loch Lomond. This was very English – there wasn't a Scot among them. At once they were joined by reinforcements from London, the North Country, Wales, Northern Ireland and sang Ilkley Moor and Cockles and Mussels and The Lambeth Walk and The Old Kent Road and other old songs, all at the top of their voices. Their repertoire was enlarged by the arrival of contingents from the Empire, Canada with Alouette and Australia with Waltzing Matilda, and finally two Frenchmen joined the party. Both the Old World and New World groups were now bawling as hard as they could, each trying to drown the other. It was a glorious row. The Americans began to lose ground, but at the same time everyone seemed to run out of songs. The battle degenerated into guerrilla warfare, as now and then someone on either side would start a song and find nobody know the words. There seemed to be a sort of Geneva Convention that it wasn't fair to sing the same song twice. It would all have finished in anticlimax and a vague but real antipathy between the Americans and the Old World if one of a group of three West Indian negroes who'd been sitting unnoticed in the corner hadn't quietly stated to sing calypso. The whole room sat entranced then joined in with a roar that must have been heard in New York. It was glorious. And even after he ran out of calypso he knew more songs than either side, and they were all songs everyone could sing.

About one o'clock in the morning, tired but happy, people began to drift back up on deck. It was incredibly hot and close, with not a breath of wind on the oily water. We couldn't face going down to our stuffy cabins. We'd figured on sleeping on deck, but everything was as damp as if it had been raining. No one felt like going to sleep anyway. We stayed up all night, leaning on the rail and talking. About four o'clock we were having breakfast and the ship was moving again. We passed the Statue of Liberty almost unnoticed in the morning mist, except by the English intellectual who was heard asking what it advertised, and saw the sun rise spectacularly behind the Manhattan skyline.

The Staten Island ferry (ferry! aaagghhhh!!) passed us very close and I inspected it carefully just in case there were any fans waving to me from it. However the first one I heard from was Joe Gibson, a letter from whom was delivered as soon as the boat docked. It was addressed to me in Banana Bin

No. 4 (I wondered how he knew the number) and said “It’s this way: I’m sitting hero minding my own business, which is to get as much done on a new novel as possible before making tracks for Chicago-that city being short of tracks this year – when along comes an innocent-looking postcard signed ‘Shelby’. Old Shrimp Boat asks would I be so kind as to welcome you ... Look for a fellow in a blue hat. He’ll look like a plainclothes policeman, but stand your ground – it’s me.”

Eventually the Immigration People got themselves straightened out. All the US subjects went smugly through first, and then it was the turn of us aliens. I had a whole pack of documents in an old *Galaxy* envelope and every time I came to an official I would shuffle them and deal him a hand. If I won I would be allowed to go on to the next table, like a bridge tournament. I’d had some practice in this game already and at least won the first prize, a clear view of the gangway. I found to my shocked surprise that suddenly there was absolutely nothing to stop me walking ashore I promptly walked ashore. I was twenty yards down the customs shed before I realised I had stepped onto American soil without even thinking about it. I was nearly going back to do the thing properly, with appropriately solemn thoughts and perhaps a few quotable words, but I was too glad to get away from those officials to risk being caught in the machine again and finding myself on the way back home. So I just made my way to the sign marked “W”, and waited to be claimed.

Someone in a blue suit came up and shook me by the hand. “Joe Gibson?” I deduced keenly. But it wasn’t, it was Dave Kyle. It was true there was only one pass allowed per passenger and Joe had got it, but Dave had wangled his way in on a press pass. Joe came up in a few seconds, and after a few moments chat they revealed conspiratorially that Will Sykora and his henchman Calvin Thomas Beck were outside. They suggested I might like to go into the cloak and dagger business. They would go out and wait for me a couple of hundred yards outside the shed, while I strolled out by myself past Sykora and Beck, who wouldn’t recognise me. I was thrilled. Nobody could have arranged a more fannish welcome. Not two minutes in the country and already I was up to the neck in New York fan feuds. However I temporised because I had nothing against Sykora – I’ve never been able to sort out New York fandom anyway – and I thought he might just possibly be a little put out at this practical joke. It didn’t seem all that practical either, and beside I

rather wanted to meet such a legendary figure as Sykora. Fortunately I didn't have to commit myself because shortly afterwards the legendary figure materialised inside the customs shed, having manoeuvred his way in by contacting the Chief of Police at Hoboken. He immediately swept the ground from underneath the others' feet by announcing that his side had a car and was willing to take all three of us anywhere we liked. Being unable to produce a private helicopter at short notice, the home team had to admit defeat. We talked together for a while and then Kyle very kindly offered to see what he could do towards getting me rail or plane reservations to Chicago. I'd wanted to get there before the crowd arrived, or at least Bloch and his 20000 snakes, and of course the boat had been a day late getting in. I arranged to phone him at noon and off he went.

By this time I'd been waiting beside my luggage for about half an hour and no one seemed to be taking any interest in it. For the first time I took time off to look around me and noticed an ominous and enormous queue about half a mile down the shed. I set off down to it, and sure enough this was where the bottleneck was, a mass of hot and bothered people who had all made the same mistake as me. For some strange reason everyone had to call here to check their baggage and then find a customs official to examine it. I supposed it was a piece of unamerican inefficiency designed to make the visitors feel at home, but I'd have been just as happy if they hadn't bothered. Half way up the queue I saw my friends from on board ship. I joined them, trying to look as if I'd just stepped out for a breath of air. After an anxious minute or two I realised I had got off with it, but it didn't seem to be doing me much good. For the first half hour the queue didn't move an inch. Then suddenly it happened. We moved an inch. I began to wonder if I would get out of here in time for South Gate.

I have to call this a queue, because it was anything but a line. It was in the form of an enormous wedge, tapering to single file between two tables. When the pressure got beyond so many tons per square inch, a mangled body would be projected with great force down between the two tables in front of the customs inspectors, in no fit condition to tell lies about any dutiable goods he happened to have. Every now and then the mass of angry people at the back would surge forward, pushing the queue and the tables and the customs officials and everything else before them several yards further down the shed.

I calculated that assuming we survived this heat we'd push the bastards into the Pacific by December. After each stampede policemen would come along and swear at the queue and the queue would swear back. Vitriolic remarks were passed about American efficiency and hospitality and the ancestry of the customs officials and damned foreigners and if you don't like it here why don't you go back where you came from. (I always say there's nothing like travel for promoting international understanding.) Now and again someone would try to move along towards the front of the queue and when this happened the crowd would roar like an animal and I would look shocked and policemen would come and push us and shout to us to form fours.

While I was standing there thinking it was a pity I couldn't print some of the crowd's replies to that last suggestion, Evelyn Smith found me. She said she'd got into the shed by claiming to be my mother. (She isn't, really.) We talked for a while and then I told her to go and sit down. Someone had better be fit enough to help carry me out. Besides policemen kept shouting at her, thinking she was trying to break into the queue. Sykora also came along a couple of times, waving encouragingly and asking could he get me something to eat. I couldn't lift my arms to wave back, but I appreciated the kind thought. After a couple of hours of this I was really seriously considering abandoning my luggage altogether, but the customs officials were now in real fear of being lynched and began to speed things up, and at last I found myself at the front of the queue. I was really surprised; I'd ceased believing there was a front to that queue. The customs examination itself was quite an anticlimax. I wished I'd had a couple of atomic bombs or something to make it all worth while. The man rooted around until he came up with a copy of the Quannish. He read bits of it here and there, gave me a peculiar look, and scrawled a rude word on my case. I staggered out of the place with my retinue, casting a last guilty look at the wretches in the queue who'd been there before me and hoping they wouldn't still be there when I was coming back.

Outside the shed, in the fresh clean air of Hoboken, there were Ken BeAle and another New York fan called Marcombe, Mrs Beck, and her son Calvin Thomas. The latter two put themselves unreservedly at my Beck and Cal, as it were, and offered to drive me into New York for lunch. I said I'd just as soon have a hamburger though, so we stopped off at a diner in the Palisades. I

had my first hamburger, closely followed by my second and third. As far as I was concerned the food problem in America was now solved. I phoned Dave Kyle from there but the fares he quoted were so much more than I expected that I decided to take the bus after all. Joe Gibson then said he would go this afternoon too, instead of waiting till tomorrow. There were a few hours to spare before the bus left, so I phoned H. L. Gold and invited myself down to his apartment. We all set off again in the car. On the way Calvin was stopped by the police for speeding, but Mrs Beck said she wouldn't do it again. The policeman was so taken aback by this that he let us off and went away by himself to think it over.

