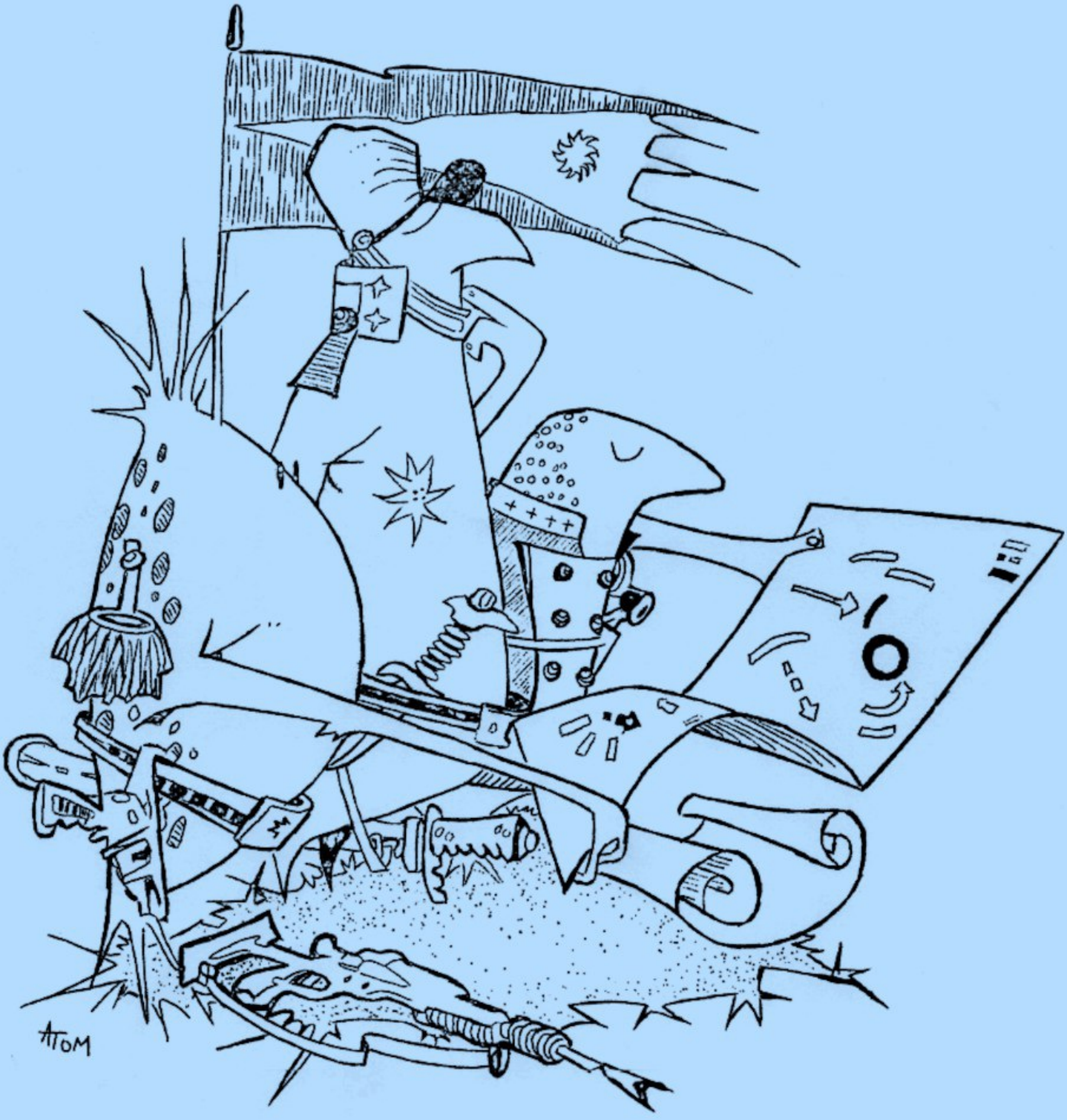
THE HARP REMEMBERED



WALT WILLIS

The Harp Remembered

Walter A. Willis

Published by Ansible Editions
94 London Road, Reading, England, RG1 5AU
ae.ansible.uk

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Ansible Editions ebook first published November 2023.
Most recently updated: February 2026.

Cover artwork by Atom (Arthur Thomson) for *Cry of the Nameless* #171, December 1963, edited by F.M. Busby, Elinor Busby and Wally Weber.

Ebook ISBN 978-1-916508-04-0

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Introduction

This will probably be the final TAFF ebook collecting and celebrating the fanwriting of the late great Walt Willis (1919-1999). Any such enterprise must labour in the gigantic shadow of Richard Bergeron's monumental hardback compilation *Warhoon* #28 (1980) – often described as having 614 pages because that's the last page number, but there are four extra pages 510a to 510d inserted to restore a column instalment missed out while typing the stencils. Bergeron's mighty efforts have been inspirational.

Past TAFF ebooks of material already collected in *Warhoon* #28 are:

- *The Enchanted Duplicator* (1954; ebook 2015) with Bob Shaw.
- *The Willis Papers* (1961; ebook 2019) – an early collection that has some overlap with *Warhoon* #28. Since the TAFF ebook exists I have taken no further items from here, though retaining the *Warhoon* selections.
- *Willis Discovers America and other fan fiction* (1955; ebook 2021) – the 1955 edition consists of the annotated title piece only and was expanded in 2021 with additional fan fiction, some never before collected.
- *TAWF Times Two: The 1962 Trip Reports* (ebook 2022) – expanding the *Warhoon* #28 "Twice Upon a Time" with Madeleine Willis's previously uncollected report of the same US trip and additional related pieces.
- *The Harp Stateside* (1957; ebook 2023) – the 1952 US trip report with some added material including the Willis speech in the Worldcon debate on fandom (typescript preserved by Vince Clarke).
- *The Harp in England* (ebook 2023) – bringing together all the reports of conventions in England.
- *The Harp That Once or Twice* (ebook 2023) – the legendary fanzine column that began in *Quandry* in 1951, omitting instalments of *The Harp Stateside* but including two extra columns published long after *Warhoon* #28.

What's left? *The Harp Remembered* takes its cue from *Warhoon* #28, opening with a selection of Walt Willis's writing in his first fanzine *Slant* (though here with several extra items that seem worth preserving);

skipping book-length stories, reports and column runs now separately collected as above; and continuing with the long autobiographical section whose core is the “I Remember Me” reminiscences mostly published as the fanzine column “Warblings”. After this, more additional non-*Warhoon* material creeps in, beginning with the “Christmas Cards from Irish Fandom”: seasonal mini-fanzines published from 1950 to 1966. The miscellany of “Articles and Columns” – while omitting the already ebook-collected “The Harp That Once or Twice”, the most famous of all the columns – includes much extra material, both standalone articles and compilations of the further regular Willis columns “The Outpost”, “Plinth”, “The Perforated Finger” and “The Warier Bard”, for which there was perhaps no room in *Warhoon* #28. “Epilogue and After” is expanded from the former “Epilogue” with the full text (rather than just a few paragraphs) of Walt’s 1970 fanzine essay on the Irish Troubles, and concludes with late articles, two previously unpublished and assembled by Rob Hansen from correspondence. Next comes the 1986-1988 revival of Walt‘s early column “The Prying Fan” for *Pulp*. After which, “Short Takes” brings together the little squibs and excerpts used as end-of-stencil page fillers in *Warhoon* #28, again with many extras including unpublished letters, to end the main part of this ebook on a cheerfully varied note. The Appendix includes an updated and rearranged version of the Willis bibliography that concluded *Warhoon* #28, plus appreciations by Ken Bulmer and Vince Clarke.

I’m hugely grateful to Fanac.org and eFanzines.com, the online fanzine archives that make my researches so much easier than Richard Bergeron’s; to Rob Hansen and Greg Pickersgill for copious advice, research and scanning; to Bill Burns and Rob Jackson for heroic proofreading; and of course to Walt Willis himself for writing so many fine fannish pieces.

David Langford, October 2023

Some Abbreviations Used

- “-” – short for *Hyphen*, edited by Walt Willis and others.
- “/” – short for *Slant*, edited by Walt Willis.
- APA – Amateur Press Association.
- AVC – A. Vincent Clarke, also known as Vince or Vin¢.
- BIS – British Interplanetary Society, UK national organization founded 1933 (devoted to space flight but with many sf fans involved

from the outset).

- BNF – Big Name Fan.
- BoSh – Bob Shaw.
- BSFA – British Science Fiction Association, UK national organization founded 1958.
- FAFIA – Forced Away From It All: as GAFIA below but compelled by outside circumstances.
- FAPA – Fantasy Amateur Press Association (early US APA).
- FMZ (usually lower case) – fan magazine, now more usually "fanzine".
- GAFIA – Getting Away From It All: leaving, taking a break from, or escaping altogether from fandom.
- *OF* or *O.F. – Operation Fantast*, edited by Ken Slater.
- OMPA – Offtrails Magazine Publishers Association (early UK APA).
- *Q – Quandry*, edited by Lee Hoffman.
- SAPS – Spectator Amateur Press Society (early US APA).
- SFA – Science-Fiction Association, the first UK national club, founded January 1937.
- *SFN – Science Fantasy News*, edited by Vince Clarke, initially for the SFS below.
- SFL – Science Fiction League – world sf organization launched by Hugo Gernsback in 1934, largely as a promotional exercise for his magazines. There were to be several UK chapters, the first being the Leeds SFL.
- SFS – Science Fiction Society, UK national organization founded 1948.
- STF (usually lower case) – ScienTiFiction, an early Gernsbackian name for science fiction.
- TAFF – Trans-Atlantic Fan Fund (see taff.org.uk).
- *VOM – Voice of the Imagi-Nation*, edited by Forrest J Ackerman.
- vV – (A.E.) van Vogt.
- WSFS – World Science Fiction Society, whose legal incorporation as WSFS Inc, subsequent fan feuding and rejection by the Worldcon Business Meeting comprised the big fan scandal of 1958 (see *Fancyclopedia 3* for details).

The Eofannish Era: Willis in *Slant*

Slant #1, November 1948

LAUNCHING A NEW SF FAN MAGAZINE, PRODUCED FOR THE BRITISH FANTASY LIBRARY BY WALTER A. WILLIS, IN COLLABORATION WITH JAMES WHITE AND DICK MERRITT
WOODCUTS BY JAMES WHITE

Dear Reader:

The name of this magazine was decided, after much argument, by more or less the same means used by the founders of the "Dadaist" movement in painting – a dagger and a dictionary; though of course we authors have more respect for books. I admit we cheated in not taking the first word impaled on our pin, but what would you have thought of a magazine called *Pamphrey*? At least *Slant* is short, original, and not without relevance to our aims, which are to present an individual outlook on the SF world. Besides, for some reason I feel there is a vague SF sound about it.

You may have noticed that this is the first of *Operation Fantast*'s followers to appear in print. This is not vulgar ostentation – it just happened that I hadn't access to a duplicator, and I was able to pick up an old printing press. I see Ken Slater is thinking of having *O.F.* printed: to him, and to anyone else interested, I may say that the equipment needed to produce a page of this size is not expensive, but setting up the type is quite a job. Another snag is illustrations. My paternal grandfather was a printer, but all he left for me was an engraving of a photograph of himself, glaring over a huge moustache. Not very helpful to an SF magazine editor, but in desperation I was toying with the idea of running it as a lesser-known portrait of Jules Verne. You may thank my friend James White that you have been spared that experience. The looks are on my mother's side.

Your comments and suggestions would be very welcome. Send them along and I'll put on my green eyeshade and pick the more polite for the next issue.

Yours sincerely,
Walter A. Willis

SF Trends

Reading through old copies of *ASF* one often finds nostalgic letters about a

"Golden Age" of SF, placed at various dates from 1928 onwards. The only thing these readers have in common is a firm conviction that whenever the "Golden Age" was, it is certainly not now. Actually, of course, it is when they began reading SF, and if they retrace their steps they are liable to meet with disillusionment. This is specially true with the first decade of SF, the pre-Campbell era. In those days all an author needed was an improbable idea, preferably involving the spectacular demise of a few million people. Some of these ideas were remarkably ingenious, but they lost whatever plausibility they had by their juvenile presentation. The universe is just too big to be pushed around by Bulldog Drummonds, even one with a lens.

Later authors met the difficulty of introducing a plausible human interest into cosmic plots by the "worm's-eye" technique used in Hersey's *Hiroshima*, the appraisal of extraordinary events through their impact on ordinary people. The approach has its own dangers. The characters became the pawns instead of the masters of circumstance, and the stories tended to be full of bewilderment and frustration.

The atom war cycle has now ended, and from Campbell's experiments lately it seems we are in for another "thought-variant" era. I hope he's not satisfied with the crop of corn which has resulted so far; surely the end is not Lafayette? The serials have been better, but paraphysics, the latest fashion among authors, dates back at least as far as Campbell's "Forgetfulness". As for *Dreadful Sanctuary*, Russell's only new angle is the import to SF of the Dashiell Hammett detective story technique. Very readable, when done as well as Russell does it; but the interest of the story is extraneous to the science, and we may be in as much danger from space "whodunits" as we were from space operas.

Corn Exchange

Would anyone like this completely original plot? Our space is closed because it is warped by the mass of our universe; which was presumably wandering in hyper-space until it acquired an extra atom from somewhere; reached critical mass, and became a hyper-sphere. There it sticks until one of George O. Smith's bright technicians gets tired of squaring the speed of light and invents a time machine. The moment he sends one atom back into time critical mass ceases to exist; and we are precipitated into hyperspace. If you like you can work in the inevitable paradox by postulating that the atom sent back into time was the one which brought about the initial formation of the hypersphere.

Or this? One of the truly two-dimensional objects in our world is a moving picture on a screen. Suppose our universe is a kind of film projection in a four dimensional space and the projector breaks down, or the three-dimensional screen develops a hole; or tilts so as to elongate our matter in two dimensions?

Here's one for "Probability Zero". Ardent young musician wanting to surpass Toscanini and Beecham, takes a bath in liquid helium, and becomes a super-conductor!

•

I'm rather fogged
about van Vogt
Some have talked
of van Vaukt
But maybe it ought
to be van Vought
And surely it's not
van Vott?

Contact with Earth

Massen paused on the coir doormat and examined his conscience. It was not unduly clouded, and he knocked softly. Too softly, he thought, and knocked more firmly. Simultaneously there was a peremptory order to come in and, hot with embarrassment, he pushed open the door. The Foreign Secretary continued writing for exactly the time necessary to show that he was an extremely busy man, but equally courteous. Then he looked up and switched on his smile.

"Ah, Mason," he said, with the odious affability of the public figure, "Sit down". Thank God for that, thought Massen, it's not trouble anyway, but what can the old boy want? The old boy came to the point with unusual speed.

"Briefly," he said, "I have just been informed that the BBC research engineers at Malvern claim to have received wireless messages from the direction of the moon. I am advised that we can dismiss the possibility of intelligence indigenous to our satellite, and assume that we are being approached by a race which has evolved space travel and is using the moon as a 'pied-a-terre'".

Massen said nothing, and he went on pompously: "I need hardly emphasize the necessity of treating this information as highly confidential.

The negotiations have, of course, been put in the hands of my Department. I know there is no precedent, but it was generally realized that the most suitable Ministry to deal with these alien beings was the Foreign Office: first however we have to find some means of mutual understanding. That will be your job."

Massen swallowed. "But Sir," he stammered, "My knowledge of terrestrial languages won't be of much use in dealing with one that probably belongs to none of the phonetic or ideographical classes known to us."

"Er, quite, quite," said the Foreign Secretary, "but actually I have chosen you less because of your ability as a diplomat, though your experience should have given you the necessary resilience of mind, than on account of your work with cyphers, and your knowledge of mathematics." He coughed almost apologetically. "I must explain that the signals so far received apparently consist entirely of groups of morse dots."

"But," said Massen, "if radio communication is possible, why not television?"

"One might have thought so, but the Chief Engineer tells me that is impossible for the present. I do not understand," he said, almost proudly, "the technical jargon used by these fellows, but he said something about synchronization, and I gather that any alien system of transmission is extremely unlikely to be suited to our present types of receiver.

"However," he concluded hastily, "I have every confidence in your ability, my dear Mason, and do not hesitate to call on any assistance you may require."

•

"All bloody well," thought Massen, as he climbed into the car, "but how could you learn a language by sound alone? That's expecting too much of onomatopoeia." By the time he reached Malvern the problem seemed no nearer a solution and he could only hope that the aliens would think of one for him.

It was obviously a matter of urgency to acknowledge the message as soon as possible, and when he reached the room which was being hurriedly prepared for him he asked to hear the recordings. While he waited he asked the Engineer for a report.

"Well, Mr. Mason –"

"Massen."

"Sorry. Well, the signals started, or at least were first heard, at 10-30

this morning. They consist of an amplitude modulated transmission on about 75 megacycles, carrying a pure audio-frequency note of 2,400 cycles. Since there is only one A.F. we have been able to use considerable amplification, with audio filters and negative feedback."

"Thanks," said Massen, "but –" At that instant the recording came on. The message consisted of "pips" like those of the Greenwich time signals, but transmitted very rapidly and divided into groups by almost imperceptible pauses. Massen noted each dot on his pad and counted them carefully:

1, 3, 5, 7, 11, 13, 17, 19, 23, 29, 31, 37.

"Hm", he muttered, "arithmetical progression? No... Yes." He turned to the Engineer.

"And this message is still being transmitted, without change?"

"Yes. At intervals of about 13 minutes. The next is due in a few moments. You will hear it through this speaker. And here is the key of our transmitter, for your reply."

"Good," said Massen, "then would you please answer with a group of 41 dots. They have sent us the first 12 prime numbers, and by replying with the thirteenth we tell them that they are in touch with someone possessing a knowledge of mathematics."

As the last dot sped on its journey a tense silence fell on the room. The wait seemed endless, but after only two minutes the alien transmission began again, with what seemed a new eagerness. Massen could hardly control his fingers as he noted the dots. The first human to communicate with extra-terrestrial beings! The message was long and very fast, and he was unable to examine it as he wrote. But when it had ceased he looked at the mass of dots in dismay. He counted them hurriedly:

9, 17, 5, 16, 2, 13, 1, 9, 2, 5, 5, 2, 9, 1, 13, 2, 16, 5, 17, 9, 16, 13, 13, 16, 9, 17, 9, 1, 3, dash, 1, 8, 5

He searched desperately for some relationship among these heterogenous numbers. He was still searching after they had been repeated a dozen times. Sick with failure he walked to the window and gazed despondently at the cloudy sky.

All at once he was attacked by an overwhelming sense of catastrophe. He whirled round, but there was nothing unusual, except that the Engineer had left the room. He stared vacantly at his desk, and the realization struck him like a blow that the signals had stopped. The implications stunned him. The aliens had abandoned their project in disgust at human, at his

obtuseness. The message would prove to be absurdly simple and humanity would revile him for having bungled their greatest opportunity.

The phone rang, and he lifted the receiver clumsily. It was the Engineer. “It’s all right, the receiver’s OK. The moon has set, and we needn’t expect anything more until 7:50 tomorrow morning.”

Massen felt better after sandwiches and coffee in the Cafeteria. “I wonder,” the Engineer was saying, “why they don’t just land on Earth? I suppose they’re short of fuel?”

“More likely they want to make sure of a friendly reception.”

“Yes,” said the Engineer, “I suppose they might easily land in some barbarous place and be attacked.” He eyed Massen sympathetically. “What are you going to do next?”

“God knows,” said Massen, “play the recordings again, I suppose.”

At 1 a.m. the recordings were still being played, and the Engineer had gone to bed. Massen was lying back in his chair and resting his eyes. His brain was tired too, but he could not afford to sleep. There was no time to waste, he thought, staring at his watch.

The chair skittered against the wall as he burst into the ante-room, where a weary technician was lifting another disc.

“Can you slow down that turntable?”

“Sure. How’s that?”

“More. Yes, that’ll do.”

The dots began to resemble fog-horn blasts. Massen took off his watch and set it down before him.

Half an hour passed, and the technician looked up again as Massen flung open the door.

“You can pack up now. Everything’s all right.”

•

“The clue,” he said, gulping his breakfast coffee, “was something that did not appear in my transcription of the message. Actually, the pauses between the groups of dots vary in length, but so slightly as to be imperceptible to our ears until the recording was slowed down. Evidently these beings have a much more highly developed sense of duration than us. More rapid metabolism, I suppose. Anyway the message actually reads like this.” He wrote:

9,17 5,16 2,13 1,9 2,5 5,2 9,1 13,2 16,5 17,9 16,13 13,16 9,17 9,1 3, dash, 1, 8, 5.

“So what?”

"Don't you see," Massen exclaimed, "The co-ordinates of a graph! Plot those points, connect them, and you will find you have drawn a circle and a diameter. They have sent us a picture! With patience they could draw anything the same way."

"And the numbers at the end?"

"The value of Pi expressed in the 12 scale of notation. Presumably they want to know our scale so they can send larger numbers, and thus more complicated pictures. It will be enough to reply '3, dash, 1, 4, 1, 7.'"

As they waited beside the transmitter key the Engineer asked, "What do you think they'll send us next?"

"I don't know," said Massen, "Theoretically we could learn one another's language this way, but it would be a slow job. I expect they'll just arrange a landing or a television contact."

"Well, I think the world owes you a vote of thanks, Mr. Mason," said the Engineer.

Earth's first diplomatic representative was much too happy to protest.

Telekinesis and Buttered Toast

Dr. Rhine's study of parapsychology has now been published in England, and those of you who read Williamson's "And Searching Mind" will notice with interest that the experiments in telekinesis were performed with a pair of dice. These the subject had to will to come up "sevens", i.e., 6&1, 5&2, or 4&3, and the results were such as to rule out chance as an explanation. There seems accordingly to be no doubt that telekinesis (the control of inanimate objects by thought) does frequently occur. But how are we to reconcile this conclusion with centuries of human experience of the obdurate intractability of certain material objects, in particular buttered toast? As the old poet says:

> I never had a piece of toast,
> particularly long and wide,
> But fell upon the sanded floor,
> And always on the buttered side.

The explanation undoubtedly lies in Dr, Rhine's apparatus. It will not have escaped the incisive intelligence of my readers that the total of the numbers on the opposite sides of the two dice is also 7. It is now clear that the apparent success of the subject's will is really an abject failure: *The sides on which he was concentrating are actually underneath.*

It is not however necessary to conclude that material objects are

activated by a malign intelligence. Indeed the apparent anomaly we had discovered provides us with a valuable clue to the mode of operation of the telekinetic faculty. Its effect is apparently to increase the gravitational inertia, or weight of the object concentrated upon. Thus, the butter on the toast, which has, for the entire period of its fall, been assailed by the whole power of the human mind, in agonized concentration, acquires enough extra weight to turn the piece completely round in mid-air. I need hardly add that the same force acting on molecules of water easily explains the delay in the boiling of a watched pot.

•

Dr. E.E. Smith
was something of a myth.
Disillusionment impends
After *Children of the Lens*.

Off Course

I wonder how often reader speculation makes authors change their plans? It's possible that the future history of the Galaxy was changed by one Robert Griffin, who in the April 1946 *ASF* may have shaken Asimov to his Foundations by guessing that Star's End was imaginary, a Seldon device to encourage Terminus; the next in the series was inconclusive, very much delayed, and should perhaps have been called "Now You've Seen It". Then in August 1947 Warren Rayle suggested that in the hands of a less capable author Lord Clane would turn out to be a normal man, the others being the mutants. Perhaps van Vogt was not so very bright after all: anyhow he has since left the twilight of the "Gods". Thank you, Warren.

Two Suggestions

I do wish Mr. Campbell would stop giving away the plots of the stories in *ASF* by those clever little introductions. (Personally I much prefer to be not quite sure what a story is about after reading it; which is why I like van Vogt.) In the time saved maybe he could find the paper for the 16 pages which disappeared in March 1947, or even for *Unknown*. This famous paper famine, I must say, seems slightly incredible to anybody who tries to lift one of those technicolor catalogues the Americans call "slick" magazines.

Whereabouts Unknown

Talking of *Unknown*, does anyone know when the stories in the current British reprints first appeared? Are we still ploughing on to October 1943, or are we on the second trip through, living on rejects from the first? Sometimes I've thought we must be on the third or fourth lap.

Our Next Issue

Won't be any bigger, but it will we hope be better, especially if we can get more equipment. When you consider that, for example, all the illustrations were produced on plywood with a razor blade, perhaps you'll agree we haven't done too badly. We have plans for improvements in the reading material, too.

Incidentally, we could run an article on book-binding for magazine collectors, and we thought it might be interesting to publish a questionnaire to find out what sort of psychological types SF readers are. What do you think?

The Editor.

Slant #2, Summer 1949

Editorial

In our last issue, which was our first (a lot of people thought the first issue would be our last), we promised that #2 wouldn't be any bigger though we hoped it would be better. Well, here it is, twice the size and containing about thrice as many words. Whether it's any better we leave you to judge.

This time we are not going to make any prophecies about the next issue, except that there will be one. Incidentally, our thanks to all the other fanzine editors who have been so sympathetic about the arduous toil involved in producing a printed mag., but it's really not as bad as all that. Personally, I find it quite a congenial hobby; of course, printing runs in our family, and I have merely reverted to type. But taking our time and with the assistance of our cat Bem, the nearest thing we have to a copyboy, the three of us (our co-founder Dick Merritt has gone to England and can give only mail assistance, but my wife is a fan too) don't find it too much trouble.

One good reason we don't say what will be in the next issue is that we don't know yet. That largely depends on you, the readers. Please write and tell us what you liked in this issue, if anything; and send a contribution if you can. We are looking for good material of any kind, but there are fanzines purveying news and articles much better than we could, and we have neither the ability nor the desire to compete with them. So, and here is *Slant*'s slant, we intend this to be mainly a fiction magazine. But we do want originality. We want to be neither a half-baked imitation of a second-rate prozine, nor a mere expression of editorial egoboo, like some American productions, but a testing-ground for new ideas, a sort of sf avant-garde. A lofty ambition, but I have just enough faith in the resources of European fandom to think we might succeed. Even if you have only an idea for a story, pass it along and I'll send it to some author who's stuck for a plot. Contributors will, if they like, be supplied with 12 separately printed copies of their story. (A very rare limited edition!) Our present circulation is about 250.

The Solution

Ill luck seems to dog the London Underground. Every extension of the Tube has brought trouble in its train, from the disastrous first junction with the French Metro (then called the "Maquis" I believe) back in 1960, to their ill-fated experimental connection with New York, the terrible Test Tube explosion. Their last project was no exception.

The Australians had started their end of the tunnel with great energy (no wonder they are called "diggers") and already they were 200 miles nearer to us than we were to them. The situation was impossible. National pride was at stake, and the Government appointed me to take over the project. Unfortunately the Underground people went up in the air about this, and I got the impression that their engineering expert, old Professor MacHinery, particularly resented my intrusion.

However they were able to take the knife away from him, and I put these worries aside. My job was simply to dig a hole, and I threw myself into it with enthusiasm. By sheer organizing ability, and payment of double wages to the men who did the actual drilling, I soon had the work progressing at almost twice the speed. Round and round went the enormous great wheel, and the tunnel grew steadily in depth. I was so buried in my work that I had lost all count of time, but one day I consulted the Professor, who had finally been prevailed on not to sever his connection with me.

"According to my calculations," he said insolently, "we passed the Australians five days ago."

"Why did you not tell me this before?" I exclaimed.

He sneered audibly.

Fired with indignation, I went off at once and made a sharp report to the Government. They were seriously perturbed. The engineers had hoped that most of the journey in either direction might be made without fuel, and the frictional losses involved in negotiating a curve would be disastrous. Finally it was decided to abandon the Sydney end of the tunnel and proceed with ours alone, in the confident expectation that it would emerge somewhere in New South Wales.

Curiously enough, we had little difficulty in further increasing the speed of drilling, and hordes of men were continuously employed in adding new sections to the great shaft. All the Government shadow factories were switched over to the production of new sections. The public were greatly interested in the project, and bore the shortage of shadows with equanimity. But weeks went by without any word from the Australian Government of the appearance of the drill in their territory.

One morning the Professor came unexpectedly to my office. He had

an evil gleam in his eye (the left one, I think) and I could tell by the way he spat in my face that he still harboured some resentment against me.

"I thought you might like to know," he leered, "that we have just penetrated the Heaviside layer."

When I had ascertained where this was I was horrorstruck. I at once wired the Australian Government and Prime Minister Molesworth ordered out the entire Australian Air Force on reconnaissance, but without success.

There was only one thing to do. The drill must be taken up. The great machine was put into reverse, and accountants checked the number of sections as they were unscrewed. A terrible shock awaited us. The shaft was only 4,000 miles long, and the drill head, with the other 4,000 miles of shaft, had completely disappeared. Yet there was no sign of a break; the end was quite smooth. As clean as a whistle is the popular phrase, though I have heard some very unclean whistles from time to time.

The Professor and I went immediately to 10 Downing St. with our grievous news. On the way the Professor seemed abstracted, and something in his demeanour gave me the impression that he was perplexed. It may have been the way he kept muttering to himself and tearing out handfuls of his hair. On arriving at our destination we found the Prime Minister sitting with his Cabinet. He put down the lid at once, and came forward enquiringly. The Professor gave a bald summary of the facts, a feat for which he was now peculiarly fitted.

The Prime Minister was flabbergasted, but I had hardly started to give him my observations on the problem when he abruptly exclaimed, "Sir! You are an egregious moron!" I bowed modestly; I am immune to flattery. He turned to the Professor. "Professor!" he hissed. "Perhaps you can present some rational explanation for this seemingly inexplicable phenomenon?"

The Professor mopped his face with his handkerchief. "Only," he said, moving out of range, "a theory so bold, so bizarre, as to defy disbelief." He passed his hand wearily over his brow. "It grew on me slowly. It had been on my mind for some time, but only this afternoon I grasped the roots of the matter firmly at last...."

"Yes, yes," cried the Prime Minister impatiently, "but the theory?"

"I asked myself," continued the Professor, "what mystery lies at the centre of the Earth? The answer came to me in a flask. What could be there but something that could exist nowhere else? The flask contained samples of the metal at the end of the drill shaft...."

"You mean the solution was in the drill?"

"No," the Professor exclaimed, "the drill is in the solution! For

centuries alchemists have been searching in the face of ridicule for this elusive substance, only to have it speed from their triumphant retort straight to the centre of the Earth. In the course of ages there has thus accumulated inside our planet an enormous globule of that legendary fluid, the Universal Solvent!"

[to be continued... perhaps]

Boss Report: Sergeant Saturn Rides Again

The new British Reprint Edition of *Startling Stories* is no threat to Atlas so far, however much it may have made the publishers of the *Hotspur* shake in their shoes. The only items of interest in the first issue are some of the misprints. Like this fascinating example of symbiosis: "...gigantic flowers towered on massive storks to a height of a hundred feet..." Even the printers couldn't read it. The presence of Captain Future, hideous skeleton from *Startling*'s past is, of course, enough to warn the discerning reader. For this stuff the publishers didn't really need to invent a new word, "SCIENTIFICATION". There was no danger of our confusing it with science fiction. Why did they have to go back to the horrors of wartime for material? *Startling* has published enough good sf in the last few years to keep the BRE going for an Unknown time. But no HoF *[Hall of Fame]* please: they only put those in to make the other stories look better.

Slant #3, Spring 1950

Some readers have asked for information on amateur printing, We use what is known as a flat-bed quarto machine. Ours was junk, but a new one costs about £6:10:0. The bed, where the type is placed, is about the size of this page. Two people can run off about 100 copies per hour.

Type consists of little rectangular sticks of metal. Size is measured in points, and there are various shapes of letters in all sizes. It is sold in "founts" containing all the letters in the proportion they are used in English. Naturally the bigger the letters the more a fount costs, but a fount of this type, which is 10pt Gloucester Bold Condensed, is about £2. It contains one hell of a lot of letters but you really need another half fount for a page of this size because about a third of your type is *always* left over.

The type is set up in a little adjustable tray called a "composing stick", and tightened up by adjusting the spaces, which come in 5 sizes. This is known as "justifying" the line. When several lines have been set up you grasp the unstable mass firmly and lift it into the bed. (This is a nerve-wracking operation.) You can set up type about as fast as one-finger type-writing.

As for illustrations, I can only tell you what we do, which we're sure is all wrong. James does the woodcuts with a razor blade on plywood. You can use lino but James would rather have plywood. That's all I can tell you so far but we hope to develop as we learn. Photo-engraving for example.

The Prying Fan

Dumb-Bells & Dumb Belles

The golf-ball on the December 1949 *ASF* is the first spherical spaceship on an *ASF* cover since February 1944, according to my encyclopaedic partner James White. (The two rugby balls seem to be quite without precedent). I think it is very nice indeed (atta Zboyan!) but James says it is all spheroids and very hard to draw. He hopes it doesn't represent a Trend. The next development, he fears, is a Clarke type dumb-bell spaceship, but I tell him he's lucky I don't ask him for BEMs or Beautiful Unclad Maidens. Incidentally, *The Ladies' Home Journal* in an article on Sex Education

carried a photo of a sexy bookstall where, among all the “dirty books”, was the *Avon Fantasy Reader*. Oh, the shame of it!

Has Beachcomber Been Reading Van Vogt?

“She is embarrassed, and only wishes the floor would open and swallow her. It does.” [By The Way, 28.10.49]

Ode to Mr. Campbell

Thanks for letting Dr. Winter rest.
He didn’t rouse our interest.
Though we do admit he’s usually
Better than Ole Doc Methuselah.
Let them practice in private and some happy morn your
Medical men may discover a corn cure.

Break for Asimov

“While taking his oral in chemistry recently, a professor posed a final question. ‘Mr. Asimov, will you please tell us something about the thermo-dynamics of thiotimoline?’” [*Saturday Review of Literature*]

Slant #4, Autumn 1950

The Amateur Editor (Come In, the Water's Lovely!)

We like it here on the lunatic fringe of the lunatic fringe, but think well before you start a printed zine unless like us you have no choice. People not only expect more from print, they think you must be a bit upstage, and you can't be controversial because you publish seldom enough to be attacked with impunity. Besides, handsetting is hard work, and reviewers tend to voice this profound thought instead of casting about for something nice to say: the implication is that of Johnson's remark about the woman preaching, "Sir, it is like a dog walking on its hind legs. It is not done well, but you are surprised to see it done at all." Another thing is that handsetting tends to make your style terse and cryptic. This is bad, because the only people who read fanzines carefully are rival editors and BNFs looking for their own names.

Well, whether your zine is mimeoed, printed, handwritten, or carved on lumps of stone, you'd better have some stories or something to keep the cover from getting torn in the mails. You could ask people who write for other zines I suppose. (Being unsure of the ethics of this I have never done it myself, except for European authors in American zines whom I consider fair game.) But it's long odds they will come up with something rejected by another fanzine. Fanzine rejects can be pretty bad; and if you return material, however nicely, it is a law of nature that the author will never speak to you again. So better write the entire first issue yourself. This is customary, but don't make it too blatant. And don't worry if it's not all good. Every zine may contain one really bad item to encourage the authors. This can be overdone, but bear in mind the immortal words of *The American Courier*. "The Courier is forced to admit that it prints in each issue poems that should never see print, yet they do serve a purpose in that they made readers appreciate the really good poems with which each issue is sprinkled." Poignant, isn't it, Mr. M?

After your first issues you will probably be delighted with letters like this: "Dear Sir thank you for your fanzine I thought it was very good, much better than X, all the stories were very good especially Y, Z was good too but I think I read some think like it before, the illustrations were very good I don't know how he does it with just a razor blade I'm sure I'd never have the patience." In time even this heady stuff begins to pall, and

the law of diminishing returns applies strictly to fanmags: so unless you improve you will attract less and less attention until you fold your mag and silently steal away. Tamam Shud.

The Prying Fan

The Other Fandom

In this town of 400,000 odd inhabitants there are apparently only three who are odd enough to admit to an interest in sf. Yet every month great heaps of sf magazines come into the shops, and vanish instantaneously, like cream. No one ever sees who buys them. The few times I have surprised persons in the act they seemed to flee in terror at my approach as if I had three heads instead of only two. My spies tell me that this state of affairs exists all over Sol III. *Who are these mysterious people?* Shocking though it may be to our self-esteem, there is only one answer. Behind fandom as we know it, using it as a screen, lurks the *Other Fandom*. To this vast organization of super intellects we are but morons, fit only to be used as unwilling catspaws in their machinations. It is through us that they press their views on editors and publishers, most of whom have learned by bitter experience the peril of ignoring them. How else explain the powerful influence of the apparently impotent minority of actifans? These mysterious intelligences, whom I refer to as the *Tendrilless Fans*, have their own secret conventions and fanzines, and for all I know, prozines too. Their number constantly increases. You have wondered why it is that actifans often retire at the very peak of their powers, why fanzines no sooner get really good than they fold? Obviously, they have been *accepted*!

Slant Tells All!

Some time ago we began secretly to circularize new fans, getting their names from the prozine letter columns. “You too can be a BNF!” we said. “You want egoboo? We can supply it. For modest fees we will do your fanning for you. We undertake all the duties of an actifan, letters in your name to prozines, fanzines and fellowfans, and publication on your behalf of any type of fanzine. Why work your brain to the bone when you can make use of our specialized services? Write at once to *Proxyboo Ltd*....”

The project was an immediate success, and the time has come for us

to make a startling disclosure. *We are fandom!* Daily for some ten years fleets of vans have brought us sacks of letters to be answered on our battery of typewriters, and taken away great stacks of *Fanscient*s, *Gorgon*s, *Operations Fantast*, *Slant*s, *Spearhead*s, etc, etc, for distribution by our customers, with countless letters, articles, columns, stories, poems, artwork, editorials, etc, carrying the names of Ackerman, Boggs, Laney, Grossman, Sneary, Riddle and dozens of others, each of whom thinks he is our only client.

But all this must stop. After today we regret to announce that there will be no more fandom, except for some poor wretches who were unable to keep up with their payments. We are sorry not to be able to finish off our various "controversies", like Laney-Metchette and Banister-Boggs (especially when the bidding was getting so high), but pressure of work has forced us to close the fandom department. Our prozine commitments are getting far too heavy.

Quaint Australian Customs

They don't care for *Thrilling Wonder*
Down under.
And when they see a *Planet*
They ban it.

Physician, Heal Thyself!

Judging him by his works, I wouldn't have thought Hubbard fit to treat anyone's mind. Sympathy, kindness and understanding are some of the qualities needed, and there was no sign that Hubbard had them. Quite the reverse. His stories, disregarding the juveniles of "Rene Lafayette", showed such an unhealthy worship of sadistic power and preoccupation with violence and cruelty as to make me feel that if he was "clear" I'd rather stay opaque. That brutish callousness is an heroic quality and the mass murder of people with different pigmentation is an heroic action are ideas only too easily acquired without Hubbard's help. Reader Robb in "Brass Tacks" said of dianetics: "None but the meanest, most callous, and least worthy of men could offer such a blessing to mankind without assuring himself of its validity." It could have been such a man who wrote "Greed".

But if Hubbard is so far no advertisement for dianetics, Campbell is,

and if only out of respect to him we must take it as more than just another “mystery”. And first impressions of the book are that although it is emotionally and unscientifically overwritten, Hubbard is, to give him his due, absolutely sincere. You should read it for yourself, and decide.

Slant #5, Spring 1951

Colour Section

We hoped our last cover would create some sensation, preferably one of pleasure. Only Lee Hoffman spotted our secret: “I am laughing at your comments on multicoloured ink. I know how you done it. I haven’t spent years as a stage hand for nothing. It’s done with lights. Simple.” Yes, Lee, the ink *is* extracted from the internal organs of animals. Cruel, but Art must be served.

Page Filler

THE WORK OF A MOMENTUM. “It took but a slight inertia for them to leap up over the edge of the pit’s mouth.” *Amazing*, Oct., 1934.

QUICK ON THE UPTAKE. “She gave a small cry of satisfaction, then quickly grabbed it up and sped down the dirt path...” *Super Science*, July ’50.

The Prying Fan

Since we keep getting subscriptions from what you might call the sane fringe of sf, a short note on technical terms might not be out of place. If my memory serves me right – if it does, what a horrible punishment – the name “fan” was foisted on his readers by Hugo Gernsback some twenty years ago. We have been stuck with it ever since because “articulate readers of imaginative fiction” is long and life is short. For some reason fans are born amateur journalists and produce large numbers of “fanzines” – henceforth called “fanmags” here for the very good reason that this one often runs out of “i”’s. They vary in size from the minute *Fanscient* to mimeographed mountains, and in quality from *Nekromantikon* through good to ordinary. There no such thing as a bad fanmag, because what’s worth doing is worth doing badly. A “BEM” is the bug-eyed monster you see on certain promags if you don’t rip the cover off in time, not to be confused with a “BNF” or Big Name Fan, however close the resemblance. Finally, “egoboo” is a word invented by Forrest J Ackerman (who else?)

for the inflation of the ego which results from praise or seeing one's work in print. It is the motive for other people's activity as opposed to the creative impulse which inspires one's own.