## To Chicago

At the Greyhound Station the party disintegrated. Joe went home to pack, Sykora went on to work, the Becks went to leave their car in, and Evelyn and I made our way to Gold's apartment. It was a nice place; full of interesting things like advance copies, manuscripts, galley proofs, beer, and H.L. Gold. After an hour or so the Becks arrived, but it was already past the time we should leave for the bus. The Becks said hello and goodbye to Gold in the same breath and we all set off again. Calvin and Evelyn Smith had a polite but heartfelt argument about the comparative advantages of taxi and subway, which Cal won after Evelyn had virtually thrown herself in front of several cabs without avail. There followed a series of wild dashes from train to train, the monotony of which was relieved by fighting with the rush-hour crowd and discussing the correct route. Everyone was solicitous about my welfare in the rush hour of a crowded city, not having seen this particular sheltered flower boarding a tram in Ballymacarrett on a wet night. Why, here there weren't even any people being dragged along the ground. We got to the bus station at 5.29 and Joe greeted us wryly with the news that we had an hour to spare since the bus left on Standard Time and apparently New York was on Daylight Saving. Feeling like dopes, we went along to a drugstore. I only wanted something to drink, but Mrs Beck was worried about my health and carried on a stout rearguard action aimed at diverting the party to a proper restaurant. She accompanied us into the drugstore under protest and, presumably out of consideration for the owner's feelings, switched over to French. I told her I wasn't hungry in French either and she settled for bringing me a dish of soup. I must say I never expected that six hours after landing I'd be arguing with a fan's mother in French. It's these little surprises that make life interesting.

Life was interesting that day. The bus left punctually at 6.30, full of gasoline and good intentions, but only struggled as far as the next stop before the spirit ceased to move it. A procession of mechanics, each cleaner than the last, had conferences over it until finally one with a tie on made the decision that we should change buses. I think this is his fulltime job.

Now, at this point I would like to defend the Greyhound Company against an unfair accusation that has been levelled against them. It has been bruited about, probably by some brute employed by Trailways, that our bus broke down three times between New York and Chicago. I am happy to say that this is not true. Not once, in all my long and eventful association with the Greyhound Company, have I known that noble and generous organisation to foist me off with a patched-up bus. Every time one broke down they would simply throw it away and bring on a new one. Their courage in persisting with this policy in the face of financial ruin was in keeping with the old bus company motto "None but the brave deserve the fare." I am glad to say it was finally rewarded. You will scarcely believe this, but the fourth and final bus *did not break down at all*. This remarkable vehicle was immediately whisked away to the Greyhound Research Laboratories, where they are working on a form of Willis-proof transport.

Joe and I didn't talk much at first. He had begun the journey by remarking that he didn't like the stuff I wrote, and since I didn't like to admit that I couldn't for the life of me remember anything at all he had written except a space opera in *Other Worlds* distinguished by the use of fans' names, a whole field of conversational gambits was closed. Besides, I was too busy getting my first look at America. Things had been moving too fast in New York. I knew I should get some sleep because I hadn't had any last night and I wasn't expecting to get much more the next few, but it was all too interesting. I must have fallen asleep for a while though, for in the early morning I woke to find myself in the Van Vogtian situation of walking along a long tunnel without knowing how I got there. It took me a few moments to realise I was in an underground passageway beneath the Pennsylvania Turnpike leading to a diner on the other side. I'd been dreaming I was walking along a corridor on the ship, and even after I'd wakened up I couldn't convince myself that it wasn't the solid earth that was rolling and pitching, it was me.

## Chicon: Thursday

By next afternoon we were so late that the driver just didn't care any more. We must have been a good 200 miles from Chicago when we passed a sign advertising the Morrison Hotel but I kept expecting it round every corner. It wasn't, and what with the tension and the heat – the last few buses had had no air-conditioning I was a wreck when we did arrive. With one last effort I dragged my luggage out and looked round the bus station. Lee Hoffman and Bob Tucker were right in front of me, but for a few seconds I didn't see them. Maybe I had never really believed they were real people. Then they came suddenly into focus and I thought they were just like their photographs, only different. Better-looking for one thing. I'd been geared up to anything, even Robert Bloch and 20000 snakes, and it was a relief to find only two. Two people I mean of course, though I learned later that they and Robert Bloch had planned a particularly fiendish welcome for me at the hotel which didn't come off only because Bloch didn't get time to organise it. I was to be shown into my room to find Ginny Saari in the bed and there was to be a knock at the door and the house detective asking had I a women in there and when I said no he was to throw another one in and there were to be blackmailers and jealous husbands and a gunbattle with blank cartridges ending in Tucker being shot and bleeding tomato ketchup all over the floor. Tucker's death would have been the give-away of course. I couldn't be expected to believe that. At the time I wasn't too unhappy that all this fell through. I hadn't seen Ginny Saari yet.

Tucker took over and whisked us all efficiently over to the hotel by cab. Joe went to his room to lie down. I don't know if it did him any good, but it made me feel a lot better. At least I had stood up to the heat and everything as well as a native of New Mexico. In my own room Lee enrolled me into the Confederate Army and gave me a cap with the initials FLEAC on it. In case there is anyone in fandom I didn't explain this to at the Masquerade Ball, it stands for "Fandom's Leading Expert and Critic" a distinction conferred on me in a *New Worlds* article describing the members of the International Fantasy Award panel. Vince Clarke has never let me live it down, though I pointed out to him that I had reviewed a book once and that the "expert" was

an obvious misprint for “export”. I countered by formally designating Lee an Honorary Irish Fan and giving her my other harp brooch brought specially for the occasion. These solemn ceremonies concluded, we went down with Bea Mahaffey and Bob Tucker to get something to eat.

Over the meal Hoffman and Tucker told me all about how they’d been waiting for me for three hours and had gone to wait in the railroad station because it had a much nicer waiting room but I wasn’t there either, and I told them of my adventures with the Greyhound Company. Then there was a stunned silence as everyone realised what an extraordinary thing was happening. We could understand each other! Contempt was heaped on a certain Vince Clarke. I was immensely relieved, though I’d been prepared to deal with the first sign of communication trouble by taking out a piece of paper, drawing nine concentric circles on it, and pointing to the third one. Still dazed and exhausted, but very happy, I made three puns, of which Tucker caught the third and worst one. He solemnly shook me by the hand, now convinced that I wasn’t an imposter even if I hadn’t got an Irish accent. (I do wish the British and Americans would get together and come to some agreement as to whether I have an incomprehensible brogue or an English accent.)

On the elevator back upstairs we were the first to make the acquaintance of Bellhop No.31 – also known as “Loverboy” from what the liftgirl called him. He revealed himself to be no ordinary bellhop, but a fan. He was thrilled to find a science fiction convention being held right under his nose end declared his intention of throwing up his job so that he could attend it. Meanwhile, he said, if there was anything we wanted, anything at all, just call on him. Nothing was too much trouble for a fellow fan. And of course there would be no question of payment. We told him who Bea was and she enrolled him as a Convention member right there in the elevator. He was as good as his word, as many fans found out, but Tucker has been so calloused by years of vile huckstering that he has forgotten the innocent sincerity of the dewy-eyed neofan. At any rate, when Loverboy imported a couple of callgirls into the room where the poker school was in session everyone fought shy of them and they were finally taken over by two rival pros, who found that they were indeed “on the house”. Tucker’s anguish when he heard this was heart-rending. “Of course they weren’t pretty,” he said, “But My Ghod, FOR

FREE!!”

The party that evening consisted of us four plus Robert Bloch, Marty Greenberg, Dave Kyle, and Evelyn Gold – a nice number. It kept moving from room to room to keep from getting any bigger, on a sort of reversal of the snowball principle. Every now and then somebody would ring up and somebody would answer the phone “Communist Party Headquarters” while the others would talk loudly and gutturally about atom bomb plans and NKVD agents and so on. If the enquirer persisted he’d be told to call back in five minutes and the Party would pick up its drinks and silently steal away. Every time this happened Evelyn Gold would suggest with her beautifully acted ingenuousness that we move to her room because there was an osculating fan and so on. I mention all this not because it was the witticism of the century, though it went over big at the time, but because it is my mission in life to explain the interlineations in *Quandry*. It was after midnight before the Party got another recruit. Tucker greeted him with a too innocent enquiry as to why he wasn’t writing in *aSF* these days and I guessed it was George O. Smith. I was told the Convention could be regarded as having started now. I saw what they meant. For one thing, GOSmith is a teller of shaggy dog stories who might be equalled by Lester Phillips, but no one else.

About 2 am – we were in GOSmith’s room by then – everyone decided to go out and get something to eat. In the restaurant people were telling mildly risqué jokes and Dave Kyle came solicitously down the table to make sure all the words were familiar to me. They were, and the stories. At the desk going out someone, probably Bloch, suggested we send a postcard to Marty Greenberg, whom we’d lost some time ago. Somebody, probably Bloch, wrote something witty and we all signed our names. On the way back to the hotel someone even remembered to mail it. The fact that they mailed it in a garbage can shouldn’t be taken as an aspersion either on Bloch’s literary style or Greenberg’s living habits. It was just that kind of party.

Back in the hotel about three o’clock it suddenly occurred to GOSmith to wonder if Boucher had arrived yet. A man of action, George called the number. After just about the time needed to wake a man out of a sound sleep at 3am, Boucher answered; and after some gay if one-sided badinage he hung up again. George couldn’t understand it. This wasn’t like Good Old Tony.

He must have been cut off. He called the number again, listened to Good Old Tony for a moment, and then put down the receiver with an injured look on his face. That bastard Boucher couldn't do that to him. We must all go along to his room immediately and kick the door in. *Or*, better still, push a strip of film under the door and ignite one end of it. The sheer beauty of this glorious suggestion moved us almost to tears, but after some talk George finally settled for us all cancelling our subs to F&SF.

## Chicon: Friday

Some time later I went to bed for the first time since Tuesday morning. I must have got up again a little later that Friday, but I don't remember it. In fact the whole day was a complete blank until I read Gregg Calkins' report in Oopsla. From that I see I was sitting on the floor outside the Convention Committee suite some time that morning. That's right. Let's see, I remember now I was talking to somebody there when I saw Rich Elsberry who was one of the people I specially wanted to meet so I excused myself and ran after him and we had walked once round the hotel when someone called me into the committee suite to tell me about some change in my part of the programme and since I hadn't even seen the programme yet because the postal delivery on board ship was so bad it was all one to me and on the way out again to rejoin Elsberry I met Eva Firestone and GMCarr and Ray Higgs and had been talking to them for a while when someone called me away to meet Howard Browne who said he knew I didn't think much of *Amazing* but didn't I think *Fantastic* was all right and they had printed a quarter million copies of it and he hoped the fans liked it and he seemed very pleasant and almost deferential and I remembered all the rude things I'd said about him and was quite taken aback to find he had read them because I never think of anyone reading Quandry except Lee and Shelby and Harris and Clarke and Bloch and a few other people I like though I know it has a bigger circulation than that and then someone said Forry Ackerman is here and asking after you so I said yes I thought *Fantastic* was the best-looking sf mag ever published without too much emphasis on the "looking" and went to say hello to Forry whom I was now meeting for the third time – London, Belfast, Chicago – and we shouted at each other for a few minutes until Forry said look here's John Campbell don't you want to meet him and I thought hell no because ghod knows he might have read some of the things I wrote about him too and how could I explain in this madhouse that I was rude to him not because I didn't think he was a good editor but because I knew he was but not so good he could do it without trying so I said not now but hey you come and meet Lee Hoffman because it was one of my pet ambitions to introduce two of America's alltime top fans to one another so we went outside and I introduced Forry Ackerman to Lee Hoffman fan historians please note and

we all sat at the end of the corridor outside the suite and talked and after a while the place was full of BNFs with Lee and 4e and Tucker and Bloch and Keasler and Elsberry and Calkins and the Committee room must have been empty now because there was a sea of faces stretching as far as the eye could see with McNeil's rising on the horizon like a full moon and we talked for a while but all I can remember is that Tucker said he once advertised autographed copies of the Weinbaum Memorial Volume for sale and got three replies and that Gregg Calkins presented him with a "Little Gem Dandy Huckster Badge" in pokerwork and I thought the poker work touch was specially appropriate and Bloch had his head in Hoffman's lap and somewhere in the distance GMCarr or someone with a carrying voice was talking in absolutely wonderful interlineations like

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WHOEVER TAKES THAT JOB HAS GOT TO DEDICATE HIS LIFE TO  
GOOD OLD N3F

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and later I had to go into the Committee room again because Ginny Saari wanted me to write out some facts of interest about myself and I thought she was Judy May because I didn't see how anyone as beautiful as that could have existed in fandom without me hearing about them and though of course I couldn't refuse her anything I just couldn't think of anything, to say except maybe that I had introduced Forry Ackerman to Lee Hoffman and puzzled over it for quite a while and then decided I'd wait until she asked for it again and then find out what it was for so I just waited and watched Max Keasler throwing a one-man exhibition of his serious artwork which is just like his unserious artwork except that the nudes are a bit more twisted looking and was thrilled to meet Ray Nelson who I think is one of the few true geniuses in fandom and tried to gut him to promise to do me some cartoons not knowing that this is the wrong approach because Nelson never promises to do cartoons he just does them and what you have to do is follow him around with pencil and paper and put them in front of him whenever he sits down and hope for the best and you're liable to get it because I saw him later turning out masterpieces for Keasler at the rate of one a minute which made me even more jealous of Keasler since all I'd got was one little cartoon which I'm beginning to be dreadfully afraid I've lost though maybe it'll turn up in the mail one of these days like the airmailed sock I got in Savannah but after a while Ginny Saari seemed to have disappeared so I went outside again and

everyone was gone except GOSmith who said Dona had told him he needn't come home if he didn't get me to promise to call on them in New York so I said thanks very much I'd love to I'd hate to come between a man and his wife and we stayed talking for a while until Sturgeon came past and George started speculating to his face about why it had grown a beard and I made a little joke about it and Sturgeon went on out and closed the door behind him and then came back to say I heard that it was good and I was pleased although it wasn't because most times nobody hears my jokes because I'm inclined to throw them away which is maybe the best thing to do with them and shortly afterwards I left GOSmith and wandered downstairs or rather downelevator by myself to the lobby where I fell among hucksters more or less the same crowd as last night except that something new had been added called Jim Webbert only of course I didn't know who he was and took him for another vile huckster although he kept offering me cigarettes and exploding his lighter under my nose and I don't think he knew who I was either but figured that if I was with the pros I was important enough to be offered cigarettes to and it turned out he had a notebook with all the important people's favourite cigarettes and drinks listed and everyone was amused when Tucker asked had he sexual preferences listed too and because he had John W. Campbell and George O. Smith on the same page and it was all very interesting but I figured there should be a lot of people arriving I wanted to meet like Manly Banister and Shelby Vick and Henry Burwell so I excused myself on the grounds that I wanted to see if the Terrace Casino was available for the recording Gregg Calkins wanted to make of *Fannius McCainius* with the original cast and in the lobby I ran across Lee Hoffman whom I hadn't seen since morning and we went down to the terrace casino but instead of fans it was full of peculiar people like accountants or Catholic girls or something so we went up to the lobby again and met various people arriving and then went with Sam Moskowitz to Wimpey's Glorified Hamburger where we drank several chocolate malts and talked about one thing and probably another but the only thing I can remember is how wonderful chocolate malts were so that I swore a mighty oath that I would drain Chicago dry of chocolate malt but I had the job only half finished when we went back to the hotel and roamed around talking to lots of people but none of them seems to have written a convention report yet so I don't know who they were.

## Chicon: Saturday

And that's all I can remember about Friday. Or rather most of Friday and a good part of Saturday. I do remember though, with horrid vividness, that the phone rang at 7.30 am that morning. I didn't think there even was such a time. It was Dave Ish. He had jut arrived, and was full of energy and enthusiasm and horrible things like that. There should be a law against young fans arriving at convention hotels at impossible times in the morning full of energy and enthusiasm. I explained that I'd had less then eight hours sleep in the last five days and the convention hadn't even started yet, and that if I got up at all that day it would be after noon. I dropped the receiver in the general area of the rest and relapsed into unconsciousness. I should have told the operator not to put through any more calls, but at the time such a brilliant stratagem was beyond my powers of thought. The phone began to ring every ten minutes. After a while I began answering it "Peter Graham speaking" and when they asked for me I told them Willis was dead. But no one believed it but me.

Finally I gave in and got up, almost falling asleep in the shower. I went downstairs and had four cups of coffee. I met Dave Ish on the way, but decided to let him live. It was still to hot to eat, and besides I felt terrible. I met Keasler and Hoffman and we bought a bottle of Indian ink and went up to my room. It wasn't an artists' drinking party, we just wanted to make some additions to the Tucker Hotel Plan I'd brought with me. Then we just sat there half asleep and talked until it was time to register for the convention. We took our places at the end of the line. I had my membership ticket all ready – I'd been careful to pack it because I'd have a long way to go back for it – but someone brought Lee and me along to the front and registered us before everyone else. The direct administration of raw egoboo like that can be embarrassing.

At s quarter to three we were in the Convention Hall looking for a table. I wanted one near the door so that at least I wouldn't snore right into the PA system, but someone called us and we were wedged at a crowded table half way down the terrace. The Convention was supposed to start at three, but it

wasn't until 4.15 that Korshak got up and announced there had been a delay – some of us had noticed that – and that it was due to the fact that Catholic girls had been using the hall. You got the impression that they had been doing Nameless Things in it. He promised faithfully that there would be no further delay. This announcement was punctually followed by ten minutes delay, during which someone called plaintively for Bea Mahaffey over the PA system. Many fans who also wanted Bea Mahaffey felt that the PA system gave him an unfair advantage. After a final desperate entreaty “Does *anyone* know where Bea is?” Bill Hemling made a graceful little speech of welcome and Korshak got up to introduce the guests.