Off the Cuff

Mr. Hal Clement is understood to have expressed considerable surprise at Ken Slater's disclosure that he is Arthur C. Clarke's alter ego. "Little did I know," he stated, "while piloting a B24 during the war, that simultaneously I was working in English radar laboratories."

The Gold Standard

I have nothing against dianetics but its author, in fact I only wish I had thought of it myself, but if Hubbard must have advertisements in *ASF* let them all be proper paid advertisements. He can afford it. As it is, the mag is becoming a sort of Dianetics Digest, or Hubbard Mystery Magazine, and what with ham radio and psychology Mr. Campbell seems to have been too busy to watch out for competition. Now, with Gold in there pitching while Campbell is out there preaching, *ASF* has lost its long unchallenged leadership, so that even us staunch followers of Campbell are inclined after seeing *Galaxy* to believe rumours of a little note discovered on his desk: "You will have to be as good as Gold or there will be a clear out – yours truly, Street and (if you'll pardon the expression) Smith."

How Sophisticated Can You Get?

"The covers were to be patterned in the *New Yorker* style – sophisticated humor. As for instance, a dog in a spacesuit, mournfully eyeing a lamp post." *Science-Fiction Newsletter*, Dec., 1950.

Sale

Proxyboo Ltd. are pleased to announce that it has been found possible to carry on with fandom after the suspension of only three major fanmags. This has involved however some curtailment in our promag commitments, and we are in a position to offer the following item of surplus equipment. *One reconditioned plot-twister*, Mark VV III. The plot is inserted at one end and emerges at the other in any desired degree of complexity, highly

polished and all loose ends neatly tied up. With tins of interest (sex, human, etc.), cylinders of atmosphere, and assorted thrills and punches machined to a crucial point for easy insertion. For those who prefer to work their own plots we suggest our robot long distance plotfinders, for farfetched plots, and our patent plot-thumper which when screwed to laggard, slow moving plots produces a strong kick at *The End*.

Proxyboo Services.

1. *Clippings Bureau,* for rejected authors and calumnized fans. Nail and hair clippings of prominent editors and calumnists available. We regret that stocks of F.C. (*Incinerations*) Davis are momentarily exhausted.

2. *"BNF" Egobooextractor Service.* This machine sucks every drop of egoboo from fanmags, letters, etc. The useless husks may then be thrown away and the dried egoboo preserved in doubtproof containers.

3. *Central Engram Bank,* for victims of Mr. Hubbard's insidious attempt at the removal of competition. We carry an enormous stock of assorted engrams, guaranteed to restore inspiration to the most hopelessly cleared author.

Slant #6, Winter 1951/52

The Amateur Editor

Since we learned our printing by doing things before we found they were impossible we acquired a few unusual wrinkles, not to mention some grey hairs.

Since I need 20 lines here I may as well pass some on; Real printers indulge in a rite called “make-ready” – necessary, they whimper, because all type is not exactly type high. We think this rite is wrong, a pusillanimous concession to the incompetence of typefounders. A cork backing means that nearly all the letters come out. True, some of them may go so far as to come out in relief on the back of the page, but so what? People PAY for embossing. (Will someone please carry out the body of that printer?)

Compositors, compose yourselves. Never argue while holding a stickful of type. It is not considered lucky to throw type over your left shoulder.

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

The Prying Fan

I Am a Stone Quarry

Graham Stone, of Sydney, classes my editorial in *S*5 among the “duds”. “You do tend to run on,” he says. Sorry, but setting up 10pt type is so exciting I sometimes get quite carried away. To add insult to insult he says he doesn’t like my face. “Too condensed and heavy” he calls it. I can’t help my face: no one can help my face. My only comfort is that Mr. Stone’s rating of the rest of the issue is the exact opposite of everyone else’s. And I used to think there was nothing in that story about everything

in Australia being upside down.

However, there may be something in what he says... There's no point in my telling you the mag is so good you won't be able to put it down, like Mr. Gold, since you're stuck with it already. Nor in giving my writers plots for stories, like Mr. Campbell, since they'd only sell them to *Galaxy*, like his do. So, and to save space on the contents page, I've let my editorial go West. Any resemblance between this and an editorial is purely occidental.

The Eyes Have Had It

Yes, the White school of linocutting has had to close because of a strike of the pupils. For the time being at least, James's eyesight is such that he can't see his way to continue his work on the same fine lines. Leaving no stone unturned, we came on Bob Shaw. Mr. Shaw has become very important to this magazine. Since he came we get through nearly twice as much work in only thrice the time and, what's more, he has now started cutting himself. This I could understand, but he has also attacked the linoleum to the tune of two cuts for this issue. His first is on p.26, and he asks me to say that no one should be deceived into thinking that this cut is "crude". Actually it is of course an example of "Stark Simplicity". Other words I am advised to use are Powerful, Savage, Brutal. (It sounds like the unkindest cut of all.) I offered to run a little explanatory note underneath, but for some reason he wouldn't hear of it.

Another thing we have done is to develop that multicoloured ink technique of ours to such a fine pitch of distraction that you don't notice – we hope – that there's not so much work done on the lino itself. That cover, for instance (you noticed it, we hope?), was done in only three runs – one for the patriotically coloured spine, one for the Rogers-blue spaceship, and a third perfectly blank except for the space for the ship. Since we got a flattering number of enquiries last time we used this technique (mostly "how" and very few "why") I may as well tell you how we invented it. Enquiries about multi-coloured mimeo ink should be addressed to our agents HOFFMAN INK, 101 Wagner St., Savannah, Ga., who do such a fine job with *Quandry*.

Whenever anything goes wrong with our printing we don't impetuously rush to correct it, any more than Fleming threw out that mouldy saucer of his. No, we always ask ourselves, now how can we make use of this interesting effect? For instance, a human hair and a splinter of wood strayed onto a linocut of a machine in *S*2 (someone must have been

scratching his head) and were such a glowing success as a weird electrical discharge and a luminescent dial that we let them stay and modestly acknowledged the compliments we received on this delicate artistry. So when it came to our notice that if you didn't mix the ink properly on the inkplate it came out patchy, we realized we could print several colours at once by "painting" the ink disc with them and dogging the ratchet that makes it turn. One result of course is that no two impressions are ever quite identical, since the inks keep spreading and being renewed. *Slant* is the magazine that's *really* different – every copy.

Ego Booh

Well, it looks as if the better part of *Picture Post*'s valour has finally triumphed. Some time ago they ran a feature about space flight by one Derek Wragge Morley illustrated by a poor men's Bonestell called Ainsworth. It was pretty bad. But worse, they didn't mention even once the name of Arthur C. (Ego) Clarke, who is to space flight as Abbott is to Costello. It was unbelievable. Even in the Sunday papers no rocketship is ever dispatched without his express approval.

At last some rash soul showed this Wragge and Bonestell effort to Clarke, and took cover. The Great Man restrained himself to sending a cold letter pointing out the "more important" errors, about 17 of them.

That seemed to be that, until *PP* published a comeback by the foolhardy Wragge. Not only did be contradict Clarke on matters of fact and opinion, and spoke slightingly of the British Interplanetary Society spaceship, but he actually called the august body itself a society of dreamers misleading the public. Survivors of that terrible night at the White Horse reported that Clarke had finally re-entered the visible spectrum and descended from the walls, and was talking comparatively benignly of a mere libel suit. Mention was made of subpoenaing the Astronomer Royal....

But now *PP* have made amends to Clarke's Ego by reviewing his superb *Exploration of Space* almost as well as it deserves. They gave it The Treatment – three whole pages, with illustrations. The review is by, of all people, Derek Wragge Morley, but this time he has a collaborator called Kenneth Allsop, unless the name is just a little joke by *PP*. I expect he was detailed to make sure that Morley didn't blot his copybook again. You can see the old "Tiger" Wragge rearing his unrepentant head now and then – "outdatedness", "ramshackle space jalopies" – but then little Allsop says, "Now now, we don't want to lose our Wragge, do we?" and Morley

thinks of his job as *PP*'s Scientific Adviser and probably how lucky he was to get it (Vince Clarke thinks he got his PhD by sending away box tops) and tries to swell Arthur Clarke's head enough to make sure the BIS "space suit" will never come off.

Slant #7, Winter 1952/53. Final Issue.

Editorial

Some time ago we got wind of this stern comment from the White Horse. "*Slant,*" said some anonymous critic, "is too promaggy." We were aghast. Could this vile accusation possibly be true? Whitelipped and trembling, we stole a guilty look at the last issue... and reeled away, sick with self-disgust. It *was* true! No use to conceal the fact from ourselves any longer; the mag was tainted with pseudo-professionalism. It wasn't just the vile prose we were printing – the very physical form of the mag was contaminated. Its condition was critical. Not only had it contracted symptoms of chronic legibility, but *neatness* was breaking out all over it.

Obviously there was only one thing to do. We must retrace our steps, in search of the True Path from which we had strayed. We began by tearfully saying goodbye to the long happy months of setting type, lifting it out of the stick, picking it up off the floor again, correcting typoes, distributing it again, and finding the rest of the typoes. But these sacrifices were only the beginning. Relentlessly I went on to invent a new method of reproducing stencils which produced a nice black impression (pages 6 to 45), and then cunningly bought 9,000 sheets of paper just too thin to take it. Now we were back to the joyful days when our readers used playfully to ask us to make it clear just which side of the page was which. Other experiments, like slipping when we should have sheeted, were equally successful; and with this issue I think we can safely say that we have regained our amateur status quo.

But please, no applause. It was nothing, really. In fact we'd be just as happy if you wouldn't make any comments at all on the appearance of this issue, just accepting the whole wonderful thing with silent gratitude. Not just on account of our innate modesty, but because I have an uneasy foreboding that we are about to backslide again. The dread symptoms are reappearing and I'm afraid I must warn you that the next issue may be almost as lamentably legible as the last.

Among the more readable items will be the second instalment of the Temple Memoirs, dealing this time with the affair of Ego and the duplicator, which is probably the funniest thing of its kind ever done, and

an unusual Thing by Vince Clarke. There'll be some other stuff too, but you know more about that then I do. Would all you brilliant minds in my glistening audience please note that under the new type set-up (or non-set-up) *Slant* will be going frequent, needs material again, and that the deadline for the next issue is the end of April. Yes, 1953.

The Prying Fan

Mighty Like a Rosicrucian

Slant will never be just the same without an attack on L. Ron Hubbard, but it looks as if the last one was only too well founded; far be it from me to kick a man when he's not only down but out of his mind.

But maybe English readers haven't heard about *Excalibur*? Well, it seems that during the war Elron died. Awakening in the Hereafter, he found himself surrounded by all the knowledge of the Universe. He had been browsing in this stuff for a mere ten minutes when he felt the call of the Flesh and was drawn back to the operating theatre, where he had just given the doctor quite a turn. He left again as soon as he decently could and typed out carefully all he could remember of the Eternal Wisdom he had acquired. This was *Excalibur*. He hauled it round various publishing houses, but none of them could take it. In fact their Readers kept committing suicide, their minds giving way under the impact of these transcendental ideas. On the last occasion, according to Elron, he was present in the publishing office when the Reader entered, laid the MS on the desk, and left the room again by way of the window. Since the window was on the 40th Floor neither the Reader nor Elron ever recovered from this experience. Kindly Ol' Hubbard decided that the World was Not Ready for *Excalibur* and confined himself to publishing a teensy-weensy little bit of it, which he called Dianetics. Lately, however, Elron has become disenchanted with humanity on account of the vile attacks on him by unsympathetic people like sheriffs, reporters, judges, and the Bureau of Internal Revenue. He has given us up, and he's just jolly well going to let us have *Excalibur*. So, now, if you'll just send him a measly $1,000 and sign a waiver for damages when you jump out of the window, you can have a specially typed copy of "Excalibur" – now reposing in a sealed vault – for your vewy, vewy own. *The New Yorker* called this the Biggest Little Book Bargain of the Month.

Autobiography

The Subcutaneous Fan

This was meant to be one of those scholarly, constructive articles that your editor so excels in, but I am beginning to think that he has discovered some important principle of life that has so far eluded me. Redd: do you ever find that when you want to look up a reference someone has invariably borrowed the book? It's always happening to me – people are so dishonest. The worst of it is that I never seem to find anything worth quoting in the books I have of theirs.

The one I was looking for this time was Rachel Ferguson's *The Brontes Went To Woolworths*. It was to have been the first link in a long chain of speculation about the ways in which the fan mentality expresses itself in the absence of fandom. As far as I remember – don't bother to correct me if I'm wrong – Rachel Ferguson and her sisters had invented an elaborate private mythology concerning the Brontes, and lived in it themselves a sort of pseudolife in parallel with their mundane existence. I think the Brontes themselves had one which they shared with Branwell, and I know that lots of other people, like Shelley, also had these private worlds of their own. I was going to argue that this was a manifestation of the sensitive fannish mind.

To me at any rate the main attraction of fandom is this property it has of being a combined mythology and microcosm – an artificial private world which does actually have a real existence (but not too real), and in which one can enjoy a sort of contemporary reincarnation. (A whole bunch of reincarnations, if you follow Speer's example and split yourself into more than one identity.) At the very least, two lives for the price of one. It could be argued that fandom is not an escapist hobby at all, but almost the reverse – an overflow outlet for the creative imagination. Fandom is a nocturnal emission. (I put it baldly like that with a view to the remark's immortalization on a Wild Hair type cover.)

However, in the absence of the Ferguson book I'm afraid this article is going to degenerate into a personal reminiscence. I only hope I'm right in assuming I can get away with this sort of stuff in FAPA. Certainly I can't think of any other audience likely to be interested in the rise and fall of sauce bottle fandom.

Sauce bottle fandom flourished in Belfast about 17 years ago and at one time had as many as four members. We met twice a week in a local cafe, and at first we talked only of the usual things students talk about –

art, religion, politics, and other dirty jokes – but it wasn't long before we invented sauce bottle fandom. We were all the sort of people who read at meals and if there was nothing else to read we would read the labels on the jars and things on the table. We soon found that we all knew by heart the label on a sauce known as "H.P." Not only did this label carry a much greater wordage than any marmalade jar, it was of an immensely higher literary standard. For one thing, part of it was in French, which gave it a tremendous distinction in the eyes of us Francophiles.

The label had three sides. The middle one had a picture of the house of parliament at Westminster, a statement that the sauce was made by Garton and Company, and a description of its constituents – pure malt vinegar and oriental spices. On the lefthand side was the blurb in French – "Cette Sauce de premier choix..." – which we intoned with the solemnity we gave to Baudelaire and Rimbaud. And on the righthand side was a copy of a certificate by two public analysts that they had "regularly taken samples from stock and found the sauce to be in every way pure and wholesome. – Signed, A. Bostock Hill & William T. Rigby."

It was those names that got us. There seemed to be limitless significance in them. A. Bostock Hill was obviously a short stocky type, stolid and unimaginative, but steady as a rock and honest as the day was long. William T. Rigby, on the other hand, was a wayward genius, brilliant and eccentric and with a streak of the Bohemian artist. In no time at all we had the two characters fitted out with parents, schools, careers, love lives, friends – an entire world. Every detail was filled in with loving care. Finally we had constructed an entire imaginary universe for Hill and Rigby, with a cast of scores which included virtually every proprietary name in the British bottling, canning, and confectionery industries.

Every change in a proprietary label was the outward sign of some vast drama taking place behind the scenes, and the occasion for long and serious speculation by us. We were, for instance, saddened when the H.P. people suddenly substituted typed signatures of Hill and Rigby for the holographed ones we had known since childhood. It could only mean that poor old Hill was failing. No doubt he had for some time been unable actually to take the samples from stock himself, but his loyal friend Rigby, ever the more dashing of the two, had shown him his results and guided his faltering hand in signing the hallowed document. Then in 1939 two things happened. The war broke out, and the certificate disappeared altogether. The latter could mean only one thing, and sauce bottle fandom came to an end.

By that time the mythos was really immense. We had not only

accounted for every idiosyncrasy in proprietary labels, but had incorporated dozens of other odd items that had caught our imagination. Things like an enormous and mysterious unsigned painting of a lady in blue that hung in the attic of my grandmother's old house, several Victorian lithographs of domestic scenes in the downstairs rooms, and a photograph of an unknown Edwardian ancestor whom we christened Wallace Willis. And finally we had integrated the whole thing with another equally massive mythology in a different field, quite incommunicable since it dealt mainly with local placenames and Irish words, and ingenious theories as to whatever happened to the Picts.

Nobody ever got around to writing the whole thing down – it would have been quite a job – and I thought it had perished completely until the other day I found among some old papers a draft I had sketched of the main events in the Hill-Rigby story itself. It started off with A. Bostock Hill's childhood and already one of the two Holy Grails of the saga – *absolutely pure* malt vinegar – was making its appearance. As you probably know, vinegar is made from inferior wines, and in the first chapter, based on one of the Victorian lithos, old Squire Hill is staggering home drunk from his nightly debauch. "'D—n and b—t,' he roared thickly as he reeled up the stairs. Mrs. Hill blanched. 'Shut your ears, children,' she murmured, clasping her eldest son in her arms. 'Arbuthnot,' she cried, 'tomorrow you embark on the great sea of life. Swear to me by a mother's love that you will fight this daemon Empire Wine that has enslaved your father, and that you will remember always our family motto SPIRIT VINI RECT.'"*

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* *Pharmaceutical term for vinegar.*

In the next chapter Hill goes to boarding school and falls foul of the school bully, Guy Fletcher (Fletcher's Tomato Ketchup) and his toadies Cyril Urney and Sidney Needler. (Urney and Needler were makers of chocolate we thought vastly inferior to Cadbury's.) He is rescued by William Terence Rigby, one of the school bloods, and confides in him his dream of transforming his father's curse into a blessing for all mankind. Later at Oxford, where Rigby is specializing in tropical flora, they meet some of the other characters in the saga – Wallace Willis, Vladimir Potemkin the mad painter, Richard Cadbury and Sydney Garton. They also spend a holiday at Heidelberg, where they meet Gustav Tobler and Heinrich Heinz. Towards the end of their university life, however, both Hill and Rigby fall in love with Wallace Willis's sister, the mysterious blue lady painted by Potemkin, and Rigby goes East to forget. Worried by

reports that he has gone native, Hill presses on with his monumental work.

> "The furore which greeted the publication of *Pure Malt Vinegar, Its Past*, need not be described. The book was at first greeted with derision and obloquy, but when it was realized that the author had effectively discredited all previous thought on the subject a wave of despair swept the world. Such was the position when Hill produced the second volume, *Pure Malt Vinegar, Its Future*. It was the young men who first realized the daring scope of Hill's ideas. *Absolutely* Pure Malt Vinegar, hitherto thought but a vain dream, *was* possible! In Paris, Montmartre student opinion rallied to the new leader as a result of some anonymous prose poems and manifestos..."

Hill can now afford to organize an expedition to search for Rigby. He enlists the aid of old Professor Heinz ("57 Varieties have I made, and I will no more until Rigby is found make") and with Tobler they set out for the orient. They find Rigby in the heart of the Burmese jungle "writing feverishly on a bamboo table covered with scientific instruments. The piercing gleam in his eye belied the signs of dissipation on his features..." "Your book made a new man of me," he says, "and I have begun my researches again. I don't want to raise false hopes, but I think we have an appointment with Sidney Garton... and I have one of my prose poems ready for Sidney if he cares to use it. 'Cette sauce de premier choix...'"

They all return in triumph to England (except old Professor Heinz who succumbs to malaria with his life's work uncompleted. Or don't you have Heinz's 57 Varieties in the U.S.?) and Garton produces the ultimate sauce. Not without opposition from Fletcher, Crosse, and Blackwell, but the saga ends at one of the "quiet dinners Hill gives regularly to his friends. The genial old man sits at the head of the table, with Rigby, frail but indomitable and with still a youthful gleam in his eye, on his right hand, and Dr. Otto Heinz, son of the revered Professor, on his left.... The gay conversation rises and falls, stilled only when the butler enters bearing tenderly a priceless cobwebbed bottle of old vintage vinegar."

And to think I might have poured all that energy into fandom instead of a sauce bottle, if I had come across the Belfast SFL in 1935!

Spring 1952

I Remember Me – 1
Beginnings

A couple of years ago the headquarters of Irish Fandom moved from a room at the back of the house into the large front attic described by Chuck Harris in *Through Darkest Ireland*. I installed four power points in it with the help of Bob Shaw and a toy motor of Carol's (the latter to help thread cable under the floorboards) and erected bookshelves all over. After everything was finally moved up and the floor was found not to sag noticeably I looked round with satisfaction. For the first time in my life I had a room for everything. I even brought some books up from downstairs to fill up empty shelves.

But now things are just as bad as they were before, and there isn't a bigger room in the house. The downstairs books have long since been repatriated. Clearly, something will have to go... and the correspondence files are by far the biggest and most unsightly item, apart from myself. These files of mine contain virtually every letter I've received since I came into fandom nearly nine years ago, and carbon copies of every letter I wrote, even before I got a typewriter. (The first item of fanac equipment I ever bought was a ball point pen.) It seems to me that such a comprehensive dossier is bound to be of some historical or at least psychiatric interest, if only to me. I hate to destroy it without at least taking some notes.

Hence this journal. I will proceed to go through these old files ruthlessly destroying everything, but making notes here of anything which might conceivably be of interest to anyone. This way you will not only have the semi-illicit pleasure of reading someone else's mail, but I will have a ready-made set of notes for my Memoirs, should I ever be possessed with a mad urge to write them. In fact, now I come to think of it, so will you. If anyone would like to write my memoirs, just go ahead.

Incidentally, this could be of interest to anyone thinking of writing a history of fandom during the last decade. There were many things that happened behind the scenes that were confidential at the time and which never did become public. I will tell *everything* here....

In the summer of 1947, in a second-hand bookshop in Austin St. in the slum quarter of the lower Newtownards Road, I came across the January 1947 issue of the US *Astounding* containing the first part of the

Padgett serial “Tomorrow and Tomorrow”. It was a tremendous shock for Madeleine and me, for hitherto we had innocently thought that the British Reprint of *Astounding* was all there was. The realization that we had been missing more than half of it, including all the serials, was indescribably shocking. Immediately we began searching Belfast systematically for more US editions. I even made forays to provincial towns by bicycle. We never found any more US *ASF*s, but Madeleine did run across a copy of Walter Gillings’s promag *Fantasy*. It had a letter in it from somebody called James White with a Belfast address. I wrote asking him to call, adding by way of bait that I had quite a few old BRE *Astoundings*. He replied on 26th August, a date now celebrated as Irish Fandom day:

> Dear Mr. Willis:
>
> I received your letter this morning and am more than pleased to hear of another science fiction fan in Belfast.
>
> I am interested in *Astounding*s mostly and have a small collection of them, chiefly wartime British editions....

“Chiefly”! That meant he had at least one American edition. It might even be February 1947 with the second part of “Tomorrow and Tomorrow”. We suggested a night and up he came. He turned out to be very tall, dark and gently mannered. (He still is, except when playing ghoodminton or writing about Chuck Harris.) He had not only a virtually complete file of BREs, but dozens and dozens of American editions. He was the reason we hadn’t been able to find any in Belfast. *He* was the mysterious figure who had been in just a few minutes ago and bought them. James worked in the City Centre and spent his entire lunch time combing the second-hand shops.

For the next few months we read through each other’s books and magazines and combined our collecting efforts. Through the advertisements in *Fantasy* we’d made contact with SF Service in Liverpool. We included each other’s wants in our own lists and took turns to share the spoils. Later we saw an advertisement for something called the British Fantasy Library, and on 16th December 1947 I sent a stamped addressed envelope for particulars. We still had no idea that there was any such thing as fandom... in fact I don’t remember any particular point in time at which I became consciously aware of its existence as an entity. Certainly I remembered vaguely reading in the 1930s letters from a fellow called Tucker and some talk about staples, but it never struck me as something anyone could join in. These people were too far away in space and time... the *Astounding*s and *Amazing*s I was reading then were newsstand returns shipped over as ballast, appearing in Woolworth’s in

tattered jumbles many months later. And though they were only 3d each I could never buy enough of them, even living on chocolate and walking home from school. No, all we were interested in at the time and for a long while to come, was getting more copies of the American *Astounding*.

The first letter I ever got from a fan was dated, neatly enough, 1st January 1948. It was a brief scribble from one Ron Holmes of Liverpool, enclosing a mess of duplicated matter. There was a *Booklist* and a *Wrapper Supplement* (sic) containing apologies for the reproduction and for the delay in publication and for the non-appearance of the Christmas Card, and a complaint that half the members had failed to renew their subscription. At the time I didn't appreciate how completely typical this was. Another enclosure was the *BFL Handbook*, which had a potted history of British Fandom to date....

> During the ten years before World War II there was much activity among those interested in fantasy fiction... we recall such titles as *Novae Terrae, Satellite, Fantast, New Worlds, Fido* and *Gargoyle*.
>
> But at the height of keen activity the war called away the enthusiasts, many never to return; fandom struggled for existence, then fell into a lethargy.
>
> When it seemed that the star of fantasy was on the wane, a champion arose in Michael Rosenblum of Leeds, who formed the British Fantasy Society. Its purpose was to hold together the rapidly diminishing remnants of fandoms – and it succeeded.
>
> The termination of hostilities found things somewhat different; the actual work of the Society was being done by four individuals only.... Officially the Society was wound up, but the two remaining enthusiasts combined the Library and "chain" into what is now known as the BFL. It is, perhaps, the last struggling effort of organized Fantasy Activity in this country; or the first brick of a new structure.

These two Last Fen were Ron Holmes and Nigel Lindsay. The roster of BFL members contained only eight names known to present-day fandom – Norman Ashfield, Rick Dalton, Charlie Duncombe, E.R. James, F.G. Rayer, Mike Rosenblum, Ken Slater and D.R. Smith – and of these only new member Ken Slater was to play a really important part in the revival of British Fandom. In fact he might almost be said to have revived British Fandom singlehanded. His *Operation Fantast*, the first issue of which appeared in September 1947, was the first British fanzine to appear for

almost a year. I got my own copy at about the same time as the *Booklist*: I can't remember whether it arrived separately or with the BFL mailing. It consisted of ten duplicated quarto pages containing an announcement on the lines of a military "Operational Order" about *OF* and its aims ("To encourage and promote greater interest and enthusiasm in sf... to complete our files of magazines with missing issues"...), extracts from correspondence between KFS and Carnell about the inordinate delay in the publication of *New Worlds*, an invitation for suggestions for new sources of power (this was the time of the fuel crises), reports of flying saucers, information about US sf mags, news items and ads. I really don't remember what I actually thought about it at the time; probably I just accepted it, having no standard of comparison. Anyway this man had magazines I wanted; obviously I should try to get into his good books. I wrote my first fan letter....

> Dear Mr. Slater:
>
> You haven't heard from me before as I am just a new member of the BFL.... I received *Operation Fantast* No.1 only a few days ago which is why I'm so late in replying to it. However may I say that I found it very interesting indeed – I hope you will be turning out further issues.
>
> I have been reading science fiction myself since about 1934....

I went on to ask him for the '46 and '47 *ASF*s he'd advertised for sale and finished up by throwing in a quote from *Wireless World* about electronics and space flight which I thought he might be interested in, and a request to be told if he knew of any other fans in Belfast.

I got a business-like reply dated 3rd January mostly about the mags he was sending, apologizing for not being able to write more at present, and adding that he didn't know of any other fans in Belfast. Since he'd just sent an unsolicited copy of *OF* to James White, my opinion of the efficiency of his organization sank a little. However I thanked him sincerely for the mags he'd sent, told him the story Conklin was asking about in the preface to his *Best of SF* was Taine's *White Lily*, and sent him a longer Want List.

There didn't seem to be anything more to do. For the next few months I paced up and down on the fringes of fandom, pestering Ken and SF Service for the mags I wanted, comparing notes with James and making out checklists with little squares for each issue so that I could have the lustful pleasure of filling them up when I got the magazines. James, who

has an orderly mind, went even further. He kept a book listing the stories, authors and cover artists of every *Astounding* he'd got, and knew the lot off by heart. We still had no particular desire to write to other fans, unless it could help us fill the gaps in our collections. If this seems unhealthy, remember that we were *starved* for sf. For years we'd been subsisting on the meagre Atlas quarterly reprint. We'd try to read them slowly, counting the pages left, or save them up for a special treat, and then read them again and again. These American editions were a glimpse of paradise for us, and we had succumbed to collecting mania in the worst possible way. And make allowances for the fact that what little we'd seen of fandom... and indeed what fandom there was at the time, for our kind of fandom wasn't really in existence then... had little appeal for us. We didn't feel ourselves a part of it, any more than we identified ourselves with the dealers we wrote to.

The December *OF*, No.2, came out towards the end of January. As well as some fan fiction, a poem by Rayer and some articles with rather more merit, it carried the addresses of some American fans. I wrote to one Paul Doerr, who wanted to trade US for British mags, and to David MacInnes, who offered free copies of his fanzine *Necromancer* and who I thought might be interested in trading too. Also in the issue was a report by KFS on a visit he'd made to London: he had met Ken Chapman, Ted Carnell, Walter Gillings, Charlie Duncombe, Eric Williams, Fred Brown and others, and discussed among other things a possible revival of the British Fantasy Society round some sort of London organization. He evidently hadn't got much encouragement.

On 25th January, KFS sent out a circular with the news that he was being posted overseas, but that *OF* would continue operating with the help of a Miss Joyce Teagle, the girl he'd left behind him. There was also a news item: Ron Holmes was going into hospital.

This left Britain without a single active fan. (Except perhaps for Nigel Lindsay, who was still carrying on the work of the BFL Chain Magazine scheme with quiet efficiency.) However KFS soon demonstrated that mere exile to Germany couldn't remove him from the fan scene. Another *OF* duly appeared in March. There was a letter from one James Grimes bitterly bemoaning the lassitude of the membership of the BFL, and a complementary one from Fred Brown explaining patiently that the London fans ("The LONDON CIRCLE, if you must have a name for us.") did NOT want to form a club. This was the first round in a long, long struggle.

More important to me than *OF*, as it turned out, was one of its enclosures... the first issue of Norman Ashfield's *Alembic*. It was just two

duplicated foolscap pages, stapled together in the top lefthand corner. It was this that started me off as a fanzine publisher, for Madeleine held it up and said, “Surely you could do better than *that*!”; and I thought maybe I could. I hope this doesn’t hurt Norman’s feelings. It wasn’t that we had such a contempt for *Alembic*, it was rather that it was more our sort of thing than *OF* had been. *OF* had had news items and all sorts of proper magazine stuff, whereas *Alembic* was just comments and general talk by Norman. Besides this was only the second fanzine I’d seen, and it made me realize that there was no closed shop. (I was of course getting Walter Gillings’s *Fantasy Review* but that was professionally printed and, I thought, professionally written. Gillings never answered my letters and his contributors were all strange names: I assumed they were all august literary figures, whereas of course they were actually pseudonyms for ordinary fans.)

I wrote Norman a letter of comment, in which I made my first joke in fandom. “I notice these flying utensils have been reported from Italy: I wonder what they’re seeing in the Plains of Lombardy?” This was a pretty sad joke, but no worse than the draft first issue of our fmz which I eventually came up with. I finally got a friend in the office to type it out for me, and it worked out to three closely typed pages of foolscap, in a form which I now recognize as that of a column. It started off...

Pilgrim’s Progress

> Way back in the bad old days when Asimov was just a name in Brass Tacks and van Vogt had not yet found his vocation, all an author needed was an idea, and the more fantastic the better: as long as he destroyed a few million people or a universe or two and made everything come all right in the end by marrying hero to heroine he didn’t even have to worry about style. As for science, it was enough to mention rheostats or coils occasionally or possibly to wedge in a slab of impressive jargon which the morons could conveniently skip, flattered at the thought that they were supposed to understand it. This was known as the educative value of science fiction.

...and continued thus for almost a page, followed by other shorter items of comment and “news”. One, headed “Sykes Seeks Soaked Civilization”, was about a certain Egerton Sykes who had according to the press formed an “Atlantis Research Group” for underwater exploration. This same

Sykes, who was continually being reported as being about to go to Mount Ararat to look for the remains of the Ark, was to make a brief but stormy appearance in fandom before long. There was also a dig at Hubbard and a little article about bookbinding, based on my own attempts to bind my little collection of *ASF*s. Hardly any of this stuff ever saw print.

Meanwhile the April 1948 *Booklist* unexpectedly came out, Ron Holmes having been discharged from hospital. It mentioned that one Tony Young would be enclosing a sheet with the next mailing. With excessive delicacy I wrote to him that I'd meant to do the same and would he like me to hold mine up so as not to queer his pitch. He replied sensibly "The more the merrier", so we went on with our plans.

By now I'd had replies from Doerr and MacInnes. Neither was particularly chatty, but Doerr suggested I join the NFFF and MacInnes (who at that time had the superbly science-fictional address of "Mars Estates, Baltimore") sent me a copy of *Necromancer*, the third fanzine I'd seen. I still have it, because for some time I filed any fmz I received along with my correspondence, but I don't recall that I was particularly impressed. It was very much a science fiction fanzine, which was all right by me at the time, but it was mostly about American sf which I'd never seen. All I was interested in was *ASF*. Even the fanzine we planned to put out was primarily intended to increase our net for pulling in the back issues we wanted.

When I'd got the draft typed up I made enquiries as to how much it would cost to have it professionally duplicated. Then the project was quietly abandoned. Until one afternoon a week or so later I happened to call on a friend who worked in a chemist's shop. I went up to the attic to help him sort out the junk while we were talking, and I came across an odd looking metal box festooned with levers. It was a little printing press the boss had bought ages ago to run off billheads, and then dumped in the attic and forgotten. I borrowed it and smuggled it out under my coat, along with a composing stick and all the type we could find. There proved to be enough only to set up 2½ lines, but I wanted to see if the machine worked before I bought any more, so I sent away the roller to the makers (Adana Ltd.) to be recovered.

While we were waiting, *OF* No.4 came out, dated June 1948, closely followed by the July 1948 BFL *Booklist*. This was an Emergency Issue, leading off with the following editorial:

> Since the conception of the Library I have struggled against adverse circumstances, blow after blow has rocked me, unemployment, illness and many other misfortunes, the latest of

> which – I need not give details – has finally broken up my existence. I am almost on the verge of a nervous breakdown, and I look to the members to return, in what measure they can, the thirty odd hours per week I have lavished upon them during the last three years. Primarily, I need your co-operation in having all items borrowed returned to me by August 1st. I need someone to take over the Library temporarily until I am on my feet again. I need money and request that those interested in the items I have for sale respond quickly. To those who have the power; can you get me a decent job, anywhere?

I wrote him a sympathetic letter, but I'm afraid that, vulture-like, I was really more interested in the *ASF*s he had for sale; not that I got any of them. Ron Holmes was never heard from again.

This *Booklist* also carried a second reference to the *BFL Directory of Anglofandom*, a mysterious *Necronomicon*-like document which had a curious history. The previous *Booklist* had said it was now available. This one formally blacklisted one Thomas MacDonald of Carlisle, who had "promised to print it but had not returned the material or answered our letters".

Round about this time there arrived *Whitconzine*, a report of an informal one-day Convention held in the White Horse on 15th May 1948. It was in this I first saw the name of A. Vincent Clarke. He had a long, serious and comprehensive report of the affair, which had apparently been attended by some 50 or 60 fans, almost all from the London area. It had been organized by one John Newman, and the platform party was Walt Gillings (Chairman), A. Bertram Chandler, Ken Chapman, Ted Carnell, John Newman and Arthur C. Clarke. Attendees included Bill Temple, Daphne Bradley (later to become Daphne Buckmaster), Sandy Sandfield, Ted Tubb and Ken Johnson from the North.

The *Whitconzine* included also an article by Ted Tubb called "The Need For Organization", in which he appealed to the younger fans to show what they could do. Ken Slater had been present at the Whitcon only in spirit, having sent along £2 for drinks, but on 1st August he issued a circular headed "The Time Has Come" in which he put forward proposals for a national fan organization. There would be a series of levels, from single fans through town or area groups, county representatives, regional representatives, etc., culminating in a Council. Each fan would register his abilities, and resources with the next higher formation and orders from the Council would be transmitted to him through this chain. (All it needed was a uniform and a Fieldmarshal.) Ken himself didn't want to be more than a

fairly active member.

I wrote offering to help, but suggesting that if the chain of command broke down the rank and file fans would be left in the air and that it would be simpler to have communications issue direct from the Council to everyone than have stencils cut all over the country. On 15th September KFS issued another circular saying that sufficient enthusiasts had come forward to form at least the nucleus of a Society. There would be a Conference in London on 26th September and an open meeting at the White Horse on 9th October.

Meanwhile our roller had come back and we'd tested the machine. It printed. I hadn't much faith in Adana so I took down a couple of letters from our little supply of type to a printer's supply house in Belfast and ordered half a font of the same. When it arrived it was nothing like the stuff we had, being a very bold condensed type, but we figured it would be stronger. Anyway we were too keen to get started to have any more delay. We had set up about half a page when the i's gave out. I reworded the editorial to reduce the incidence of i's – this was to become standard practice – but that still gave us only a few extra lines. Here it was that James leapt into the breech by volunteering to do woodcuts to fill up the page. All we knew about woodcuts was that you got them by cutting wood, but James set to determinedly with plywood and a razor blade and produced results that we thought were wonderful. This was the origin of James's famous wood and linocuts, which were the most remarkable phenomena in the history of fan art. He did a symbolic cover showing a spaceship and an open book (a more polished version of which I still use on my posh notepaper), which nearly led to our first editorial argument. He had been to immense pains to carve out a border for the picture; I thought it looked more tasteful without it and persuaded him to chop it off. I was backed by Dick Merritt, a friend of mine who was mildly interested in sf and who'd come in on the fanzine project. Before the first issue was completed he moved to England and we eventually lost touch with him.

On 20th September I wrote to John Gunn in Nottingham, who KFS had told me had taken over the BEL, to say that we were producing a fanzine and could he let us know his next mailing date. He replied on the 23rd that he was sending out an emergency issue next week, and the deadline for the following one would be 15th October. By 11th October *Slant* #1 was ready and Gunn still hadn't sent out his emergency issue. I wrote to him asking if *Slant* could go out with it. He ignored my letter and distributed his Emergency *Booklist* on 20th October. I wrote to him the day I got it asking for his next mailing date and offering to pay part of the

mailing costs. He ignored this too and sent out another *Booklist* on the 9th November. I wrote to him again more in sorrow than in anger, offering to send out the next mailing for him. We would have sent out *Slant* on our own, except that we didn't have any addresses. The Emergency *Booklist* had announced, with apologies to MacDonald, that the *BFL Directory of Anglofandom* was a splendid job and now in circulation, and copies could be obtained from the Editor. But neither money nor entreaties could produce anything from Gunn but *Booklists*.

So by the time Christmas was near we had been sitting on our first fanzine for over two frustrating months, and our first creative pride had cooled to misgivings. Viewed dispassionately, it wasn't much to look at... three folded foolscap sheets, saddle-stitched to make a twelve page magazine... and there weren't any big names in the contributors. In fact there weren't any names at all, since there weren't any contributors. As well as the editorial (in which it was mentioned that the name of the magazine had been chosen by sticking a pin in the dictionary and choosing the second word thus impaled – the first had been "pamphrey", a kind of cabbage), I had written two columns, a story which was pretty poor as a story but which contained a gimmick which still hasn't been used by anyone else and still seems pretty good to me, a little article called "Telekinesis and Buttered Toast" which was supposed to be deadpan funny and two bits of satirical verse written expressly to fill up spaces of a certain size. After all these years I can at last (I think) look at it quite objectively, and on the whole I suppose it wasn't bad for two inexperienced neofen, considering the standards of fandom at the time. It suffered from a certain lack of intimacy as well as naivete, but then we didn't know any of the people we were sending it to... and in any case printing is an inhibiting medium for spontaneity, when you are setting the type yourself.

In any case, whatever our private doubts... and we never expressed them to each other....the thing represented such a colossal expenditure of time and trouble that we had to go on believing in it. The thought that we'd wasted some 100 hours of backbreaking toil was too horrible to contemplate. So we continued week after week and month after month impatiently watching the post and thinking hard thoughts about John Gunn.