In some ways this was the best turn of the Convention. Korshak's eyesight is on par with his knowledge of present-day fandom, and he spent more time apologising for the first then introducing the second. After picking out the few notables in the front rows he peered despairingly about the auditorium, being finally reduced to calling on just anyone whose name he happened to know. He had announced first that he was going to “jump from table to table”, a prospect which delighted many of us who felt that an acrobatic turn of this sort was just what the Convention needed and were looking forward to the review of it in the *Burroughs Bulletin*. But before he even started beating his breast and swinging on the chandelier, Korshak unaccountably turned vicious, threatening to “strike here and there at random” and to “hit as many people at the tables as he possibly could.” Naturally, this terrified the guests and they cowered in the shadows so that he couldn't find them. This seemed to infuriate Korshak even more. He knew they were there all right. He produced the registration papers to prove it, and revealed blackly that he was going to “shoot up and down the list, picking out the highspots”. Among the highspots so picked out were various ornaments of antediluvian fandom, well known to fan Historians, and such luminaries of tomorrow's fandom as Harlan Ellison and Roger Sims. Among the nonentities left to their obscurity were Lee Hoffman, Max Keasler, Shelby Vick, Henry Burwell, Rich Elsberry, Eva Firestone, GMCarr and virtually every other fan who has been hyperactive in the last few years. The only reason I got among the immortals was that for a good half hour Henry Burwell had been shouting “Walter Willis!” and passing cards up under Korshak's nose with “INTRODUCE WALT WILLIS” written on them in block letters. He was on the point of organising a fireworks display with my name spelled out in coloured lights

when Korshak, running out of names he remembered from the most recent issue of *The Time Traveller*, reluctantly introduced me. I stood up and waved a programme, grinning foolishly. After a decent interval I sat down again, and noticed to my dismay that Korshak was still peering desperately about the auditorium. I looked around for something to throw at him, but before I could lift the table he asked me to stand up again. I stood up, waved programmes above my head like a helicopter, and was about to let off a small hydrogen bomb when he saw me. I was the only fan introduced twice to that convention. No wonder McCain thinks I have a split personality.

Korshak at last gave up the struggle and introduced the members of the Committee who were, fortunately, just under his nose. Judy May then introduced the gavel which is to be handed down from convention to convention, and very nearly broke the line of descent there and then by hitting the table two terrible blows with it. After a nice little speech about the present-day prestige of science fiction she was presented with a bouquet of roses slightly bigger than herself but not half as attractive.

After that I'll bet there were announcements and things, but I was feeling too dreadful to pay any attention to them. I decided that if I was going to last through this convention I would have to get some sleep, so I went to bed. This was the most sensible thing I have ever done in my life. I left instructions for Lee to ring me at p.30 sharp, which she says she did. In fact she says she rang for five minutes without getting any answer. She got worried and called Shelby Vick, who came in from next door to view the body. He didn't have either the heart or the strength to waken me, but he could see I was breathing so he left me until about 11. I got up, still feeling fairly dopey, and wandered into Burwell's room where a girl called Rosen whom I'd never heard of before came up and called me a chiseller. My morale momentarily shattered by this unexpected attack on its most vulnerable point, I retreated through the next room and took a glass of whiskey, Lee Hoffman, and an elevator up to the top floor. We looked in at the penthouse party but it was too noisy for us in our present state so we just sat for a while on the steps to the observation tower and looked at Chicago and talked. After a while we went to the penthouse party, just in time to be thrown out along with everyone else. I don't know what had been going on – all we had seen was Sturgeon playing his guitar and it didn't seem as bad as

all that – but I suppose this was the night all the damage was done in the penthouse, because it was the next day that all the rumours started about Les Cole having flown back to Frisco in an unscheduled huff, disenchanted with fandom. Actually he did stay on in the hotel, though he withdrew from all participation in the official programme and he certainly was sore. No wonder, because it seems there was over a hundred dollars worth of damage done to the Little Men’s penthouse that night. At the end of the Convention they were afraid to check out because they hadn’t got the money to pay for it. Burwell overheard them discussing it and though he hadn’t been in the penthouse said he didn’t like to think of them going home feeling like that about fans and gave Les \$20 towards the bill. Ed Wood chipped in with another ten and so did one L.J. Grant of Chicago. These were all the names I was able to get, but in a few minutes Les had more than \$100 and just stood there with tears in his eyes. That’s just typical of fandom. Sometimes it’s enough to disenchant anyone, but it’s full of nice people.

There was such an immense horde of refugees from the penthouse waiting for the elevators that Lee suggested we walk down to the 20th Floor and catch the local. Myself and Forry Ackerman and a few other congenial maniacs followed her, and some hours later staggered out into the 20th Floor, which amazingly enough was still there. We wouldn’t have been surprised if the hotel had been rebuilt in our absence. We went on down to the Committee suite, but one look at that amoeba-like mass was enough. We decided we’d prefer a nice roomy sardine can any day and went out for some chocolate malts. At least that’s what I had. Nectar! Then we went back to the Atlanta suite and talked till some time in the morning.

## Chicon: Sunday

I got up at ten, feeling fine except for worry about my speech at the banquet. I went next door to find that Burwell and Vick and Calkins had been up all night, and looked it. So had Bea Mahaffey, who didn't. I took some of their coffee and iced water, which were both at the same temperature, and began to write my speech on Burwell's portable typer. Of course I'd had a speech written out weeks ago, full of fannish allusions, but one look at that Convention told me it wouldn't do. Then I had breakfast with Hoffman, Keasler, Kyle and Calkins and went along to the FAPA meeting. I don't know if it was over by then or whether it just never got started, but the only fans present were GMCarr, Lee Hoffman, Hal Shapiro, Martin Alger and Walter Coslet, and there was just some desultory conversation. I think everyone was subconsciously expecting Burbee and Laney to appear in their midst in a pillar of fire. There had been a rumour they were here the previous day – Elsberry and Shapiro and Briggs had passed themselves off on Webbert as Boggs Laney and Burbee – but no one else was fooled except Keasler and Hoffman and me. We merely heard that Boggs had arrived, which we just could wish ourselves into believing, and all three of us rushed madly along to the room only to find Elsberry grinning at us sarcastically.

Unpunctually at 1.45 the Convention started again, with the pro editors' panel. Boucher said the various magazines were not competitors, and something also equally genial but not so ridiculous on which I can't decipher my notes. I wish those people would speak more legibly. Browne, on the defensive right from the start, talked about the letters he'd been getting on "asbestos paper" and defiantly described Mickey Spillane (currently disfiguring in *Fantastic*) as "one of the best science fiction writers in America." Through the general daze induced by this remarkable appraisal Browne tried to pass off on us the equally remarkable argument that if fans didn't object to sf in the *Saturday Evening Post* they had no right to object when sf magazines printed detective stories. (Mr Spillane's career as a science fiction writer had lasted approximately 30 seconds.) This was more or less equivalent to saying that if we didn't object to digging our food out of the ground we had no right to object we were served dirt in our dinner. This

glittering target hung temptingly in the air, but John W. Campbell manfully ignored it in favour of a few stultifyingly uncontroversial remarks about the various magazines being complementary to one another. Evelyn Gold promptly livened things up again by being uncomplimentary to *aSF* with a deliciously innocent comment about how she – or at least *Galaxy* – kept following Mr Campbell, obviously implying just the opposite. She went on to give some interesting news, as did Lester del Rey who said he had got up out of bed to follow her. No one found this surprising. Hamling engagingly defended *Imagination's* “all things to all fen” policy and was followed by new boy Sam Mines. He started off by saying how as an editor among all these writers and fans he felt like a carrot entering a group of hungry rabbits, but the audience found him very much to their taste and he went down very well.

Palmer made a speech about *Other Worlds's* policy as disarmingly frank as his own editorials. *Other Worlds* had no policy. He said however that it had a new associate editor in the form of Bea Mahaffey. I can think of few better forms, but I doubt if in actual fact Bea can ever be really much more than a glorified consultant. The man who pays the paper calls the tune. Though I must say that Palmer told me later that he recently wrote a story for *Other Worlds* and submitted it to Bea, who rejected it. He rewrote it and Bea rejected it again, whereupon he sent it to Howard Browne (I don't know what Browne did with it – he seems to be at the end of the line. Maybe he passed it on to the *Saturday Evening Post*.)

Quinn of *If* made a short but amusing speech quoting a letter by a fan who panned everything in *If* unmercifully and then enclosed a sub. Quinn seemed to think this nullified the criticism, it not having occurred to him that the fan was probably a completist.

Next came the questions session, starting off with one that was inspired only in the sense that it had been cooked up beforehand to start the balls rolling. It was why they were all in the editing business. Reasons varied from love of money to marrying H.L. Gold, but most of them said they liked it too, even Howard Browne. JWC said it was because he was interested in speculative thinking and wanted someone to help him do it. It's interesting that JWC was the only person there who could not only say that sincerely, but be believed.

In a discussion about format Browne said Ziff-Davis thought the pulp mag was dead. No one suggested they knew because they had killed it.

A more interesting question was why editors don't write more. JWC, at whom it was obviously aimed, said he had a sort of gentleman's agreement with Street and Smith. Apparently he didn't think it was quite fair to S&S to write independently while in their employ, and S&S didn't think it was quite fair either. Something will have to be done about Street and Smith.