On Christmas Day a parcel and a letter arrived. The parcel contained nearly 200 copies of the December *Booklist* – two quarto sheets starting off: "Hi Members! Here's *Booklist* once again, with my very best wishes for a Merry Xmas and a Happy New Year.... Walter Willis and his gang in

Belfast are distributing *Booklist* this month so that they can include their own production of a fan mag....” We thought ruefully it was a bad start for *Slant* that we should get the blame for holding up the *Booklist* till after Christmas. The letter said: “Herewith the new edition of *Booklist*, which has just arrived to hand, and I am bundling it off to you rightaway.” There was also more about the mysterious document....

> I am also enclosing the only copy of the Directory of Anglo-Fandom in existence, so please don’t lose it.

There was neither stamps nor money enclosed, and indeed we never did get any recompense for the cost of the mailing, but it didn’t matter anyway because there was no postal collection until after Boxing Day. We spent most of the intervening time writing addresses and sticking wrappers for about 150 people – the 49 noted as fully paid-up members of the BFL plus 101 others chosen more or less at random – and on 27th December 1948, the first fanzine ever published in Ireland was released on an unsuspecting fandom.

I Remember Me – 2
Slant, Vin¢ Clarke, Ken Bulmer and Clive Jackson

At the end of our last thrilling instalment our two innocent neofen, Walter Willis and James White, had just sent out their first fanzine... a little twelve-page affair called *Slant*, hand printed on a junked machine... and were anxiously awaiting developments.

The first one was a copy of *Slant* returned through the post. This was all right though – it was a copy I had mailed to myself to check that the mailing would get through in spite of its defying the postal regulations. I opened it and read it through, trying to put myself in the mental attitude of a stranger. I don't know if you ever do this, but anything I publish I can read over and over again from differing points of view: when I'm not pressed for time and when, as sometimes happens, it's something I like myself, I often read through the copies going to various people... Grennell's copy, Ken's copy, Russell's copy. – seeing each one afresh from a different aspect. This time the synthetic stranger thought *Slant* #1 wasn't too bad.

The first outside reaction was from the nearest English fan to us, T.L. MacDonald of Carlisle, the same one who had been so mysteriously concerned with the non-printing of the illusory *BFL Directory of AngloFandom*. It wasn't a comment though, or even a letter, just a few lines of verse in answer to some of mine about the pronunciation of van Vogt. For the first taste of egoboo we had to wait another day, and it came from one Raymond Bailey of Melton Mowbray, Leicestershire. His momentous letter began:

> I thoroughly enjoyed every word of *Slant*... the illustrations were very good....

As well as this heady stuff he sent some stamps to help with production costs, so there could be no doubt he meant it. Bailey has vanished from the fan scene these many years, but I hope he somehow sees this and realizes we're still grateful. For days afterwards we lived in a rose-pink cloud.

During the next few weeks we got some ten other letters, all more or less appreciative. They converted us from amateur publishers to fans. The writers were people called Medcalf, Fears (who started "Dear Mr. Wallis",

enclosed a copy of *Science Fantasy News* #1 and invited me to join the SFS, of which I was already a member), Gunn, Bell, Hillman, Jackson, Walker, Kerr and Clarke. Clarke was the A. Vincent Clarke who had reported the Whitcon and whose address appeared to be the source of *SFN* (no editor was named). He was obviously a serious thoughtful type and his 2½ page letter was much the best we got. If the present day Vin¢ will forgive me, I'll quote...

> Dear Walter:
>
> Many thanks for *Slant* #1. It was a complete suprise *[sic. Vin¢ has always had trouble with that word],* and its printing rather shook me after having been struggling with the rudiments of duplicating, in helping to turn out *SFN* No.l. It must have taken you an awfully long time to do, but it certainly looks better than a mimeographed mag.
>
> When we were discussing the possible name of *SFN*, I believe *Slant* was mentioned as a possibility, but as we all had names that we thought were good, we settled on the prosaic *SFN* as favouring no one. *S*'s s-f-ish ring is probably due to the "Slan" part.
>
> ....Well, as to general criticism, I like the layout, and the woodcuts haven't come out at all badly – the cover's good. Tell James White to watch that tendency, in a lefthanded person, to draw spaceships with their noses pointing right (left on the copy). Or am I wrong? If all one needs is some plywood and a razor blade I must see what I can do! I seem to recognize the illustration at the end of the story – Uranus eclipsing the Sun, is it not?
>
> I like your sense of humour as exhibited in the Editorial and the bits of terse verse (or terse Erse verse), but would have preferred a serious treatment of the telekinesis theme....
>
> ....Well, as you will have gathered, I think you've put up a pretty good show for a nearly one-man effort – I shouldn't make it too much of a one-man show if you can help it however, and pu-leese don't have too much facetious comment.
>
> Good luck and good reading,
>
> A. Vincent Clarke

He *was* wrong about James being lefthanded and we thought he was a little solemn to have taken seriously our pretended ignorance of *Slan*, but it was a very intelligent letter and we felt the future of the SFS was in safe hands.

But Ken Slater didn't seem quite so confident. This first issue of *SFN* had apparently come out just in time to avert an explosion from Germany, where KFS had been pacing up and down impatiently like an expectant father. In *OF*, dated December 1948, he had rumbled:

> By the time this page gets out, I hope the SFS have produced their first newssheet. It is intended that this be sent out every six weeks....But, my friends, I am not running the Society, and I hope you will all join me in chivvying, in a friendly spirit, the committee when they seem to be, er, not showing any action. First issue of the News Sheet was due before Christmas....have you had it yet? (And on the back cover.) To date, I have not had any more news about our lil' club... hope the Committee haven't started to hibernate.... someone down in the South of England give 'em a nudge for me please.

However he can have had little fault to find with *SFN* itself. The editorial said earnestly:

> It is intended that this magazine shall provide a common meeting ground for all lovers of science, weird and fantastic literature. In it, all are invited to air their views, opinions, likes and dislikes, for it is our magazine.

This was followed by a lone article by Ken Slater about the history of British fan organizations and the aims of the SFS, and 3 pages of news and reviews. The names of the SFS Committee were given as Fears (Secy.), Plumridge (Treasurer), Clarke, Clay, Duncombe, Newman and Slater. In accordance with Ken Slater's draft constitution, all communications to them about the Society from ordinary members were to go to the Regional Secretaries, whose addresses were listed.

Shortly afterwards I heard from my own Gauleiter, one Peter Bell of Glasgow. He was "glad to see that we've got such a flourishing fmz going in our group already." I eagerly offered to help by printing announcements and advertisements, but heard nothing further until February, when Bell apologized for the delay, but he had "been engaged in trying to form a fan group here in Glasgow." I had a brief mental picture of Peter wandering the streets of Glasgow ringing his bell and accosting passers-by.

Spring brought a minor renaissance in British fan publishing. There was the first issue of *Wonder*, by Mike Tealby of Leicester, an *SFN Bulletin* announcing a one-day Convention in London at Easter, *SFN* #2 with six pages of news and reviews including the very first published

egoboo for *Slant* (“an interesting little affair”) and the news that Ted Tubb had replaced John Newman on the SFS Committee, another *Alembic*, an *OF* Trading Supplement and another *SFNMinor* acknowledging the loan of a rotary duplicator from Ken Slater. Previously *SFN* had been run off on a flatbed... if the word “run” can ever be used in connection with a flatbed. Just as a matter of interest, the current US fanzines round about this time included Liebscher’s *Chanticleer*, Burbee’s *Shangri L’Affaires*, Sneary’s *Gripes & Groans* and Rapp’s *Spacewarp*. I didn’t see any of these until much later of course... this list was from an N3F leaflet. Eva Firestone had inducted me into the organization by offering to pay my dues by way of a subscription to *Slant* and sending me an application form. I was too busy assembling material for *Slant* #2 to pay much attention.

I wrote again to the “C. Walker” who had commented on *Slant* #1, now identifying him as the Cedric Walker who had had a good little story in *OF*. He had offered to send material, otherwise I wouldn’t have dared: at the time I was doubtful about the ethics of such matters. In fact I had written to Mike Tealby for advice....

> ...what are the ethics of this contributor business? I mean do you think other fanzine editors would think it a low act if you wrote to people whose work you admired in their zines and asked them for a contribution. Stealing authors? Would be glad to know what you think.... Particularly interested in Newman and Ridley.

Mike’s reply was evasive.... I think he was trying to hold onto his own authors.

I also wrote to Wilkie Conner of North Carolina, whose name had been given to me by N3F Welcommittee member Zeda Mishler as a willing contributor, but my main hope was Clive Jackson. His letter of comment on *Slant* #1, written on 9th January 1949, had read:

> Dear Walter:
>
> This is just a brief note in appreciation of your brain-child, *Slant*. I’m not a fan of long standing or great experience, but I think your zine is a praiseworthy effort. The only fault that I can find with it, an unavoidable one, is that there isn’t enough of it. The part I liked best was “Telekinesis and Buttered Toast” – did you write it, I wonder, or was it some other lunatic?

From the slender evidence of this first paragraph I deduced that here was a kindred spirit and eagerly took him up on his suggestion that he might supply material. Having heard nothing further, I wrote again in May and

got back almost immediately a brilliant little Bradbury pastiche called "The Still Small Voice", which was subsequently to see republication in prozines, books and newspapers. I also got a nice little story from Walker, who was a much more solemn type and abhorred my attempts at humour, but the approach to Conner hadn't been so rewarding. He had sent me an article about trends in American sf which I thought was wordy and trite. (There's nothing like setting type by hand to give you a respect for brevity.) I held onto it until Slant 2 was finished and then plucked up the courage to return it on the grounds that I hadn't been able to fit it in and that anyway most British fans knew about American sf: I suggested something about US fans and fan doings would be more acceptable. Because of the length of time it took to produce an issue of *Slant* we were stuck with fiction for most of the contents, but I still wanted some gossipy stuff.

Another thing that worried me a lot about this time was a solicited contribution from Frank Cooper of London, who ran a bookshop and library and had some connection with Nova Publications, and was therefore a person of awe-inspiring importance. This was the time just after Fantasy Review had published a translation of the notorious article in the Russian *Literaturnaya Gazyeta* attacking American science fiction, the reverberations of which have still not quite died down. Everyone assumed only too readily that the Russian article meant that sf was proscribed in the Soviet Union, but I knew this wasn't so. According to Ashby's book *A Scientist in Soviet Russia* science fiction was very popular in Russia and there was even a special section of the Soviet Writers' Praesidium devoted to it. But unfortunately this was all I knew. I tried to get further information by writing to the British-Soviet Friendship Society, but they never replied. So I wrote to Frank Cooper, who had seemed to be the only pro-Soviet contributor to the discussion in *Fantasy Review*, and invited him to state his case in *Slant*. Unfortunately his article didn't seem to me to be up to much. I tried rewriting it, but when I'd finished the result bore so little resemblance to what Cooper had written that I didn't dare print it. After a lot of mental anguish I guiltily returned Cooper's article. After that I took care to solicit material only from people I was pretty sure would come up with the sort of thing I wanted.

By the 13th May 1949, *Slant* #2 was nearly finished and I wrote to Vincent Clarke asking him for the next *SFN* mailing date. We had to have some two weeks' notice because it would take that long to set up and run off the last few pages with news and Peter Bell's SFS advertisements and other perishable stuff. Clarke had invited me to send out *Slant* with *SFN*

and I was only too willing to save the postage and trouble: anyway the list of SFS members published in *SFN* hadn't given any addresses so I'd no choice.

By the end of May I'd received no reply, so I wrote again. Another month passed. In desperation I appealed to Frank Fears. He didn't answer either. I was furious. Here we were kicking our heels again for months, just like last time. I wasn't going to stand for it. On 7th July I wrote a registered letter to Clarke and sent copies to Fears and Plumridge....

> Dear Vincent:
>
> I suppose that since my letters of the 13th and 31st may remain unanswered there is very little point in writing to you again, but I feel I should give you a final opportunity to reply.
>
> If I don't hear from you by the 15th July I don't see what else I can do but print the enclosed explanation and send out *Slant* No.2 myself.
>
> I must say that this has been a great disappointment to me. I could understand it if you had thought *Slant* not worthy of SFS distribution – though I have already told you that the second issue is a considerable improvement.
>
> PS. A stamped addressed envelope is enclosed.

Note the undertones of hurt pride and insecurity. The aweful Special Announcement ran as follows. (The first sentence refers to the note "Issued free to all members of the British Science Fantasy Society.")

Special Announcement

> The reference on the contents page to the SFS is no longer applicable. As far as *Slant* is concerned the SFS has apparently ceased to exist. Letters to Vincent Clarke and Frank Fears over the last two months have failed to elicit even the courtesy of an acknowledgement. Accordingly, as I have been unable to obtain even a list of SFS members, this issue of *Slant* is being sent out only to people on my own mailing list and at my own expense, as was No.1. (Note the sideways swipe at John Gunn. I was right in there, bitching.)
>
> If circumstances remain unchanged future issues of *Slant* will be distributed in the same way. If the SFS has really folded we will be happy to offer our facilities to other fanzine editors on a co-operative basis by providing regular quarterly mailings for

their own productions. Our present circulation is 240.

This got results. Both Plumridge and Clarke replied by return of post. Plumridge sent the list of SFS addresses and promised to refund our postage on sending out *Slant* separately if we hadn't heard from AVC by the 15th. He himself hadn't heard from him in weeks and thought he must be ill. He hoped the "Special Announcement" wouldn't be necessary.

Vince's letter was contrite and poignant, and enclosed a copy of the new *SFN*, No.3. There was, surprisingly, a reference to *Slant* in the editorial.... "We are hoping to include the second *Slant* with *SFN* #4; Walt Willis, editor of this printed fanzine, has been ready to produce for some time, but not knowing when this *SFN* (which sets the date-line for the next) would appear, we have not been able to contact him about it."

The reasoning behind this explanation confused me somewhat, but Vince's letter threw some light on it, even if it didn't make it look any more logical.

> The trouble has been caused by the fact that up to the present, the *SFNews*, and most active administration by the Committee has involved yours truly as the most active agent.... Unfortunately... if anything happens to me the whole business is kaput for a time. (He went on to explain that he had been under the weather for a while.) I suppose the best thing would have been to have posted off some of the work to other fans with typewriters, but I foolishly credited myself with more energy and spare time than I actually possessed, and thought I could manage it myself. At the moment, I'm looking for another job and lodgings away from home (these lodgings turned out to be the famous Epicentre), which also complicates things.
>
> ....I never dreamed that this *SFN* would take so long to prepare. I thought it would be out at least five weeks ago, when I could have sent you the information.... If you would overlook my rudeness and send *Slant* along whenever it's ready, I'll push it out whether there is anything to accompany it or not....
>
> As you see, from the enclosed, I haven't been exactly idling my time away, in spite of everything. I've duplicated 130 *SFN* #3s, 150 new membership forms, 100 odd copies of the "Introduction", 170 *SFNMinor*s, all of which I stencilled, and have also turned out, with help, 50 of the "Hints on Stencilling" which were stencilled rather badly by Ken Slater.... Happy, carefree days!

I reflected ruefully how much trouble would have been saved if some of this energy had been devoted to the writing of one postcard, but I was learning, the hard way, that fandom has different standards from the Civil Service. We set to and finished off *Slant* (without the special announcement) and sent it out ourselves, with a friendly postcard to Vince. Yes, I even kept copies of postcards... didn't I tell you I was in the Civil Service? Look:

> Dear Vincent:
>
> Thanks very much for your letter. What a relief! Was afraid I was going to be left high and dry. You seem to have got enough to do at the moment so I'm sending out *Slant* myself. Hope you like it. Am sending out another 160 to other people – BFL members, Americans, etc. If you like, let me have some of those SFS brochures and I'll send them with it. You seem to have had a poor time of it lately – hope you're feeling better.

As you can see, I was already beginning to acquire the attitude of affectionate tolerance which enabled me to remain friends with those unreliable but likeable Londoners throughout the years.

Slant #2 had 26 pages and a cover woodcut by James showing a helicopter dropping flares on a wrecked spaceship, a scene from the Cedric Walker story chosen because it was all sharp angles and highlights and had lots and lots of black (in a woodcut, white is work). We innocently thought Walker would be overcome at "getting the cover", and such a wonderful cover too, but he seemed to take it quite calmly. As well as the Jackson and Walker stories there was one by me with a highly complicated plot related with such regard for brevity as to amount to little more than a synopsis, an allegedly humorous story about how an underground railway tunnel through the centre of the Earth foundered in a pool of Universal Solvent, a short-short ghost story (which was later to have the rare distinction of being reprinted in a US hectoed fanzine called *The Purple Bem*), a column called "The Prying Fan" (an allusion to Merwin's "The Frying Pan") and the editorial. None of these had my name on them except the long story (well, it must have been all of 2,500 words), which I was very proud of at the time. Having set it up in type letter by letter I could see all the subtleties and profundities quite clearly, and was quite disappointed when readers complained it was hard to follow. I read it just now and damned if I can make head or tail of it myself. However it was a pretty wonderful magazine, we thought at the time.

James and our original co-founder Dick Merritt, by then in England,

had been rather disappointed in the response to *Slant* #1. A dozen letters seemed poor return for six weeks spare time. However, I'd been pleased that even twelve people had taken the trouble to write, and since it was obvious that *Slant* #2 was several times better than *Slant* #1, we were happily confident that the response would be more than twice as good. Alas for the innocent hopes of neofans. Two weeks after the mailing I was unburdening myself on Clive Jackson....

> Maybe you'll be surprised at my answering your letter (received today) so soon, but don't feel yourself rushed. It's just that I'm all keyed up for writing long letters ever since *Slant* went out and haven't been given the opportunity. After No.1 went out there were about a dozen nice commentful letters like yours from various people and I expected to get more this time, in the proportion that No.2 was better than No.1. But NO. We got about half a dozen straight off from people who confessed to having read nothing but the "For Sale" ads and couldn't wait to get their hands out. Two or three from dim but well-meaning types who "haven't had time to read the mag yet" but were very grateful. We were beginning to think that nobody would read it. Finally two letters from semi-illiterates, or possibly elementary school children, also about the ads, but saying also a few ill chosen words about the mag....And that's all so far. Very disappointing. But I suppose a lot of people are on holiday and anyway I sent nearly as many to America as to England this time.

The US recipients were mainly picked at random from the N3F membership list, and all the officers of that noble organization.

It wasn't as if there was nothing going on in British fandom at the time. *SFN* #3 had had a report by Plumridge on the 1949 Loncon, a one-day affair that ground on right to 10:30 in the evening. Familiar names there included Gillings, Temple, AV and AC Clarke, Laurence Sandfield, Daphne B., Ted Tubb and Derek Pickles. Ted Carnell was absent, suffering from vaccine fever contracted as part of the preliminaries for his visit to the Convention later that year.

In July the first printed *OF* came out and I wrote Ken Slater 2½ pages of enthusiastic comment. Ken replied commenting on my comments but failing to refer to *Slant*. This was a pattern that was repeated for quite a while, until I stopped commenting on *OF*. At the time we suspected he was peeved at our having beaten him to the post in the matter of printing

(we didn't consider *Fantasy Review* a fanzine) but probably he just didn't care much for *Slant*, an idea that was inconceivable to us at that stage. His published comments were usually to the effect that it must mean a terrible lot of work and we were rather to be pitied: this used to annoy us quite a lot, because our subconscious agreed that we were mugs. Besides, Ken had his own worries. At this point he had spent £25 for 1,000 copies and got in 20 subscriptions.

The gloom of the rest of July and part of August was relieved by short but kind letters from Mike Rosenblum and Ted Tubb, but that was all. I wrote to Mike Tealby commenting on *Wonder* #2, ready to share our woes, but he replied disgustingly cheerfully that he had got much more comment on his second issue than on his first. He thought it might be because he charged a subscription rate.

But on 11th August the tide turned, because on that day we got a letter from the fabulous Forry Ackerman: "Hello Walt – I set the brand new *TWS* aside to glance thru *Slant* #2, got interested in reading the contents. 'The Still Small Voice' is 'Ray' markably Bradburyesque *[My Ghod, eight years and I set it up in type, and I've just noticed that's a pun!]* and I'm sure my friend Ray would be amused to have a copy...." In 1952 in Los Angeles Bradbury was to tell me he'd got that copy and commented on it, but I never got his letter. Forry went on to express interest in the Walker story also from the agenting point of view and asked for 25 copies of the magazine, offering a promag per copy. He also sent a story of his own for us and said he was asking his client E.E. Evans to send us one too.

This was by far the most wonderful thing that had happened to us and I wrote post-haste to Jackson and Walker with the great news. By this time I was carrying on a close correspondence with both of them and had invited them over to visit us. Walker's plans fell through, but Jackson came over for a week or so towards the end of August.

His visit was something of a disappointment. This was our very first meeting with another fan and we'd been expecting too much. We'd innocently assumed that Jackson would sparkle continuously, like he did in his letters, which were witty, fluent and sophisticated. Instead he was quiet, almost lethargic. We liked him, but conversation after the first few hours was full of embarrassing lulls. I hadn't yet realized that for bright conversation you need between four and eight people. There was also the affair of the abortive ascent of the Cave Hill. This is a mountain just outside Belfast, about 1100 feet high and very steep on one side. It's a popular walk for Belfast people, at least those who live on James's side of

the city – I'd climbed most of the prominent mountains in Ireland but never even been on this one. James, acting as guide, scorned the easy path and led us up the steep face of the mountain. We soon found ourselves in a forest of fir trees growing at an acute angle from a wet and slippery slope, so that the only way you could make progress was in a series of desperate lunges from one tree to another, throwing your arms around the trunk until you found a secure foothold for the next lurch. By this method we traversed back and forth until we were about halfway up, and then Clive went all white and shivery and sat down, clinging to a tree. We thought he was probably scared, but we didn't like to appear to assume that, with him being in the RAF and everything, so we all passed it off as a sick-turn. I told James the route was too difficult for me anyway and he agreed he'd been foolish to try it in wet weather and we made our way down again shortly with, we hoped, our visitor's face saved. It was a trivial and silly affair but I've felt ever since that it created a barrier between ourselves and Clive, us thinking he might be embarrassed or resentful, and suspecting he thought that we thought he was a coward. It would have been better if we'd been frank all round and laughed it off – after all there's nothing to be ashamed of in being allergic to heights even if you are in the RAF – but we were younger and less knowledgeable about people then and having once started on the path of insincerity we couldn't see any way to get off it and clear the matter up. The subject was never mentioned again... though for all I know Clive never gave it another thought. And I still haven't been up the Cave Hill: the highest point we now take visitors on the usual fan tour is the Tower of the Enchanted Duplicator, on a grassy hill on my side of Belfast. Though even there we had trouble with the ultra-urban Evelyn Smith and a stile... but that's a long way ahead yet.

Clive's visit was far from a total loss of course. We did have a lot of good talk, just not as much as we'd foolishly been expecting, and on his last night we kicked around various plot ideas, one of which was "The Swordsmen of Varnis", which probably holds some sort of record for number of subsequent pro republications.

After the visitor had left I resumed my fanac. Arthur Rapp, then an N3F official, had started sending me *Spacewarp*: I wanted to go on getting it between issues of *Slant*, so I sent him a letter of comment, part of which he published. It was a very poor letter, but it was the first thing I ever had published in another fanzine. Having become an adherent of Roscoeism, the revelation of which was in the first *Spacewarp* I got, I asked for permission to reprint the Sacred Writings: and availed myself of it a mere seven years later.

Round about this time *Wonder* #3 came out, with probably the most hideous cover girl ever seen on a fanzine, even including *Femizine*. There was a story by Walker and an article in defence of the Shaver Mystery by Ron Deacon. There was also an editorial, which I read with mixed emotions... "In a letter to this address Walter A. Willis said that he was rather disappointed in the response to the second issue of *Slant*. Whatever the reason, I'm glad to say that such is not the case with *Wonder*. If you read *Slant*, drop Walt a line now and again...." It was nice of Mike, but I didn't want charity especially from what even then I regarded as a crudzine, though I probably didn't know the word then. This just about completed my disillusionment with British fandom and accelerated my tendency to turn towards American fandom which had been started by Forry's letter and *Spacewarp*. And by another great event of that month, a letter from Rick Sneary, already a legendary figure to me from his letters in promags. The one to me was a full two pages of interesting and sensible comments: it was the first real letter of comment we'd got on that second issue which we'd thought so wonderful, and I was so grateful I made him our first life subscriber. There was one thing, though, which I couldn't understand in his letter, the slogan at the end. I asked him about it. "What is the purport," I enquired, "of South Gate In '58?"

Then, on 9th September 1949, came a letter which stopped me writing off British fandom... and indeed did as much to keep me in fandom as any single thing. It was 3½ handwritten pages from somebody called Bulmer, who was apparently now living with Vince Clarke at 84 Drayton Park, Highbury, London. It started off with some enthusiastic praise of *Slant*, which was meat and drink to us, with a passing recommendation of an old mag called *Zenith* published by one Harry Turner, and then went on to technicalities....

> I notice you used an ordinary M.F. Printing for the most of the mag with a centre of Cream Laid and it looks like "Kingsclene" Cream Wove for the cover. For the M.F. the ink must have been too runny, for she shows through. Try an S.C. and see if you get better results – although an S.C. is hard on type face.

We didn't understand a word of this – we'd just been asking for "paper" – but we were immensely impressed and felt quite proud of ourselves for using all that stuff he mentioned. After commenting on *Slant* in detail he went on to make a brief mention of his own activities....

> ....I've started a small effort called *Nirvana*, to be increased later on – if enthusiasm and money permit – to a full size subscription

magazine.

...and then referred briefly to the enclosure, a story of his own called "Wishful Thinking" which he was submitting to *Slant*. We ran it in the next issue with the title changed to "Last Wish" because we hadn't got enough large letters for two long words like that. Any facility I have for thinking up titles can be traced back to early training in coping with such eventualities. Ken finished up in a blaze of glory – for us, that is:

> If I do see it in No.3 *Slant* I'll know it's in good company in the best fmz in present existence.... I haven't seen *Operation Fantast* in its printed guise (or even duped) but I hear it's a flop....I gather you are in the trade – the whole atmosphere of *Slant* reeks of a professional job....

Naturally this unbounded enthusiasm for our poor little brainchild gave me a deep affection for this Ken Bulmer, but it's a feeling that a more adequate acquaintanceship with him has not diminished: quite the reverse. What he said may have been overly fulsome... we even thought so at the time... but it was nice of him to say it and take the trouble to give us some encouragement, which he must have guessed we needed. And I like people who can show enthusiasm and appreciation. Equanimity is a fine virtue, but as expressed through the mails is hard to distinguish from torpor. Anyhow, I like to think that the regard we felt for Ken after this letter wasn't just gratitude, but a subconscious appreciation of the kindness and sensibility I was to find in him when we really got to know one another.

I replied at once, in a letter I would quote if I could find the slightest trace of interest in it, but didn't hear again from Ken for a couple of months. Meanwhile I'd been looking for material from the N3F Manuscript Bureau and in October three pieces arrived from Wrai Ballard, who was running it at the time. There was a story by Wilkie Conner and a poem by Ed Ludwig, which I returned at once, and a piece by Bob Johnson (then publishing a fantastically ostentatious thing called *Orb*) and his girl Sandy Charnoff, which I returned to them for revision and never got back. I tried to explain my Editorial Policy.... "I'd like *Slant* to be a bit more sophisticated – it's hard to avoid the word highbrow – than most fan magazines, so I'm looking for material that's original, off the beaten track. I don't mind if it's obscure or even queer, as long as it's intelligent and different.... The trouble is that the people I'm after don't read fanzines, and don't think of writing for them, but I might get a few of them in time."

In the next instalment our sophisticated Hero, bless his little cotton socks, gets a typewriter, encounters Chuck Harris, and has other wonderful

and terrible things happen to him. Will he survive?

I Remember Me – 3
Slant, Vin¢ Clarke and Chuck Harris

As I would be very surprised if any of you remember, we left our heroes working like eager and inky beavers on the third issue of *Slant*. They were toiling in the shadow of a December 19th deadline, which had been given to them in the summer by Ted Tubb as the date of a bumper SFS mailing for Christmas. It was a deadline which as time went on seemed to exercise a hypnotic fascination on the whole of British fandom: like a hen hypnotized by a chalked line on the ground, they seemed unable to think of anything else. By the end of November there hadn't been an *SFN* for five months. Ken Bulmer wrote:

> The idea was to have an ish out by now and a bumper Christmas number in the mails for the blokes to digest with their Christmas pud. I hope that still works out, but everything seems to have turned against us....
>
> Vince has big plans to get out an *SFN* every month commencing with the New Year....

Vince himself explained:

> The duplicator which Ken Slater loaned the SFS has turned out rather a disappointment (instead of reams of *SFNews*). We've had a lot of bother with it, scrapping finished stencils right and left, and in desperation Ken has gone and done it. Bought a Gestetner with automatic feed, automatic counter, and all one needs do (we hope) is turn a little handle like mad. If it works, the job of turning out a monthly News, which I was contemplating doing on Slater's cursed contraption, will be no bother at all.
>
> .... This is The Epicentre (point around which things occur) signing off.

To my knowledge this was the first recorded use of The Epicentre as a name for 84 Drayton Park, one of the most famous fan addresses. It was neither the first nor the last mention of its Holy Grail, a monthly *SFN*. On December 9th I replied to Vince, in a letter which turned out to be

prophetic in more ways than one....

> I really am more pleased about the new duplicator than you would think – it's quite important for isolated fans like us to feel that there really is a live central organization in being, and I've always been worried that it might fold and leave us high and dry. However there seems no danger of that with you people in charge...
>
> ....Why not a World Convention in London during the Festival of Britain? I've been thinking of starting a campaign for it, like Sneary's South Gate In 58 (but it's hard to think of a rhyme for London or 51). There has been some desultory talk among American fans about a World Convention in London, and there'll never be another opportunity like the Festival...

Meanwhile we'd been toiling away three nights a week on *Slant*, cheered up towards the end by a laudatory review of *Slant* #2 in *Amazing* which Wrai Ballard kindly typed out and airmailed over. The Heinlein novel "Gulf" had just appeared in *Astounding* and some things in it so annoyed me that my editorial boiled over: so I chopped the lot off and sent it along to Ted Tubb, who had just asked me for material for the Great Christmas *SFN*. This was the first time I'd ever submitted anything to another fanzine, for reasons which I'd earlier told Ken Bulmer when he asked me to do something for Nirvana....

> ...I'm a bit diffident about my own stuff... as long as it's only in *Slant* it's OK but I should hate to think it was cluttering up some other fanzine because the editor was too kindhearted.

I did make an offer later to write a regular column for *SFN*, but Vince ignored it. The item in *Slant* #3 we were most proud of – justifiably, as it turned out – was Jackson's "Swordsmen of Varnis", but in our innocence we thought it was mostly pretty good. Apart from the stories by Ackerman and Evans, which I've already mentioned... we didn't think a lot of them but we were impressed by the Big Names and their generosity in sending them... there was the retitled story by Ken Bulmer, illustrated by James's first attempt at delineating – or de*lino*ating – a human figure. (Through what he regarded as a grievous error on the part of the editorial department, the story contained no spaceships.) Since we now had enough material from outside I had thankfully given up trying to write fiction, but I'd used one of my plot ideas for a competition, giving the readers a situation and asking them to figure how it could have come about. (We got

one entry.) It seemed to me at the time that it was far too corny and old-fashioned an idea to make a real story out of it, but five years later Fritz Leiber wrote the identical plot up in *Galaxy* and made a polished sophisticated job of it; which just shows that a good enough craftsman *can* make a silk purse out of a sow's ear. I also had an editorial and a short column and some readers' letters (the real ones didn't seem lively enough) – and I had actually dreamed up a cartoon. I mean that literally – it came to me in a dream. It may not have been a very good cartoon but it was the first one we'd ever had. Besides I thought it was sort of interesting: you know the way you often write whole wonderful novels or direct film masterpieces in your mind while you're asleep, or solve the riddle of the Universe or something, but you never get any of it written down before you forget it. Well, this time I did get up and write it down. It wasn't the work of sheer genius I thought in my sleep, but it was all right for a filler and easy to cut in lino... a picture of a coffin with the caption, "The Case For Shaverism". The whole issue ran to 26 pages this time... most of them closely printed, since I'd now bought another half font of type... and represented several months of spare time.

The 26th page, the outside back cover, we had left until the very last because it was all news items and lists of the *Astounding*s we wanted or had for exchange. By Sunday 11th December, well on schedule, we had it provisionally set up and were running off a few advance copies for cash subscribers and other exceptional people – when disaster struck.

The press we were using, the one I had smuggled out of the chemist's attic, was basically just a metal box. The type stood in the box itself and the paper was tucked inside the lid. To print you simply closed the box and applied pressure with a crude lever consisting of a handle with a sort of cam at the end. There had also been an arrangement whereby a roller was pulled back and forth from an inking plate on to the type, but we never used it because it didn't seem to ink properly. Instead we took it off and I inked the type while James worked the press: this division of labour was because James was bigger and I was nimbler. As I was rolling the roller on the type he was putting in the paper: as I was rolling the roller on the inking plate (we used a piece of glass on newspaper) he was bearing down on the lever: and as he was picking up another piece of paper I was plucking out the finished sheet. The degree of synchronization required was nerve-wrecking but we used to work up to some remarkable – and dangerous – speeds. The reason the press's own inking system didn't work was one we didn't find out for a long time... that a printing press is not supposed to print a type area of much more than half the size of the area of

the bed. Ours, on the other hand, was so full of type that we didn't even have room in the bed for the wedges (technically, quoins) that are used to tighten up the type so it all stands straight. Instead we used to hammer in little strips of metal until we couldn't force in any more. The power we had to use to print all this stuff – all bold type, too – was so colossal that the solid steel of the bed and platen had assumed a visibly curved shape.

However as I was saying we were running off a few advance copies of the last page. It was another closely printed one, and James was bearing down with all his weight and strength, his 6' 3" off the ground, when there was a sharp explosion, James collapsed on the floor and pieces of steel flew across the room like shrapnel. Madeleine came dashing upstairs to see what had happened. The lever had disintegrated. Haplessly we tried putting the press on the floor and standing on it, then jumping up and down on it, but all we got was a vague smudge. The pressure that lever exerted must have been almost inconceivable. No, we were finished: and the Great Deadline only a week away. That evening I wrote to Adana for a replacement lever and, knowing it wouldn't arrive in time if at all, to Ken Bulmer, special delivery, asking him to run off a substitute last page on his new Gestetner. We were downhearted. All that work, spoiled at the last moment....

My cry for help was just another complication in the already hectic situation at The Epicentre. I was by this time practically a part of the SFS directorate, the regional bureaucracy set up by Ken Slater having disintegrated, and in fact *Slant* was being subsidized by a couple of donations of £1 from the SFS funds by way of a bulk subscription... and I'd volunteered to send out the whole Christmas mailing from Belfast. Ghod knows why: partly out of innocent helpfulness I suppose and probably partly so I could make sure that the good copies of *Slant* went to the right people. Anyhow, it was a mistake. Vince and Ken were running around in circles wrapping up parcels for Belfast and consigning them to the bottomless pit of the Christmas mails wreathed in "Express" labels and following them with desperate notes of corrections, explanations of surpluses and deficiencies, detailed instructions, special instructions and amended special instructions all of which arrived before any of the parcels. In the middle of it all their stapler broke and they had to mail half the *SFN*s as loose sheets. Meanwhile I was scratching my head over the instructions, clearing the decks for action and worrying the already harassed officials at the GPO about the missing parcels. When they had all come it was quite impressive, like a football pool office on a Saturday morning. There were copies of the Gestetnered bacover of *Slant*, address labels, lists, *Alembic*s,

*SFN*s stapled and loose, *Nirvana*s, SFS Christmas Cards and *BFL Newsletter*s. And of course *Slant*s. The last consignment from The Epicentre arrived at 10:45 a.m. on the morning of Wednesday the 21st. I had taken a day's leave and had most of the mailing in the 2:45 collection the same afternoon. That included stapling *SFN*, assembling the mailing, wrapping up and gumming down 100 copies, sticking on sticky labels and then taking them off again and sticking them again with gum because they weren't sticky enough, amending addresses, putting on stamps and posting the lot in several different mail boxes.

I was quietly proud of this achievement, so different I thought smugly to myself from the slipshod ineffectiveness of The Epicentre's organization, and it was unfortunate that the first reaction from Vince was an indignant outcry:

> What the blank blank was the idea of not sending *Slant* out? You've got all the trouble of doing labels and stamping another hundred packets, as well as invalidating any good sending the stuff to you might have done in the first place! As it happens I'm darned glad I didn't put much about *Slant* in *SFN*....

(In fact he had put nothing.) This was an unfortunate misunderstanding, but the injustice rankled with me deeply for a long time. What had happened was that Vince had given me the wrong address for one Trevor Wilson, and his mailing had been returned to Vince, whose address was on it. It so happened that Trevor was one of that selfless dedicated group of suckers who had voluntarily subscribed to *Slant*, even though they would have got free copies as SFS members, and I had sent him one of the advance copies run off before the press broke. (Come to think of it, this must have been the reason I offered to send off the SFS mailing, so I could do things like this.) Vince didn't know Wilson's special status of course, and assumed I hadn't sent *Slant* to any of the SFS members.

Meanwhile Adana had replied to my appeal: the model hadn't been in production since 1932 and they offered no help... typically. I took the remains of the old lever along to a neighbourhood blacksmith and the mighty man made a replacement out of iron. It kept bending under the strain and was never as efficient as the old one, but we were able to make a reasonable job of finishing up the *Slant*s left over after the SFS mailing.

Reaction to the 100 or so already sent out to British fandom had been very disappointing. Up to 2nd January 1950 we had had only 3 letters. As I wrote to Ken Bulmer: "Perhaps when a fanzine gets established no one bothers to write to the editor any more. If so, can't see *Slant* lasting much

longer." At this I was better off than Ken Bulmer, who never received one single solitary letter of comment on the first issue of *Nirvana*. (Except, that is, from me, and one from Bob Shaw many years later, who wrote gravely that he had seen a copy soon after he came into fandom but that it had taken him all this time to understand the prose poem.) In the circumstances it was surprising that the reference to *Nirvana* in *Slant* #3 ("A fanmag with a future") should have proved so prophetic.

Ken however wasn't discouraged, and sent me one of those wonderful long revitalizing letters of his (four pages, one paragraph), so heartening that I immediately sent him a nine page interim (!) reply. It ended casually: "Have discovered through letter in *Fantasy Review* unknown fan in Northern Ireland. Hot on his track. Will probably start my own organization!" The unknown fan was George Charters. He came up in response to my invitation, but for a long time his visits were very infrequent and he would just sit quietly in the corner while James and I worked on *Slant*. We didn't like to ask him to help and he was too diffident to volunteer. Other encouraging things that happened about this time included a letter from Ackerman reporting he had sold "Swordsmen of Varnis" to a prozine, one from Carnell suggesting that *Slant* authors might like to submit to *New Worlds*, and a story from Ted Tubb. (I asked him for more like it but he said "the other efforts of mine to become an author are of a totally different type – adventurous, space stuff. To be truthful, they are all corny.") As Ken said, "It really begins to look as though *Slant* is becoming a forcing medium for fan authors into pro although, rather naturally, I'm not thinking that way myself."

A more discouraging development was a letter from a reader pointing out that the Evans story in *Slant* #3 had already been printed in *Peon*. I wrote and apologized to Lee Riddle, who was very nice about it and said he'd guessed I hadn't known. He also thought the Ackerman story had already appeared in *Shangri-La*. I realized Ackerman had figured *Slant*'s circulation would be almost all in England so it wouldn't matter about the stories already having appeared in America, but I was annoyed all the same and acquired a dislike for Ackerman which I didn't lose until I met him in 1951.

I had now been fanning for two years with a ball point pen and I was getting tired of it. I wasn't the only one. Ken said: "I am thinking of inaugurating a fund entitled 'Great Project for Humanity and the National Health Eye Scheme'. Fighting Fund. A typewriter for the Willis. Buy shares etc." One day I saw in the office an old typewriter belonging to the head of the Registry, an eccentric old boy who liked to tinker with junk. It

was in fact the same man on the same typer who had typed out for me the material for the original unpublished *Slant* of 1947. The typer was a three-bank Oliver, the same model as the dreaded Shaw-Berry typer frequently maligned but still used by John Berry, but in fact quite a decent machine in the hands of anyone who isn't a mechanical moron. Its only real fault is slowness – the letters are mounted on concentric half hoops which loom above the paper like a couple of amphitheatres, and it takes a while for them to make the descent and resume their places – but it's plenty quick enough for two fingers. However it definitely looked quaint and primitive, and it was the only typewriter I'd ever seen that looked as if I could afford to buy it. I borrowed it with the intention of holding on to it if I could (I later bought it for £3) and one dark February night James and I carried it home from the man's garage slung between us on a broomstick. The first thing I did on it was a letter to Ken Bulmer. I don't have a copy of this: I have the original....

> Let not this startling development weaken the effort of the Fighting Fund. This extraordinary contraption is one James and I dragged through a driving rainstorm last night and we shall probably have to return it before I learn to use it, though I hope to put another finger to work when I find where all the letters are. You are getting the carbon because the top copy is rapidly being completely covered with the paraffin that was poured over the works. However this is one letter from me that you will be able to read.

After two double-spaced pages of comment quotes on Ken's story in the last *Slant* and general gossip, it ended...

> Well, this is about killing me, so I'll close now. The things I do for fandom! Cute the way they do exclamayp oh dear exclamation marks on these machines. It's all very interesting, but maybe it would have been quicker to set the letter up and print it. That *would* have shaken you!

Reaction to this was highly satisfactory – a 4½ page letter including a three-act play about fans dying from shock at getting legible letters from me. I debated for some time about publishing this, but decided against it because of its limited interest. I've just held exactly the same debate with exactly the same result, but instead of throwing this letter in the wastebasket with the rest I'll pass it on to Ken so he can incorporate it in *his* memoirs.

As you'll probably have noticed, I was gravitating towards Ken rather than the other inmate of The Epicentre, Vince Clarke. Partly because I was a little irritated with Vince over all the past delays and confusion about *SFN*, partly because of the way he had assumed my stupidity over the affair of the Christmas mailing and partly because he seemed to be studiedly ignoring *Slant*. This sounds very vain, I know. The only excuse I can put up for my former self is that *Slant* represented an enormous investment of our time and energy, and recognition was the only return we had to expect: subconsciously we suspected we were being mugs and we wanted reassurance, I suppose. Besides, or probably because of these prejudices, I got the impression from Vince's letters of the time that he was a snooty type. Ken's letters were enthusiastic, friendly and sincere, while Vince's were much less frequent and seemed offhand and patronizing. I visualized him as a conceited sneering pseudo-intellectual, who probably visualized me as an eager-beaver provincial nuisance and upstart.

Five months went by amid mutterings of discontent among the provincial fans with no sign of the projected monthly *SFN*. When it did come, towards the end of June, I looked eagerly for my promised bouquet. But instead of editorial comment on *Slant* there was a fulsome advertisement, which didn't seem to me to be the same thing at all. I was bitterly disappointed, but wrote fairly calmly to Ken....

> Three hours ago I returned bronzed and fit from four days hostelling in the Antrim glens. Ready for anything, I thought I was, even a Shaver story in *ASF*. But not for *SFN*5! THAT AD! Don't you realize, PEOPLE WILL THINK I WROTE IT. Woe woe woe. I'll never live it down. And what will Slater think. Seriously, it was very nice of you, but would you mind mentioning to the other bods that it wasn't my idea to make those extravagant claims for *Slant*. Dignified restraint, that's my racket. It was a kind thought to say a few kind words about S but if it had looked like editorial comment rather than a paid advertisement I should have been even more grateful. However thanks all the same, and no hard feelings.

And later, in the course of a page of comments on *SFN*....

> Quotes, Notes & Reviews. Let us be honest. I am no less subject to the sins of the spirit than those of the flesh so I am a bit disappointed that there is no mention of us here. I had expected you might mention our coming reprints in prozines or Cedric's

> successes. I should have thought they would have been newsworthy enough. British fan authors crash prozines. However I can see you are short of space and I suppose in a way since everyone in the SFS gets *S* anyway there is no point in mentioning it, as if it were a proper subscription fanzine.

Note the implied accusation of ingratitude. I must have felt slightly ashamed.

> The above sounds terrible now I look at it in cold blood. Pay no attention. Me, behaving like a prima donna.

After about a month's silence from the Epicentre, I got a reply to this letter from Vince:

> Am standing in for Ken for the time being as he is trying to throw off the effects of reading *Seven Days In New Crete* with a stiff dose of *World Below* (the benighted ignoramus ain't read it!). In any case I have a bone or three to pick with thee.
>
> Firstly (logical minded we sf fans – always putting first things first), I must plead guilty to dashing off the copy for that ad of yours. Seeing that you were printing Ken's stories, I was unaware that "dignified restraint" was your racket. As the SFS members already receive *Slant*, the only people it would or could impress would be the humble neophyte, and the h.n. takes everything that's printed or mimeoed in a fanzine as gospel truth. Natch. He hasn't had a chance to learn better. And you wanted the durn thing advertised didn't you? Even the *Times* would be pretty expansive if it went in for advertising.
>
> How about this for the next ish? Right on our back cover.
>
> SLANT
> can't
> shock your maiden aunt
> Each story
> is terrific
> Also scientific
> Each article
> is a particle
> of wit from a higher sphere
> Yet SLANT supernal
> can be your journal
> For a mere two bob a year.

He apologized for missing out the news about prozine reprints and then, after a page of news and gossip....

> Let us chant
> In praise of *Slant*.
> Closely printed in solid black
> Picture on the front cover
> Adverts on the back.

This letter got me mad. That bit about "closely printed in solid black" struck home specially deep, because I knew I'd bought the wrong kind of type, but apart from that I thought the letter was sarcastic and superior and clever-clever. So I flew off the handle and told Vince just what I thought of him. I haven't got a copy of this letter because I dashed it off at work with a pen, and I haven't got Vince's reply either, I think because I was so ashamed of myself afterwards that I destroyed it and tried to forget the whole incident. But of course I didn't. I remember it vividly. I always remember, Ghod help me, occasions when I make a fool of myself. Vince had got my letter the following evening, Thursday, on his return from work and had stayed home from the White Horse answering it. It was a sincere and friendly answer, without the slightest trace of superiority or sarcasm, and it hit me like a bomb. It impressed me deeply that Vince should stay away from the White Horse... making what seemed to me the supreme fannish sacrifice... just to straighten out a confused neofan like me: even more, that he should think my friendship worth keeping, or making, when he could so easily have torn me apart or just ignored me. Anyway, I was grateful, and have been grateful ever since. It may not seem a very important incident to describe in such detail, but it was important to me. It was the first real lesson I learned from fandom and I've never forgotten it. I've learned a lot from fandom since but I think that was the most important and perhaps if it had been someone other than Vince Clarke I'd never have learned it until it was too late.

Vince said I seemed to have a chip on my shoulder. My first reaction was shocked incredulity, but then I looked at my mental shoulder – and there it was. A chip, if there ever was one. All of a sudden I realized what had been happening to me. All my life I have thought of myself as a mild and inoffensive person – too mild and inoffensive. When I came into fandom and started as it were a new life in this new world, I automatically tried to correct this defect in my mundane character. I was over-compensating, overlooking the fact that these new people didn't *know* I was actually a mild and inoffensive person. To them I just looked to have a

chip on my shoulder. It was a startling thought. As I've said half seriously before, fandom is a wonderful school of character training and, as you'll probably see from other evidence in these memoirs,, the understanding and frankness of other fans has changed me a lot through the years, and is still changing me. I still do stupid things in fandom, but thank ghod the intervals between them seem to be getting appreciably greater.

That momentous letter of Vince's was in the latter half of July, and we've jumped ahead six months. But we're now in 1950, which was the start of my really becoming active in fandom and so many things were happening – a visit to England and the Epicentre, contacting Eric Frank Russell, Manly. Banister and Lee Hoffman, the entry of Bob Shaw, etc – that it would be impossible to follow strict chronological order.

So back to March 1950, when I got another momentous letter... though I must admit it didn't look much at the time. It was in pale blue ink in an almost supine backhand handwriting from someone in Dagenham...

> Dear Mr. Ellis, *[sic]*
>
> Many thanks for the Spring 1950 issue of *Slant*. I hope that the enclosed magazine is suitable for a "subscription". If the prozine offer is only open to US fen and/or you have a good supply of English reprints, you can have the 2/- postal order instead.
>
> ...Can you give me any information about the British Science Fantasy Society? I've heard of it before, but don't know anything definite. It's rumoured that *Fantasy Review* is folding and that Gillings will start a prozine. If this happens to be true, your mag. should jump into *F.R.*'s place as the leading British fanzine.
>
> Cordially,
>
> Chuck Harris
>
> PS. How did you get my address? It must have come from the States because I only know one other Anglofan. I suspect Ron Friedman.

I was a bit annoyed about the BRE *Weird Tales*... I could flog a US edition of a promag for 2/- any time, but any BRE was worth just nothing... but I was polite. I was learning....

> Thanks for your letter, and the magazine. The latter is quite OK. After all I did say any prozine, and I didn't happen to have bought that one yet. It was indeed Ron Friedman that I got your address from, or at least from his fanzine. Funny you shouldn't

have been in touch with the SFS. You can get the gen from Ken Bulmer, 84 Drayton Park, Highbury, London N.5. Sub is 5/- a year and it entitles you to Norman Ashfield's *Alembic* as well as *Slant**. Also the club organ, *The Science Fantasy News*, which was announced in the last issue dated Christmas as about to go monthly. You will draw your own conclusions. Though they're not unlikely to be erroneous. The London Circle has periods of inactivity, but it never quite dies.

It seems to be quite definite, or as definite as these things ever be, that Gillings is going to revive "Fantasy" as a sister to "New Worlds", incorporating some of the features of FR. Thank you for the flattering remarks about *Slant*'s status in that contingency, but I should imagine that Ken Slater would have something to say about that.

** No refunds!*

I never got a reply to this letter. I passed on Chuck's name to Ken Bulmer, along with that of one Dave Cohen of Manchester who had sent me a weird letter purporting to be a communication from an inhabitant of a planet called Botturor in the Milky Way, and forgot about it.

Until next month, that is, when a copy of the ISFCC zine *The Explorer* arrived with a little story by C.R. Harris which I liked. I turned up the previous correspondence and made with the orchids and blandishments:

I was going to quote the letter here but I've been wondering about something and I think I'll just stop here until I see what you think about it. Do you like reading other people's correspondence? I do. I'm one of those who believe that there's no such thing as an uninteresting letter... at least when it's written to someone else. It's sort of like an unscripted live television interview – anything can happen, or at least you can get all sorts of fascinating sidelights and insights into personalities, things which you weren't meant to see. But maybe some of you just find other people's letters dull unless they affect you personally or have literary merit? If so let me know, because I've got an awful lot of old letters here I'm not quite sure how to deal with.

I Remember Me – 4
Chuck Harris and Eric Frank Russell

It's a terrible thing to have an orderly mind. You'd think that reading through old letters and reminiscing about them would be a pretty easy way to churn out prose, and so it was when I started these memoirs and they dealt with the period early in 1950 when I was just getting started in fandom. But then things began to proliferate... if that's the right word: it sounds OK and you don't often get a chance to throw one like that about... and lots of things were happening at the same time. My bureaucratic mind began to visualize dividing the great Work into sections, following each line for a time and then going back to another one, like a History of Europe or a Burroughs novel. The project got so ambitious that I shelved it, and then it fell down behind the shelf where it's just taken me half an hour to find it. I figured I've got to push on with it somehow or the tide of waste paper will sweep us all into the street. So to Oscar The Malevolent Muskrat with system and logic. I shall take up these old letters one by one and if I see anything of conceivable interest in any of them I'll give you a glimpse of it on its way to the fireplace...

25.4.50

Dear Walter:

I was just getting around to answering your previous letter, but your second letter beat me to the post.

You really startle me, – do you mean you'll consider publishing a story by me without paying me for it?

Seriously, I've never written anything other than the piece you saw – this sad state of affairs will be rectified just as soon as I can get a reasonable plot worked out...

This pale blue backhand belongs to Chuck Harris... curious how mild he seems in longhand. I don't know if I said anything about this last time (I know I could go upstairs and check, but that would be the upstirring of organization again. Down sir!) but I'd seen a story by him in a fanzine called *The Explorer* published by Ed Noble about a magician who said he would saw a woman in half and did and I thought it showed promise. The second story when it arrived turned out to be about a werewolf who picked

up a girl in India who when confronted by a death worse than fate turned out to be a weretiger. James White saw the gimmick after the second paragraph and I told Chuck this when rejecting the story, which was the beginning of the great White/Harris "Feud". At about this time Chuck had a regular thing about werewolves and produced the first line of a story about a whole group of them, which was really a classic among first lines: "The family were changing for dinner". But back in April 1950....

> Thanx for the information about the SFS. I will write to Ken Bulmer (sometime) and become a member. I've heard of the London Circle, but have never attended any of their meetings.

We'll come back to Chuck and the London Circle later, no doubt. I've just destroyed a four page letter from somebody called John Edmiston Blyer or Butler, who published a little zine called *Makhzan*, and a ten-page reply from me. He seemed a pretty good prospect for a columnist but the correspondence lapsed and he was never heard of again that I knew of. I'd like to destroy the next one too, but if this is to have any interest for you you'll have to have the uncensored truth. This is the sort of fugghead I was in 1950.... What sort I am now I suppose I'll have to wait another ten years to find out.

1 May 1950

Dear Bob:

Thank you for your *S-F Newsletter* #15. Naturally I want to receive future issues. *[Yes, it's me to Bob Tucker.]*

I hope you will not mind my making a few remarks about the review of *Slant* #3. This is, I suppose, the "worst" review we have had yet, but please don't think I am bellyaching (haw!) about the position you gave us, or about your commendable refusal to deal out the indiscriminate flattery which is unfortunately so common. (Eechh!) What I should like to point out is that this sickeningly familiar comment about the amount of work the magazine must involve carries an implication you might not have intended. It always reminds me of Johnson's remark about the woman preaching. "It is like a dog walking on its hind legs. It is not done well, but you are surprised to see it done at all". The implications are that we are mugs and that the reviewer cannot think of anything more creditable to say than that the magazine has freak value. As for the first, you are probably right, but I should have thought you were one of the last persons to say so. (An allusion to the fact that *SFNL* was

expensively photo-offset and distributed free.) And since when has enthusiasm become a thing to be despised in fandom? As for the second if this is your opinion we would rather you would say so, and why. I expect you mean your reviews to be helpful rather than discouraging.

However I have probably got hypersensitive on this point. (You can say that again.) Probably the Scot in my subconscious does think I am wasting my time.

Bob did not, naturally, reply to this letter, and I can only hope he never got it. What a horrible mixture of pretentious pompousness and injured vanity it is. I hate me. This next one doesn't help much either.

2nd May 1950

Dear Mr. Russell:

I have just read your story "Dear Devil" in the May issue of *Other Worlds*, and I felt I should like to write and tell you how much I enjoyed it. Although you have been one of my favourite authors for years – since "Metamorphosite" anyway – I should never have thought of writing to you if I hadn't just been reading a book by Llewellyn Powys where he mentions that even famous authors like to receive letters from readers sometimes. If he is right I should be very happy to think I had repaid some of the pleasure you have given me, and if not there is no harm done.

Apart from the fact that "Dear Devil" is a fascinating story in itself, well and intelligently told, it is a most refreshing change from the vicious stuff we are getting so much of nowadays, like Heinlein's "Gulf" and Hubbard's "Greed". In the old days heroes certainly wiped out whole universes with gay abandon, but in the most honourable way and with the very best of intentions. Never were they guilty even under the most intolerable provocation of anything which could possibly be described as "dirty", or indeed anything which one could remotely believe. Nowadays they go in for torture, murder, even genocide quite as enthusiastically as the villains. Indeed the only thing that distinguishes them from their rivals in iniquity is that they are invariably victorious and of course American.

So it is a real pleasure to know that there is one author who can turn out stories which are a pleasure to read, in more ways than one. At least one of your readers is very grateful to you.

Yours sincerely.

Let's analyse this odious letter. It is true that I had liked "Dear Devil" very much (and "Metamorphosite") and wanted to tell the author so, and I had been struck by that remark of Powys, and I was worked up about Hubbard and Heinlein. But what is sincerity? It was also true that I wanted to "cultivate" Eric Frank Russell – what a thing it would be to have something by him in *Slant*! – but oh so subtly. Hence the deliberate avoidance of any mention of myself as a fanzine editor, the allusion to Powys to establish myself as another cultured intellect, and the tying-in of Heinlein and Hubbard... in a paragraph that I'd used practically word for word in two other letters and which eventually dragged its feeble corpse to a grave in some unfortunate fanzine. I wasn't going to make the tactical error of suggesting that he reply to my letter but I was going to give him something to reply *to*.

EFR replied by return of post far more courteously and cordially than I deserved. Even after all these years I'm not going to endanger a friendship I value by quoting him without permission, nor am I going to ask him to go to the trouble of reading through a batch of his old letters. It'll be enough to say that he thanked me for writing and told me something of the history of "Dear Devil", quoting from a letter of rejection by an editor whom I took to be John W. Campbell. This fascinating flash of life behind the zines was too much for me: Willis the Fanzine Editor sprang. Casting aside my sheep's clothing and revealing my feral faned's face I asked him for permission to quote his remarks. And although I'd delayed writing for ten days so he wouldn't feel himself rushed, I was still so megalomaniacal as to try to inveigle him into expanding them into an article, thus:

15 May 1950

> The part I would like to quote is of course that about the difficulty of pleasing editors. This is a most fascinating subject, and what it would be very nice to do would be to run a sort of symposium about other editors' slants, or more generally, about how to write successful science fiction. However even if I had the nerve to ask you to amplify your remarks it is obvious from the fact that most of your work has appeared in *ASF* that you have never had enough trouble in placing your stories to acquire any distressing familiarity with the thought-processes of editors. I'm assuming that you offer most of your work to Campbell first, as I expect many front rank authors still do, such is the prestige of *ASF*. It is very nice for Mr. Campbell to get first pick like this, but unless he makes better use of it he may not have it much

longer. Personally I suspect he has been spending too much time on that wireless station of his. Certainly some of the stories he has printed – not to mention those he has rejected – give one the impression that for some time he has been editing by remote control, leaving Miss Catherine Tarrant to follow a few simple directives, like no more atomic bombs. Certainly some of these "C.T." stories have been really shocking.

I agree that "Dear Devil" does not really call for a sequel. Only a story which is basically incomplete does, and in any case it seems to be a law of nature that sequels are anti-climactic from *Catriona* to *Children of the Lens*.

When I was reading some books on telepathy recently I was reminded of *Sinister Barrier* in a rather unusual way. The mention of *iodine*. As you probably know, iodine is associated with thyroid complaints. In *The Reach of the Mind* Rhine says: "The young woman in question was treated for hyperthyroidism. She had scored above QI hits per 25 through 74 runs carried out before her breakdown. After the period of treatment... a second series of tests was made, but the average score this time was close to 'chance'". Later, Rhine says: "the case of a hypothyroid lad... had exceptional ESP ability... when the boy was treated for hypothyroidism he lost his ability." Carrington in "Telepathy" has nothing to say about iodine but he does say this: "under bromide he did significantly better..." But probably you know all this, and perhaps I had better not waste any more of your time. Assuming you are still with me at all?

Thanks again for replying to my letter.

Yours sincerely.

Did this obnoxious neofan get his well-deserved come-uppance? Stay tuned for the next disgusting instalment.

I Remember Me – 5
Eric Frank Russell continued

You will all remember from the last gripping instalment how things stood in May 1950. Walter A. Youngfan had got into correspondence with Eric Frank Russell and was trying to manoeuvre him into expanding some of his remarks into an article for *Slant*, with all the Machiavellian subtlety of a hog rooting for truffles. The reply was prompt, two pages long, and friendly and interesting, but crystal clear on the truffle situation....

> Reason why people like me often don't respond to letters is that they've found from sad experience that no confidence is respected, and that they're likely to be quoted, or half-quoted, or even mis-quoted, for the sake of creating a fancied scoop in a fan-mag. That, sir, is the surest way to make any writer clam up. Of course, if said writer turns out something specifically for the said mag, it is different – he then has some control over what he is saying rather than is alleged to have said. But please don't come back at me asking for an article. I did them years ago, would like to do them today and occasionally do if the time and inspiration come together, but mostly they don't. I am very hard pressed for time these days.

He went on to defend Campbell, without actually denying in so many words that it was he who had rejected "Dear Devil", and to discuss some other things which you'll probably be able to identify from my reply.

> Well now, touching Mr. Campbell (to think that the day should ever come when I of all people should try to clast this ikon) I realize that there may be people so lost in turpitude as to like the stories I dislike, but I consider myself a fairly average *ASF* reader and I assume that *ASF* has tried to please a certain section of the reading public who don't like the more pulpy story. Either *ASF* is changing its policy or Campbell is falling down on the job, because the stories I have in mind are not good by *ASF*'s standards. Apart from that moreover stories which have been both commercially and artistically good have been rejected by JWC and acclaimed by other mags. I base this on statements by the editors themselves in their own magazines. Manly frankness

is the fashion among them today. Another complaint I have against Campbell is that he nowadays just throws the magazine at you. Three or four years ago every big story got a terrific build-up beforehand. You didn't take it all too seriously but it was nice to feel that things were happening, even if they didn't turn out as big as they were billed. Nowadays all we get is a few tired cracks about the inelasticity of type-metal or the difficulty of comparing apples with oranges or whatever cliché he happens to have set up in type. I am glad to see that you agree that there is too much blood in s-f. But on looking through these old issues of *ASF* the other day I was reminded that you were unnecessarily bloodthirsty yourself once. In "The Undecided" to be exact. A lot can be forgiven such an excellent story, but were you not very cruel, vicariously, to the alien soldiers? I know aliens are often considered fair game – like Jews and gypsies in Germany – but surely it is obvious that the wholly evil aliens of the more naive stories like those of E.E. Smith are a juvenile concept. Any race which lives a highly organized community life must have the virtues which make that life possible – consideration for others and respect for public opinion. Conscience. Tolerance. Possibly we should start a movement for the prevention of cruelty to bems. Its not a purely hypothetical question, even if we never encounter a flying saucerful of monstrosities. My point is that the frame of mind that aliens are murderable and torturable just because they are different is very easily acquired and hard to get rid of. Easy to acquire because it pleases the subconscious and hard to lose because once the first million have gone into the gas chamber it's difficult to entertain the concept that possibly you have made a mistake. Possibly I have a bee in my bonnet about this question but I was very impressed by Huxley's story *Time Must Have a Stop*. It seems to me he is right that even the smallest of one's actions may have infinite repercussions. It may for example have been a malicious story told to Hitler in his youth that resulted in Auschwitz, and every one of one's actions should be judged in that light.

I can't remember whether I was still hoping to get material out of Russell or whether I had now for once no ulterior motive. I suppose it's possible. Maybe I had even reconciled myself to developing my own authors, because things were going well. Palmer had actually paid money to Clive Jackson to reprint his "Swordsmen of Varnis" from *Slant* #4 and our other

bright star, Cedric Walker, had sold a longer story to the revived *Marvel*, and altogether we all looked to be advancing towards a roseate dawn. Whatever happened?

But I see now that in June I was after Chandler too. I found his address somewhere and wrote admiring a story called “Haunt”.

Another correspondent was Mike Tealby. Ploughing through a 4-page letter in purple ink, I see he was commiserating with me about contemptuous reviews of our fanzines by Merwin in *TWS* (we thought Merwin read the fmz) and that I was already offering to print his covers for him. He wanted a sphinx, but settled for a pyramid.

But to conclude the EFR story for the time being. In mid-June he wrote again defending Campbell, discussing editor and author problems, and defending “The Undecided” on the ground that the aliens were aggressors. I was getting more confident....

> Dear Eric:
>
> (As you say, to hell with diffidence) I must spring to the defence of my beloved bems. I suppose you think you know all about the set-up just because you wrote the story, but listen! WHOSE PLANET WAS IT ANYWAY? So they defended themselves when invaded. The fiends! “Cet animal est très méchant. Quand en l’attaque il se défend”. As far as I can gather from your garbled account of the affair these alien bods were going along quietly minding their business, keeping themselves to themselves in a most gentlemanly fashion, save only for their friendly overtures to terrestrial spacecraft. Even when these were uncouthly rebuffed there is not even a suggestion that they raised a tentacle against the craft which had cut them dead. Now all of a sudden homo and his menagerie of other sapiens lands on his planet. Obviously a scout, if not the advance guard of an invasion from these sinister monsters. Even then they merely send one lone representative to test the defences. This courageous soldier is horribly murdered by the goothirsty terrestrials. I ask you, is this cricket?
>
> Coming back to our discussion about diffidence, I should have thought the famous would regard it as a virtue almost as worthy as it is rare. From the other side, you certainly need a thick skin to dispense with it. There was the fellow here who was a great admirer of the poet Ezra Pound. Read every instalment of the cantos as they came out and was generally what you might describe as Pound foolish. Well, one day Ezra’s

> latest effort was published and this chap found a mistake in one of the esoteric references. Also an opportunity. He sat down and concocted a letter to the master, full of humble worship and also pointing out with a certain amount of false modesty the slight mistake. In anxiety he awaited. Would the great man reply? Would he deign his humble admirer the privilege of a personal letter, perhaps later to be published to his immortality in the *Life and Letters*? Yes! In a short time an envelope came, addressed in the handwriting only a poet could think up. Tearing it open with shaking fingers, he read: "Dear Sir, I think you are a bloody S++t."

...and so on, for another couple of closely typed foolscap pages. I apologize for the coarse Pound anecdote in this refined and ladylike fanzine, but no doubt Ethel will substitute asterisks for that four-letter word and, as you'll see later that anecdote turned out to be quite important. One wouldn't have thought so at the time, because EFR was quiet for a month and then wrote, on 18 July: and for once I quote in full....

> Dear Bro. Willis:
>
> I'm getting too pressed for time to keep it up – so accept this Wesso original by way of a consolation prize.
>
> Sincerely,
>
> Eric F. Russell

The Wesso original was an enormous detailed drawing but I hated the sight of it. I considered that I had been given the brush-off in about as final and insulting a way as possible. Whether it was my guilty conscience or not, it was quite obvious to me at the time that the reference to a "consolation prize" meant that he believed I'd been after another "prize" from him, that he was now bored with my antics as one gets bored with a dog doing his tricks, and he was paying me off to keep me quiet. I never even wrote to thank him for the Wesso.

So ended that phase with EFR. I was so disheartened that I never even replied to Chandler when he wrote a friendly letter thanking me for my comments on "Haunt", recommending some of his stories he preferred himself and passing on an anecdote about a Pilot friend of his who had claimed to know Chandler the writer and that he was a Chief Officer in Shaw Savill's. "Rubbish" said his messmate, "whoever heard of any Mate in Shaw Savill's being able to read or write?"

But then, on August 11, EFR wrote again.

> Greatly enjoyed that salty Pound anecdote of yours. I passed it on to Tiffany Thayer who is a friend of Pound and sees him quite often. Today, Thayer writes back saying it is probably authentic because “the old boy is fully capable of it and was never constituted differently”. This makes me happy. I like to think that some of the world’s characters are real. Did you get that Wesso drawing I mailed you? Or have your censors (the Pope’s Own Fusiliers) seized it and burned it?

I wrote back apologizing for not having acknowledged the Wesso, but without explaining, and saying I hoped to be passing through Liverpool soon... fishing for an invitation to call. But that first trip of mine to England had better wait another instalment.

I Remember Me – 6
The Epicentre

In August 1950, you may remember, I was contemplating a trip to England. One of the three friends I hoped to meet was Chuck Harris... but I didn't, for a reason that surprised and saddened me. On 24th August he wrote:

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

At the time I didn't know Chuck well enough to dare try to override his protestations, so I just accepted his wishes. Even now I doubt if I should have tried to see him, because Chuck was then very sensitive about his disability. For years it was one of the best kept secrets in fandom, known only to me and then to a widening group of other personal friends.

Anyway, one evening that autumn I took the night boat to Liverpool. I spent the afternoon in Eric Frank Russell's house, a fairly small suburban-type semidetached villa in a village a few miles from Liverpool. He works on a big roll-top desk in the front room, the walls of which are decorated with *ASF* cover originals. There he sat for hours talking about his writing and experiences and the sf world in general. It was just as well he needed only an occasional question, because his larger-than-life personality had a wilting effect on me: in fact it was years before I could hold my own with EFR except on paper. He was a very hospitable host.... actually it was EFR I was mainly thinking of for the character of Profan in *The Enchanted Duplicator*... and his wife's cooking was wonderful but, determined not to presume, I left after tea and spent the night in Chester Youth Hostel.

Next morning I set out along the road to Nantwich to try my hand at hitchhiking. I found I hated it. I felt like a beggar standing there pleading for lifts, and when I finally got one was relieved to find the driver was going all the way to Birmingham. To make myself feel better I took his name and address and promised to send him a pound of Irish butter... hard

to believe now, isn't it, that rationing was in force five years after the war? (And yes, as a matter of fact, I did send it.) That finished me with hitch-hiking, so I got a bus from Birmingham to Leicester, where I stayed with Mike Tealby (see *Void* #23). Then, on Thursday morning, I took another bus to London. I met Vince Clarke, accompanied by Ted Carnell, at a Lyons cafe and we went on to the White Horse. I don't remember much about that, but afterwards Ken and Vince invited me to stay at The Epicentre, and I *do* remember that. It may have changed my whole life, and it certainly changed my writing style. Hitherto everything I'd written had been either serious and solemn or terse and turgid, but within a few weeks of getting back, in an article for Pickles's *Phantasmagoria* called "Veni Vidi Vinci! (I came to see Vince)" I was writing like this:

...They seem to stop drinking very early in England, so soon after ten everyone went home, their fanning finished for another week. I went with Vince Clarke and Ken Bulmer to the flat known for reasons lost in the mists of antiquity as "The Epicentre". It is near Holloway Gaol. In fact I believe it *was* Holloway Gaol, until the League for Penal Reform got going. In the wilder parts of North London, where the hand of civilized man has never set foot, is this long grimy street, sinisterly deserted. On one side is a railway shunting yard. This is known as the goods siding. Opposite are Bulmer and Clarke. This is known as the bad siding. In front of their house a watchful Borough Council has installed a single warning lamp of a shade of green I had not seen since the boat docked in Liverpool. Pausing only to sign a certificate indemnifying the caretaker against any claims by your relatives you start the long climb to the flat. If your oxygen holds out, and you are not caught in the tangled mass of *SFN* deadlines which cover the stairs, you eventually arrive at the door. This must be opened carefully. Heaps of whitened bones tell of the fate of earlier travellers who were crushed by one of the periodic avalanches from the mountains of unanswered correspondence which give that peculiar curved appearance to the walls.*

** See The Outpost for the whole piece. [Ed.]*

And so on. Keen students of literary style will notice that this is more or less the way I write now. Yes, I had spent a night in The Epicentre and I had become a fan.

Next morning Ken and Vince went to work and I was left alone in The Epicentre. In an earnest but rather foolish attempt to do something for my keep I tried to tidy up a bit, but after bringing to light a fantastic quantity of decaying foodstuff and corroded coins in the vicinity of the

sink I had an agonizing re-appraisal of the rest of the flat and gave up the unequal struggle. Every level surface was covered to the point of instability by fanzines, prozines, letters, stencils, busts of Napoleon and model ships, their outlines blurred by a deep film of coal-dust which sifted continuously through the window. I reflected I was no Hercules and went out to visit various cultural centres of the capital like the Folies Bergere, The London Casino and Charing Cross Road. (The Windmill was too dear.) Actually it wasn't Hercules who finally cleaned up The Epicentre, but a slip of a girl called Pamela, whom I have ever since regarded with awe and admiration.

I can't remember anything about the rest of Friday and Saturday except that Ken Bulmer invented the steam engine, but I know what happened on Sunday because there is documentary evidence. Vince Clarke produced a oneshot called *Inductive Reactance,* in which he mentions that Ken and I had gone to Regents Park Zoo... where incidentally we arranged to collaborate on a story called "The Gatecrashers". This oneshot was in reply to one Mike Tealby and I had put out in Leicester called *Slander* (*Slant + Wonder* – Mike's title and brilliant I thought) which carried a semi-serious feud against the London Circle whose current inactivity was, as you'll have gathered from the extract above, a source of dissatisfaction among us provincials.

As I think I mentioned before, Ken Slater had set up a British fan organization called the Science Fantasy Society, with an elaborate structure of regional gauleiters, and had then been posted to Germany. Most of the London fans who had been in on its conception, including Ted Tubb, had then left Ken and Vince to carry the baby. My own feeling was that they should either do something about the organization or drop it, but instead the SFS dragged on a nominal existence from year to year, so that nobody ever knew where they were. Ken Slater made a last desperate effort to save it by arranging for one Egerton Sykes to take over the Secretaryship and sent him along to the White Horse. Unfortunately Mr. Sykes's only qualification for the job appeared to be that he was perpetually on the point of setting out to Mount Ararat to discover the remains of the Ark, and the London Circle did not particularly want to be organized. They explained to Mr. Sykes, not too diplomatically by all accounts, that there was no money or publicity to be made out of organizing fandom and he vanished from the scene never to be heard of again... except perhaps in Armenia. Disgruntled, Ken Slater washed his hands of the SFS and started a drive to popularize the N3F in England without very much more success.

The most unfortunate aspect of the SFS affair was that for years Vince Clarke's publishing activity was perforce confined to *Science Fiction News*, the official organ of the zombie organization. Perforce, because he and others felt that if he had the time and money to publish anything, it had to be *SFN*. He did publish some fine *SFN*s, but I always thought that editing a mere newszine was a waste of his talents, and a job for which he was temperamentally unsuited. An incurable perfectionist as far as publishing was concerned (it was he I was thinking of for Perfexion in *The Enchanted Duplicator*), he kept holding up issues for hot news, and by the time he got the news the rest of it was cold, and by the time the stencils were re-cut (of course, they had to be re-cut) the hot news was cold again, and so on. Looking back on it all, one can't help feeling that the SFS was an unmixed disaster for British fandom. It did no good, and it wasted Vince while we had him.

This is, of course, an objective appraisal. Subjectively, the SFS had its merits as far as I was concerned, in that it had provided a ready-made mailing list for the first issues of *Slant*, and Ken and Vince had contributed from its funds towards our costs... I think about £2 in all. Nor did I mean to cast any reflection upon Ken Slater. The SFS may have been a flop but it was no fault of his, as could be seen from the success of his own *Operation Fantast*, which virtually created post-war British fandom.

It was mainly *OF* which had brought us into fandom and, while I was staying with Mike Tealby, then acting as its British agent, he got an enquiry from another unknown in Belfast. I made a note of his name and was able to his surprise to greet him by it when he called at my house some while after I got back home, having been given my name and address by the *OF* contact bureau. I excitedly reported the event to Ken and Vince:

> The Belfast Triangle is no more. It is now a quadrilateral. We have discovered a fan who is... listen to this. A: Mad keen to be active, publish fanzines and all that. B: Writes stories. 3 *[sic]* Draws some of the best sf illos I have ever seen. Can you imagine! And lives not a quarter of a mile from my front door.... He didn't know a thing about fandom, and you are the first English fans to hear about him. But by ghod you won't be the last.

Of course you recognize the description. Yes, it was Bob Shaw, and that historic meeting had taken place on the evening of 10th October 1950.

I was so impressed by Bob's elegant little drawings that I borrowed from star *Slant* author Cedric Walker the carbon of an MS he had sold to

New Worlds and got Bob to do some illos for it, and sent them to Carnell as an example of his capabilities. I didn't really expect him to use those particular illos, after all he might already have allocated the story to someone else, but I hoped at least for some encouragement. Carnell replied a month later:

> ...I am not greatly enamoured with the enclosed. I presume that they are *finished* articles, and not roughs. If I tell you that my artists submit roughs which look like these, you will understand that the finished jobs really look good.

This from a man who published Alan Hunter. It was then that I had my first suspicion that Carnell might not be a very good editor.

One of the congenial people I'd met at the White Horse was Peter Phillips and, between exchanging shaggy dog stories, he'd asked me to look up a journalist friend of his in Ireland. I'd also got a story from him, to which Ken Bulmer had waived an option in my favour, about a post-atomic world in which a Geiger Counter had become a magic talisman. In November I was writing:

> I'm sorry I haven't been able to find any trace of your friend over here, unless he has given up journalism and taken up honest work as a breadserver. At least that's the occupation of the only person of that name listed in the directory.... I gave that clooshmaker story of mine a new lease of life in your improved "oggle-box" version and it seems to be doing well. Anyhow the other day somebody tried to tell it to me. Marvellous how they get around, isn't it? You know, sometimes I think the main pleasure in listening to a shaggy dog story is looking forward to telling it to someone else. This ties in neatly with the theory that the origin of humour is in the discomfiture of others, arising from the explosive release of breath at the unexpected downfall of a dreaded enemy.... They don't go over well on paper, but here's a short local one. Two men in the shipyard. About the middle of the morning one says to the other "What's the time?" His mate puts his hand in his pocket and produces an old boot-polish tin. He looks at it and says, "Half eleven." "Wait a minute," says the other, "that's only an old blackening tin!" "Oh, sure anything's good enough for work".

His reply, unexpectedly, came from a hospital.

> No, I haven't been shot, run over, bitten by a mad dog or

> contracted bubonic. For the next few weeks – or months – until they cure my merry little anxiety neurosis, the above will be my address. I'm under Dr. E.T.O. Slater, who reads *Astounding*, likes my stories and thus has a friendly interest in restoring my productivity.... I managed to knock out five odd stories before incarceration, and they've all sold. The American fantasy market is so wide-open at the moment, they'd probably buy Anderson or Grimm with very little rewriting.

I rushed to the aid with two pages of closely typed foolscap of which I'll quote the first three paragraphs:

> I don't knew how it is with you, but from the time I was in hospital I remember that two things assumed vast importance. Meals and visitors. As for the first, can I send you anything from this land flowing with milk and honey – seems rather messy doesn't it? As for the second I'm afraid the best I can do is write to you occasionally.... So one Slater is looking after you. Well, well, there's a thing. Mind he doesn't try any of these Fantastic Operations of his on you. Do you know the Captain by the way? I've never met him myself and until recently I knew of him only from his magazines, and from what Ken and Vince had to say about him. But he must be a more let-me-tell-you-the-story-of-my-life type than I had always thought. There's a little magazine for little magazine editors, called *Galley* and their last issue was the biography number. Some dozens or so pages of potted biographies. Most confined themselves to a few modest lines, but Slater absolutely let his hair down. Amazing, all about his childhood and whatnot. Positively Slavonic. Which reminds me, Mike Tealby once wrote to a girl in America and he said something "Fans being Slans". Well, you know his writing, she wrote back asking what was all this insistence about Finns being Slavs. Seemed obvious enough to her. But who am I to talk about people's bad writing, whose typewriter was bought by public subscription.... Things always seem to be reminding me of things. I used to think I should look around for a job in which efficient association centres would be an asset, but all I could think of was salesmen in a book or record shop, and neither gets much of a wage.

Peter didn't reply till he was out of hospital. I think towards the end of February.

> I've been out of hospital for four weeks. Should have had the sense to stay there until the dry-rot was eradicated in our new dwelling and the coal shortage was over. I've got me a room of my own to work in at last. When the builders replace the floor-boards and I have some means of heating other than a halfpint oil heater, which I place under my chair, maybe I'll get some work done. My backside keeps nicely warm but my fingers are freezing and my brain congealed. And I don't work with my backside, although a contrary opinion is probably held by the Piccadilly business lady who approached me one night when, in my capacity as a crime reporter, I was waiting in a dark nook to see a spiv about a story; and in reply to her charming solicitation (Looking for somewhere warm, ducks?) I said: "Sorry love, but I'm working myself." The look she gave me would have curdled the milk of the Ten Contrary Virgins; but I didn't realize her misapprehension until she was gone beyond recall and explanation.

And that seems to be the end of the Phillips/Willis correspondence. I was looking for another letter in which he interestingly deplored the "private jokes and curious excesses" of fandom, but it must have been one which has not survived. It's an unhappy thought that when they cured Peter's neurosis they appear to have eliminated his creative talent as well, for he never as far as I know wrote anything up to the standards of "Such Stuff As Dreams" or even his little gem in *Slant*, published as "Counter Charm", which I think was later anthologized. However he is still to be met at British sf functions, as convivial as ever and strikingly like a BRE of George O. Smith.

I Remember Me – 7
Vin¢ Clarke, Ken Bulmer, Lee Hoffman and *Quandry*

Before I go any further into the Fifties, I've been repeatedly asked, both times by Ethel, to describe what Vince Clarke and Ken Bulmer were like in those far-off days. This seems like a pretty good idea, except for the fact that I haven't the slightest idea what they were like. All I know is how they seemed to me, which was by no means the same thing.