After they had all been coy about their circulation there came a question which gave everyone their long awaited chance to jump on Howard Browne. It was "What is the place in science fiction of the impinging fields of detective fiction etc?" Or, in basic English, "Micky Spillane! What the hell?"

Browne came out of his corner fighting. Millions of people read Spillane. He would help *Fantastic* make money and that, he implied, was that. Evelyn Gold, unsheathing her claws again, apologised for not being able to hear what Browne had said though she was sitting right beside him. She didn't think Spillane would attract steady readers. Browne, speaking a little louder, said if he was proved wrong he was willing to take his place in the breadline. Apparently he kneaded the dough.

Mines said nothing of importance and Boucher said that was what he was just going to say. In an improbable alliance with Browne JWC vouchsafed the opinion that the best source of new readers was from among detective story readers. Del Rey made the excellent point that there were no detective story readers. Browne said there were no detective story readers because there were no good detective stories. Del Rey said there were no good detective stories because there were no detective story readers.

Before it had been decided which came first, the grunch or the eggplant, the argument concluded. It's difficult to say who won it. In a sense Browne did, because he brought everyone else down to his level. The whole thing was fought on the basic assumption that the only criterion was commercial success, whereas – though it may sound old-fashioned and old world – the real point is that anyone who traffics in the effluents from the Spillane sewer is doing real harm to his fellow men. Marihuana peddling is also commercially successful.

On the question of reprints Browne was more likeable. He was so disarmingly frank that one felt pretty sure neither Mr Ziff nor Mr Davis was within earshot. He said Ziff had made him reprint the Poe stories, and all he could do was pick the shortest ones he could find. “Mr Ziff,” he said, “thinks that Mr Poe is still writing good science fiction.”

After the questions the speakers all stood up amid applause, like the last night of a musical comedy, and the convention adjourned for the auction. I didn't intend to try to buy anything, though I thought I might bid for the April '43 *aSF* if it came up, just to perpetuate a fannish tradition. I just wandered around looking for people I'd missed seeing so far and trying not to get too nervous about the banquet. I didn't succeed too well at either. Inexorably the hour came when I had to mount the platform. Among those present on the scaffold at this time were de Camp, E.E. Smith, Clifford Simak, and Jack Williamson. I carried on brief conversations with them all as we drifted past one another like ships in the night, driven by the whims of the organisers in their attempts to arrange us in the least hideous array. Simak and I played several rubbers of musical chairs which I must have won, because I was finally placed next to Ginny Saari. Or maybe this was on the theory that no one looking in that direction would notice me, for I noticed to my slight horror that everyone else was dressed up while I was still in my sportscoat and baggy trousers. However I hadn't anything else with me so there was nothing to be done except look as if I was an apostle of dress reform. It's not the sort of thing that really embarrasses me – I just hoped the Committee's feelings weren't hurt.

After some more arranging of thorns between roses the banquet was served. I stared at the first dish in horror. Was all my work come to naught? Had I not written a widely disseminated article designed to alert all America as to my tastes in food? And now, at this banquet expressly designed in my honour, what do they serve me? *Lettuce!* Oh, the horror of it. I toyed with the idea of throwing the plate in the faces of the Committee and stalking out, ignoring their piteous pleas to return. I know I would have fandom behind me. From LASFS to QSFL fans would breathe to one another in shocked whispers; “Did you hear what they actually served Willis at the Chicon?” ... “No, not lettuce?” ... “Yes, *lettuce!*” Elsberry would write an Open Letter to Harry B. Moore thanking him for not having poisoned the guests of honour at the

Nolacon. I should be a martyr to fandom. Furthermore, I would have got out of making a speech.

But on the other hand I was sitting next to Ginny Saari. I remained where I was and toyed idly with the dish. (No, not Ginny Saari.) I poked viciously at the vile stuff until someone came and took away the mangled remains. After that they served some food. It was good, but I partook of it sparingly though I hadn't eaten since morning. No doubt I was going to disgrace myself in innumerable ways but at least I was not going to be sick. I don't remember what the food was because I was talking to Ginny Saari, but I do remember thinking that out there in the darkness everyone must be commenting on the peculiar way I used my knife and fork. I felt that maybe I should rise and make a brief speech explaining that it wasn't just that I didn't know any better, but that in Europe everyone ate this way and I could prove by time and motion study that it involved less muscular effort, and less wear and tear on cutlery, and less delay in the elevation of nutriment than the American system. But on the whole I decided to restrain my impatience to make a speech.

In due courses the banquet ended and the debris was cleared away. Will F. Jenkins then performed 1952's Greatest Service To The Cause Of Science Fiction by remaining absent and leaving Robert Bloch to master the toast. Bloch was wonderful. After his opening remarks I felt deep within me a firm conviction that it was the unanimous feeling of the Convention that all us other guests should remain silent for the rest of the evening and just let Bloch talk. I for one was willing, nay eager, to sacrifice my own place on the programme. But not so Hugo Gernsback. Nothing was going to stop him reading his speech after he spent all that money getting it printed. He got a tremendous welcome. Personally I thought the ovation was rather to him as the almost accidental symbol of science fiction than to Gernsback himself, but Hugo seemed to entertain no such doubts.

Now, Hugo is a nice old boy, kind, courteous and a thorough gentleman. He is also the Father of Science Fiction and a respected figure in the publishing world. Furthermore he stood Forry and me a lunch in Los Angeles. All these are mighty virtues. Nevertheless it seems to me that the paper he read, however interesting in itself, was not altogether suitable for the occasion. Its

whole point was that people who foresaw inventions should have a cut of the patent royalties, a suggestion from which no one would stand more to gain than Hugo Gernsback. In fact, if it had been law he would own half the world today and the rest of it tomorrow. It seems to me that a World Science Fiction Convention is not the place to air a private brain wave like this, especially one as odd as the idea that people should be paid just for thinking of things it would be nice to have. I know that Hugo felt he was speaking for all sf writers, but when he was reported in the papers what sort of publicity was going to result? Not something about the prestige of modern science fiction, but that Hugo Gernsback thought of the wheel even before the Russians.

However it was a good speech and Hugo sat down to applause not much less enthusiastic than before. Bloch then introduced Sprague de Camp, who obviously loves making speeches. He was good – a lot funnier than his humorous novels, which to me have always suffered from the slight defect that they aren't funny. Someone told me during the Convention that de Camp has no sense of humour at all. However, it seems he is a very intelligent man, and after many years of observation and experiment he has succeeded in isolating the elements in a situation that other people consider amusing. Retiring to the privacy of his laboratory, de Camp then combines these elements in new combinations and produces these novels of his which apparently roll some people in the aisles. However, synthetic or not, his speech struck me as genuinely funny. Maybe he's got hold of a new formula.

Doc Smith, who obviously doesn't love making speeches, followed by explaining in his modest way how he didn't expect to have to make this one, and went on to confess disarmingly that his previous ones had all been carefully written out beforehand. I loved this part of his talk, especially when he pointed out that people who can write can often not speak in public and shouldn't be expected to. Me and E.E. Smith, I thought. But he then cut the ground from under my feet and proved himself a traitor to the cause by making one of the best speeches of the Convention. Though I think he'd have got nearly as much applause if he'd merely read the stock exchange quotations in a Swahili dialect, as apparently I did at the Loncon. He is just about the best loved person in science fiction.

Simak came next with another intelligent contribution, but I didn't hear a

word of it because I was on next. This was the moment I'd been dreading for the last six months and it was all worse than my vivid imagination had allowed for, even after seeing that terrifying photo of the Terrace Casino. All these nonfans, the footlights, the calibre of the other speakers, the microphones which were so low I knew I'd have to crouch over them like a gorilla, or risk them coming to pieces in my hands when I tried to adjust them. My only comfort was that the Committee had gone out of their way to reassure me I could be as brief as I liked and since everything was already running late I could take them at their word.

Simak finished his speech and sat down. Bloch introduced me in the most tactful and unembarrassing way possible. I walked to the rostrum. Good old Gwasdorf hurried forward and adjusted the mikes intelligently. I spoke for a few minutes, making three bad jokes that were laughed at and one good one that wasn't. I went back to my place and sat down. Life, it seemed, went on. I had never really thought of it doing that. I was getting used to this extraordinary behaviour on the part of life. Boucher came up from the floor of the house, with a remark that coming up to the platform like this was a Conventionmanship ploy worthy of Bob Shaw. I was delighted and resolved to airmail Bob about it first thing tomorrow. Boucher finished his witty speech and the banquet was over. Still suffering from shock I went down into the hall and met Keasler and Hoffman. They threw their arms around me affectionately and said my speech was wonderful and they were proud of me. I loved them for that. They can have my right arm any time they like, and I'll even pay the postage. I know it wasn't true but at least I must have been intelligible. I loved not only Keasler and Hoffman, but everyone – the fans, the pros, America, life, the Convention. The Convention: My Ghod, here was this wonderful thing going on and I'd been wasting half of it worrying about a trifle like a speech. I declared the Convention open as far as Willis was concerned and went to change my shirt.