You see, I had this idea that fandom was like the French Foreign Legion. People joined it to Forget, or at least to start a new life. No matter what sort of a fugghead or a failure you were in the mundane world, you began anew in fandom. You had a second chance to be the sort of person you wanted to be. You could have a new character, even a new name if you liked, and build your relationships with other people on a new and better basis. It was a sort of contemporary reincarnation. So I reasoned it was not done to ask fans about their mundane background, though you could speculate. I speculated. Vince Clarke, for instance, had a Home Counties accent, the sort that in Ireland is recognized as belonging to the governing class. Moreover, he spoke with what seemed to me an aristocratic, almost contemptuous, drawl and was obviously well read. Nevertheless he was unemployed and living in poor circumstances. It seemed pretty clear to me he was a Harrow or Winchester type gone wrong, maybe through having failed his exams at the University and having been disinherited. His manner, both in person and paper, initially gave me little cause to doubt this assessment. He was polite, friendly, but reserved and casual as if not wishing to be too intimate: he might have gone native, but he still mentally dressed for dinner. I liked and respected him, but for a long time regarded him with a certain degree of awe and caution. In appearance he was tall and thin, with a very large and round head with thinning yellow hair. I think I described him once as looking like a distinguished toffee apple.

I was still not familiar enough with English accents to recognize Ken Bulmer's as almost pure cockney, so I put him in the top drawer too, though not as high as Vince. I visualized him as coming from a small country vicarage, not quite big enough for a tennis court and immemorial

elms, but with a lawn of the sort admired by the American visitor in the old anecdote. (How do you get a lawn like this? It's quite simple, you just sow some good grass and roll it every day for 600 years.) The vicarage was of grey stone and covered with ivy, and Ken's widowed mother lived there with her memories. She was of solid upper-middle class English stock too, but hers was a naval family. Presumably Ken had spurned or been spurned by both the Navy and the Church and had fled to the Epicentre to Forget. All this was based on a photograph of an elderly woman on Ken's mantelpiece, a model ship on the sideboard and a passing reference of his having been in a church. In appearance he was much like he is today, now that he has shaved off his beard again... smallish, dark and slightly stooping as if bowed down by some Load carried cheerfully.

Both these backgrounds were pure phantasmagoria, but I don't think I would have visualized them so clearly if they hadn't represented to me a real difference in their characters, as revealed fleetingly in their letters. Vince wrote interestingly and well, but with a certain degree of cynical detachment. Even when he was complimentary it was with overtones of flippancy, as if condescending, and for a long time I viewed his remarks with suspicion and they were inclined to rub me the wrong way. Ken, on the other hand, was from the start full of friendliness and enthusiasm, which gushed out in his breathless all-one-paragraph letters. When Ken liked something, he let you know it, and we loved him for it, poor egoboo hungry waifs that we were. He had a rare talent for flattery... or, if you were the recipient of it, appreciation. If you had worked every night for four months at a printed fanzine, wouldn't you love a man who wrote by return of post a letter like this?

> Dear Walter:
>
> Have some very serious news for you. Thought you would like to know right away. Vince and I today received through the post two magazines, professionally produced jobs, and with, I must admit, absolutely first class artwork and print set up, on semi-slick paper and turned out in the best way I've seen any magazine dolled up. However these magazines, obviously from a long established professional house, quality breathes through them, have the temerity to title themselves *Slant*. Not only that, but impudently enough, they style themselves as being edited by a Walter A. Willis at your address. Further, they claim to have artwork by a James White and a Bob Shaw. These false claims, as we are still hopefully waiting for *Slant* to come along, do not fool us in the least. There is a certain doubt that they may

> confuse other readers of *Slant*, who also are waiting for copies, but we well know the truth. I thought you might be interested, in fact you are obviously interested in such a matter close to your own interests. I do not see any professional editorial address, the publications claiming to be made from N. Ireland. What confounded impudence! The only thing that can be said is that they are of beautiful workmanship, a real credit to the publishing profession. However I do feel that any publication capable of such glorious work should not stoop to the inglorious ruse of assuming the name of *Slant* in the search for further circulation. I now notice that my own name also is included, coupled with yours. Monstrous! Believe me, I shall not rest until I find the perpetrators of this effrontery and let them know, in forceful though restrained language, that the correct place for their publication is on the bookstalls and not sneaking through fans' letterboxes under the guise of an old and loved friend. Watch 'em, Walter.
>
> Yours,

The correspondence with Vince and Ken continued voluminously, but almost entirely about each other's publishing activities and the coming 1951 Festival Convention, that climatic event. There wasn't much more to talk about, since there were still less than half a dozen active English fans. As Vince put it:

> The trouble with British fandom at least is that the personalities are so nebulous in any writings. A number of personal allusions would be lost on the "outside" reader at the moment. Regular and frequent publication of about 3 different fanzines would be needed before a sufficiently strong background could be built up in the non-active fan's mind, and he would know instanter of the allusion back of, say, my crack concerning Shaver and Deacon in IR.

Parts of my reply have some historical interest....

> On the same day your letter arrived I had a letter from Banister saying that on the same day my last letter to him had arrived he had a letter from you saying that on the same day his last letter to you arrived accepting your story my letter to you arrived accepting your other story. What did you want to start all that for? By the way, don't let that mention of carbon fool you, I'm

> not at all business-like, it's just that I have to be careful because I tell so many lies. I remember once a letter from a fan who quoted a reference number at me at which I felt properly insulted.... I think you do pretty well for Ray, and I hope he gave you his Invisible Little Man, which must obviously have been intended for you. What you really need is a plot-twister. We can supply a model almost as good as the one we use for van Vogt. Just feed in a simple plot at one end, turn the handle, and it emerges at the other end in any desired degree of complexity. I am afraid we cannot supply the identical VV Mark 11 model because this has to be handled by skilled operators. We had a lot of trouble with it some time ago, Some of the plots got very badly buckled and when we tried to straighten them out there was a lot of loose ends which proved impossible to unravel so we had to invent Charles Harness. So called of course because he was all traces and bits of VV.... Would like a copy of *Wastebasket*, and it doesn't matter how sorry looking it is. It won't look as sorry as I will if I don't get one. Actually I don't much care how a fanzine looks as long as it reads well. People who are stuck with printing have to do the best they can with it, but my own favourite fanzines are chaotic, informal and frequent. Like *Warp* and in a lesser degree *Quandry*. Not lesser in content, that is now very high, but Hoffman seems to spend too much time on the appearance of his magazine. Not that he doesn't make a very nice job, but I wonder would it not be better if he cut out some frills like these linocuts.

Quandry edited by a man, and printing linocuts! But such were the weird inchoate beginnings of the era known as Sixth Fandom. Lee had produced the first issue of *The Quandry* in the autumn of 1950 and when we got *Slant* #4 finished I sent an exchange copy... hence, probably, the brief manifestation of linocuts in *Quandry*, a mistake which Lee soon realized, returning to the mimeo artwork for which she had such talent. And hence this momentous letter she mailed in November:

> *Slant* arrived today. Gorsh, thanx. As is my custom I read the editorial first. Terrific! Liked to laughed m'self silly. If you should ever feel so inclined don't hesitate to send material to *Quandry*.... Hah, I am laughing at your comments on multi-colored paint. I know how you done it. I haven't spent years as a stage hand for nothing. It's done with lights. Simple.... Neither

> *Destination Moon* nor *Rocketship X-M* has come to Savannah yet. Personally, I doubt if the world is ready yet for STF... or if it ever will be. I believe in the cyclic philosophy... that all things wax and wain (or is that wane?) I saw a stf movie made about 1930 not long ago. It was a *Flash Gordon* serial spliced together. Two of them were released recently to cash in on the stf trend.... *Rocketship* and *Mars Attacks the World*. I saw the latter. It was the funniest movie I've seen in years. Especially the part where Flash and his friends were locked in a cave on Mars when suddenly a hole appears in the wall and out tumbles the Prince of Mongo (a planet) who just happened to bore in and just happens to be an old friend of Flash. So tell me this is strictly for the kids, I know... Savannah is a fairly large town. Around 190 thousand. Well, way over on the other side of town a fan grew. Over here I grew. He did it by himself. I delved into the black mysteries and purple ghlories with a lil shove from a guy who was a fan five or six years ago. I entangled two friends slightly. That gives Savannah a fan population of 2 slans, 1 retired slan, and two nonslans. Yet when I go dashing down to the mag. shop looking for something that came out a week or so ago when I was really broke... what do I find? Yes, nothing. I, too, fear that we dwell in ignorance on the edge of a ghreat fandom in which Ghu, himself, walks. Perhaps it is the oft mentioned fan-heaven... could be fan-hell too. It's my theory that they're the same.

I had just been waiting for someone to ask me to do a column, because I always had bits left over from *Slant*, so I jumped at the chance. Not too obviously of course....

I'd be very pleased to write for *Q* but I'm not the sort of bloke who can sit down and dash something in cold blood. Let me know what sort of thing you would like and give me a week's notice and the number of words required and I'll airmail some sort of crud back. I suppose a one page column would be the best thing, could put anything in it. Would try to keep a monthly schedule but it might break down during the period *Slant* was going out.

I Remember Me – 8
Lee Hoffman, J.T. McIntosh and "Fandom for the Highbrow"

Well, as I was saying, I wrote this column for *Quandry*, calling it "The Harp That Once or Twice" because I thought its future was doubtful: but taking as much trouble over that first instalment as if I knew how important it was going to be. I mailed it on 22nd January 1951, and three months later I was writing to Lee:

> Letter section was more interesting to me than usual this time. I'd been a bit worried about how THTOOT would go over – you never say anything about it in your letters and for all I knew you were disgusted with it – but it seems to have been received quite well. Ghod bless Joe Kennedy. Not only does he say the thing is good, but he implies that anyone who doesn't agree is a bit stupid. What more could you ask?

I notice from the rest of this letter that I had by now joined FAPA, or rather been inducted into it. Out of idle curiosity, I had scrawled a note in a sample copy of *Slant* to Harry Warner asking for the dope about it. Next thing I knew I had got a letter from Burbee notifying me I was a member and that the current mailing was on its way. Apparently Bob Tucker had paid my subscription knowing the exchange difficulties British fans were faced with at that time. I was a bit taken aback by this unexpected extension of my publishing activities since I didn't have a duplicator, but with the help of Hoffman and later McCain and Vick I kept up my activity requirements by contributing to existing FAPAzines. When I eventually retired from FAPA in 1953 G.M. Carr pointed to the small number of issues of my FAPAzine *Pamphrey* and suggested I wouldn't be missed. However true that may have been, the fact was that I was active in FAPA before and outside *Pamphrey*. Lee took to heart the implied rebuke in my letter:

> Lemme see now, yes, I printed what Redd Boggs said about Harp in No. 10. And he seems to have voiced the general opinion of my readers. At least he's summed up what they've said, pretty well and he's put what I say into words. Namely in

> the lines: “Walt Willis is easily the fan find of the year, and you’re lucky to snare him as a columnist.” Only it was you found me. I was sitting home one day when a *Slant* came. I was overjoyed at the fact that you wanted to trade such a lovely magazine for poor miserable li’l *Quandry*. Then I realized that you probably had never seen a copy... only seen one of my ads and fallen for it. Then I read *Slant* and I sat me down and tried my best to write you a sufficiently intelligent letter to merit a reply. Apparently you received it on a slow day for I did get an answer. And wot an answer! Where I had daringly ventured that you just might sometime mebbe find it in you to write a li’l bit of something for *Quandry* please? you offered to do a column! So I can’t claim to have found you... you found me or something... but regardless, we are both found so now *Q* and I are thriving happily on the egoboo that comes to the ed of the zine with Harp in’t. You make me so happy I could sit here (I sit crosslegged on the bed to type) and die from sheer ecstasy... with a smile on my face....

She ended on a more cryptic note:

> Hey, Walt, how are you on keeping secrets? I mean really hanging on to one for a few long months... not telling a soul....?

You will no doubt be thinking I was pretty stupid not to have guessed what the secret was – I mean, what male fan would sit cross-legged on a bed to type – but you haven’t heard anything yet. I can be much stupider than that without even trying. Why, three months before, in February 1951, seven months before the secret was detonated in front of an astonished Tucker at the Nolacon, Lee Hoffman had *sent me a Valentine*. It was a picture of a squirrel with the legend “You’re nutty but nice”, and so inured was I by now to the eccentricities of fans that I accepted it quite casually as a mere fannish pleasantry. Finally, Lee had, almost literally, to draw me a diagram. She never actually told me she was a girl: she just sent me a photograph and let me draw my own conclusion. Looking back on it now, it’s uncanny to see the way Lee and I were almost unconsciously building *Quandry* for its destiny as the first Anglo-American fanzine. The next important step was all Lee’s own idea:

> It one day occurred to me that you people can’t just reach into your pockets and pull out a dime to stuff into an envelope and send to me over *Quandry*. Subsequently I stopped short and said

to myself, “Hoffman, these fans outside of the US can’t just reach into their pockets and pull out a dime to stuff into an envelope and send to you.” “True,” I replied thoughtfully. “Well,” sez I, “Are you trying to be a professional amateur publisher or do you do this for the fun of it?” “Wot do you think?” I asked me sarcastically. “Which means mo’ to you? A measly li’l dime or a letter from somebody?” I question further. “W-e-e-e-l-l-l,” I look longingly toward an ad for some grease... which shows beautiful golden chicken frying in full colour, and reply, “A letter.” “So?” asks I. “So,” sez I. So from now on overseas fans can have *Q* for a letter or note of acknowledgement per issue.

At that time *Q* had a circulation of 93, only two of whom were in England. And neither of those two were leading fans; they were Ken Johnston of Liverpool and Pete Ridley of London. But after my London Convention reports British fandom took advantage of Lee’s offer and swarmed aboard the *Quandry* bandwagon. However all that was still to come. *Slant* was still the main thing with me and I was pushing it into all sorts of odd corners. I had read an sf poem in *The Listener* by Robert Conquest, and sent him a copy care of the BBC. He replied with a letter of comment and a subscription. I was infiltrating with a character in London called Borrow who produced a printed little-magazine called *The Glass*. I wrote for it an introduction to sf and fandom especially aimed at the highbrow mentality, which Ethel might think worth publishing as an appendix to this. And I had sent a copy of *Slant* to somebody called MacGregor in Aberdeen, who had had an interesting letter in *New Worlds*. This seed seemed to have fallen on stony ground, but it eventually burgeoned into the following correspondence:

Dear Walter:

I got a copy of *Slant* about eight months ago and have finally read it. What do you mean, an insult? I have *ASF*s of much earlier date which I haven’t read. All in good time. At any rate I liked *Slant* (I didn’t read the fiction, of course.) Is it still alive? If it is, you will probably react to that as I did when someone asked me if I had anything published yet. Violently. At any rate, I enclose a PO of convenient denomination and would like to see *Slant*, please.... I promise to read it before the end of 1951. If you would like some fiction for this magazine which may and may not exist, I have a 500,000 word novel I could let

you have. But I had better warn you that I'd have to revise it first, and it would be a little longer after that.

....Recently *Planet*, knowing no better, sent back a story for a minor alteration. I added ten thousand words. That, I trust, learned them.

Yours sincerely,

James Macgregor (J.T. M'Intosh)

Dear James:

Thanks for your letter and the sub. And of course for the very nice ploy in proauthorship, but it wasn't really necessary. We know you. You wrote "The Curfew Tolls" in *ASF* 1950/12 and you have a story coming up in *New Worlds*. But I did not know that you were the MacGregor who had the letter in the October '49 issue which we thought interesting enough to be from a potential subscriber. Nice to see the prognostication fulfilled even after such a long time.

About TCT, now. I remembered that story and I'm glad to meet the author. Not just because I wanted to query this O & S business. This I do with the greatest reluctance, since I like this sort of twist, but here it didn't seem to have any logical connection with the plot. Besides it seems a most curious way to go about selecting people. On the most severely practical grounds, how about the several hundreds of millions of people who write their names with an ideographic "alphabet"? However it's a small point and the story was done well enough to make me quite willing to suspend my disbelief. Thanks again for writing.... Oh, and about that novel: sure, send it along and we'll serialize it if it's any good. Should be able to get it into only about 500 instalments.... Well, it was good enough for Dickens!

Cordially.

Dear Walter:

Yes, you have a very nice zine. But how could anyone say a word against, it when he thinks of all the effort it must take? Ploy in proauthorship, indeed – I shall confine myself to remarking that if I had really been ploying I should certainly have mentioned my ten stories coming (as of January 1) in US and British magazines. However, I now have. As for O & S....At first, never having had a high opinion of TCT, I was going to let it pass. But on consideration I find I am quite prepared to defend

it. In the first place, I don't think the ideographic alphabet question matters much. An author can always cover himself in matters like this. He can explain in tedious detail exactly what was done in all the out-of-the-ordinary cases. But then he has a big unwieldy story which doth protest too much. No, I wanted some method of random selection, and this is never easy. In fact, I am inclined to think it's never possible. Maybe you know some of the classic cases. An oatmeal manufacturer, on the basis of a survey of three pages on the London telephone directory, found a colossal consumption of oatmeal and publicized it. Random selection? No. He omitted to mention that he took his three pages from the Mac section. Another case in Aberdeen not long ago had doctors tearing their hair. There was an upstairs ward and a downstairs ward in the maternity hospital. Over a period deaths, length of convalescence and percentage of stillborn babies were incredibly low in the upstairs ward compared with the other. Theoreticians got busy. Had atmospheric pressure something to do with it? Was there a psychological factor? Again no. Someone found out that the porter had been directing the cases who could walk upstairs and those who were carried in filled the downstairs ward. Enough to upset the random selection completely. So when I wanted a method of selection from names (to include all families as units) I hit on this one. Alphabetical order is not good. You start off with the Aarons and Aaronsons and Abrahams. At various other points you get nothing but Macs and O'somethings. On the other hand, while the OS method means that your first group includes all the Stones (possibly biasing your selection) the fact that the Stones have absolutely nothing to do with the Carsons and the Costers tends to remove the bias. Though you have a lot of "sons", there is no bias in this suffix that I can see. No, frequently I have to admit that if I were writing a story again I'd do it very differently. But on this point I stand firm.... My novel is practically on the way to you. *Galaxy*, perhaps, and *ASF*....

Yours sincerely,
Jim

I was making a lot of new contacts in America by now – Max Keasler, Duggie Fisher, G.M. Carr – but our letters don't seem to be of either intrinsic or historical interest so I've ruthlessly consigned them to oblivion lest these memoirs get so long that I never catch up with them... or even

gradually lose ground. There was also Ed Noble, the one who changed his address so many times that Bob Shaw called him "the roamingest Noble of them all". He and I were bound by a bond of fellow feeling since Sam Merwin had castigated our fanzines in his review column. I thought myself specially unfortunate because when I had written a letter of mild expostulation he had quoted parts of it as an excuse to change his reviewing system to one in which he merely listed most of the fanzines without comment. Actually the real reason was that he couldn't be bothered to read them – he admitted when he left the *TWS*/*SS* editorship that he hadn't even read most of the ones he did review – but it worried me that I should get the blame. My problem was to protest my innocence in such a way that Merwin would print it, so I conceived the idea of writing an article called "The Mind of Samuel Merwin". Ostensibly it was a psychological analysis of Merwin based on his personalized writing, but worked in with it was this episode of the reviews. I figured Merwin would hardly resist reading an article like that and that prima donna that he was he might even refer to it. Curiously enough this strategy worked. He devoted a whole page or so to it, quoting copiously just the bits I had wanted him to. I felt quite Machiavellian.

But now everything was being overshadowed by the forthcoming London Convention, the Festival Convention, the first real International Convention to be held this side of the water. There was only one man who made it really worthy of that title and the letter from him I got that Spring is as good a way to end this instalment as it was to presage that climatic convention.

6 Mar 51

Dear Wally the Jolly:

I just received *Slant* No.5, roared over the departments, and find your fannouncement on the bacover not to be ignored. I give you fair warning: *don't* come to the Loncon! Because I shall be there, and I weigh 202 pounds in my stalking feet (or hadn't you heard I've become a detective) – and if you dare show your face in my presence, I warn you that as sure as God made little green apples, little green fen, and little green Irishmen, I shall give you the most awful thumping on the back out of sheer exuberant enthusiastic ebullient enthusiasm for the unadulterated pleasure that your treasure of a fanmag brings to me! I trust I have made my intentions clear? Stf be with you and yours, far friend, and I look forward to soon setting foot on your shores – and hand on your back in appreciation.

With every good wish.
Forry

Fandom for The Highbrow

The first magazine to specialize in scientific romance was published in 1926. It was called *Amazing Stories*, and included reprints from Poe and Verne alongside new stories by hack authors. At the end of 1950 there were 26 such magazines in America alone. A few specialize in reprints, chosen recklessly from the works of authors ranging from E.R. Burroughs to G.K. Chesterton, Arthur Machen, Olaf Stapledon and C.S. Lewis, but most of them consist entirely of material that is original, or at least new. Much of it is written by professional authors who have specialized in the genre, or by scientists and technicians with some literary talent, but on the whole the standard of writing seldom rises above the competent. The aficionado is accustomed to skimming through a dozen stories before he finds one he considers worth reading, but the superficial observer is apt to take away with him the impression of a mass of nonsensical and ill-written rubbish. The appearance of some of the magazines does nothing to encourage a closer look. Since none of them has a circulation of more than 200,000, they fall inevitably into the category and company of "pulp" magazines, with whose lurid covers their own must compete for the attention of the casual buyer. Recently the better magazines have tended to give up the struggle, adopt restrained covers and pocketbook format, and rely on subscription sales. The best of these are *Fantasy and Science Fiction*, *Galaxy*, and *Street and Smith's Science Fiction*. The cover of this last actually bears vestigial remains of its former juvenile title *Astounding*. A reprint is available in England, and except for the British magazine *New Worlds* is the only "sf" magazine on sale here that is worth inspection.

One of the first things that the publishers discovered about sf was that it inspired an extraordinarily articulate interest among some of their readers. The editor of *Amazing*, commenting incredulously on this in his third issue, dubbed them "fans", and in time they have come to accept the name with a special significance of their own – rather as the "Contemptibles" did. Those correspondents whose letters were printed in *Amazing* immediately began to correspond with one another and in 1929 some of them published the first fan magazine. Since then about 3,000 fan magazine titles have appeared, some lasting only one issue but many publishing regularly for years. Quite a variety of reproductive processes

have been used – letterpress printing, lithography, mimeography, hectography, handwriting with carbon copies, and even wire recording. At the moment there are about 200 being published. Their circulation ranges from 50 to 1,000. Their paid circulation is notoriously less. It has never been reliably confirmed that any of them has ever made a profit: they are very seldom meant to, and many are distributed free.

These magazines all circulate in the tiny world of "fandom", sometimes called the Microcosm. Estimates of the number of fans vary according to the degree of activity one adopts as the criterion. The nucleus is the two Amateur Press Associations of some 100 editors, who as it were live by taking-in one another's magazines. Just outside are the editors of subscription "fanmags", each the centre of the closely knit group of his own subscribers, many of whom are in close touch with other groups. Most of these editors spend all their spare time in fan activity – publishing, writing, drawing, editing and corresponding. The most active often end by throwing up their jobs for a hazardous existence as professional authors, editors, publishers or agents. About half the editors of the professional sf magazines are ex-fans.

At any one time the number of really active fans is about 300. In addition there is the comparatively sane fringe of people who are active to the extent of occasional subscribing to and writing for fanmags, writing letters to the professional magazines, and corresponding. The total number of people known to take an articulate interest in sf is about 1,500. About a thousand of these are in America, and the rest mainly in the United Kingdom, France and Australia.

Explanations of fan psychology have ranged from a viable mutation to a castration complex, but the truth is probably no more than they are journalists *manqués*, brought together by an interest so eclectic as to give them almost the status of a persecuted minority. As for the interest itself, it seems to me what requires explanation is not why it exists, but why it is not more widely shared. There are two facts that should be more widely realized. One is that space flight is today a practicable proposition (1). The other is that there are estimated to be a hundred thousand planets in this galaxy inhabited by intelligent beings (2). Either space travel or contact with extra-terrestrial thought would be the most important event in the history of mankind. Are science fiction readers wrong to take an interest in them? They were virtually the only members of the public who were mentally prepared for the atomic bomb, the political and psychological implications of which had been a subject of discussion among them for ten years past.

(1) *The Conquest of Space*, Ley and Bonestell
(2) *The Nature of the Universe*, Hoyle

I Remember Me – 9
The LonCon Report, The Quannish and Lee Hoffman

The British Convention of 1951 was the first I had ever been at, and the 15-page report on it I wrote for *Quandry* was frighteningly uninhibited. At least it frightens me now when I re-read it: if it had all happened in New York, I'd probably still be in jail. It didn't frighten me at the time partly because I didn't yet know personally any of the people on the official programme, and partly because I was under a peculiar misapprehension about them. I thought of them as pros, remote godlike figures who moved and had their being on a higher plane altogether. Nothing a scruffy little fan could say about them could ruffle their Olympian composure. So I was cheerfully caustic about everything on the programme, from the food (I'm not saying a word against the catering arrangements at this hotel. It's just that it's the first I've seen where they have a fifth place on the cruet stand for a stomach pump.) right up to the Convention Chairman.

This was poor Ted Carnell, whom I saw as a Machiavellian figure who had manoeuvred Walter Gillings out of his central position in English science fiction. This theory was based on nothing more than doubt as to whether Carnell was really a better editor than Gillings, reading in old fanzines about their long standing rivalry, and a speech which I reported as follows:

> Ted started by saying how sorry he was that Gillings wasn't there, and you got the impression that his grief was mainly due to the fact that there were a lot of things he wanted to say to his face that he didn't like to say behind his back. However he managed to overcome this handicap pretty well. All that was missing was a little wax image of Gillings. First he contrived to make it quite clear that Gillings's resignation was not due to illness, unless you think bad blood is illness. Then he announced that he himself was taking over the editorship of *Science Fantasy*. The magazine had apparently been losing money like a fanzine, but nevertheless he paid a glowing tribute to Gillings's work on it. Obviously Gillings had every quality of the ideal editor except ability. There was absolutely nothing wrong with

> *Science Fantasy* that a complete abolition of all traces of him wouldn't cure....

And so on. The first warning I had that the Olympians could be ruffled was a letter from Vince Clarke to Madeleine, whom he affected to believe was my widow. Then George Charters told me he had had a letter from Carnell in which he asked me to pass on the message that my convention report "stank". I'm relieved to see that I didn't respond to this by a grovelling apology: in fact I was almost defiant.

> George Charters was here this evening and passed on your comment on my convention report.
>
> If you mean the report stank as a report, OK, but if you are objecting to the way you appeared in it yourself I can't agree with you so easily. This was a frankly impressionistic account and that was the impression I got....

Nevertheless I was, judging from carbons of other letters to friends at the time, quite upset about the affair and Ted's reply was a relief. It was to the effect that my report had stirred up a lot of "shall I say, discord" but it was now all water under the bridge as far as he was concerned. I found out later that immediately Bill Temple got his copy of the Quannish (he was at that time the only London pro on Lee's mailing list) he had telephoned Ted Carnell and probably the others and read out the juicier bits.

The Quannish was of course the 100-page anniversary issue of *Quandry*, I think the largest fanzine ever published up to that time. And it went on being monthly, Lee at this stage of her life being able to fan pretty near full time. By now she and I were in correspondence on three different levels, simultaneously – airletters for urgencies, long surface letters for conversation, and postcards for stray thoughts. Or maybe I should say poctsarcds, for that was when that particular piece of nonsense started. There had been a hiatus in their flow and I had typed a hasty PS to a letter which came out, "What, no poctsarcds?" Lee replied:

> No, Walt, I'm sorry but it is very difficult to get poctsarcds here now. Seemingly there is a shortage. I have been to every drugstore and every dimestore in Savannah. I can get some fair pitcuer poctsarcds for twice the price of regular poctsarcds. But that is outrageous. I will go back to the place where I originally got poctsarcds and see if they have any. If not, you are out of luck on the poctsarcd situation.

Having a printing press gives you an advantage in some situations. I got

some blank cardboard and promptly printed some “Poctsarcds” and sent them off to her. While I was at it I ran off some for myself and printed Lee’s name and address on the other side. She was charmed at the idea of incoming mail with her letterhead on it. I also printed up a supply of visiting cards and mailed it to her at the Nolacon Hotel, where the great Secret was to be revealed. Though the inner circle had grown (and Chuck Harris was being uncannily perceptive. Way back in June he had said casually, “I’d always thought previously that Lee was a female.”) Lee had set her heart on keeping the Secret until the Nolacon, an event which was looming very important in her young life. The way she told me was by sending me a photograph, with a letter which read in part:

> Concerning the Secret which is enclosed: You, Shelby Vick and Bobby Pope are the only fans to whom this has been revealed.... All will be made known at the Nolacon of course, but until then I want it kept secret. I’ve built *Q* and myself up in fandom pretty well on merit alone... no quarter asked because I am a girl and none given. The N3F’s voted me top faned and I like to think I earned it and not that I was just given it. It’s a nice feeling to achieve something.

My immediate reaction was a stunned and airmailed postcard, which Lee pinned to the wall of her room: I can’t remember what was on it, but later I was writing:

> Still haven’t got used to your being a girl. I suppose the idea should have crossed my mind some time or other, especially when I got the valentine, but it never did. I had quite a clear picture of you in my mind – a short tubby chap with twinkling brown eyes and an absent-minded manner. Don’t imagine I’m disappointed – I’m delighted, especially when you turn out to be pretty. And it’s an absolutely wonderful hoax. I don’t think there’s ever been one as good. And that business of sending me a valentine was delicious, like “The Purloined Letter”.

By the time the Nolacon came I knew Lee pretty well, and looked forward to it nearly as much as she. I was with her every mile of the way to New Orleans... more literally than you would expect. For instance there was this letter I got postmarked Montgomery, Alabama:

> Well, I’m off. Right now I’m on the train, 20 miles out of Savannah. This is a “local” and it stops at every crossing between here and Montgomery. Left Savannah 7:30 p.m., arrive

Montgomery 7:50 a.m. Change trains. Arrive New Orleans 3:10 p.m. My first train trip alone.... 1 a.m. and we're sitting on a siding waiting for some other train to use the track.... This is a very modern train. All the latest conveniences, like wheels. Only trouble is that they stop every few miles – probably to water the mules. Laid over 45 mins, in Waycross, so I had a cup of coffee.... Well, the train we've been waiting for has finally come. I'll mail this in the next stopover, probably Montgomery, Alabama.

This arrived in Belfast even before the Convention had started and, intoxicated by this participation in Lee's historic trip, I replied immediately under the subconscious conviction that she was still on the train.

Dear Lee:

Gosh, what are you doing in Alabama? I don't want to worry you but are you sure you're on the right train? Besides how did Alabama get in there anyway? I don't see any justification for it at all. I don't know much about US geography, but I do know that both Savannah and New Orleans are somewhere down there in the bottom right-hand corner only an inch or so apart. With such a convenient arrangement I see no reason for Alabama to come butting in and spoil everything. In fact I'm beginning to take a very poor view of Alabama altogether. Sinister sort of place. Did you notice you are always hearing about midnight choo-choos leaving for Alabama, BUT YOU NEVER HEAR OF ANY OF THEM COMING BACK! Vestigia nulli retrorsum or something – no footprints coming out. Of course I'm willing to admit that my knowledge of the US is not very extensive – in fact it could be written down on this form. There are 48 states plus Washington, DC. There may be a Washington AC too but I never heard of it. On the top righthand corner is the communist state of Rhode Island, a foul sort of place. At the other end is California and at the bottom are various Mexicos in various age groups. But the bottom righthand corner baffles me. I don't ever like to talk about Texas for instance because I have a sort of neurotic bloc about it – one of those things that are always happening in *ASF* when you feed electronic brains contradictory data. 1. The west is where people shoot sheriffs and punch cattle. 2. Nowhere do they do this more

assiduously than in Texas. 3. Texas is in the South East. Let's see, this is the 31st. This won't arrive till the third at the earliest, by which time the con will be over. Imagine that. I'll bet you're worn out. So – WELCOME HOME!

I Remember Me – 10
Lee Hoffman, Henry Kuttner and J.T. McIntosh

While Lee Hoffman is steaming on her midnight choo-choo through Alabama on her way to her first convention, I think maybe I should interrupt my own train of thought for a confession. This is a dark secret I have been keeping from fandom for many years, and I only make a clean breast of it now because it will be impossible for you to understand these memoirs without it. Not to make any bones about it, the skeleton in my closet is this. I am neat.

Neat by fannish standards, that is. By mundane standards I am no doubt slap-happy enough, but compared to Shelby Vick (who once lost his typer in his fan room) or Duggie Fisher (who mailed out his fanzine copy by copy whenever he happened to trip over a subscription) I am not a proper fan at all. If you haven't already ground this page under your heel in disgust, I'll explain how it takes me. I don't put the letters I receive in any of the recognized places like the floor or under the bed, I actually at some stage or other *file* them. Yes, in real manila folders with a file tag.

When I first started this addiction I put everything on the same file just as it came in. This was my own infallible invention to prevent letters being put on the wrong file, and it was convenient for passing comments on to contributors. But of course when I began to correspond with more people it became difficult to find previous correspondence, so I took the momentous step of opening special files for people like Lee Hoffman and Chuck Harris.

It was from this fatal decision that you are now suffering. For having followed Lee Hoffman halfway from Savannah to New Orleans, you are now unceremoniously jerked back out of that timestream and deposited breathless in London, where another portentous event has just occurred.

Oh. No, it hasn't. The letter I was looking at was dated 16th January 1951, but I now notice that my reply was dated January 1952 and in those days I was quicker to answer letters than that. We won't come to that portentous event for another four months, so back to Lee Hoffman and the Nolacon. Sorry about these dizzying transitions, but I am close to Ethel's deadline, and the explanation about the filing system will serve for alas too

many discontinuities in the future. During the next few weeks there trickled into Belfast a small stream of hectic airletters, letters and postcards from Lee in New Orleans (including one reading simply "MET TUCKER!") from which I gathered that Lee had had a wonderful time, and that the denouement of the Great Hoffman Hoax had been sensational. Though not perhaps as sensational as Lee had hoped, judging from one letter in which she repeated three times darkly, "Fans are blabbermouths." Indeed by this time quite a few fans were party to the great secret, and were comparing notes. One was Ian McAulay that is, whose description of Lee as she was at that time was disarmingly frank compared to the delicate hints of older fans:

> When I got off the train at Savannah I nearly fainted. Boy what a surprise! A big fat girl came up to me and said, "Are you Ian McAulay?"

Before we move into the stirring events of 1952, "The Year of Not Enough Time" as Lee called it, there are a couple of 1951 letters I can't throw away without some record. The first because it was written by a great sf writer from whom we won't hear again.

> Dear Walter:
>
> Thanks for the Winter *Slant*. C.L. Moore and I were delighted. I hastily enclose a buck for our subscription. The magazine is very refreshing, somehow. I'm not sure exactly why. Possibly it's its high literacy which compares so favorably to the majority of U.S. fan magazines, though there's more to it than that. Possibly the maturity of the humor (most of it, I qualify) gives *Slant* its extremely pleasant air. At any rate, there is no air of feverishly compensatory neuroticism, the sort of thing which makes many U.S. fan magazines rather embarrassing. I've always felt that writing should involve at least some amount of mental activity. This may prejudice me fatally. I'm sorry I didn't see your article on van Vogt and Kafka. They do have something in common, certainly. But your statement that Kafka seems to be a s-f writer manqué – couldn't you with equal justice say that most science-fiction writers are Kafkas manqué? It rather turns, to my mind, on the definition of science fiction, a term for which I've found no satisfactory answer as yet. I'm working on it, though; wish me luck. I suspect the answer may turn upon method, as in the "pure" detective story, fathered by the Gothic: the detective was a

symbol and not necessarily the protagonist; the criminal was the centre of the target, and the inductive process the method. In s-f, my present hypothesis is that the target needs better definition, and perhaps the method. Since I get confused quite easily, I admit that I may be wrong. But at least I know there *is* a target. This automatically puts me one up on Kafka. On the side of general popularization, I still say that what s-f needs is an H. Rider Haggard. Glad you like *Fairy Chessmen*, and thanks for your kind words. I got the advance copies of the book last week, but couldn't bear to re-read the story. I figure that a man's reach should exceed his grasp, and, whenever I pick up one of my published yarns I realize that it certainly did.

Regards,
Henry Kuttner

And the second because it contains a piece of information about a famous story which however slight would otherwise perish completely.

Dear Walter:

I shall introduce my section on proauthorship very adroitly this time with a true story. Part of the story could have been told earlier, but the end has only just supplied itself. When I sent you a little story for *Slant* some time ago it was only after two prolonged searches for the thing. After the first, I decided "Look Out, Grandad" was lost for ever and sat down to write another short piece for you. The only idea that occurred to me was the not very new one about human beings refusing to follow out the commands of an electronic brain for their own good. Good enough for *Slant,* I said blasphemously to myself. I got under way as follows, viz.

On Earth a town died.

Its name was Katahut.

But Katahut was on Venus 25 million miles away.

It was like Koko's story to the Mikado. When Economics Centre said "Let a thing be done", it was as good as done – practically, it *was* done. When EC said a town must die, the town was as good as dead – practically, it *was* dead – so why not say so?

This went on happily for a while. But when I reached the bottom of the second page, it became obvious that "Katahut Said No"

was not, as I had intended, going to be finished on page three or four. So I put it aside and instituted another search for “Look-Out, Grandad” – this time successful. I sent it off, and that was that. Last week, however, I heard from my agent that he had just sold “Katahut Said No” and another story, “The Bliss of Solitude” to *Galaxy*. So when you read “Katahut” in *Galaxy*, remember the first two pages were written for *Slant*. That may enable you to add a few trenchant phrases to your comment about rejecting stories merely out of a high regard for H.L. Gold.

J.T. McIntosh

I Remember Me – 11
Chuck Harris

When someone dismisses our hobby as worthless I think of Chuck Harris. Not just because he is one of the finest people I have met through it, but because his father once took me aside and thanked me for fandom.

Chuck contracted meningitis while serving as a nursing orderly in the Navy during the war and lost his hearing completely. Being stricken suddenly with deafness in adult life is a very different thing from growing up with it, and back in civilian life Chuck became a virtual hermit. Then he came into fandom through the International Science Fiction Correspondence Club and started writing letters, first to American fans and then to me. But he still never met anybody. When I was about to make my first trip to England he wrote and explained about his deafness and asked me not to call on him.

I accepted this at the time, but after I got back home I kept nudging him and the Epicentre towards one another, and on 16th January 1952, Chuck wrote:

> Remember I told you I'd written to Ken? Monday I had an answer from Vince. A damn nice answer too. Five pages mostly about duping. Vince asked me to go see him at the Epicentre (and Ken). Listen.... "Where else can you see them but at the Epicentre? We've been meaning to ask you around ever since Walt Willis gave us a glowing account of your letters (ta) along with the reason why you fight shy of the White Horse...." I shall go up on the 27th probably.... I'm a bit scared of going.

The historic visit actually did take place on the 27th, and next day Chuck reported to me:

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

And so it started, the nucleus of what came later to be known as Sixth Fandom, the closest and happiest *gestalt* ever formed in international fandom. It lasted until the Great Mackenzie War, but that was a long time in the future, and meanwhile for some of us fandom became in one sense of the hackneyed phrase a way of life. It was one that was to end in tragedy for Vince Clarke, but for Chuck I cannot think it brought anything but good. After visiting the Epicentre he went to the White Horse and then to Conventions, lost his sensitivity about his deafness and became as social a person as anyone. I don't think he would have done all this so quickly and easily in any other group. Where else can you progress so circumspectly from letters to meetings: where else do people find it natural to converse by writing things down: and where else, let's face it, are people so sensitive towards one another?

Chuck is now happily married and, temporarily at least, has left fandom. But he still writes to me and he's still the same likeable character I was swapping promags with back in those early days. Here's some correspondence we had way back in late 1951 which shows his characteristic style:

> Dear Walt:
>
> What a bloody silly place to hide a spares list. I want those zines I have made tix after. Don't misunderstand this and send me a cruddy heap of *Amaz* and *FA*. Let us have no misunderstandings about this. Either send me those *ASF* I have listed or stand by to run out of fandom.

This was a footnote to a letter I wasn't to bother answering. I replied:

> Dear Chuck:
>
> So I'm not to answer your letter am I? No wonder, after you made such an exhibition of yourself, coming cringing and whining to me for magazines instead of asking for them forthrightly like a healthy clean living English lad. And what magazines! Look, Harris, you may think it's smart to follow the crowd like this, typical of you rabble-rousing agitators, but do you never think that I might welcome a spot of originality now and then. Where's your initiative (and don't say you never had one, we were too poor)? What's wrong with solid substantial mags like *Amazing* and *FA*, which can be used for a variety of purposes about the house? But no! He must ask like everyone else for *ASF* and *F&SF*, just because everyone else is doing it these days. Don't you realize that *AM* and *FA* have the biggest

circulations of any sf magazine? They MUST be good. The mere fact that the superficial observer notices FA good about *Amaz* shouldn't put you off. Study them carefully, maybe they're in code. I have a beautiful stock of *FA* and *Amaz* here and because of our beautiful friendship I'll let you have them for exactly the same price as those tiny little magazines you asked for. These *Amaz* and *FA* have been in my possession for a long time and I can recommend them as being thoroughly housetrained and free from eyetracks.

Chuck came back with:

Dear Walt:

Ohgoshohboyoboy, do you really mean this about these *Amazing*s? You would really let me have 'em? I did start to save these at one time but couldn't get enough to make it worth while. I've got a swell idea about these, – you know how Unger sells those complete sets of *ASF* and *Unk* at such ridiculously high prices? Well, IF you had a COMPLETE set of *Amz* you could do the same. I've always tried to help you since you entered fandom – with a little help you may go far – and I am willing to stretch a point and let you have my *Amz* in exchange for those tiny ol' *ASF*. Please don't thank me for this, – we fen must stick together and try to help each other.

We were all mad for old *Astounding*s those days. Talking of which, I have a curiosity here, a letter from myself to Vince Clarke, signed with an assumed name, and the reason it came back into my possession was that he wrote to Chuck on the back of it and Chuck passed the conversation on to me. That was one of the nice things about our relationship. Every time Chuck went to the Epicentre he or Vince kept all the pieces of paper on which Vince had written down what he said to Chuck, and afterwards they mailed them on to me. It was like being there. Come to think of it, there's another little piece of fannish history buried in this letter, because it was sent inside a copy of *Astounding*. It was all in pencil and in crude capitals, and it said:

DEAR MR. CLARKE:

I AM ENCLOSING AN OLD "PROZINE" FOR A SUB TO YOUR S.F.N.E.W.S. I HOP THIS IS AL RIGHT BECAUSE I HAVNT GOT ANY CURRENT ISSEWS JUST A LOT OF THESE OLD THINGS WHICH I FORGOT TO GIVE

TO THE SAVAGE MEN LAST TIME.
FANCERELY,
A.N.E.O'PHAN
P.S. I THOUGHT YOUR CONQUEST OF SPACE WAS VERY GOOD.

The enclosure was the April 1943 issue, which Vince needed for his collection. I had needed it for mine too; in fact some of you may remember that I made a sort of fannish Holy Ghrail out of it. But curiously by this time it was not the only wartime *ASF* I had missing, but the only one I had. Two people had sent me April 43's but I'd sold the rest of my collection to help the Fund Shelby Vick had started to bring me to the 1952 Chicon.

And that is really jumping ahead a bit. We should really go back as far as June 30th 1951, when in the middle of one of his letters Shelby Vick embedded this casual query. "Any chance you might strike an oil well, and attend the Nolacon?" I said, equally casually, no but if I did I would. Whereupon Shelby hit me with this – in a PS!

> I'm instigating a contest. It's to find out who is the most popular foreign fan. There is, of course, a possibility that you will win. If you do, and if enough money is donated, you will be brought to the Nolacon, post paid.... You might make sure you can come, in case everything works out.

I Remember Me – 12
Pre-Chicon, Robert Bloch and Richard Elsberry

Unless I start to lead a more humdrum existence or I get a move on with these memoirs I'm going to start losing ground. I shall have to cover at least three months of the past each installment.

So this time I'll try to polish off 1952. It's made easier by the fact that I have already written up six weeks of it in unremitting detail in *The Harp Stateside*. I left that account on the tender at Southampton at the last sight of the *Neptunia* because it was the nearest approach to a climax, or at least a natural termination. What happened afterwards was, until I got home, something of a let-down. I got the train for London with a minute to spare and no time to notify anyone of my arrival, and when I got to Waterloo there was no one there to meet me. I was a bit let down because I thought there might have been. I said as much to Chuck in the first letter I wrote when I got home....

> I haven't even read some of the letters here but I do gather you people were expecting to see me in London. I'm sorry to have dashed away like that, but by the time I got to Waterloo I was very browned off with lugging that luggage and with my travelling generally and when there was nobody there to meet me I thought what the hell and phoned BEA and made a reservation. I didn't fancy making the safari to Welling (where Vince Clarke lived then) without native bearers. If I'd been in Vince's place I'd at least have met the likeliest train – I got up at 6:30 one morning to meet the Liverpool boat that time we thought he might be coming – but that's Vince and I wouldn't have him different for the world. But I do think he might have given me a phone number to ring. As it was I sent him a telegram to meet me at Waterloo that afternoon and we had until then until the plane left at six. Anyway I wasn't so keen on going to the White Horse.... I was very fed up with large aggregations of fans.

While waiting until it was time to meet Vince who at that time was out of work, I wandered about London, feeling very anonymous and

sophisticated. Anonymous because I was surrounded by fans who didn't know I was there, and sophisticated because suddenly London was so commonplace. Only six weeks ago it had been to me a distant and glamorous metropolis, attainable only after weeks of preparation and a whole day's journey. But to a world traveller, familiar with New York, Chicago and Los Angeles, and about to fly home that evening, it was like my own backyard. Both feelings were curiously sad and pleasant. Back at Waterloo and I met Vince and reclaimed my suitcases from the Left Luggage Office, and we made our way to the Air Terminal talking all the way. There was so much to talk about I didn't find out until I got home why he hadn't been at Waterloo in the first place. He had written to me care of the Shipping Company and they hadn't delivered his letter: it reached me eventually in Belfast and I wrote to Vince explaining this and various other things, such as:

> After a suitable interval I hauled Madeleine over the coals for not passing you on the gen from the letters I wrote her, intended for the *SFNEWS*. I told her she should be a member of the London Circle. (Her lawyers tell her this is grounds for divorce).... I don't right now feel like writing anything about the trip – I'm in a sort of deep spiritual exhaustion... by the way, thanks for passing on the quote from Shelby's letter. I've been wondering what the reaction was – I'm afraid to open fmz that come in nowadays.... Lee and I are going to start a whispering campaign in fandom that Burbee and Laney are That Way. Have already started by making James change an inscription mentioned in his current pro story to "CB loves FTL".
>
> ....the main impression I took home from the Chicon is that we in Britain won't really knew what a convention is until we engage a hotel for it. The only thing that prevents our conventions from being the mad and glorious affairs that the US ones are is that we give up at 11pm, when the Convention should only be starting.... With their set-up the Convention attains very soon the sort of organic unity we know only in the closing sessions. It gathers momentum from day to day instead of, as with ours, being merely a couple of desultory lecture sessions.

It seems strange to think that British conventions used to be like that. But then how familiar some of the rest of this is. Isn't it a strange coincidence that this period in my memoirs should come up at a time when I'm re-enacting it. And that our editor should have a fellow-feeling now too for

that weary WAW of ten years ago.

The quote from Shelby was a complimentary reference to me. He wrote direct, too, his letter starting..

> .....and what do you say after you say "It's over?"
>
> 9:29 October 10th 1952
>
> Suppose I just try saying: "Hi, Walt –" Now that it's gone and finished, what do we do; pick up like nothing has happened? Start over again? Pretend we don't know one another? Try to ignore the whole thing? Aweel.

But then he reverted to his usual cheerful self and went on for another four pages about his plans for *Confusion* and everything. But I wasn't the only one in the house getting letters from Americans now. Madeleine had an unexpected one from one Robert Bloch.

> Dear Madeleine:
>
> The other day a man named Chuck Harris requested that I do a piece on Walt's visit. I turned it out for him in short order... having some difficulty, as I had previously done a number of similar items for fanzines in this country and was running out of foolishness on the subject. I sent it off and thought no more about it until last night. Then I got to thinking that I have been a damned fool and I had better write to you.
>
> Fan humor, so-called, has always been pretty rough... through the years I have more or less fallen unconsciously into a pattern of acceptance, and have gone along with perpetrating some rather outrageous libels more as a matter of course than anything else. This based on the feeling that fandom as a whole can dish it out and take it without being too serious about the matter.
>
> Knowing Walt as I do, I had (at the time) no hesitancy or guilty restraint in laying it on pretty thick. Quite suddenly I realize that someone else is involved... viz, you... and I might have unthinkingly embarrassed you by depicting Walt as a crude, libidinous, besotted monster. Even though you probably realize it's all a gag, still the repetition of such japeries may have irked or upset you. If that's the case... please accept my sincere and humble apologies along with this explanation. I want you to know despite my libels, that I (along with a couple of dozen of other pros and American fans who have recently corresponded with me on the subject) hold WAW in the highest esteem. But

oddly enough, our way of showing our esteem usually takes this negative, backhanded method of humorous slander and calumny. Now my conscience is somewhat clearer... and the next time I concoct some vile slur about your husband I'll do so with the feeling that you know it and there's no truth in it!

Only hope that some day you will be able to accompany Walt on a joint expedition to the colonies here... if you're half as nice as he says you are, American fandom is missing something.

You needn't show this note to Walt if you don't want to... it might be just as well for him to go on thinking of me as a complete stinker. After all, the poor guy is entitled to have a few illusions!

Believe me to be,
Yours most sincerely,
Robert Bloch

I don't suppose I need have quoted that letter, because most of you already know what sort of guy Robert Bloch is. But I don't like to see a man do so many good deeds by stealth without being from time to time exposed. Early in 1953 I had a closely-typed 11-page letter from Richard Elsberry and I wrote him a six page reply. We had only the most desultory contact before and after, and it was as if we had discharged a whole lifetime of correspondence in one great spasm. Looking back on it, that huge flashover illuminated a watershed in fannish history, and I'll keep some of it for the next instalment, which will deal with so-called Seventh Fandom. But there are parts of it which seem too appropriate for this present mood of mine not to quote here....

...One of the things I've noticed since I got back is that it's harder to write letters to some people. It's like those stereoscopic viewers. The first time you look through them the eye persists in seeing two separate images, until your brain makes the adjustment. Before I went over I had perfectly clear mental pictures of the people I met. Now I have another perfectly clear mental picture, but just slightly different. Not much more different than the two pictures in the stereoscopic viewer, but still different enough so that you're not quite sure which one to concentrate on...

...I wasn't offended by anything you said in your con report. In fact I guess I got off lightly. I feel rather as if I had passed my finals. I expect you can imagine how I feel about this whole

thing, how important it was to me that this Fund affair wouldn't appear to posterity as a dismal misguided flop. And it's not what happens at the Convention that matters as far as that's concerned, but what happens in the con reports... as for the Hoffman angle, I was expecting some talk about that. It's rather peculiar the way this happened. People had been assuring me that I'd be surrounded by crowds of neofen and I'd finally come to believe they might actually be so very different from English fans. Of course at the time I actually believed that the younger fen wore helicopter beanies. So I just naturally waited for them to come to me. Everything was so hectic that it wasn't until the con was nearly over and I totted up mentally the list of fans I'd met against those I hadn't, that I realized people *weren't* thrusting themselves forward. I was being accompanied by a train of a few like Ish and Beale and Mitchell who had little backwardness, while dozens of people I'd really wanted to meet were staying tactfully away. I'm not accustomed to being a social lion and it was really hard for me to accept that if I wasn't seeing much of Shelby it wasn't because Shelby had other things he preferred doing, but because he thought I mightn't want to see him. By the time this possibility had dawned on me the convention was nearly over.... But if I didn't see as much as I wanted to of some people the fault was theirs or mine, not someone else's. Certainly I don't think anyone should blame Lee or Max. Curious that no one criticizes Max, with whom I spent as much time as with Lee.

...You have some real complex stuff in that Pogo thing. Vince Clarke would love it and I must pass it on to him when I get my energy back. Right now I can't even get interested in psycho-analysing Su Rosen though there was a time when I thought about her a lot. She really shook me that time. I had my guard completely down, full of bonhomie and vague amiability, and a type like that was the last thing I expected to bump up against. I'd known people like that when I used to knock about with the arty crew in the local Bohemia but I never expected to find one in fandom... and so young too. Extraordinary. I kept wondering why she behaved like that. I mean, where's her percentage? It's a useful act in a highbrow set, where the idea is to get a reputation for eccentric genius without actually doing anything, and you get invited to parties as a sort of turn, but in

> fandom where most intercourse is on paper it doesn't seem to me it should work out so well.... Maybe she's trying too hard, not realizing that in fandom any girl with looks is bound to be a big hit anyway. The nymphomaniac act was just piling Pelleas on Melisande. I really did like America. I felt absolutely at home there. The people knew what I was saying, I knew from the movies how to get about in it, and after the first few days it didn't feel like a foreign country at all.... Thought the postal service was poor, as if the US was so deeply committed to private enterprise that they were reluctant to have a public one, and couldn't get used to not being able to send a telegram from a post office.... The average nonfan citizen seemed pleasant and amiable, though with maybe a higher percentage of ignorant louts. Though maybe that's only because where people are less inhibited in expressing themselves you recognize boors sooner.... It would be better if your cinemas would allow smoking and ban popcorn. You drive twice as fast and twice as well....You have an irritating habit of disguising your tv sets as 18th century commodes.... Your food is more plentiful than ours, but no better cooked, and in most households not treated with proper respect. The American kitchen not only looks like a snack bar, it often actually is.... I thought your newspapers dull and unwieldy. I resented being a captive audience for commercials in Public transport. I think drug stores are wonderful.... The story about there being no class distinction isn't cant, it's true and wonderful. The supposedly unpleasant features of the AW of L one reads about, like low educational standards, crime, corruption, greed and conformity, I didn't have personal experience of. The climate didn't affect my health. I felt sort of dull and mentally anaesthetized much of the time, that I think was the absorption of too many new impressions, and the heat.

It's curious how little of this letter I would change if I was writing it again today. Of course being so much older and wiser I didn't make the same mistakes at the Convention: I made a whole different set of new ones. The bit about Su Rosen is put in because it will be of intense interest to those of you who knew her later. She has for years been living a strange secret existence in the shadows of fandom, a sort of Park Lady of the DNQ's. As far as I know she has been mentioned only twice in public, once in *The Harp Stateside* and once in an outrageous letter from Ray Nelson in *Hyphen*, which I couldn't resist printing. You must remember the episode

it recounted – the punch-line was “And tell Harlan Ellison our engagement is off!”

I Remember Me – 13
Richard Elsberry continued

Since I'm still toiling on the Great Trip Report*, which is getting to be so long it'll take nearly as much time to read it as it did to live it, I think I'll let this installment be taken over by the rest of the two letters which comprised the great Elsberry/Willis correspondence of early 1953....

---

* The Harp Stateside. *[Ed.]*

Dear Walt:

Oh, God, Walt I've just got to write! I could jump on my foot, bang my head against the wall, cut off my arm with a rusty knife, smash my knee-cap, gouge out my ear with a broken beer bottle, smash myself in the face, pulp the flesh with an old sludgehammer, kick my teeth out, stick lighted matches under my fingernails. Maybe even pinch myself. I'm mad. Bitter! Yes, bitter! And all because I haven't written to Walt Willis for so god-damn long!

What set me off, and finally got me wound up enough to write is *Confusion* #13, I had a card to Shelby in the typer, and I decided to comment on *Fusion* and so I pulled it out of the stack and began to look through it. First I got p.'ed with Dave Hammond, and almost stopped to dash off a short article kicking him in the gonads; but I held myself in check. Tho I read Willis's article. "This Ackerman fellow isn't such a bad guy after all," I said to myself. "I've got to tell Walt about it." Of course, I knew I wouldn't. Not yet anyway. Then, suddenly, I found a reference to myself. A lean intense man inside me, eh? So that's what Boggs was talking about! I thought he was just being cryptic again. I immediately propelled myself upward from the bed, tossing *Confusion* to the winds, tore the postcard out of the typer and began to write this letter. That's the way it happened.

Of late, I've been wondering if it's worth it all. Fandom, that is. I've found that if I don't read the promags I don't really miss them. The same with fanmags – probably because there are so few good ones. The majority of fan material of late has been

truly cruddy, and I've probably contributed my share. You can look through a dozen fan mags without finding anything worth remembering or commenting upon. I remember at Chicon, Tom Quinn asking me if I thot I could give up fandom. I told him yes, and he just gave me an incredulous stare. Right now I don't think I've ever been so sure of that answer.

Fandom doesn't carry that glorious exultation any more. I find myself finding fault with things, perhaps justifiably so. As I said, the good fanmags are few and far between, and I just don't have the time to fan like a true fan should. I thumb through a fanzine and see good fans wasting themselves. Instead of turning out reams of fan crud they could be working on a story to sell to the pros. But it's a vicious circle, you can't break away from it without severing a lot of ties. I can't figure out fans anymore. They've become aliens of some sort. Take Hoffman. She's loaded with talent, but of late seems to be becoming cynical and cliquish. Some issues of *Q* are directed toward just one or two people or a little clique of her friends. And she says, "So what. If you don't like it go jump." I don't mind the attitude, I employ it myself sometimes, but not all the time! Instead of doing something worthwhile I find her mumbling on about Bloch being her great-grandmother etc. I am not amused. In fact, I find it almost silly. I like humor, and fan humor and satire is vitally essential to combat the cliquish type. Like I say, I can't figure Lee out. She isn't the fan she was a year ago. Now, somehow, she is remote and aloof. Fandom is above her. *Q* has slipped badly. I've read whole issues of late and found nothing in them. I'm lost. It seems that a new fandom has arisen, and I'm not in it.

Dear Rich:

I've been down with a real 1919 type flu. After eight days with a temperature of 102 I tottered downstairs with the thought of a week or so of full time fanactivity in which I might actually get up to date with everything and get onto a sort of day to day level – only one day's mail to deal with – and started to get organized. (I wish I had that peculiarly fannish ability *not to bother* with things... I should be a lot happier... but I will persist in keeping letters, not only keeping them but filing them and even answering them.) Started with the business type ones and worked up to the more important ones, mailing out *Slant*s and *Hyphen*s the while, and then of course found myself in such a

state of complete exhaustion that for the last week I've only been able to read and doze all day. I haven't felt so browned off with fandom since I came into it. Maybe it's just post-influenzal depression, but the letters I get seem stupider, the new fanzines seem more completely devoid of merit, and the general standard of fen sano in corpore sano more depressing than I've ever noticed before. The only encouraging thing is that the few people of worth in fandom seem to belong to the inner active circle, the True Fans if you'll excuse the expression. But a census of them makes you realize how horribly precarious the position is. I suppose if you count the number of people without whom fandom wouldn't be worth belonging to... well let's do it. Reading from left to right, Sneary, Burbee, Laney, the Coles, Calkins, Boggs, yourself, Vick, Hoffman... ooops Bloch, Faulkner, Tucker, Silverberg (there must be more, I can't be bothered totally recalling fandom) and on this side Clarke, Harris, Bulmer and Enever....there couldn't be more than a couple of dozen altogether. It makes you wonder what fandom will be like in a couple of years, now that the prozines have virtually withdrawn their support and the rate of recruitment is starting to drop. On the other hand quite a large proportion of the good fans have been in fandom a long time and look like staying in it more or less all their lives. I don't think myself I'll ever completely withdraw from it: it's far too interesting to watch. Another reason is that fans like ourselves have an extra interest in the timebinding qualities of fandom. We get not only egoboo out of it, but immortality. That is assuming that fandom is still extant in another twenty years, and fans still have this interesting tendency towards fancestor worship, there will be eager neofans fingering with awe hallowed copies of the Elsberry *Opus* or the Willis *Q* and writing goshwowoboy articles about us legendary giants. It's a fascinating prospect and makes me wonder should we not in our own interests rally round the N3F, which after all does do the drudgery of digging up potential acolytes.

You wonder why people think you're bitter. Well, you do give that impression. But as you imply yourself it's not so much what you say about things but the things you select to write about. You're inclined to select the things which should be criticized and criticize them effectively, neglecting the things which should be praised. In the *Opus* report you dissect with

surgical dispassion and efficiency a number of things that deserve it, but you don't praise a number of things that equally well deserve to be praised. Of course I know it's hard to be interesting when handing out compliments, and criticism is more fun both to read and write – I had the same trouble myself, which is why as you say my report was better when it wasn't about the con – and there's really nothing to be done about it. The best con report I've ever written *per se* was the one on the '51 Loncon and that was because it was written at a time when I didn't know the people I was writing about very well and had the neofan's idea that pros were semighodlike creatures with no ordinary human feelings. I tore into them without restraint and started regretting it almost immediately. Apparently I disrupted the London Circle, brought the 15 year old feud between Gillings and Carnell to a head so that Gillings retired from publishing, and incurred Carnell's eternal distrust. Since then I've been more circumspect, and of course in any case as a guest it wouldn't have been ethical for me to have been really rude to anyone at Chi. Which is one of the reasons your conreport is a better one than mine.

Of course I think sometimes your reputation precedes you and people attribute to you bitterness beyond the call of duty. As for instance when Chuck comments: "I thought it was wonderful too. Elsberry would insult anything except the Mpls. U. He must have a hell of a job fitting a little stinger into every paragraph. I bet Kyle passes around his Chesterfields at the next Convention." Whereas it hadn't occurred to me that you intended any dig at Kyle at all. (Note: It is not customary in America to pass cigarettes around.)

This letter has already taken me two weeks so I guess I'd better not try to finish this page. That flu seems to have really taken it out of me. I get up about eleven, read for a while until my conscience begins to hurt, send out some /s and maybe write a note to somebody, and then feel so tired there's nothing I can do the rest of the day but read and doze. Ah well, I guess it's about time I had a rest. I've been active in two fandoms for too long without a break.

Thank Ghod I'm not feeling now as I did then. That sort of mood was endemic in fandom at the time, as if everyone had had pneumonia (which it turned out to be in my case) and we were entering the long and difficult

convalescence known as Seventh Fandom.

I Remember Me – 14
Vin¢ Clarke and Chuck Harris

But I can't remember me in those days without remembering Chuck Harris and Vince Clarke, without whom fandom has never been the same. Here is Chuck as he was at the beginning of 1953:

> I don't know whether you are sore at me about my "-" thing. I wouldn't be surprised: it seems to be "Let's Trample on Chuck week". I am alone and comparatively unloved and don't particularly care for the Feb *ASF*. I don't particularly want to go to the Philcon either. I am dull and despondent. A woman's plaything without any hope of ultimate salvation. I have neuralgia, insomnia, and constipation. I lay awake nights muttering snatches from Hamlet and odd stanzas from Browning.
>
> "Do I live? Am I dead?"
>
> Sometimes I wonder if I'm going bloody barmy. Alright. On with the motley. It hasn't been a great week for fanning, but I've knocked out a couple of hot letters to Vince – I'll see if I can find the carbons afterwards. I think you'll enjoy this episode. If Vince and I ever run out of teacups we'll make Fran v 4e look like a kiddies' picnic. Fortunately, there isn't much danger of that happening, – I think we set too high a value on each other's friendship. The longer I stay in fandom the more I find myself inextricably tangled up in other people's lives. No sooner have I stopped worrying about whether you are being scalped by Red Indians, than I find myself taking a paternal interest in Bob and Sadie, I worry about Lee's virginity and Vince's hair. I even interest myself in James's career as a pro. Ghod knows why this should happen to me – but I get quite a kick out of it. And I just can't imagine myself *not* being a fan. Ordinary people seem to live drab lives. Their whole lives seem to centre on what will win the 2:30 or whether Arsenal will beat Spurs or "the smashing boy I was out with last night". Fanning can't be just a sublimation with me. I think I would be aware of it if it was. I'm beginning to think that we really *are* star-begotten.

Vince and Chuck did eventually run out of teacups, but that sad day was still far away. I still have the correspondence Chuck referred to above and I can't bear to destroy it. And since it would be nice to see those two in OMPA again, maybe Ethel will let me quote it virtually in full, with the draft they were arguing about. Anyway, it's not every day you see literary criticism of this calibre. And I mean calibre....

The Happy Fannish Circle

A Farce in several acts. Co-Authors Harris & Clarke

Prologue

Once upon a time, in the earliest eras of Fandom, Willis was hoaxed. He was fooled, sucked in, and bamboozled by the diabolical efforts of Clarke and Wilson (the latter appearing in Belfast as a neofan called Wainwright). This culminated in Willis – all agog at discovering a literate neofan – sending a carefully prepared manuscript *back* to Clarke with a note attached, "Isn't he a natural?"

Interval

Harris, fogbound at Welling, discovers the mss, steals the Willisania attached, re-reads the unfinished corn and says: "You know Vince, this stuff ain't bad. Why don't you fit an ending?" Clarke, desperate to do almost anything to distract Harris from his correspondence, whips a new sheet of paper into his typer and the two greatest writers in fandom cooperate to finish somebody else's opus. They dream up a reasonable ending and agree that the whole thing could be pretty good if it was re-written. Harris takes it home and rewrites it. He deliberately overwrites it, changes the ending, laughs immoderately at the finished product and rushes back a carbon to Clarke. With the carbon is a little note telling Clarke just how good it is and would he please signify approval to Harris's scheme of sending it to Hoffman.

Now Read On....

Bullets on Bbllzznaj or Thataway by Jim Wainwright (*isn't* he a

natural!)

A howling screech of displaced air and tortured metal broke the unnatural quietness of the main street of Slopes' Gulch as Slim Destron's space-black ship sent up a wave of red-hot dust before settling on its tail. The airlock sprang open and Slim stepped out onto the deserted road, humming a lone spaceman's song to himself. There was a thud as a glass someone had left in mid-air fell to the ground, and in the middle-distance a crippled waif who couldn't get under shelter was digging himself in.

Slim smiled, and his tough leathery features cracked across the middle. Pulling open a small door in the nose of the sleek little flyer, he brought out a chain and clamp which he snapped to the hitching rail, locking as he did so the nasal lock that was keyed to his body odour. It was a strong lock.

Protestingly, the rickety wooden stairs of the Last Chance Saloon creaked under the weight of Slim's magnificently proportioned body. It was often said of his proportions that he was exactly broad as he was long. His head was highbrowed and intelligent, his eyes steely grey and piercing – he had worn through sixteen pairs of spectacles – his jaw firm as a planet in its orbit. Greyish was the leather space uniform – it should have been white – and belted low across his thighs were the two horn-handled sub-atomic-deltron-ray-blasters.

Shouldering his way through the swing doors of the saloon, he sent a sweeping glance over the crowd inside. Blinking the dust from his eyes, he saw his quarry slouched across one of the gaming tables with three of his cronies lounging on either side. Slim strolled to the long imitation-mahogany bar, and nodded at the bar-keep. "Four fingers of jet-swill, pard" he lipped thinly. "I've burnt space to get here on time to meet Dione Eero." He jerked his head towards the gaming table. "That him?"

"Shore is," said the bar-keep, who was an old sailor. He looked curiously at Slim. "Got business with him, stranger?" Slim's space-tanned hand reached for the jet-swill and a flicker of his steely eyes gave the affirmative answer. With one gulp he downed the acrid raw spirit and sauntered slowly across the sawdust to the gaming table.

He smiled tightly as he saw what they were playing. Four dimensional Blasko, a card game played by the inhabitants of Spudgtt, a far outlying sun-system. Catlike grace was in his movements as he eased himself into an empty chair at the card table and purred softly. An easy nod to the dealer sent eight four dimensional cards skimming across to him. He picked them up. Four skags, three blurts, and one squash. A good hand.

He hefted his purse onto the table. The dealer opened it and amazement rippled round players and spectators alike as he spilt a shining steady stream of 1,000 credit pieces onto the green baize. The dealer's hands trembled as he counted the sum aloud, (as was the custom), and when he hoarsely announced "One million credits!" Dione gasped. His lieutenant's mouth fell open, and somebody stole his gold teeth before he could recover.

There was a brief muttered consultation, then Dione leaned forward, pale phlegmy eyes glistening with greed. "You gonna bet the works, stranger?" he crisped. Slim's eyebrows rose slightly. "Kin you cover me?" he drawled softly. Dione drew first and called on the second slurp. Slim worked a skilful three-dimensional move, and covered himself, as he saw what their play would be... three straight drooles and a second dimensional slurp. As he concentrated on the drooleplay a flicker of ultra energy caught his attention. He dropped his cards on the table, his steely grey eyes turning a fiery blue.

"Dione....you cheated!" he gritted savagely. "Yeah? Prove it, stranger! These folk din't see nuthing, did yuh, folks?" He looked around menacingly, and there were hasty head-shakings. He leaned back and leered at Slim. "Dione," ground Slim, "I saw you urble those cards through the fifth dimension and out through the seventh. You know that's cheating." "Huh. So what? And what are yuh gonna do about it?" His hand strayed toward the micro-blaster in the shoulder of his black alpaca jacket.

"Dione, I got proof yuh were behind them Snargo Gum hold-ups beyond the asteroids a couple of cycles back. An' what's more yore a meteorite rustler... no, siddown an' lissen... if yuh ain't off this planet by the first sun's setting, I'm a-coming for yuh!" He rose and stalked out.

Came sundown... At the far end of Main Street, Slim stood erect and steady, a light breeze ruffling his crisp hair, and when a figure appeared at the other end, he began to pace slowly forward. He dropped into a fighting crouch, the lines of his body converging instinctively to offer the smallest possible target. A flaming neutron bolt flew past his left ear. Slowly, he shifted his chew to the other cheek.

And then, swift as a Martian snurk, or the lesser banded schniss that roams the lunar seas, his hands flashed at faster than light speed towards the wellworn leather holsters at his hips. In a poem of easy motion the twin DeLameters leapt into his hands and his fingers jammed the firing studs against the barrels. And then, instead of the trembling, crackling roar of energy drawn from Space itself, the barrels were cold, lifeless, dead. Instinctively, he glanced behind him to see Dione's lieutenant grinning

balefully over a cone-shaped forcefield projector.

Despairingly, he straightened up, – if he had to die, then he'd do it like a freeborn Terran instead of spacelanes scum. He called the half smile back to the corners of his mouth and thought regretfully of the green hills of Kentucky where he'd spent his childhood, of the arid red deserts of Mars where he'd spent his adolescence, and of Big Gertie's Pleasure Asteroid where he'd spent his.

Coldly, ruthlessly, Dione burnt him down. With one contemptuous foot he rolled the lifeless body in the gritty dust. "Another increase in Boot Hill's population index," he sneered.

Somewhere, in the sombre hills behind the town, a lone coyote howled.

> *The original in both* Scottishe *and* Warhoon *#28 has a "green beige" rather than a "green baize" card table, but that looked more like an actual error than the other examples of mangled prose and crumpled cliche.... [Ed.]*

Clarke dislikes Harris's efforts. He says so....

> Dear Chuck:
>
> Thanks for the carbon of THATAWAY. The "thanks" is merely because I'm polite, understand. Personally, I'm not only fed up with reading the damn thing but I think you've made a lousy job of rewrite. Frinstance, you're *afraid that we overdid the corn*. You CAN'T overdo the corn on a thing like this. Corn is its lifeblood, its undying glory and its main reason for existence. Take away the corn and you have a mere husk worthy only of *Sol*, *Orb*, or *Operation Fantast*. The ending up with which we eventually came was a beauty, except that I'd have added the sun... a sun sinking with a dull hiss onto the last sentence. You've entirely missed the point in the opening paragraph. When the ship was *landing*, the street was crowded; after it had *landed*, the street was deserted except for the cripple. See, stoopid? Otherwise, the glass in mid-air and the cripple lose half their force.
>
> And the object of fan fiction rewrite should be to compress, condense and consolidate, not add a few purple adjectives here and there. You're not trying to write a second *Gone with the Wind*, however flatulent your prose. Calling a bar "imitation-mahogany" instead of plain "bar" ain't funny, and we're not trying to be realistic. If you called it a "polished uranium bar"...

"acrid raw spirit" is like saying a "hard metal gun"... the terms are not exactly synonymous, but too complementary for comfort... I agree that the confusion of the gang "leaving" and "doing" when they started the game should be eliminated, but not by putting "played" and "playing" within 6 words of each other.... I give you full marks for having 'em leaning over the card table instead of the bar... that was an original mistake of Mike's I didn't bother to alter. Why "he hefted his purse"? The other is more picturesque. Why "shining, *steady* stream"... you gotta lotta adjectives you want to find a home for? Or do you just like alliteration? Same goes for "pale phlegmy", tho' it might be allowed on the grounds of supercorn if there *is* such a word. Why "drawled *softly*"! Have you ever heard or read of anyone drawling *loudly*? Why "called on the second slurp" instead of the first? Don't you know that your overhand can be jimmied if you cast a slurp in Blasko? Be more careful... it's these little details can get you into trouble with the readers. You'll get some expert writing in and ri-i-ip goes your reputation in shreds. I may be a fake pro but I know that much.

Vince

Harris Retaliates!!!

Dear Vince:

Thank you for the professional criticism. I'm enclosing your original draft. It's not my idea – you can do what you please with it. I suggest a small hole in the top left-hand corner and a loop of string. It's a waste of time trying to argue about it. Obviously you've been deifyied since I last saw you. However, I don't propose to kneel here whilst you kick my teeth out. I think your assumptions are unjustified and your sneers are bloody rude. You've had this thing for almost a year and done damn all to it. At least I tried. Perhaps you'd care to spend ten minutes on it sometime and then sell it to Carnell? Certainly the corn was overdone. Parts of it were not only childish, they were puerile and embarrassing too. "A sun sinking with a dull hiss" was just silly, especially in the last line which was sufficient as it stood. I thought that a quieter build-up would add more effectiveness to the last line. I wasn't trying to amuse RJ Banks or Wilkie Connor. I thought that this version was more likely to amuse say,

Willis and Hoffman. I still think so.

I thought the opening paragraph was sufficiently pointed by using "*unnatural* quietness" i.e. the inhabitants were transfixed by the sight of Destron's spaceship. I thought the object of a fan fiction rewrite was to *improve*. I can't see the use of compressing and condensing a mere thousand or so words. The idea that I had was to weld cowboy clichés into a space opera. True, the adjectives were purple – they had to fit in with the ones already there. I'm sure that you'll be able to fix the little inaccuracies without using played and played in juxtaposition – although you seem to want to use "first slurp... first slurp" a page or so later.

"Hefted his purse" seemed more picturesque to *me*. He had one thousand 1,000 credit-pieces. I pictured this as a £5 bag of copper which wouldn't clink. And hence, "shining steady stream". All Western gamblers have "pale phlegmy eyes". "Drawl" means to talk in a slow lengthened tone. If you'd allow "said softly" I can't think of any reason why you should quibble about "drawled softly". In the original state, I doubt whether Dave Ish would find it funny.

But after you've re-written it....

Clarke Pours Oil Upon the Troubled Waters

Dear Chuck:

Don't thank me for the *professional* criticism; I'm giving it to you for free. Just part of my service to you young fan authors. Of course I shall expect some commission on your first 45 sales, but we'll leave the sordid financial details till later. No, I haven't been deifyied yet, if that's the way you spell it. I've been canonized tho. This doesn't mean shot out of a cannon, much as you might like to do same.

I've succeeded! Harris has called me "rude"! I must write to Walt about this! Infame at last!! I don't think there's any further goal left, except maybe to be called obscene by Rog Philips. James must know too. I had a letter from him by the same post as yours. He is telling me all about his plans for the Convention. By the way, is your bungalow fire-proof?

Well, the only way to see whether Walt and Lee are amused is to send 'em the corn and await criticism. As the first draft was 80% Mike in construction, and was intended, as I said

somewhere or other, for the JF's London Circle 'zine, I'd never felt inclined to do the extensive re-writing job needed to run it in a respectable zine. There is one good idea in it... the card game, but the rest is well-cooked corn. This present thing I just regard as an exercise in corny wisecracks and puns, and *your* particular angle on it... overwriting as well in great gobs... never struck me until a few moments ago when I started thinking constructively on the same.

Uh-huh, the idea of re-writing is to improve, and I have a fetish (M'Gooli-M'Gobbla) that improvement in fan-fiction means condensing. It's not that I have an ambition to Write Perfectly of Beautiful Happenings in words of which each one is as perfect as a lustrous pearl in a gold setting... which I have... but as an Editor and Publisher, the less wordage there is to a certain piece, the less money spent on paper, stencils, and ink and the less time spent on turning the duper handle and other odd jobs. Do you remember that FAPA mailing with a drawing by Lee in which there was just an eye and a bit of foliage and the thing occupied a whole page? I could no more think of doing that than I would – well, duplicate on only one side of each sheet.

As to the specific instances quoted (coo, don't it sound impressive?), I think the cleared street is preferable to the "unnatural quietness": matter of opinion; I think that there's a big element of incongruity in the business of the purse; you're led into believing that it's just a small object, and if you're awake your mind does a double-take when it appears that there's a 1,000 pieces in it. That's where the humour lies; not in the fact that he's toting a million credits around. I give in to the pale phlegmy eyes, tho' it's still got echoes of albino bushmen to me. "Drawled softly" "shouted loudly" "whispered softly", "hummed musically", "laughed cheerfully", "hissed menacingly" are all much of a muchness to me; a style which I don't cultivate. Van Vogt does it. I'd allow "said softly", because you can have "said loudly", "said cheerfully", "said menacingly", "said slowly" etc. The last two you could also drawl but with the "loudly" and "cheerfully" it would be... well... not compatible. "Drawled softly" is a borderline case, and if it pleases you to have a double adjective where a single would do, far be it from me to stand in the way of your grammatical

Combine Harvester. The... well, I suppose it's not a punch-line, just a rattle in the tail, (-le?) is a knotty problem. It's no good dismissing the sun sank line as plain silly 'cos not only are a number of other things plain silly, including this seriously-taking-thot-about-epic, but it emphasizes the point of the coyote. Coyotes *always* howl at sundown. As an old coyote lover myself, I'm willing to call upon outside opinion as to this. Not only from coyotes either. Tell you what I'll give this thing some serious consideration for an hour some evening when I can't think of anything better to do, and will send you the result... a Clarke adjusted epic. Then *you* can tear it to pieces. I would have put a paragraph in up there, but I'm having to fight off a dog trying to climb into my lap. I must have a kind nature as animals love me. Do you?

Vince

Harris Half-Sheathes His Claws

Dear Vince:

I'm delighted to hear that you have become a revised edition of St. Francis. Cats and dogs may love you, – but I'm not Assisi. Most of the time I feel like tearing you limb from limb. I am now contemplating going into the holy relics racket. When I said you were rude it was merely the best euphemism that I happened to have laying around. Actually, you were insufferably pompous, overbearing, and flatulent. The next time your spleen needs venting I suggest you take two Rennies instead of heaping scorn on my deathless prose.

I shan't bother about your footling remarks about "Thataway". I shall stockpile my answers until I see *your* version. I never agree with vague generalities like "nothing is so short it couldn't improve by shortening". This may be all very well for Mama's lil Babylove, but as a fully certified sex-fiend I could list you several instances where the reverse applies; I must say I was astounded that the possibilities of over-writing it had only just dawned on you. Surely, this is what Mike had in mind when he wrote the thing instead of just using it as a vehicle for puns.

Ever Thine,

Chuck

PS There is no past participle of “deify” in my O.E.D. It does have argument tho’. – With only *one* “e”.

I Remember Me – 15
Vin¢ Clarke and Chuck Harris again

All sorts of things had happened to me by 1953 which don't seem to have been mentioned in these memoirs yet, like the confidences Peter Hamilton used to make me about the behaviour of Ted Carnell and vice versa, and the grandiose plans of Bert Campbell which were always highly confidential until they fell through, and sending a telegram to John Brunner while he was still at school with the news of his first professional acceptance (a novel to Curtis Warren: they didn't have his school address so they told me), and being offered an Associate Editorship of *Galaxy*, and the excitement of seeing all those *Slant* stories being bought by prozines, and being on the International Fantasy Award panel and everything. Oh I was a Great Big Man.

And true enough it was all very exciting at the time, but it doesn't mean much to me any more. I used to think that pros were sort of deified fans, whereas now most of them seem rather poor creatures who are not as good at their jobs as we are at our hobbies. I feel less compunction about throwing all that junk in the wastebasket than over one letter from Chuck Harris. As for the International Fantasy Award panel, I knew I was only on that because I was a sort of foreigner and that "Fandom's Leading Expert and Critic" as Les Flood called me in his blurb, to Vince Clarke's disgust, would be dropped as soon as they got hold of some more serious-minded Europeans and Americans. I read the books and voted soberly enough, but Chuck took it far more seriously than I did. He would try subtly to influence my decisions, thus....