Soon afterwards the three of us met again in Lee's room. The function of Max and me was to persuade Lee that she *could* possibly come to the masquerade in her costume. We had been ready to do this no matter what the costume was, but when we saws it we knew we had a ghod-given mission to give it to the world. She had mimeoed pages of *Quandry* on sheets of silk and made them into a dress. With this and as many other ingenious

Hoffmanotions as a contents page of *Quandry* she was attired as its last issue. We were overcome with admiration. Max was so inspired he resolved to come in costume after all. After some thought he took off his shirt and shoes, rolled up his trousers, and came as a fan from Missouri. I put on my confederate hat and we set off for the elevators.

A lot of people had already arrived, and more were coming every minute. Evelyn Gold was fetching as *Galaxy* in a stardusted evening dress and many of the other girls had pretty costumes, but the men seemed to prefer to come as monsters. We roamed around saying hello to people. Every time we met someone not in costume I would say “I say, that’s clever,” and Lee would say “Gad what a terrifying costume,” and Max would say “Gosh, yon look horrible.” And of course if they were in costume we would ask them why they weren’t. We did this to S.J. Byrne, who was disguised horribly as The Thing, green skin and fangs and all. He caught on quick and, coming unexpectedly on conservatively dressed Forry Ackerman, reeled away gibbering with terror. Shortly the punch was served. This was compounded from fruit juice and absolute alcohol under the expert supervision of George O. Smith, whom the Little Men had co-opted as spirituous adviser. After this things livened up, and became a little more like my original. idea of an American convention. A procession of fans was weaving its way round the hall singing, to the tune of “John Brown’s Body”, a song which began “Glory How We Hate Ray Bradbury.” A smaller group was staging some sort of mimed play surrounded by a group of curious onlookers. Someone was shooting flying saucers out of a gun. Helicopter beanies were in evidence. The floor was littered with flash bulbs. In one corner there was even a water pistol fight going on. Someone was lying on the floor after this and we thought it was part of an act, but it seems from SFNL that he was actually hurt. Another casualty round about this time was GMCarr, whom we had last seen got up as a woman with three heads. Apparently she got the middle one caught in the elevator door. We were really sorry to hear this, though Max commented callously,

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“I hope the hotel doesn’t sue.”

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He always speaks in interlineations. He was nearly being a casualty himself that night. He was accustomed to wading barefoot through spilled punch, but

the broken glass took more getting used to.

I'd meant to go up to the Atlanta suite at 10 o'clock, but I got roped in to judge the costumes, along with Bill Hemling and Shelby Vick. Being inexperienced in these affairs, we took the most logical and least tactful way of doing it – had the contestants parade before us several times while we rejected them one by one. Bill Hamling, the one with the most moral courage, got the job of pronouncing our sentences, which he did with great suavity and tact. The main advantage of this procedure was that we got several excellent views of Ginny Saari, being the only people in the hall who could really take in the finer points of her costume without appearing rude. Finally we gave her first prize. I don't see how any red-blooded male could have done otherwise, but actually the best costumes there from the point of view of wit and originality belonged to two girls who didn't enter for the contest – Lee Hoffman and a girl from the Little Man's party. The latter caused a real sensation by appearing in a low cut dress whose neckline plunged on either side of a shockingly lifelike third breast.

By the time I got up to the Atlanta suite – the 770 of this convention – things were very quiet. It seems this unusual state of affairs was due partly to Bill Entekin and partly to the house detectives. Bill had imported a carboy of some liquid that seems to have been the American equivalent of poteen, and it had wrought havoc. Bob Farnham innocently took one glass and passed out for ten hours. Some other fans who tried it were never heard of again. Some say it even made Henry Burwell's eyebrow twitch. I would however like to deny the rumour, first spread by Tucker, that my esteemed colleague Jim Harmon passed out in front of the elevators. This is not true. In actual fact Jim *came to* in front of the elevators. while the cortege bearing his body was being questioned by the house detectives.

My remembrancer Gregg Calkins says I was talking that night with him, Elsberry, Shapiro, Van Splawn and some other people, but all memory of what we talked about has been blasted from my mind by the stark horror of seeing that Max Keasler was drinking ginger beer mixed with creme de menthe.

# Chicon: Monday

Next morning I was awakened by the phone ringing and Ed Wood telling me I was due to speak in the panel debate and could I hurry on down. I asked would I have time to shave and he said yes. Greatly daring I asked would I have time for a cup of coffee and he said yes. After such consideration I didn't like to ask him would I have time to prepare a speech, which I'd figured on doing that morning. I had something already, but it was for a proposer and not a seconder and would need to be altered. Twenty four hours ago the prospect of doing this on the spot would have terrified me, but I was a new man since the banquet. I shaved and had some coffee and strolled into the hall just in time. Moskowitz introduced us and Evans and Wood led off while I cut chunks out of my speech and scribbled smaller ones in. It all went off OK I suppose, though I was still half asleep. I think everyone else was too, so it wouldn't have mattered anyway. I don't think any of us felt like constructive forces in science fiction that morning, except maybe the people who were trying to prove we weren't. Personally I felt more like a cup of coffee. The most interesting part was the question period, when Jim Harmon got up and made a speech the purport of which seemed to be that Joe Gibson was an imbecile. As if this was a mere procedural error, Moskowitz told him mildly that he must ask a question, not make a speech. Whereupon Jim, logically enough, asked the panel whether or not we agreed that Joe Gibson was an imbecile. It seemed to me at the time that this would have been a much more interesting subject than the one we had and I'd have liked to ask Jim to state a case. Maybe we could have got Joe to take the negative and had a full dress debate on this controversial topic. Unfortunately SaM ruled the question out of order so I never found out what had made Jim so eager to give his revelation to the world.

After this it was announced that the rest of the programme would be postponed until the afternoon and I went out to get some breakfast and airletter forms. I asked a Chicagoan the way to the Post Office and he not only understood me but politely showed me the way. Which just proves neither you nor I can believe *anything* the English tell us about each other.

The afternoon session started with a book publishers' panel, it says here. It might have been a troupe of dancing girls for all I knew, because I was too busy talking to all sorts and conditions of people to pay any attention. Everyone stopped talking when Bloch came on though. I just don't see how it's possible to have a good convention without Bloch. I think he should be preserved intact for future generations, immortal like Tucker. The very next time I have a million dollars I'm going to rent an hotel and throw a command convention for half British fandom and nearly everyone I met at Chicago. Bloch will intervene while Temple and Arthur Clarke are insulting one another, Carnell will be MC, Tubb will handle the auction, and Max Keasler will make occasional devastating comments over the PA system. And the whole thing will be filmed with sound so that I won't have to sit here beating my brains out trying to remember what people said. I'm afraid I more or less stopped taking notes after the banquet, I was having so good a time. Of course I can remember a few things about Bloch's speech, like how he named Evelyn Gold and Bea Mahaffey as the editors he'd most like to submit to, and how he talked about someone being so busy he couldn't even take a couple of hours off to edit an anthology, and how he compared the flight of a ship in interstellar space to a thought flashing through an editor's head and how he presented a toilet seat to Judy May and threw a saucer at Willy Ley. But for all I know, John W. Campbell may have done all these things and more; I just don't remember. I know I'm failing in my duty as a convention reporter in neglecting this important speech, and I'm sorry. However, all is not lost. I do happen to have one note of what Mr Campbell said and though I can't quite understand it just now it must obviously be very significant. Apparently at one point in his address he made the following statement, as near as I can make out: "Hawming beys ate hanr levy." I haven't seen this remark reported in the press, so perhaps it has been suppressed in the interests of national security and the FBI are up in Campbell's office again. If so, the next generation of fans will hear about it. Frequently.

It's no wonder I can't understand what notes I have here, because people kept dropping by our table and talking. Every few minutes someone would come along asking had we seen so-and-so and Max would invariably reply "Over there" and point to the other side of the room. If we'd stayed there long enough Max would have had the whole convention up against that wall, but after Campbell's speech we went up on the roof and flew paper aeroplanes.

We'd plenty of fanzines with us and were able to follow several interesting lines of research. One of the most important contributions to aeronautical design made by Hoffman, Keasler and Willis that afternoon was that photo-offset aeroplanes fly much better than mimeographed ones. Maybe it's because their contents are meant to be on a higher plane or maybe it's just that they fold more readily. Anyhow the theory was proved when a Hoffman Mark IV photo-offset model flew halfway out over Lake Michigan at an altitude of 38 stories and then wheeled in an enormous arc over Chicago. Few fanzines can have had a wider circulation.

Having proved that fandom was a constructive force in science fiction we went downstairs again because I wanted to see the voting for the next convention. I don't want you to think I'm just a dilettante constructor of paper aeroplanes without my heart in the work, it's just that I simply had to see this ballot. This was history, the sort of thing that gets reported at length in *The Immortal Storm*. I got out my notebook and determined to miss nothing. (By the way, looking at this notebook again, I've just remembered what Campbell really said, because there's a Keasler comment underneath I've just deciphered. Campbell said "Human beings are human beings" and Max said "That's a broad statement.")