> Ghu knows why you voted for *Fairy Chessmen* (you told me why you voted for *Sands of Mars*. Nyaaa), Kuttner has written a damn sight better stuff than that, that I would have voted for. Geller is a Moron, the other continental judges are ignorant swine. Fred Brown is the only competent judge on the panel and I told him what to vote for. (He ignored me). I am seriously thinking of starting a rival Award with only one person on the adjudication panel. Me.

Here's another letter from Chuck, referring to my thanking him for

contributing to Shelby Vick's Fund. He was the only British fan to do so and I wouldn't have known about it if his name hadn't been on the scroll they gave me at Chicago. I had felt guilty about being invited to the States instead of fans who deserved it more, like Ken Slater, and had sort of kept the existence of the Fund from British fandom. This wasn't difficult because at that time *Quandry* was the only US fanzine with any circulation in Britain and it never mentioned the Fund because until nearly the end Lee Hoffman didn't think it had a chance of success.

> Certainly my name was on the scroll. "Rainham's No 1 Fan endorses Willis". Being your True Friend and Confidante I felt it incumbent on me to help swell the coffers, and I sent Shelby an American coin that I had (with a picture of a buffalo on it) and some uncancelled stamps that I steamed off of various issues of *Quandry*. Hell, I bled myself for you. The lifetime sub to *Cf* that I got could never replace that foreign coin (I don't know what its worth in real money) or fill in the gaps in my stamp collection. I shall be wearing my ribbon (in my hair natch) at the Whitcon. I shall expect some really fervent protestations of gratitude and half a column of acknowledgements in the next *Slant*.

The ribbon referred to was a green silk thing with my initials on it in Gothic capitals, that Henry Burwell was distributing to everyone who contributed to the Fund. They were supposed to wear them at Chicago. I hated the whole idea, though I couldn't very well say so. I visualized people avoiding me or apologizing because they hadn't got one of the damned things, and watching me to see if I was observing who was wearing their receipt. I was neurotic enough about the Fund without that. Chuck had a talent which amounted to genius, and one which was to recoil upon him later, for putting his finger on sore spots like this.

Another belated repercussion of the 1952 trip was the arrival of a suitcase I had left in London. It was too heavy to go on the plane to Belfast so I had left it with Vince Clarke to forward by rail. This resulted in a clash between Vince Clarke and British Railways. They tried to charge him twice, and got this letter....

> Re. attached slip, this account was paid by me when I visited Broad St. Station to hand in the goods for despatch, at approximately 5:46 p.m. on a Friday in the middle of October, probably the 17th.
>
> I received a small, white printed receipt at the time. At the moment, I have neither the time or inclination to pander your

> inefficiency and see whether it is still in existence; no doubt a proper check will reveal your copy. Surely it is not your custom to allow private individuals to send goods by rail without pre-payment? Kindly remit 2½d to cover cost of this letter when forwarding apologies.
>
> With the Compliments of the Season.

My comments on this at the time still seem to me appropriate, and a possible basis for a fan fiction story....

> I love to see this sort of situation... it's one of the basic dramatic situations like Cinderella and almost as appealing – the one in which some powerful giant comes up against an apparent weakling who turns out to be a giant in his own way. You know, Harpo Marx, David, etc. I can imagine BR bumbling on its way through thousands of easily-awed and incoherent men-in-the-street and then unexpectedly coming on a fan, who has been writing rude letters all his life and sees a victim even bigger and more vulnerable than the National Fantasy Federation. You know, one of these days some fan will be the centre of a national cause celebre.

True enough, British Railways was no match for Vince. They replied with incredible humility: "You will appreciate we deal with thousands of accounts... due to a bad impression from a rubber stamp... regret the trouble you have been caused and enclose the 2½d postage stamp as requested."

The season of which Vince wished BR the compliments was of course Christmas 1952. The Oblique House Christmas Card had already assumed its present form, though one of the things I subsequently stopped doing was leaving a blank space in the stencil in the body of the text and typing in each recipient's name. I stopped it because so many people thought it was mimeoed in, and were flattered at the individual mention. Not that I minded that, but I was afraid they might be hurt if and when they were disillusioned. One I had no compunctions about though was Rich Elsberry, who had no compunctions about other people's feelings. So when I found he had made this mistake in 1951 I typed his name in red in 1952, with the footnote: "Look, a special run in colour!"

I Remember Me – 16
James White

Even the most circumspect of fan writers eventually accumulates a backlog of unpublished articles, and (even more frustrating) one of half-published ones. The latter kind is the worse, for while an unpublished article can always be repulped and issued hopefully afresh, a half-published one is almost a total loss. When someone pays you the compliment of asking you for material, it does not do to send him something which has already been published, however carefully you explain it was only hecto, ten years ago, and to the tiny fan population of Oshkosh, Wisc. For if you or the editor fail to mention that fact, it is a law of nature that every surviving member of the Oshkosh Science Fiction League, now scattered all over the fan world in positions of vast power and influence, will leap to the nearest housetop and denounce you for a fraud.

No, the only thing to do is wait until you are an old fan mumbling through your memoirs, when with any luck it will be found that that old article is so relevant to your subject that it would be a crime to destroy it. Here, for example, I have two little biographies that James White and I did of each other in July 1952, for someone called Henry. I think it was Henry Oden, and I think they did eventually make a faint ghostlike appearance, in either spirit duplicating or hectoplasm, in an ill-fated fanzine whose name I can't remember. I don't think anyone else in present-day fandom will remember it either, except of course the ex-members of the Oshkosh Science Fiction League. But anyway, here are James White and myself as we were in those far-off days before James became a big-time professional author....

Walter Willis by James White

The sorry state of this country today cannot be blamed entirely on Mr. Willis, for although he is a Government official with a position of some importance in the administration – he has his own personal staff, which he naturally calls his shillelagh – his work is comparatively harmless. His hobbies, on the other hand, are not. I first met him in August 1947, through a letter I had published in a British prozine. At that time he was deep in building a radio that would have turned the *Venus Equilateral* crowd green

with envy, all shiny aluminum* panels outside and a completely nauseating mass of multi-coloured spaghetti inside *[the circuit was designed by Signor Macaroni himself – WAW]*** – and worrying about becoming a father. It wasn't until both these matters had been cleared up satisfactorily and he had a super-efficient receiver and a beautiful baby daughter that he turned his attention to fandom. It all started when a fanzine arrived one day (I won't plug it; it folded anyway) and Walter said surely we could get one out as good as *that*.... The rest, as they say, is history. *[Too modest, James – it's* your *story too. – WAW]* His chief occupation at the moment is of course fanning, though he still devotes some time to governing the country, and in the summer varies this with climbing an odd mountain, playing tennis. *[Not, of course, at the same time. You would need an* even *mountain for that. – WAW]* If there's a deadline to meet he often dashes in between matches in his nice white shorts to operate the press, engages in a half hour of whirlwind activity, and dashes out again in his nice black shorts. In appearance he is slim and about medium height, 6' 1" to be exact, is very quiet spoken, has thick brown hair, keen blue-grey eyes and a thin sensitive tanned face with the high forehead of a true intellectual. *[it has to go back next week – WAW]* And he's got knobbly knees. He puns a lot, and his slightest utterance is received in a suspectful silence and examined for cracks, ambiguities and innuendoes before a reply is ventured. The English language just isn't safe to use when he's around. I don't really feel qualified to be writing a thing like this, and I wouldn't be doing it only that Mr. Willis has been very kind and I'm deeply in his debt.

** Note sophisticated translation for American market.*

*** The interpolations date from 1952 too. I decline to be held responsible at this date.*

James White, Art Editor of *Slant* by Walt Willis

Those keen-minded, or cross-eyed, fans who have been reading between the lines of that account may have conjured up a mental picture of James spending the long summer evenings slaving over a hot press turning out *Slant*, while I enjoy myself in the sunshine, tanning my knobbly face and thin sensitive knees. They may even have got the impression that James does all the real work on *Slan*t while I collect all the egoboo.

Nothing could be nearer to the truth. With real feminine intuition Lee Hoffman, without ever hearing directly from James, summed him up as

follows: “I’ve always had a special sense of affection for James White, partly because he is – as far as one can tell – so quiet. He seems to go quietly about his tasks, performs them all with efficiency and despatch, and never gets as much as a nod or a thank you for doing them.” This is very true indeed. James puts more into fandom and gets less egoboo out of it than anyone I know. Each issue of *Slant* is more his work than anyone else’s, and yet he is so quiet and unassuming that even me and Bob Shaw, who like and respect him more than anyone we’ve met, are inclined to overlook the fact that he is the mainspring of Irish fan publishing, the power behind the zines. Nevertheless it is quite true to say that without James *Slant* would not be what it is today, or even exist at all. Apart from his linocuts, where without any previous training or experience he has worked up a technique which puts most professionals to shame, every issue represents hours of patient conscientious work by him setting type and working the press. We all look up to James here, and not just because he is about 6½ feet tall.

•

That wasn’t of course the first published writing by James White. To be scrupulously correct, his first published words were “These views on the great Smith are not those of the typesetter, J. White”, diffidently but stubbornly inserted in parentheses in a column by Clive Jackson in *Slant* #4. *Slant* was now dying, being replaced by *Hyphen*, and with the disappearance of linocuts and of the labour of typesetting James’s post in Irish fanac was becoming redundant. So we urged him to start writing. He kept saying he couldn’t write, but after the London convention in 1951 he turned up at Oblique House one evening with part of a convention report. If it had ever been finished it would have broken all sorts of records, because after 24 closely written pages he had got no further than 8:30 p.m. on the night before the Convention started. I ran a fragment from it in *Inclinations*, a duplicated letterzine transitional between *Hyphen* and *Slant*, and persuaded him to send a rather longer piece, rewritten as a story to Vince Clarke’s *SFN*. There it was duly published in the issue dated March 1952, under the title “The Unconventional Fan”. We didn’t appreciate just how important this debut was, but we were determined it shouldn’t go unnoticed, so Bob Shaw and I mounted a campaign. For weeks Vince was getting letters of comment like this:

> Bikodney Atoll
>
> Dear Sir:
>
> I have been writing to fanzines for 75 years now, yet I have

never read one before. But something drove me to read James White's story in the current *SFN*. I was profoundly stirred, as if I had swallowed an eggbeater. This story, sir, is a masterpiece. It will stand the test of Time. Indeed I venture to say that when the ephemeral scribbles of lesser authors – Heinlein, van Vogt, even Willis – are forgotten, this story will live on, bringing inspiration to countless thousands. When I read this story first I was unable to contain myself, and poured over it again and again. But now I am exhausted and can only proffer these pithy comments.

yourth thintherely.

Prof. Harold Urine (No 1 fan)

Or this on the back of a picture postcard of Windsor Castle:

Dear Mr. Clarke:

We *were* amused by the story about the Unconventional Fan by Mr. White. This is one of our favourite subjects.

yrs.

E.R.

X – This is our room.

My grandmother's postcard album wasn't restricted to *British* scenery:

Capetown

Great! Colossal! Goshwowboyoboy! This guy White is terrific. Why doesn't he try for *Slant*? Don't let Gold get him. Throw out all those other hacks of yours and let White fill the whole magazine. Give him his head. (What are you doing with it anyway?)

Yours for more White

A White Fan

(A. Caucasian Winnower, Mr.)

Tropical Palms Court, Florida

INTERESTED FILM RIGHTS WHITE SUPERCOLOSSAL SMASH HIT EPIC STOP OFFERING $10,000.00 OR SUB TO SLANT STOP WITH WARM CLASP OF FRIENDSHIP HANS TORRID RKO

Elbbrucke, Hamburg.

My Dear Mr. Clarke:

I like White!

Yours sincerely,

D’White Eusenhower (General)

Meanwhile Bob was busy too:

Dear Vincy-wincy:

I have just read your cute little *SFN*, I *love* every line of it. Would you do a little girl like me a bi-i-i-g favour? You would! Oh you dear boy. Just send me the address of James White who wrote that adorable story. I feel we are soul mates. I can just imagine him – dark, strong and ever so brutal. I must meet him – that super-dooper story convinced me. It was great! So *vital*, don’t you think?

Yours eagerly,
Leva Firestone (Miss)

SEXY SEX STORIES

Could you send me White’s address? I want very much to get him into my magazine. I think he is the very type we need.

X. Tasy, Editor.

And so on. I wouldn’t be surprised if James got more comment on that first story than on anything else he has written subsequently.

I Remember Me – 17
Arthur C. Clarke, Poul Anderson, Robert Bloch and more Chuck Harris

It has been pointed out by one of our perceptive new fans that I took up a lot of space in the last instalment of this column with previously circulated material. I'm truly sorry about this, but I seem to have this strange difficulty with memoirs... everything I remember seems to have already happened. My only consolation is that my critic's complaint is not that he or anyone else has actually seen the material before; just that it may have made the writing of that installment too easy for me. In an effort to make this installment more readable I am accordingly typing it in the dark wearing boxing gloves. I shall also try to make better speed in disposing of all this dull old stuff from dull old fans so that we can get on to really interesting people like Charles Platt.

So into the wastebasket with:

> Postcard, 20th June 1952, from Peter Graham. "Dear Mr. Willis, I wish to offer my sincere apologies for the card about your death I sent out. It was a stupid asinine thing to do, and I realize this fully. I am truly very sorry."

That is the only document in that Affair that hasn't been previously circulated, and I thought it should be recorded.

Letter, 8th February 1963, from Eric Frank Russell:

> I think you're going to find several after-effects, as we did. For one, the Belfast-Liverpool boat will now seem like a piddling ferryboat, as the Isle of Man boat does to us. And NYC is no longer thought of as someplace on Mars, but rather as the other terminus of a local boat. The American Way of Life has some big attractions we'd never been told about: chocolate malts, for instance. And some repulsive aspects we didn't know about either until we got there. (I think that general blatant dishonesty took me aback more than anything. Not being stuck by money restrictions as you were, and being well heeled, I could bribe

anybody to get anything or do anything no matter how illegal. Any cop would direct me to a brothel for a couple of bucks). Within three days of getting to NY I knew where I could obtain filthy pictures, morphia, marijuana cigarettes or a whore or even a professional pansy. Yes, me – but E and I both concluded that while the inhabitants of USA are greatly to be envied in some respects, in many others they can have their way of life and welcome.

Postcard, 17th February 1953, from Arthur C. Clarke:

Congrats on a brilliant travelogue. Even friends of mine who don't know a thing about fandom enjoyed it. I'm off at the end of March – will be driving up from Atlanta to the Indian Lake Con, then going to Florida for a trip in a cabin cruiser along the Keys. Hope to do quite a bit of underwater photography which may be the end of me if I run into anything with better false teeth than mine...

Letter, 7th January 1953, from Poul Anderson:

Dear Walt:

A thousand thanks for the *Songs of Ireland*, which came just the other day... Have been reading a good deal of late, inter alia Costain's two volumes on English history – which would have no surprises for you, but plenty for me; and the man's non-fiction story is far superior to his novels. Have also been playing around with communications theory, whose basic concepts seem to have some startlingly broad applications – biology, sociology, the arts, etc. It does seem to me that a genuine methodology is beginning to emerge for psychology and sociology; so far it's been mostly huge accumulations of uninteresting and largely irrelevant data, but some possibilities exist for the foundation of a true theory in the next few decades. Funny how the really important advances are made so obscurely, almost unnoticed at the time. The work on stearin synthesis was buried in the back pages of the newspapers a couple of years ago, over here at least. I haven't received *Slant* for quite a while, and imagine my subscription has run out. If you'll drop me a line as to how to re-subscribe, I certainly want to do so. *Slant* along with *Rhodomagnetic Digest* and maybe a couple of others, is that very rare bird, a genuinely readable and interesting fanzine. In fact, it

would be more accurate to call it a little magazine or something of that sort. An amateur publication, in the old sense of "amateur", one who works for the love of it.

Letter, 10th March 1953 from Robert Bloch:

> Seriously, Walt, it may well be that the release of your intended *memoir* marks the passing of an era in sf-fanhistory. There are signs and portents which I interpret to indicate that your good friends and mine are gradually withdrawing from activity. Lee, Max, Shelby and a number of others have not shown their wonted industry of late... methinks it's the beginning of the end. But they have left their mark on fandom with their greasy little paws; and God bless their greasy little hearts, they've done a lot which we can all be grateful for, whatever their activity in the future. I may be wrong... this may only be the lull before the storm... but something tells me that the Ides of March have come. You will remain as the Living Memorial of Sixth Fandom. Dunno what to predict of the new group. I have a horrid fear that fandom may one day be dominated again by a Serious Element. There may be Committees and Plans and Purposes and Crusades and Positive, Right-Thinking Constructive Attitudes. If that comes to pass, I'll be down in the bar with Tucker, crying in my beer of the good old days and wishing it wasn't a bar but a pub and not beer but Black Ben. There is, fortunately, a heartening note. If *Hyphen* and *Slant* are any indication, and if Harris, Clarke, Shaw and others are representative, a new Sixth Fandom is arising mightily in the Isles. From Bangor to Donaghadee, from Carrickfergus and across the Strangford Lough comes the clarion call, "Pyromaniacs of the World, Ignite!" Yes, I have high hopes for you in this endless struggle against the Decent Element, this battle against the Better Things.

Hm, I've just noticed that the pros seem to be taking over this column. The obvious antidote is a letter from Chuck Harris from this huge file I have here, but this rich lode is curiously difficult to work. The humour is so thoroughly embedded in the text that short quotations are difficult to extract. Madeleine tried it once for an article for *Femizine* she was writing about Chuck and failed, so that the article was never finished. Here's what there was, and I assure you it has not been previously circulated....

I Remember Harris by Madeleine Willis incorporating Chuck Harris, Friend of Fish by Walt Willis

The next time we met was at the ’54 Convention in Manchester. He didn’t seem so shy this time. I had gone into the Mackenzies’ room to say hello to Stu when Chuck, seeing me from the passage, dashed into the room so boisterously that he felled me to the door. He led me away, moaning softly and added insult to injury by explaining: “I knew Walter was downstairs so I thought I had better look after you. I don’t trust Mackenzie with women”. Mackenzie hadn’t attempted anything, not even knocking me down with a door, but I appreciated the kind thought. I think Chuck was worried over my welfare, though the compliments he paid me were such that only a fan would appreciate. He constantly offered Walt his complete file of *Galaxy* in exchange for me, and after staying at Oblique House and sampling my cooking he offered to throw in his *Vargo Statten* #3. He even sent me all his cheques for his pro writing (uncashed) to provide wallpaper for the fan attic, and only the unappreciative stupidity of pro editors prevented our being unable to cover the remaining 99.9999% of the wall with the same contemporary design. I commiserated with Walt that he wouldn’t be able to point out to visitors that the wallpaper had an interesting check pattern but he said he would just say the rest hadn’t come yet. Walls, he said it was generally known, had arrears. Talking of Walt, he has asked if he can use this space, which is lying vacant while I make his supper, to present what he claims is a little known facet of Harris, that of the Sportsman.... I hope Ethel won’t regard this as a sneaky attempt to crash the purdah of *Femizine*.

Walt speaking. Thank you ladies. I’m sure you’ll appreciate that to get a properly rounded picture of Chuck Harris, you need also to see him as a Man’s Man. It is true that one does not think immediately of Harris as a huntin’, shootin’, and fishin’ type, in spite of his familiarity with Prince Philip. His nickname is not an abbreviation of Chukka, although it is true that his path and that of the Duke of Edinburgh crossed during their service careers, as described by Chuck himself in *Orion* some years ago. Prince Philip may have forgotten this memorable encounter, but Chuck Harris does not forget his old comrades though he has attained a prestige in fandom far greater than the Duke’s.

I used to wonder why such a multi-talented person exhibited no talent for field sports... with one exception of course... until one summer day in County Donegal. It was a reason that did him credit. Simple that he is too fond of dumb animals.

My daughter Carol is crazy about sea creatures and spends most of her holidays dabbling about among rock pools with a fishing net. Naturally the fish she catches by this means are no Moby Dicks, and one evening she was complaining about this. I looked helpless, because at the time I knew absolutely nothing about fishing except that the sea seemed a pretty good place for it, but Chuck stepped competently into the breach. “I will show you how to fish tomorrow,” he said. Next morning we went to Dunfanaghy village, and he bought a sort of square wooden frame with a lot of green cord wrapped round it, a contraption which I’d always thought was for flying kites, and we tripped along to the end of the pier wall, where Chuck unrolled about 100 feet of the green line, revealing a vicious hook and a piece of lead. On the former he impaled a bit of cold fried bacon he had saved from his breakfast, at great personal deprivation. I had never myself heard of any fish that subsisted on cold fried bacon, but I kept silent, realizing I was in the presence of an expert at whose knees Walton himself might have knelt... especially if he was whizzing around his head a length of cord with a hook on the end. Having baited the hook, Harris took the line in his less severely wounded hand and, standing up, whirled the end round and round at ever increasing speed. Then, when the noise of its passage had risen from a hum to a scream, he released it. The coils of line on the pier began to disappear like smoke in a high wind. The lead weight was flying out over the sea in the direction of Newfoundland, closely followed by the hook, the piece of cold bacon, the green cord and the wooden frame. The surface of the pier suddenly looked very empty. Chuck looked at it completely without expression. Carol looked at him with an expression changing slowly from admiration to puzzlement. “How are we going to pull the fish in?” she asked. I was at a loss. How to explain to this unsophisticated child, I wondered, that at that last vital moment, the moment of truth, the Great Sportsman had been replaced by an even greater facet of Harris, that of the great humanitarian, the St. Francis of the fishy world?

I Remember Me – 18
Chuck Harris and Forrest J Ackerman

Lee Hoffman, in 1952, used to date her letters “The Year Of Not Enough Time”. For most of us survivors of Sixth Fandom the following year was the one of Not Enough Energy. By early 1953 the strain of the American Trip had finally caught up to me, and in March I was writing to Chuck Harris....

> I went into the office that Monday with the sole purpose of borrowing the stapler and they sent me home that afternoon. Went to bed, next day sent for the doctor, temperature 102, sulfa drugs, no good, medical science baffled, doctor collapses with flu, second doctor says penicillin nurse comes in daily with garden syringe, 600,000 international units, finally after eight days temperature gets back to normal, after 11 stagger downstairs, start weakly to send out /s, too much for me, back into semi-coma.
>
> I still don’t feel so good, but I’m a hell of a lot more cheerful than I was. That second doctor sent me down to the Mass Radiography place for an X-Ray. They called me back for a larger one, and then recalled me again for a medical examination yesterday. This did not make me happy, because I’ve always had a thing about tb, and I had already mentally drafted a gallant message to fandom and was wondering whether I should make a joke about the fanatarium. However the bod says for his money it’s nothing but a post-influenzal inflammation of the lungs so I may live awhile yet.

I feel something like that at the moment, which is why this instalment is briefer than usual and less controversial than I had intended. I had thought of embarking on a study of the first phase of the Great Mackenzie War, but the research needed is beyond me at the moment. I had also thought of doing a survey of the notorious fanzine *Incinerations*, the only fanzine to my knowledge ever to have been actually banned by the Postal Authorities, but I lack confidence in my ability to indicate exactly why it was banned without bringing the same fate to *Scottishe*. Why, last time I

merely tried to answer some criticism in what I thought was a good-humoured and tolerant way, and was immediately accused of being “snide to neo-fans”. Obviously I am losing my touch. It’s a pity, because Incinerations would have showed what “snide” really means. Maybe by the time the next deadline comes round and the hospital has found out what is wrong with me I will feel more enterprising. Meanwhile, back in 1953, I see I was so sunk in lethargy as to have doubts even as to the future of OMPA, which was then just a gleam in Vin¢ Clarke’s eyes....

> Now here I am left at the top of the page with all the enclosures tucked away and all of a sudden nothing left to comment on. Don’t tell me I’m going to be reduced to thinking of something original to say. Recently it’s begun to alarm me the way you and Vin¢ and Paul seem to spend your fannish existence writing witty letters to one another. I seem to have lost the habit some time during the last year, when I was forced to work on the principle of the Conversation of Fenergy... that is never waste anything in letters which you might be able to use in print. Or rather, since prior appearance in a letter has never been any ban to subsequent use in print, only write letters when for some reason, such as complete mental exhaustion, you can’t write a colm or something with a higher crifanac index. This is utterly wrong and unethical, and not only that but not much fun. I intend once I recover from my present state of mental torpor to join your happy circle. Maybe even my carbon copies will be worthy of circulation in this congenial group. Which is incidentally the nearest thing I think we need to a British FAPA. Who else do we want? Why should we waste time duping mags for a parcel of cretins when we can reach all the people we want with a few carbon copies. I think this British FAPA idea is crazy. Just look at Initiative Inc. which died away with less than half a dozen participants. The truth is that there is just not enough talent in English fandom nor likely to be in the foreseeable future to make it self-sufficient. I don’t see why it should be anyway. I think our job is to integrate British fandom with the main stream in America and have one strong fandom instead of one fairly strong one and one epicene one. Look at Australian fandom as a horrible example. It has been going on for some twenty years and never yet has produced one single issue of one fanzine of the slightest merit nor since it’s never produced one worthwhile fan, probably not even one original sentence. The whole of

> Australian fandom with all the rivers of ink and reams of paper it's used had just been a complete waste of time. No, what we should do is become members of a new world fandom. For a start you and Vince should join SAPS. I can stay in FAPA and we can exchange mailings and contribute to each other's mags.

Before I throw away the rest of this old letter there's a reference to an ethical question which arises from time to time in fandom and is never discussed. It arose this time because Forry Ackerman had offered Chuck Harris in some way a present of books or money or something to the value of £5, and Chuck had refused.

> I don't know if you were right about 4e. I know how you feel alright – it's the same in miniature as his wanting to bigpond me; but isn't this one of those occasions when you've just got to weigh the damage to your own self respect against the possible hurt to Forry's feelings. Forry really likes to be generous, and isn't it maybe a bit selfish to value one's own amour proper above the pleasure it gives him to be bountiful. Sometimes it's almost as blessed to receive as to give... though more difficult to do gracefully. Knowing Forry as I do now, if that bigpond situation arose again I don't know I wouldn't accept. Forry just loves to be generous... and incidentally is surprisingly introspective about it, speculating to me, in a wry sort of way, about it's being a symptom of psychological insecurity... and the way I behaved over the bigpond affair really shook him. I believe it sort of struck at the root of his psyche, at the deeply held belief that there should be none of this debit/credit nonsense among friends, and all along the journey from Chi to LA he was sort of *timorous*. I'd been expecting trouble with him standing me things and maybe announced a bit too firmly my intention of paying my own way... meals, drinks and whatnot. Anyway he was sort of cowed about it and almost leaned over backwards to avoid offending me by pressing anything on me. Though when he saw the opportunity to do something – as for instance when at Grand Canyon I was eyeing a stereoscopic viewer as a possible present for Madeleine and he jumped in and bought it himself for her – he took it with glee. It's awfully hard to know what to do in these affairs, when to draw the line. I accepted one of Forry's shirts in LA against one that had been lost in the wash, and before I knew it I was being fitted with an entire outfit...

jacket, trousers, shoes... which were supposed to have belonged to Alden Lorraine and which of course they were just going to throw out since they didn't fit 4e. They did fit me perfectly, and by this time I'd come to have a revised outlook on Forry's make-up, so the next time you see me I'll be wearing a jacket that used to belong to Alden Lorraine Ackerman, and maybe trousers and shoes too. If I can do that, you can accept five quid. Who are you thinking of, yourself or 4e?

And finally, a piece of gossip....

Lava Firestone wants details of British fmz for an N3F checklist. I'm gonna give her *Nirvana*. Did I ever tell you about Eva and G.O. Smith? One day GOS was wandering thru a convention with his feet about two inches off the ground as usual, when someone stopped him with "George, give us a dollar." George generously obliges, whereupon the other says "Congratulations George you are now a fully paid up member of the National Fantasy Fan Federation." "NOOO!" screams George falling to his knees. But there was no escape. Muddily mimeographed mutterings began to come through his mailbox. And also letters from well-meaning old ladies calling themselves the Welcommittee. One of them, Eva, was helpful with advice as to how to get on in fandom. "Comment on fanzines," she exhorts him, "write letters, articles, be active." George replies, deadpan, that he's sorry he wouldn't have much time for fan-activity – he's too busy with his professional writing. Back comes a congratulatory letter from Wyoming. "I'm so glad," she says, "to hear that you are trying your hand at pro writing. Just keep trying," she advises him, "and one of these days I'm sure you'll crash the prozines." This, GOS assured me, is the absolute truth.

Chuck's six-page reply was as fascinating and as unquotable as ever. To show I'm not hogging the limelight I shall send the whole letter with what I regard as the quotable bits indicated, and let Ethel quote the whole six pages if she likes....

If Degler was ever equipped with a conscience, he must have felt just like I feel right now. If only I'd known you were ill I could have bombarded you with letters, "get-well" cards and medical dictionaries. Instead, I thought I'd been pariahed and I maintained a haughty silence. I'd been frantically re-reading my old carbons trying to find out what I'd said... I shall write to

Vince tomorrow and try to find out if he's sick too.... I'm sorry you've got influenza. For my money it's an underrated infection. It can be damn dangerous (Ol' Job used to love my bedside manner). Whatever you do, *don't* go back to work in a hurry, and *don't* be overly energetic. Even after all the symptoms have vanished there is always an aftermath of a terrific sense of depression. The best cure for this is lassitude. To do this you just sit.... I agree with you about a British FAPA. It was Vince's idea at first but I think it was mainly constructiveitis. It never struck me that we could cover the elite by using carbon copies. I half-believe that you are a genius too. I think you are a little harsh on Australian fandom. One original sentence indeed! How about "one-handed readers"? ...They're building a Full Gospel church down the main read.... Up on the caravan site somebody's kid fell in the cesspool when they left the manhole open and his mum dived in and saved him.... Do you think I would look a fairy in a red corduroy jacket?.... I've got terrific fat during this winter. Mainly around the gut. Haven't reached Elsberry stage yet – I only look about four months gone.... After I've posted this I have to pollinate the peach tree. It's too early for bees so I do an imitation with a twist of cottonwool stuck on a piece of bamboo. It's not very exciting. Bees have a very dull existence. I would rather be a female spider with hubby as a post-coital snack.

I Remember Me – 19
William F. Temple, *The Enchanted Duplicator* and The Great Mackenzie War

> There has passed away a glory from the Earth; where is it now, the vision and the dream. It was different in the old days, when there was only a handful of sf mags being published. One had time not only to read them, but also to re-read them. A new novel which had even a trace of sf in it – be it only the old Mad Professor – was an EVENT. A new sf film was so rare it was a MOMENTOUS EVENT.
>
> When fen met, they could discuss their reading and be on common ground, for the other fellow was bound to have read the story you were so enthusiastic about.
>
> Today sf batters you with more magazines and books than you could hope to read if you did nothing else all day. It's all over the cinema and tv screens, and drools from the radio. It infests advertisement hoardings, strip cartoons, comics, toy shops, literary weeklies and pantomimes. It's even been mentioned at the Globe. We always wanted to spread sf, and now, God help us, we've done it. And somehow in the stampede the Magic has been trampled underfoot.
>
> Science fiction is too much with us; late and soon, getting and spending, we lay waste our powers.

Thus William Wordsworth Temple in March 1954 in a letter of comment on *The Enchanted Duplicator*, which we published the previous month. This, and indeed *TED* itself, was typical of the period of introspection which fandom had entered. *The Enchanted Duplicator* was received by fandom with such awe-inspiring enthusiasm that it must obviously have filled some deep-felt want for a new basis for our hobby, now that our former proselytizing zeal for science fiction no longer seemed to make sense. More surprisingly it was warmly welcomed by people like Ken Slater and the new generation of serious-constructive fans in the North (Bentcliffe, Varley, Ashworth, Cohen and Mackenzie) whose attitude to

fandom it had criticized by implication. In fact the booklet received such general acclaim that I thought it worth while answering in detail an enquiry from Redd Boggs as to its origins. And since it has been reprinted since and may be reprinted again soon elsewhere, perhaps this may still be of interest to some of you....

> If you are really interested, Bob Shaw wrote most of Chapter 5 and 6, part of 7, and the first para of 17, but the idea itself is a much closer collaboration. It arose out of a conversation two years ago about a radio play by Louis MacNeice based on the quotation "Childe Rolande to the Dark Tower Came". We kicked the idea around for a whole evening, ending with a pageful of notes. I wrote the first four chapters almost immediately and passed them on to Bob. That was the end of it for more than a year. Then when Vince was over last September we had a discussion about the sad state of fandom at the time – at that period Seventh Fandom was howling alone in the wilderness – and put *TED* high on the list of Projects to promote a fannish revival. Like the new *Hyphen* and *Toto*. George Charters offered to cut out the stencils, and every Tuesday afternoon I'd scribble a chapter or so in the office, type it out at teatime, and give it to George that evening. At one time I thought I'd never get it finished, because new ideas kept coming to mind more rapidly than the story progressed to a conclusion, and finally I'm afraid I cut it short too abruptly. There was to have been an Ultimate Temptation, science fiction itself, but I found it difficult to symbolize the exact shade of action representing the True Fan attitude to sf; and there was to have been some reference to FAPA and SAPS; but whether because of the same difficulty or plain impatience – I was no longer quite so enthusiastic, having lived with the thing for eighteen months – I just brought it to a close with that purple passage. Which I felt quite uneasy about at the time as perhaps having gone *too* far.

I see I have mentioned Mackenzie again, and indeed he had entered fandom quietly in 1953 and we have arrived at the first of the long chain of events which I think of as The Great Mackenzie War. You must have gathered from the number of times I have referred to this without saying anything definite about it, that it is a subject which both fascinates and frightens me. It fascinates me because it was so full of drama and

psychological complexity: it may not have culminated in a real live bomb, like the Insurgent Schism in America, but it did ruin at least one life, with such lesser incidental catastrophes as lawsuits, the disruption of the remaining nucleus of Sixth Fandom and of the London Circle and the downfall of the body regulating world conventions. The subject frightens me because the emotions it aroused cannot be wholly dead yet, and because its ramifications are so complex. Finally I have decided that I was too intimately involved with some phases of it to write an objective history, and since this column is frankly nothing more than the raw material of memoirs, I should confine myself to presenting to you the various events as they presented themselves to me at the time.

But first I think I should say that the term the Great Mackenzie War is unfair to Stuart Mackenzie, just as it is unfair to blame Jenkins for all the consequences of the War of Jenkins's Ear. He was not even involved in the later stages, when it spread to New York, and even in his early actions for which he was so harshly attacked at the time, I still cannot instance any concrete example of wilful treachery or malicious intrigue. He may have lacked discretion, but basically I think Mackenzie was simply a *Force* and that it was fandom itself that made him a destructive one. He merely exerted pressure on us, and we split along lines of psychological weakness which had been below the surface all the time.

It wasn't even he who started it all. In fact, looking at the first letters about the unimportant event which started it all, these scraps of paper blown ahead by the advancing storm, I find to my horror that I could be said to have started it all myself.

In January 1954* I had a letter from Eric Bentcliffe, who was then editing the serious-constructive fanzine called *Space Times* for the Manchester Group comprising Brian Varley and Dave Cohen who were going to put on the forthcoming Convention in Manchester, the Supermancon. The fanzine was being published by Stuart Mackenzie in London. Bentcliffe told me a deal had been arranged with the publishers of the new prozine, the *Vargo Statten Magazine*, for them to print the fanzine covers in return for free advertising. Now the *VSM* was of course devoted to juvenile potboilers of John Russell Fearn under his various pseudonyms and was properly despised by all us fans; it struck me as wryly amusing that these serious dedicated sf lovers in Manchester would accept a subsidy from it. I sent a postcard to Bentcliffe reading, in part, "Will the golden calf be on show at the Supermancon?" and published the news item in *Hyphen* with the comment, "Nice, but I mustn't be surprised if people make remarks as they do about girls and mink coats."

** The original says January 1964, but this is evidently a typo: 1954 was the year of the Supermancon and also saw the final issue of* Space Times*. [Ed.]*

This was I'm afraid sheer mischievousness, but I had no way of knowing that pulling one leg in Manchester would throw the entire group off balance. Dave Cohen sent an ultimatum to Eric Bentcliffe demanding his resignation from the editorship of *Space Times*, for unauthorized disclosures of information leading to the group being brought into ridicule. Eric Bentcliffe sent carbons appealing to everyone involved protesting the injustice of this. I sent carbons appealing to everyone for calm and a return to the status quo after the convention. Mackenzie then wrote to me enclosing a dittoed letter he had been about to issue, implying that he had lost the offer of a good job on account of Bentcliffe's "ill-timed disclosures" (it had been Mackenzie, of course, who had arranged the deal with *VSM*), complaining bitterly about his editorship and refusing to serve under him any more. He wanted my advice on whether to issue it or not, revealing that Cohen's ultimatum had been the result of a complaint from him and Brian Varley. Before I could answer Eric formally resigned, bringing the immediate crisis to a close but leaving a lot of unanswered questions and bad blood.

When the dust had settled the *VSM* had gone bankrupt and the Northern SF Club was in fragments, but the editorship of *Space Times* was securely, in the hands of Stuart Mackenzie and Brian Varley.* It was at this point that I re-christened the latter Machiavarley, but I am sure this was an injustice. I am not so sure about Mackenzie, because all the following feuds in which he was involved seem to follow an eerily similar pattern.

** Walt was mistaken here. As Rob Hansen points out in* Then*, Brian Varley did not in fact become an editor of* Space Times*. [Ed.]*

But let's end on a note more science fictional than these petty squabbles. When Brian Aldiss was in Belfast recently for the Arts Festival he gave a very fine lecture about sf, but admitted that it had not anticipated one development, that the Russians would be the first in space. So it was with some pride I found the following in a letter of comment that I wrote to a US fanzine in March 1954....

> Joe Gibson is an extraordinary mixture of sophistication and naivete. His letter is intelligent, but his article about space flight and Russia is almost childish. Does he really think the concept of space stations etc has only occurred to the Russians? They have

> been reading and writing science fiction for years and they probably know more about what's going on in Western scientific circles than most Western scientists. It doesn't pay to underestimate those lads.... Better be careful that the first space flight isn't made from some base in Central Asia (a steppe rocket, of course) and Mars really becomes the Red Planet.

Which proves that pro authors, and indeed the United States Government, should read more fanzines than they do.

I Remember Me – 20 Letter Columns and Robert Bloch

Having already spent three hours on this column without getting past the first paragraph, I am forced to a dread conclusion: Creeping Perfectionism has struck again. This disease is one of the most serious that can afflict a faned, since it can lead to annishthesia and permanent gafia, and like malaria it's never permanently cured.

I used to have it pretty bad myself. I remember my first letter section, for instance, in a forgotten fanzine called *Inclinations* which consisted of letters of comment on *Slant*. *Slant* had never had a letter section, since few people write letters of comment which cry out for immortality tersely enough for a hand-set printed fanzine, so when I finally got myself a duplicator I had years of frustrated letter-section editing to work out of my system. That letter section was the most edited there has ever been. First I typed out all the interesting bits from the letters: then I rearranged them in what I felt was the most effective order; then I typed them all out again with a linking commentary so designed that the comments on one letter led on to the next one, the idea being that each quotation should fall into place with uncanny aptness; then I transcribed the lot onto stencil. By that time, as you'll have noticed, I had copied out each letter three times. And yet in the end I had a letter section not half as good as Max Keasler could produce with one hand tied behind his back.

What he had got, and what I had thrown away, was spontaneity. You knew that anything was likely to happen in a Keasler letter column, so you kept watching with the same fearful fascination that you watch live outside broadcast interviews on tv. Somebody might say something rude, and in Keasler's fanzines they often did. It's arguable that the best letter section is one that is not edited at all, like Forry Ackerman's *VOM*. That was claimed to be the Mirror of Fandom, and with some justification, because Forry took pride in reproducing each letter with photographic completeness, even down to the signature. You knew that what you were getting were the readers' reactions to Forry and his fanzine, not what he wanted you to think they were.

In the same way it occurs to me perhaps that I am wasting my time by

trying to impose some sort of thematic continuity on the quotations which make up this column. It's a temptation to link up letters one with another, discerning trends and all that, but if I were writing a Decline And Fall of Sixth Fandom I wouldn't be writing this column at all. All it was ever meant to be was a final wastebasket for my correspondence files, and people who expect something else from it are looking for silk purses in a piggery. I only hope there are enough of you others, people like me who like reading other people's mail, to outnumber them.