There were nine contenders – New York Kyle, New York Sykora, Philadelphia, Indianapolis, Detroit, San Francisco, Baltimore, Niagara Falls and Pittsburgh – and they were placed in order by being drawn from a hat by Fritz Leiber Jr. Jr. Sykora claimed the nomination on behalf of the Queens Science Fiction League, the New York Science Fiction Society, and the American Science Fiction Society. Kyle, not to be outdone, claimed it on behalf of the Eastern Science Fiction Society, the New York Science Fiction League, the Bronx Science Fiction Club, the Hydra Club, and the New York Chapter of the Little Monsters of America. The two protagonists stood panting at each other while behind the scenes their supporters hastily constituted further fan clubs in case reinforcements were needed.

Round about here I'm afraid I started to get mixed up. Not because there seemed to be more fan clubs in New York than fans, but because E.E. Evans got among them some way or other and confused me. Besides, people kept talking to me while I was trying to sort everything out. These American fans

don't seem to realise how *historic* these matters are. No reverence, that's the trouble. I didn't catch up with the march of events until they'd got as far as Detroit. Their spokesman announced that actually they didn't want the Convention at all, it was just that they'd got into the habit of bidding for it. This seemed pretty odd, even for fandom, until he went on to say that they were in favour of Frisco and started to speak on its behalf. I was overcome with admiration at this neat trick for getting in extra time for Frisco's case, and got my first inkling of the intrigue that was going on behind the scenes. I got a whole bottleful of inkling almost immediately afterwards when I was called down into the smokefilled area just below the stage and told confidentially that it was all arranged that Philly was to get the nomination, and that most of the other bids were dummies and would be withdrawn at the crucial moment so as to precipitate a landslide end that if I would say a few words on behalf of Philly I would get my fare paid over next year. This was all so exciting as to be pretty well impossible. I said the last suggestion was unthinkable, that I didn't think I should interfere like that in American fan affairs, and that anyway I thought San Francisco should get the nomination. Then I climbed over the carcasses and went away by myself to recover. Somewhere about this time people were asking questions about what facilities the various cities could offer, mainly interesting for their implied criticisms of the Morrison Hotel. This was the first public expression of the widespread disgust everyone felt for the Morrison Hotel and their house detectives and everything they didn't stand for. At one point during the questions session it seemed clear that Niagara Falls would get the nomination unanimously if they could only promise that the falls would run whiskey for three days. Some shocked member of the audience asked whether we wanted a serious constructive convention or a drinking brawl, and got the inevitable answer.

I finally gave up hope of writing a connected account of all this when I was called up onto the stage to scrutinise the counting of the votes. All I know is that things did work out as I was told they would, that someone voted for Pogo, and that I thought it was a shame the Little Men didn't get the nomination after they'd worked so hard for it and shown that they could do a good job. It's not as if Philadelphia had done either. In fact it seemed that they hadn't expected the nomination at all and weren't prepared to find it dumped in their laps just because, presumably, New York fandom couldn't

compose its differences long enough to put on the convention themselves. However it was all very exciting even from the stage, and it must have been hectic in the auditorium. I heard of one New York fan who had his ballot paper torn up by others who disagreed with his vote and had to fight his way down to the front for another.

After the result was announced Judy May came over to me and asked me to make a short speech on behalf of world fandom asking everyone to get behind Philly and pull together. This seemed a rather awkward procedure, but I knew what she meant and started trying to work out something that wouldn't sound too presumptuous. Then she changed her mind and decided it would be better first thing after the interval, so I went and got an N3F application blank to write on – incidentally they seem to have been about the only exhibits that weren't stolen – joined the Philcon (or is it the Eleventh Anniversary Science Fiction Convention?) in the lobby, and went out to have something to eat.

Afterwards I turned up in the wings with about 5000 words, 4500 of which were crossed out, and waited nervously with this clutched in my hot little hand. But either the Committee had forgotten all about it in the general chaos or had felt that the breach between the Little Men and the others was too deep even for my silver-tongued Irish oratory. Neither would have surprised me.

Greatly relieved, I went back to my table to listen to Bob Tucker's wirerecordings. I might as well have gone up to the roof again. I kept moving my seat to get in line with the speaker voice coil, but any extra high frequencies I got that way were just as unintelligible as the rest. It was very frustrating because people were laughing their heads off all around me: nevertheless it was not me who stole Burwell's wirerecorder after Tucker had finished with it.

After this there was a guitar accompanied by Ted Sturgeon. It was a nice guitar.

The ballet was surprisingly good. Ballet is always inherently ridiculous, and it was a tribute to this one that nobody laughed at it. In a way it was like a copy of *Orb* set to music – the same pretentiousness and overseriousness, the same pseudosophistication, and the same undeniable talent. The music was

outstanding.

After this there was to have been a play, but it was cancelled by agreement between the Committee and the Committee. We did get a sample of it, a song by Bea and Bill Venable. This was so well received that it had to be sung all over again, so people must have liked it. A matter of national taste I suppose; personally it made me squirm. I just don't feel a taste in literature is something to sing torch songs about.

I'm afraid that like everyone else in the rear of the hall I gave up trying to follow the Philadelphia group's *Fall of Fen*. People were saying that if this had been put on before the voting San Francisco would have got the nomination, but it would have probably been OK if everyone behind the third row had been issued with binoculars and a hearing aid.

Round about this time the winning tickets were drawn in the various ballots. There were only three people involved in this. Forry Ackerman held the hat, Evelyn Gold drew the tickets, and Doc Barrett collected the prizes. This labour-saving arrangement left everyone else free to wander about and talk. Doc Smith stopped by, swore me in as Assistant Moon Commissioner, and asked for my autograph for his two daughters. I was so flabbergasted I forgot to ask for his. (Not that I collect autographs, but as a matter of courtesy.) Now, I kept thinking, something has happened that will really impress James. Next time he speaks of E.E. Smith in that hushed voice I will be able to mention casually how Doc asked me for my autograph at the Chicon.

I just can't remember where Gerry Davis's and Harry Harrison's excellent turn fitted into all this. All evening I'd been getting up from my table to roam around looking for people I wanted to see. Later on I reported back every couple of minutes because I'd been told there was going to be a formal presentation of the scroll and I didn't want anyone to think I was trying to get out of it. When the films started, however, it began to look as if I was going to get out of making yet another speech (some time I must publish a collection of my undelivered speeches) and I sneaked a look at the scroll, which Bill Entekin had left with me while he went looking for someone to present it. This was the first time I'd seen a list of contributors, and I was shaken to find how many of them I hadn't met, or worse still had met without saying a word of acknowledgement. In desperation I went about peering at

people's chests like a movie talent scout, and was shaken again to find that people were leaving all the time. The Convention was breaking up before my eyes. Somehow I'd been imagining it would end like the London ones, with everyone joining hands and singing "Auld Lang Syne" or at least standing around and saying goodbye. Instead it was just petering out in universal chaos. Shelby Vick, whom I still thought of as having just got in, had checked out hours ago. People had even given up looking for Henry Burwell, a quest which had united the whole convention for the first part of the evening, though poor Henry was still hunting for the ballot prize which had been stolen. With the end of their ordeal in sight the Committee had got out from under and were just wandering about muttering to themselves and looking pathetically for assurances that the convention had been a success. All the time groups of people were checking out. It was like the breakdown of civilisation.

Finally it dawned on me that the convention was actually over, that the only vestige of the official machine still functioning amid the ruins was the film projectionist, and that I could take up my scroll and go with a clear conscience. I didn't feel like watching movies, so Lee and Max and I left to look for a party. We were immediately joined by Ken BeAle. The four of us roamed the hotel for something like an hour, searching for what Bob Shaw calls "fannish good cheer". We would stroll along disconsolately for a while, someone would suggest a room, we would go to the elevators, get out at another identical floor, find another dark and silent room, and resume our trek through the endless wastes of red carpet. We knew there was a party going on in the penthouse, but none of us had been invited. We'd thought the original three might get in, but we didn't think there was much chance for the four of us. Lee suggested going upstairs and throwing a party off the roof, but Ken wasn't in the mood.

## Chicon: Tuesday

Some time after 2am we were in the main lobby again when Bea Mahaffey and Henry Burwell came in and called me over for a consultation about the ballot. I arranged to meet Lee and Max again either at Lee's room or in the penthouse – like most people Max and I had checked out of our own rooms that morning to save money – and went out with Bea and Henry to a night club. We sat in an alcove and drank Tom Collins's and talked as best we could while a brassy woman sang at a piano in a niche above the bar and another one with no clothes on swam around in a glass tank. (Gad, how I've lived.)

After a while I found my way back to the hotel and knocked on Lee's door. No answer. I stood for a moment assuring myself that this wasn't the wrong room. As a matter of fact I wouldn't have been too surprised if it had turned out to be the wrong hotel. I'd been five days in Chicago and I still hadn't had time to take a look at the place. As for the hotel, the forty odd floors were so absolutely identical in appearance that my subconscious was firmly convinced there was only one of them, though with several million rooms and a system of corridors possessing infinite connectivity. All I knew about the layout of that hotel was that if I wandered about at random for a minimum of five minutes praying to Roscoe for guidance I would through his divine intervention suddenly find myself at the door I wanted. Yes, this was the right room all right; I was still sober enough to retain my memory for numbers. I was unsober enough however to give the door a couple of hearty thumps before I moved off, the way people do when they're really quite sure there's nobody there. I'd just done this when I noticed two house detectives bearing down on me.

I began to realise that my position was delicate. I don't know much about hotel etiquette, but I had a suspicion that the house detectives mightn't approve of me battering down the door of a girl's room at three o'clock in the morning, especially when I wasn't even registered at the hotel. I suddenly visualised myself cut off from fandom and condemned to wander the streets of Chicago till dawn.

I nodded at them casually and asked what time it was, trying to capture the initiative. When they told me I went tch tch, muttered something about how they must have gone out for something to eat, and set off briskly in the direction of the elevators. But they were going that way too and fell into step beside me. One of them asked where I came from and I said “Ireland”. The other asked what my room number was. I said “1630”, wishing we weren’t just about to pass it. The worst happened, and they stopped dead in front of 1630. “It can’t be,” said one, of them suspiciously, “everyone checked out of there this morning. I hadn’t figured they’d know the Atlanta suite as well as all that. I played my last card. “Oh really?” I said, producing a key to the room. This was a second key I’d picked up somewhere and thought I might as well hold on to until I finally left the hotel.

They were shaken, but still waited expectantly for me to open the door. I supposed they were looking for luggage and was pleased to see a pair of shoes on the floor that I’d left behind because they weren’t mine. No one else in the suite seemed to have claimed them either. I sat down on the bed and made to change into them, hoping they would fit and not feeling a bit like Cinderella. “everyone was supposed to have checked out of these rooms this morning,” said the obstinate one. “Where’s the rest of your luggage.” “In the car,” I lied, “I am checking out this morning.” That confused him for a minute. “Where are you going” he asked for lack of something more sleuthlike to say. “Los Angeles,” I said. Animal cunning gleamed in his piglike eyes. “OH!” He said triumphantly, mentally polishing up his Dick Tracy badge, “I thought you said you came from Ireland?” Give him credit for one thing, he knew Ireland wasn’t in Los Angeles. Maybe not even in California. The sheer unfairness of being suspected because I was telling the truth for a change infuriated me. “I *come* from Ireland and I’m *going* to Los Angeles,” I explained with exaggerated patience. “And I don’t see what damned business it is of yours.” We glared at each other for a few moments and then the communicating door opened and in walked my guardian angel disguised as Bill Entrekin. “Hello,” I said casually. Apparently the car battery had run down and the rest of the suite *had* checked back in again. The detectives were quite demolished. They became apologetic and loquacious. They’d had a bad time of it these last few days, one of them explained. “Yes,” said the other, “we’ve had all sorts of conventions here, but we’ve never come across anything like these science-fiction people.” Naively he

added, “I don’t think they’ll get the hotel again.” “I don’t think we’ll want it again,” I said coldly, and held the door open for them.

I did up my shoes, picked up the ownerless pair, and made for the elevators. I found the penthouse easily enough and knocked on the door. The only result was that someone inside shouted “Don’t open.” I scribbled a note – “Are Hoffman and Keasler there? – Walter Willis” – and pushed it under the door. Nothing happened. I was just going away to look for a phone when the door opened to let some people out. I went in, picked up my note from where it had been lying unnoticed, dumped the shoes in a corner, and went on into the big room. It was certainly an exclusive party. The only people there were Little Menfolk and some pros. Max and Lee told me with glee that they’d got in only as a great favour and after solemnly promising not to break anything or make any noise and to leave when they were told. It was hilarious to think of these promises being exacted from probably the best behaved people at the Convention, but apparently when the Little Men get disenchanted they do it in style.

As the night wore on more fans came through the pearly gates, but the party stayed very close to our ideal – not too many people and all of them conscious. The only noise came from the pros around the bar, where for a while I got caught up with a crowd which seemed to consist mainly of Mack Reynolds, though one caught glimpses of Tony Boucher, Poul Anderson, Jerry Bixby and others roaming round his outskirts. I scored an almost fatal success with some limericks they’d never heard before and had trouble getting away. Not that I didn’t like their company, but I wanted to get back to Max and Lee. Especially Max, whom I knew I wouldn’t see again and whom I knew I’d miss. I finally escaped and went back to the window-ledge where we’d been sitting. We spent the rest of the night there, holding court with various people who dropped by, including Les and Es Cole, Rich Elsberry, Briggs, Sims and others. Mack Reynolds made occasional sorties out of the bar to plead for more limericks. I promised to mail him some. Poul Anderson came along wanting to be taught some Irish drinking songs. I sang him as much as I could remember of “The Cruiskeen Lawn” and promised to mail him the rest. I had some competition from S.J. Byrne who was standing in the middle of the room singing excerpts from *The Mikado* to a select audience. Tucker was being very quiet somewhere on a sofa. Max had been dancing

with Evelyn Gold, had swept her off her stocking feet sufficiently to sell her a subscription to *Opus*, and was now dispensing “No Dose” tablets all round. He’d been living on them himself for days and was beginning to feel very odd indeed. But as the dawn broke we were all quietly happy and talked about how wonderful it had all been and how much we were going to miss each other and how we must get together again some time somehow. As for me, I was as happy as I’d ever been in my life. All the tension of the last few days was over and to look forward to I had the prospect of four weeks of seeing America and after that a return to fandom without the worry and embarrassment that had spoiled it for so long. I had now been just seven days in America without even having had time to think about it, but now a feeling of utter exaltation swept over me to realise that here I was sitting between Lee Hoffman and Max Keasler at the top of a skyscraper watching the sun rise over Chicago. Life can be wonderful. It was one of those moments that has to be broken while it’s still perfect, and when the sun was fully up we went down to have breakfast.

# Postscript

I suppose anyone who has got this far must be still looking for his own name. Well, look, I remember you all very well, but if I'd stopped to talk about everyone I met this thing would really have got out of hand. This is just as much as I could remember of what happened; I'll have to sort out my impressions of everybody and everything somewhere else. I would like to say that I liked everyone I expected to like and a lot I didn't, and that I had a wonderful time. Even if I had been as "quiet" as Tucker makes out, which I wasn't, it would have only been because I was so fascinated by what was going on that I didn't want to interrupt it. I can hear myself talk any time.

The joke about the grunch and eggplant on [line six of the sixteenth stencil](#) belongs to Bob Shaw.

*Quandry #27/28, December 1952*

## Post-Postscript

I came home from my US trip to find that half of you good people didn't know I'd been away, and the rest had written anyway. I'm sorry I haven't replied to your letter or acknowledged your subscription or appeared in answer to your writ, or whatever it was, but for the last six months I've either been getting ready to go over to America, been over in America, or been getting over America. And believe me it's a hard place to get over. People keep asking me what I thought of it. Well, that's a good question: I wish someone would hurry up and tell me a good answer. There were some things I liked a lot. Malted milk, the Okefenokee Swamp, orange juice, the Gulf of Mexico, hamburgers, the Rocky Mountains, pastrami, the Grand Canyon, fried chicken, the New York skyline – subtle nuances like that in the American scene which the less perceptive tourist might pass unnoticed. And of course Americans. The place is full of them. Why, do you realise there are more Americans in America than there are in Britain? (Nicer ones, too.) One especially nice thing about Americans is that they understand English, a feat which the English themselves have never been able to master yet in my experience of them.

And to the other question that people ask, yes, I would like to live there, just as soon as I can find a small university town in the Rocky Mountains just outside New York with the climate of Florida. I am now inclined to believe, however, that there may be some difficulty about this. I don't want to jump to any hasty conclusions about the place after a mere 8000 miles of travelling about in it, but towards the end I was really coming to suspect that it's a lot bigger than it looks in the atlas. You drive for two whole days at 60mph, and on the third find yourself still in the same state – that of bewilderment. The place has got out of hand and something should be done about it. If the United Nations won't take action America should contract out of it.

The only other really damning thing I noticed about the country is that they have a chain of grocery stores called the "Piggly Wiggly". There are a few other faults – you can't smoke anywhere ... the Statue of Liberty offers you a light as you go in, because it may be your last chance ... and they look under

the bed every night for the Politburo – but nothing else with the stark horror of that “Piggly Wiggly”. The people are just like people everywhere else, except that they’re not terrified of American foreign policy, which is to say they’re pretty nice. What really did impress me was the American small town, which seemed to me the nearest thing to the ideal place to live in that has appeared so far on this planet. Pleasant houses, tree-lined streets, young people in summer clothes, and warm evenings filled with the crepitation of crickets and of neon signs – symbolically indistinguishable in sound.

*Slant #7, Winter 1952-1953*

**The End**

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