12 Feb. 1954. Robert Bloch on fan activity and pro writing:

> As to my fan activity being a secret vice....vice it may be, but hardly a secret one. The reason for my indulgence is so basurdly simple (I started out to write "absurdly simple" but now that I see the neologism I think I'll leave it that way: isn't it a *dirty* looking word?)
>
> In the words of Ado Annie (a character in *Oklahoma* which is as you know the American equivalent of *Hearts of Oak*) my trouble is that I can't say no. Somebody writes and asks for an article, chances are if the request is at all reasonable I'll oblige. Get roped into all kinds of fanactivity that way, too. (Did I hear some cosher in the back of the house mutter "Egoboo"?) Well, it's not that at all. Egoboo is earned by pro activity. Me, all I get is headaches. I spent the whole morning doing an article for Calkins: because he asked me, and because he said he needed something to balance your illiterate contribution. It's just weakness that keeps me in fandom. Here I am, on p.111 of a slimy little opus about a one-eyed private eye really – and instead of finding out what happens on p.112, I am penning random remarks to some faraway Belfastness in the wilderness. Are we still in this confounded parenthesis? Let's get out before we're suffocated.)
>
> Hadacol and dianetics might help you to do creative writing. But with me the big trick is *impersonation*. More and more I've come around to writing stories in the first person, pretending to be somebody else. No need to be self-conscious then, because you merely adopt an empathy for the person you're supposed to represent and allow his or her attitudes and viewpoints to flow freely. At times you may find your own personality intruding, but usually it's easy enough to keep on the track. Of course I'm not a successful pro writer – just a hack,

> and a rather old-fashioned one at that, inasmuch as I don't adapt myself to current trends in sf. But what I do seem to sell is largely a product of this little trick, assuming a role for purposes of narration. Variation or extension of a monologue, that's what it is. I don't know if such a device suggests anything to you which might be of help, but perhaps you can try it.

Well, at least this voice from the past may give hope to other writers who are thinking of themselves as old-fashioned unsuccessful hacks. The advice about writing wouldn't help me, but on another occasion Bob wrote trying to help me about public speaking on similar lines, and he did. He confided he hated public speaking and always felt nervous, and the way he made out was to make believe he was delivering someone else's speech. Thereby, as it were I suppose, shifting the responsibility.

3rd April 1954. Mal Ashworth, on receipt of *The Enchanted Duplicator*.

> You told me you were hectically busy but when it arrives it's mimeoed! ...Fanmagrevoos. Aaaah yes. Harrumph. When I did finally get the Janish of *Space Times* I found they had run that review I mentioned earlier of *Hyphen* #5. Well it wasn't exactly a rude review, just plain moronic and unappreciative. But then it was done about last November and that accounts for it. I don't know why the hell there isn't some injunction to stop neoactifans from diving in and judging, criticizing, expressing opinions about things and generally making fools of themselves before they know what things are about at least to some degree! There ought to be if only for their own sakes.

Round about this time Mal Ashworth and Tom White published the first issue of *Bem*. Recently I had said something about all first issues being badly duplicated, and Mal had the bright idea of saving a set of spoiled pages, further messing them up with inky handprints etc even including one page with an outline of a necktie in white down it, as if someone had got his tie caught in the duper, and stapling them all together and sending the horrible mess to me without comment. I was just finishing an issue of *Hyphen* myself and after I had run off the editorial stencil I cut a hole in it, inserted a disgusted review of *Bem*, and ran off one copy especially for Mal. By return of post I had a furious letter threatening to denounce me to every fannish authority. In case it was genuine I had to dash out and send a telegram to Mal telling him to look at Tom's *Hyphen*. By 1st May the smoke cleared and Mal wrote....

> Did you not have even a tiny little fit about my proposed plans to restore *Bem*'s fair name? Oh well I tried. I wish you'd call in an arbitrator and find out who ended up, relatively, where. I knew of course before I wrote that letter that my copy was a hoax, but I didn't know from the start. Oh no, not by a long way – you got me completely, I admit it....I never even considered my copy might be a hoax even tho there was some type missing beneath the review.

As for who came out best at the end, well you are posterity and you can judge. Personally I always felt that I had won because my hoax worked although Mal could have detected it: while theirs worked only because I couldn't check on it.

23rd March 1954. Ted Tubb with some helpful suggestions about TAFF:

> Each contributor to TAFF to be entitled to nominate ONE candidate. Then contributors will vote on candidates. The trick is, votes will be proportionate to amounts contributed, i.e. 2/6 and under – one vote, 5/- – 2 votes, £1 – 8 votes and so on. The winning THREE candidates to then be revoted on. Nov; I know this seems undemocratic, but it makes good sense. Surely if a man is willing to contribute a £1 he is helping the winner eight times further on his way than one who chips in 2/6 and so should have eight times more say in who should go. Also, and this is it, it will make for a keen sense of rivalry and the money should come rolling in faster than it does now. After all, if a man gives 2/6 and then knows that no matter what others give he has the same power to vote as they, there is no incentive to pay more other than pure fannish love which seems to be nonexistent.

Fortunately Ted seems to have been wrong.

I Remember Me – 21
Harlan Ellison and the Fall of Sixth Fandom

One evening in March 1953 James White arrived at my house in great excitement clutching a letter from John W. Campbell Himself disclosing that he was willing to pay $285 for a story James had sent him called “The Scavengers”. This was a fabulous sum to us in those days, but even to mention money in the context was misleading except in that it lent an air of reality to the incredible glory which had descended on our humble fan group, born and nurtured on *Astounding*. Our feelings were more like some country vicar who receives out of the blue a tablet of stone announcing that his sermon last Sunday has found such favor on high that henceforth it is to be included in the Bible.

Before James’s apotheosis could be confirmed it was necessary for his signature to a contract to be witnessed by a notary public, and his problem was that such creatures did not seem to exist in Northern Ireland. Momentarily sobered by my responsibilities as leader of the fan group, I brought my fine mind into action, examined my broad mental horizons, and deduced that the local equivalent must be Commissioner for Oaths. I even remembered that somewhere down the road there was a brass plate with those words on it. So we walked down the Upper Newtownards Road, disturbed an amiable old gentleman called Norwood and assured James’s immortality. I felt equally godlike myself, for had I not discovered James and encouraged him to write and insisted he send that story to *Astounding*? All he had contributed was talent and industry.

After we had put in some more serious gloating James cycled home again, and I hurried to the nearest telephone kiosk to send a telegram to Chuck Harris with the awesome news. Like Robert Bloch, Chuck Harris plays a role in present-day fandom reminiscent of that or Yorick in *Hamlet*, but in those days he was the friend and confidant of all the leading fans in what is now known as Sixth Fandom, admired by them as some writers are more admired by other writers than by the general public. He was a fan’s fan, a confidant because of his sympathetic and generous nature and his isolated situation, and admired because of the wonderful letters he wrote. We all felt that if Chuck could only make the jump from

letters to general communication, he would be a better writer than any of us. But he never did, and indeed it is curious how permanent seem the attributes which first revealed themselves in all of us as young fans. I see that on St. Patrick's Day 1953 I was writing to Chuck about Harlan Ellison:

> I like Ellison. He had a short piece about himself in *Vanations* and he seemed for a minute to slip into sincerity with a story about his youth and how he coped with antisemitism in the Cleveland slums. Besides anyone with that much energy and enthusiasm is a real asset to fandom. Just figure how much work he must put into *SF Bulletin* – 0 to 50 pages, 300 copies, monthly and *every margin justified*, sometimes in double columns. It just isn't possible.

Those impossible issues of *SF Bulletin* were muddily mimeoed on coarse absorbent paper, and ever since then I have been unable to read anything by Harlan Ellison, however elegantly produced and professionally praised, without thinking that it shows signs of over-inking.

Here is Harlan Ellison, the young faned, seeking material for his fanzine:

> Dear Unca Walt:
>
> Whether you are aware of it or not, you dirty low-down sneaking slob, I've been holding up my annual since February on the promise of an article from you. And I will keep my 400 subscribers waiting until I do get that article. I already have Willy Ley, Tucker, A. Charles Catania, Paul Cox, Gregg Calkins, Mack Reynolds, Venable, Elsberry, Ridley, Wells, Nydahl, and about eight others of equal note, but I want a real BNF (bloody-nosed fan) and will stay on top of this stack of mouldy fanzines, eating nothing else but stale chicken-fat sandwiches until I get that piece of material (of decent length too, you louse) for the damn thing....Please, please Walt.
>
> ...Beastley's was a complete flop. Read the con reviews in my next issue of *SFB* after #13. They will, I contend, blow fandom wide open. Everyone was potten ((sic)) and lascivious. A thoroughly nausiating spectacle.
>
> Yours very birdbathly,
>
> Max J. Runnerbeam

"Come now, Harlan," I temporized, "I'll have to speak to you like a Dutch

Uncle. Luik, Mynheer, you can't expect me to believe you've been holding up an annish on account of *me*, especially as I didn't promise you anything....” But even gags pinched from S.J. Perelman were of no avail against a natural phenomenon like Harlan. He came right back:

> NOW HEAR THIS! NOW HEAR THIS!
>
> This is 100%, gold-plated, pure-bred truth. I have been holding up the *SFB* annish since February in hopes, in hopes mind you, of getting from you something. I've pleaded, I've cajoled, I've coaxed, I've threatened.... I've done them all to no avail. Over four hundred readers and fans have been waiting for this momentous tome to leave in the dust all such annishes. I have been, to put it bluntly, sweating my testicles off trying to get something out of you.
>
> NOW I'VE STROPPED FOOLING AROUND!
>
> Here it is Willis, you creep: if I don't get one of your best articles (or stories, if you so choose) in less than three weeks, you can expect to receive a visit from a certain short young man with a large pipe, an even larger nose, horn-rimmed glasses and portable birdbath cleaner. You think I am kidding? How wrong you are! I swear by all that is holy that I will come to Ireland to GET that damn material from you. And since I cannot afford to come at all, I will work over on a HMS garbage scow or something for fare. That is the truth!
>
> I don't lie about things of such seriousness.
>
> So if you don't want to wreck my life, you'd better send that mss. in QUICK-LIKE, brother.
>
> I still love you like a nephew, however.

Actually the main reason for my refusal was one I hadn't mentioned to Harlan at all, a profound distrust of annishes. I had learned that either they never appeared at all, or if they did appear the editor promptly went gafia with exhaustion or if it did appear and he did survive the readers were so stunned there were few locs anyway. So while I did write something for Harlan's annish, purely because I had liked him so much when we met at Chicago in 1952, I sent the same piece to the editor of a London fanzine, and told both of them what I had done. Harlan telephoned me about this, presumably to expostulate: I don't know for sure because the conversation never took place. Only Harlan Ellison would have tried to call up somebody who wasn't on the telephone. He got my father's house, some few hundred yards away, and by the time my sister had come round with

the message and I had reached the phone, Harlan had gone. The only outcome was an addition to fannish mythology. Chuck Harris was staying with me at the time and was in the very act of crowing over the fact that he had got more mail than I had, when the message arrived that a Mr. Ellison wanted to speak to me from Cleveland, Ohio. Do you often get phone calls from American fans, asked Chuck, chastened. Only when it's something important, I explained with calm effrontery.

The only further contact I have had with Harlan was another meeting in Los Angeles in 1962, and yet I feel, and I think he feels too, that we have always been close friends. It is one of those undemanding but wholly satisfactory relationships which can continue to exist between people who never write to and seldom see one another, rather like a family relationship. Lee Hoffman, whose fantastic esotericisms often concealed startling perceptiveness, brought Harlan Ellison into her imaginary family tree as our nephew while he was still the *enfant terrible* of Seventh Fandom, and her intuition was sound. (This family tree business, incidentally, arose from an article by Burbee describing how he tried to disabuse Francis Towner Laney of the fixed idea he was supposed to have that Les and Es Cole were 16-year old twin brothers, a useful technique for writing humorous articles that I've used once or twice myself). The Hoffman/Willis family tree included Bloch, Tucker, Keasler Vick, Ellison and a few others. There were quite a number of other leading fans of the day whom we liked and respected, but for some reason they did not seem to qualify. It was one of the disagreements between Lee and myself that she always seemed to me to be trying to form elites, using esotericism as a sort of wall to exclude outsiders, and the family tree worried me from this point of view. But when I tentatively nominated candidates for inclusion she firmly turned them down, I could see that in some subtle way these people differed from the family. Eventually I accepted the situation, and now after 15 years I am coming to believe that she was wiser than I was, for none of the members of the family has ever fallen out with another.

Even the relationships still seem valid, although my nephew has become so famous. I admire Harlan for all the qualities I lack myself, just as if he were the child of my complementary twin.

I was right about his annish, because it never did appear. Dire forebodings were being heard on other fronts too. On 30th March 1953 I was writing to Shelby Vick:

> Don't tell Peter Graham, but I've been very ill. No, not his "diptheria" – when I do die of some disease it will be one that's properly spelled – but influenza with some newfangled version

of pneumonia. Also gafia, but the doctor couldn't do anything about that.

....Had an unusually sombre letter from Bloch yesterday bemoaning the apparent demise of Sixth Fandom, where he mentions the silence of you and Max and Lee and seems to pin his hopes on the European side of Sixth Fandom. But to carry on as a living entity, and the most fun there's ever been in fandom, we need an American wing. This is where you should come in and *Confusion* should come out.... Unless you and *CF* can carry on for a few months we're all in real danger of losing something valuable that we've built up over the last year or so. Remember what happened when *Spacewarp* folded? All that wonderful crowd... Nelson, Singer and the others... just disintegrated. Fandom was plunged into ineffectual chaos for years until *Quandry* built up another world. And yet all during the interim between *Warp* and *Q* the potentialities were there. For myself, I was entering fandom just as *Warp* folded. If it had carried on or if *Q* had started earlier I'd probably have started The Harp two years earlier than I did. I'm sure the same goes for other people. Bloch for example had been hanging around just waiting. It was us that made him active as a fan. And now that *Q* is folding... or looks like it from here... it's left to *CF* to carry on our type of fanzine until some neo appears to carry the torch. Then you'll be able to retire and become a legend, like Tucker's Great Fan who was automatically sent a copy of every fanzine, like the British Museum or the Library of Congress.

I want very much to keep in touch with everything myself, but I've got to cut down my fanac. People tend to forget that in a sense I have been the first world fan, fully active on both sides of the Atlantic. I only kept up that pre-Chicon output with quite a severe strain.

Whatever happened in the States it seemed a safe bet at the time that European Sixth Fandom would continue to exist. Chuck Harris, Vince Clarke, and myself backed by the rest of Irish Fandom (which had no separate foreign policy of its own) seemed a group so congenial and happy that it could continue forever without dissension. To describe the holocaust that destroyed the Second Foundation of Sixth Fandom, and which is one of the few calamities of the sort which was never reported in a fanzine except in the suppressed issue of *Orion*, of which I believe I have the only copy, would need at least one whole instalment of this series. But perhaps

I can start by reintroducing American fandom to Vince Clarke. He was one of the most talented fans of all time, but he was a perfectionist and his output was small, and inclined to be literarily oriented. It consisted largely of his news fanzine, which started off like this:

> I have thought of my story, announced Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley. Pass the marmalade dear.
>
> Percy looked vaguely around the breakfast table. Marmalade... lade... laden? Ah! ...That orbed maiden with white fire laden, Whom mortals call the Moon, Walks... no, Flies... no... ummmm.
>
> Allow me, my dear Mrs. Shelley. Lord Byron passed the marmalade, and shook his curly head at Percy. Tut, Bysshe, you'll no more go aroving by the light of the moon, and the sound of revelry by night ill becomes a married man. But pardon, my dear lady. You have decided to enter our little contest of ghost tales?
>
> Yes indeed, and I have a tale that is truly horrifying. I could not sleep last night and my imagination, unbidden, possessed me, going far beyond the bounds of reverie.... I saw a pale student of unhallowed arts kneeling beside a thing he had put together. I saw the hideous phantasm of a man stretched out, and then, on the working of some powerful engine, show signs of life, and stir with an uneasy, half-vital motion. Frightful.
>
> She shuddered. Tea dripped into the marmalade.
>
> His success must terrify the artist; he would rush away from his odious handiwork, horror-stricken. He would hope that its transient life would fade... he might sleep in the belief that the silence of the grave would quench the hideous corpse for ever....he sleeps, but he is awakened; he opens his eyes; behold! The horrid thing stands at his bedside, opening his curtains, and looking on him with yellow, watery, but speculative eyes....
>
> Lord Byron nodded reflectively. Almost, he murmured, you might be describing:
>
> **SCIENCE FANTASY NEWS**

The *Slant* Story

"Thirty shillings a page," I said disgustedly one evening in 1948. "I could nearly get it printed for that." At the time I was sitting in the Cafe de la Victoire with a couple of fellow members of the intelligentsia. Well, actually to be quite frank it was a fried fish shop in Ballymacarett called the Victory Supper Saloon, with a decor of checked linoleum and fly-papers, but it was the best we could do. Belfast is short in open-air Montmartre-type cafes and we were short of money, so we had determined to inaugurate all on our own a tradition of left-bank avant-garde fish and chip shops and had started by rechristening this one without the knowledge of the proprietor. The next step, we felt, would be to supply him with a pile of old copies of *transition** to wrap his take-out orders of chips in, and soon the place would become the Mecca of international Bohemia with us as doyens. At the moment however we were talking about this science fiction fan magazine I was thinking of starting and about the high prices of professional duplicating.

** Literary journal (1927-1938) whose title always appeared in lower case. [Ed.]*

"I know where you can get a printing press," said Alan Seaton, toying idly with a bottle of fine old vintage vinegar. (Yes, these are the people who invented the sauce bottle fandom I wrote about elsewhere.) Seaton was our artist: he painted an average of four pictures a week, using both sides of the canvas, but never signed any of them lest the market be debased when he became recognized. He went on to explain that his employer, a pharmaceutical chemist, had bought this press about twenty years ago to print his own letterheads but the technicalities had defeated him and he had relegated it to the lumber room. He had certainly forgotten all about it. So next afternoon I went to Seaton's shop and lurked about like a customer, ready to buy a bottle of aspirins at the drop of a hat if it became necessary to disarm suspicion, until I could be smuggled upstairs.

Arriving finally in the attic, breathless with anticipation and three flights of stairs, I was a little disappointed at my first sight of the Printing Press. The only printing presses I had ever seen before were the great whirring machines which the hero always stopped in the last reel of movies about journalists, and though I really wasn't expecting one of those, I at least thought it would be something that went round. Not a little

iron box with a handle. However there was no time to think about that. We dumped it into a cardboard box along with everything that seemed to belong to it and I was smuggled out of the shop again successfully, all aspirations and no aspirins.

At home, I examined the prize more carefully. As well as the press, there was what I learned later is termed a composing stick and a vast quantity of type. The press itself seemed pathetically simple. There was a tray in which you presumably placed the type and the lid had a couple of clips on it to hold a sheet of paper. If you linked the lid and closed the box and leaned on the handle the paper would be pressed against the type and bingo. Privately I thought Gutenberg was a bit stupid not to have thought of it sooner. There was nothing broken... in fact there was nothing to break... and the tray for the type was as big as the page of a small book. We were in business, and I told as much to James White when he came up later that evening.

"A printed fanzine!" said James, awed. We had only seen one printed fanzine so far, Walter Gillings's *Fantasy Review*, and that was so far above our lowly neofan level that we regarded it as an august professional publication, similar in stature to The Proceedings of the Royal Society. Its reviewers breathed such a rarefied atmosphere of the higher learning that we had never even heard of any of them. It wasn't until much later we found that they were all house names disguising the identity of scruffy London fans like ourselves.

So, diffident, but undaunted, we set out to topple *Fantasy Review* off its pedestal. I grasped the composing stick and started setting up the editorial. Now in case you know as little about letterpress printing as I did until that moment, perhaps I had better explain that the letters come individually on the ends of little metal sticks, and there are shorter metal sticks of different sizes for the spacing between words, and by juggling about with these you can get all the lines exactly the same width. You arrange them in the composing stick, which is a little three-sided tray with one side which can be moved back and forth, and when you've got from two to eight or so lines set up, the number depending on your optimism or confidence, you release the screw holding the adjustable third side and holding your breath and the type in a desperate vicelike grip you lift up the whole mass of letters and spaced unsupported from beneath and transfer them to the printing tray you hope... phew! Nothing in mimeography, even the sound of a ripping stencil wrapping itself round the self-feed, compares with the stark horror of that moment when you feel the type disintegrating between your fingers and hear it starting to spatter on the floor. And even

when you've become expert at it, disaster can still strike. I remember one evening much later we were setting up type and talking and Bob Shaw made an impassioned gesture, forgetting he was holding a composing stick, and two hours work went hurtling over his left shoulder like salt. We spent the rest of the evening picking the letters off the floor and putting them back in their compartments again, which is a very slow job when you have to look at each letter, reversed and decide which it is. (Hence the expression, mind your p's and q's and they could have added b's and d's and I's and 1's.)

But we ran into yet another problem first. The vast store of type we had acquired with the machine ran out after three lines. However we managed to manoeuvre those three lines into the press and I rubbed them with a rubber stamp pad I had with great forethought brought home from the office and we clipped a piece of paper to the lid and closed it and levered it down and opened it up again. Impressions of several of the letters were clearly to be seen on the paper. We had printed something! Drunk with power, we gazed in admiration at the spotty purple hieroglyphs as if they were the Book of Kells. What few imperfections there might be in the printing should, we agreed, be ascribed to worn type and wrong ink. We were suffering already from the occupational disease of new fan editors, Delusions of Legibility.

Next day I went down town bringing an example of our existing type to have it matched. An old man, probably Gutenberg himself, pored through an immense catalogue of typefaces and told me it was Gloucester Bold Condensed, so I bought a font of that. It cost about two pounds. I bought it home all silvery and shining in a neat little cardboard box, starting with an impressive two full rows of A's and ending with all sorts of quaint punctuation marks and diphthongs, and that evening I spent happily sorting them all out into a dirty old wooden type-tray the old man had thrown in for another five shillings, having first labelled all the compartments with bits of sticky paper. In my ignorance I just labelled them A B C D E and so on, not knowing there was a special arrangement for printers' typetrays like QWERTYUIOP, and for the same very good reasons. By the time we knew better we figured it was too late to change.

By the end of the following evening we had finished setting the editorial and had somehow got it into the press. I had also bought a pound tin of printer's ink, for about half a dollar. It lasted the whole lifetime of *Slant*, which is one of the things that makes it difficult for me to find my way out of mimeograph supply shops nowadays, on account of the red mist before my eyes. James had come up again, all eagerness, and we

rolled out a little ink on the bathroom mirror and then rolled it onto the type and printed again. The result was both triumph and disaster. On the other hand there was a clear and beautiful impression on the paper of nearly every other letter: on the other hand the editorial looked as if it had been started off with a whimper and finished with a bang. The type we had been sold was compressed and emphatic; it could hardly have been more unlike the type we had, which was obviously neither Bold nor Condensed nor probably even Gloucester. We cursed Gutenberg and conferred grimly. Finally we decided that rather than take all that new type apart again and clean it we would keep it for our body type and use the other for headlines. This was the first really bad mistake we made, if you don't count taking up printing in the first place, but we weren't to find just how big a mistake it was until the third issue.

Next evening we had the first part of the editorial reset in the new type, but another blow had fallen. We had run out of small i's. (it's a curious thing, but every writer seems to have some letter he uses more than the average, and with me it's small i's. Small i's, I said. I was to spend many hours in the future filing the tails of J's and changing words like insipid to tasteless.) I had barely got the editorial finished and yet it covered only about two thirds of a page. We couldn't publish a magazine with pages as tiny as that, but it would be another month before I could afford to buy more type.

Faced with this impasse, James made a diffident suggestion. He had heard, he said, of things called woodcuts. The idea presumably was that you scraped lines on a piece of wood and the ink didn't get into the grooves so they printed white on black. If we had illustrations we wouldn't need so much type. He was willing to try and supply them. I congratulated him on this brilliant suggestion and gave him a supply of old bits of plywood and single edged razor blades. Actually of course it should have been blocks of boxwood and tiny chisels but I didn't know any better: it seemed to me in my innocence that plywood, being faced with a hard wood, would be close grained enough and he could get large areas of white easily by just levering off the top ply. His first efforts showed our mistakes. The large black areas needed so much ink the type was nearly swamped and even then the grain of the wood showed. But as the production of *Slant* #1 went on James got cleverer and finally, for page 5, he produced a woodcut with only a few bits of surface wood left here and there. It looked like nothing on earth until we printed it and then in a way first impressions were confirmed because it turned out a perfect lunar landscape. Well, anyway, it looked perfect to us. It illustrated a story by

me (I wrote the whole issue of course because we didn't know any other fan writers we could ask), a serious one about the problem of communicating with aliens by radio transmission alone. It wasn't up to much as a story... apart from my own limitations there's nothing like setting up your material in print to make you cut it down to the bare bones... but it used an idea which is still original. The aliens sent bunches of pips representing the first twelve prime numbers, and we replied with the thirteenth. Then they sent pairs of numbers which plotted on a graph became a circle and its diameter, followed by the value of Pi in their scale of notation. Once that basis had been established pictures of almost any complexity could be transmitted. The other contents included an article about telekinesis, a clerihew, a short column and... what was really the reason we had thought of publishing a fanzine in the first place... a list of the copies of *ASF* we wanted to complete our collections. (We needed, I see, all of 1940, 1941, 1942 and 1943 but were undaunted.)

The whole thing was contained on three sheets of folded foolscap, making twelve pages in all. Such was the publication which burst on a lethargic fandom in November 1948.

Before pulling out all his dead bride's teeth, the monomaniacal hero of Poe's "Berenice" used to "repeat monotonously some common word until the sound, by dint of frequent repetition, ceased to convey any idea whatever to the mind." It is possible for the same thing to happen to an entire magazine, if you have written and revised the contents yourself, typeset them by hand and checked the proofs. So by the time we had finished *Slant* #1 we had no idea what the contents were like.

Later I found I had a peculiar ability to assess my work as it would appear to others. Not objectively... it takes many years before I can do that... but subjectively from the point of view of someone else. I could pick up an addressed copy of a magazine I had produced and put myself in the position of that particular recipient, and read it quite anew as he would see it, and I could do this over and over again for everyone I knew, reading as it were a different magazine each time. I find, to take the most extreme example that Eric Frank Russell's copy reads quite differently from Eva Firestone's, and indeed when I am reading a copy of an issue just before mailing it, I have to take care that I pick one that's addressed to someone I like so that I won't feel discouraged. But at the time of *Slant* #1 this faculty was useless to me, because I didn't know any of the recipients: I had no idea what to expect.

I suppose we got about ten letters of comment on that first issue and we were intoxicated by this flood of unaccustomed egoboo. Most startling

of all one thoughtful person had actually sent some stamps “to help defray expenses” (we had not thought of asking for subscriptions) and the idea that people would actually pay money for something we had produced was quite overwhelming. In fact I haven’t quite got over it yet. Full of fresh enthusiasm, we plunged into our second issue. I replied to everyone who had commented and those who looked literate I flattered outrageously and begged for material. Two of them came through almost immediately, Clive Jackson and Cedric Walker, neither of whom had been active in fandom before or had written professionally. Jackson’s story, “The Still, Small Voice”, was a beautiful little pastiche of Bradbury, tiny and brilliant like a jewel and perfect for a hand-printed fanzine.

We led off the issue with it proudly, and then there was my first attempt at humorous fiction, a piece full of bad puns about an attempt to drill a subway to Australia which foundered in a pool of universal solvent.* (All the samples distilled by successful alchemists had of course made their way to the centre of the earth.) Then there was my last attempt at serious fiction, which I have just now read for the first time in twelve years and can now be objective about. It had a good plot which has still not been used elsewhere and some good lines (“Do caterpillars believe in butterflies?”) but was ruined by condensation. There was enough in it to make a novel, but it was so fined down to fit into eight small pages that now I can hardly understand it myself. Then came Walker’s story, which still seems to me a pretty good sf short. And there was an editorial and a column and various other fillers by me, because I couldn’t get anyone else to fill up the magazine.

** See “The Solution”. [Ed.]*

It was after the publication of this second issue that things really began to happen. Like for instance Ted Carnell asking our Cedric Walker to write for *New Worlds*. This was a big thrill – Professional Recognition – and I don’t remember being at all put out that Ted didn’t seem to be interested in my story. I don’t remember if this was true humility, or whether I privately thought it was a bit too good for *New Worlds* – probably both alternately. Cedric did duly appear in *NW*, and later in the American *Marvel* with a story I had rejected from *Slant* (only because it was too long – we weren’t all that choosy then) but he was a bit of a sobersides and after a while we lost interest and stopped cajoling material from him. We thought Jackson a much more congenial type and regarded him as our real find. This opinion was shortly confirmed by a startling letter from Forrest J Ackerman.

Ackerman was, I think, the only American to get *Slant* right from the start, and that was only because he appeared in the membership list of the then British Fantasy Society. I wondered at the time why that was and later found that he had done so much for British fandom during the war that it had become a tradition to list him as an honorary member of every British fan organization, local and national, and automatically to include his name on every mailing list. Hence he got *Slant*, and read it, and wrote offering to replace Jackson's story in a prozine. It eventually appeared in the Avon Fantasy Reader, Jackson netting the vast sum of $19.00 and us a gracious acknowledgment as an "Irish fan magazine". We were utterly awed at ourselves.

We invited Jackson over for a holiday and had several story conferences, after one of which he produced "The Swordsman of Varnis", the most successful thing we ever published. It was reprinted by *Other Worlds* almost immediately, and later appeared in at least one hardcover anthology. We also had for No. 3 a story by E.E. Evans which Forry had sent us. Privately we didn't think it was all that good, but it was by a real live genuine professional author and we were bursting with pride. We worked four nights a week and all weekend on this third issue, which was to astonish the world.

We had learned a lot about printing by this time, but not enough. James, for instance was still cutting his illustrations with a razor blade on plywood, and although he was doing wonders his woodcuts still needed twice as much ink as the type, no matter how much furniture polish I rubbed into the grain. (We certainly had the most polished artwork in fandom.) So we had taken the roller off the machine and were inking by hand, a procedure for which we had trained ourselves in split second synchronization. While James was picking up the next sheet I was removing the printed one; while he was adjusting the margins I was inking the forms, one roll on the type and two on the woodcut; while he was cleansing the press and bearing down on the lever I was replenishing the inking roller on the old mirror which we used to spread the ink on. It was like nothing so much as machine guns firing through propellers, and I wonder that we survived without crushed hands. The room was a blur of motion, accompanied by rhythmic clicking and swishing noises and a pervading odour of methylated spirits and paraffin. Eventually we could print up to ten impressions a minute, and produce a whole page of the magazine in a single evening. An hour or so to distribute the type of the last page, two to set up the new one, fifteen minutes correcting and make-ready and half an hour for printing. I had wired an extension speaker and

Madeleine downstairs would play us inspirational music on the record player, and later when we had finished bringing up tea and help us to admire the results of the evening's work. It was a dedicated existence.

That making ready business had given us a lot of trouble at first, because we found that even taking all the trouble in the world to make sure that all the letters were the same height, by such cunning stratagems as bashing them with a hammer and a piece of flat wood, some just refused to print. What you are supposed to do then is to cut out all the offending letters from a proof and paste them onto their images on the fixed backing sheet, so that they get that little extra pressure. We thought this a fiddling and time wasting job, all right for Gutenberg but not in keeping with the broad mental horizons of science fictionfans, so I experimented with various resilient backing sheets such as rubber, finally settling on cork dinner mats. With a cork dinner mat and James's strength everything printed whether it wanted to or not. Admittedly it was in three dimensions, but we saw nothing wrong with a little embossing.

We had by now bought enough type to print a full page of text and were beginning to realize what a mistake we had made in settling on that bold condensed surface. In the first place, any printing press is supposed to print an actual type area of only about two-thirds that of the chase, and our chase was crammed so full of type we didn't even need quoins. (Quoins are the little wedges printers use to hold type firmly in the chase, or frame.) On top of that, our bold condensed typeface, with its large printing area per letter, just about tripled the overload. In our innocence we hadn't quite realized all this, though I did notice after a while that the steel bed of the press had become quite convex. However, I noticed also that by some happy chance the lid of the press was correspondingly concave, so we carried on determinedly. Admittedly it seemed to be getting more difficult to get an even impression, but really there wasn't much a few little pieces of type could do when levered against a cork table mat by an enthusiastic fan. We just seemed to go through a lot of dinner mats.

James had the job of operating the press because he's bigger than I, being about six feet four inches tall and the rest of him made to scale. He had the process down to a fine art, if you can describe as a fine art anything so brutal and awesome. Having closed the press he would take a deep breath, grasp the lever firmly with both hands and push himself into the air, where he could remain for a moment before returning to the floor. I estimate he had made this ascent twelve thousand times, and the first 25 pages of *Slant* #3 were stacked neatly in the corner, when disaster struck. We had set up and proof-read the last page, the back cover, and were ready

to run it off. The time was about ten p.m. The page we were printing was even more crammed with type than usual, and James realized that an even greater effort than usual was required. Besides, this was the last page of an issue on which we had devoted our entire spare time for six months, he was going to finish the job properly. He eyed the press grimly, making sure it was firmly based. Then, retreating about three feet, he reached forward for the lever. Grasping it firmly in his two large hands, he bent at the knees and launched himself upwards in a parabolic arc, descending on the printing press from the vicinity of the ceiling like a heavyweight avenging angel. We cowered in anticipation of the crunch of half a square foot of type and paper being rammed halfway through a cork dinner mat, but instead there was an earsplitting CRACK! Pieces of shrapnel ricocheted off the walls as James fell heavily onto the table and slid to the floor with a dazed expression, still clutching a stump of lever.

It was some moments before we had recovered sufficiently from the shock to realize what had happened. It appeared that the part of the lever which had made contact with the top of the press had completely disintegrated: at least we never found any of it except a few anonymous little particles like meteorites. We had never heard of metal exploding like this, but it was understandable. Being of cast iron it could not bend, and this was its only escape from an intolerable situation.

Putting the question of the long-term future out of our minds for the moment, we concentrated on the problem of getting the present issue finished. It would be difficult without proper leverage, but surely we could manage some sort of impression for the little there was left to do. We put the press on the floor and James stood on the lid. There were a few faint marks to be seen on the paper. James tried jumping up and down. It was difficult to land accurately on such a small field but James managed it. The number of faint marks had slightly increased. There was only room for one person to stand on the press but I balanced a plank across it and we all got on... including Madeleine that is, who had rushed upstairs on hearing the cataclysm... holding onto one another and balancing it like a seesaw. Then at a word of command uttered despairingly by me, we all jumped into the air. We made a good three-point landing but while we were still teetering about trying to keep our balance, the plank slid off onto the floor. Without bothering to get up I lifted the lid of the press. I had been willing to contemplate doing that 199 more times but it seemed it would not be necessary. A few words were now legible, but that was all. I began to have some idea of the fantastic pressure James must have developed with that lever.

That evening I wrote to Adana Ltd., manufacturers of the press, asking for a new lever. They replied that my model hadn't been in production since 1926 and no spares were available. Conceding temporary defeat I asked Ken Bulmer and Vince Clarke to run off a mimeo version of the last page, and we mailed out most of *Slant* #3 with it. It was an ignominious anticlimax to our six months' work, and the future of *Slant* looked black.

Our friendly neighbourhood blacksmith had no spreading chestnut tree, just a contracting clientele, but he lasted in business long enough to go out into a blaze of glory, by making a new lever for our printing press in place of the one that had disintegrated so dramatically. Watching him at work with his bellows and hammer, I felt a vague sense of dissatisfaction. To use such primitive means towards the production of a science fiction magazine seemed somehow wrong, reminiscent of that famous shot in *Things to Come* of the luxurious modern automobile, panned to show it being pulled by a couple of weedy post-atomic bullocks.

We weren't too pleased with the lever itself, come to that. It bent. Only a little, but enough to alarm two fans still suffering from shell-shock from the previous explosion. However, we braved danger and carried on because while the publishing of the magazine was getting increasingly difficult, its editing was getting daily more exciting. We were not only getting unsolicited material, but we were actually rejecting some of it... and quite cavalierly, too. Rummaging through the old files last night I find, for instance, that I rejected a story by Charles Beaumont, submitted by Forry Ackerman. "Tell Beaumont to go back to Fletcher," wrote Walter A. Youngfan airily.

By far the most important factor in the progress of *Slant* was Manly Banister. He had produced the first issue of his *Nekromantikon* in early 1950 and we were overcome with admiration. The material was excellent, the printed headings the last word in elegance, and the mimeography so incredibly good I really thought it was photo-offset. I wrote Banister an enthusiastic letter and sent him a copy of *Slant*. He replied to the letter and then when *Slant* arrived, wrote again without waiting for an answer. Apparently he was just as impressed with our efforts as we were with his, if for different reasons. We immediately formed what must have been one of the most enthusiastic mutual admiration societies ever to exist in fandom. Banister knew everything about printing – he seemed to know everything about everything – and was fascinated by what he thought the ingenuity and determination of our enforced improvisations. But, generous soul that he was, he could not bear to see us doing things the wrong way

when he could help us do them properly. So as well as a neverending stream of good advice, he started sending us all sorts of helpful odds and ends, even a font of 18-point Bodoni type for titles. We had a few of this type but only a couple of dozen letters, which meant we had to re-title almost all our contributions. It wasn't a bad thing in a way, because it forced us to develop quite a facility for thinking up short snappy titles. A story from F.G. Rayer, for instance, about a girl in a devastated post-atomic world became "Eve of Tomorrow". For the cover, by the way, we had no really large letters at all, and I used to borrow them from the printer down the road where we bought our paper. Through diffidence I never told him what they were for and through politeness he never asked, thought I have often thought he may have been lying awake nights wondering what possible reason that character must have for coming into his shop every few months and borrowing the letters A L N S T.

Banister also told us about his own press, to give us some idea of what a real machine was like, and how it had come into his hands:

> I thought I had printing troubles! I regard *Slant* with a tincture of awe. It was a monumental effort of herculean difficulty. The Augean Stables were a swoop of the shovel in comparison! The way you go about resuscitating machinery in the form of presses, typewriters, et al. It shows industry commingled with decisiveness of purpose. The enclosed tear-sheet shows a picture of my press – which I bought second hand about a year ago for $85 plus some extra for freight.
>
> I have a friend who was then engaged in imprinting Christmas cards with a little 4x6 press. I thought I should like to have a press of my own, and looking into the matter, received a bulletin from a concern showing the little Victory press in the tear-sheet, but describing the Superior press. I figured this was about the size I should like (6½x10), and it did not seem to be much bigger than my friend's press, so I sent for it. Six weeks went by, while the shipment was held up by strikes, riots, floods, and I don't know what all. One day the wife called me at the office. "The press is here," she said, "and it looks like rain."
>
> "Goody," I said, "what has that got to do with the press?"... "It's out in the front yard," she told me... "Well, for crying out loud, why don't you carry it in?"... "I can't lift it!"... "That little thing? What you got for muscles – rubber bands?"... "Little thing?" she yells, "it weighs 280 pounds!"
>
> Then I fell out of my chair. And I had to end-over-end the

> crate up the front steps, through the house and upstairs. If I ever sell it, the buyer is going to have to carry it out – not me. Caveat emptor!

We were doubly impressed, because our own press was so small that you could have thrown it across the room, and many a time we felt like doing just that. As we'd feared, the new lever broke half way through *Slant* #4, and it was back to the smithy again. Then a few weeks later this third lever broke. But we were determined to finish *Slant* #4 even if we had to place a standing bulk order with the blacksmith, and we did. In fact we had even staggered a few pages into *Slant* #5 with our fast disintegrating press when the most momentous of all Banister letters arrived.

It was a long, long letter, written over many days, and embedded from time to time among other fascinating items were a series of communiques about his own printing press and about his incipient feud with Redd Boggs, who had just published a hostile criticism of *Nekromantikon* in *Spacewarp*. The sequence showed, quite unconsciously, the operation of the endearing enthusiasms which made Banister not only a most likeable character, but probably the most impressive colossus ever to stride across our microcosm. He had, Manly reported, glanced idly through the Boggs article and consigned it to the incinerator: he had more important things to think about, having bought an old treadle-operated press: Boggs was somewhat irritating, but not worth bothering about: he had cleaned and re-conditioned the treadle press and it was as good as new: maybe someone should slap Boggs down, but he hadn't time, he was fixing an electric motor to replace the treadle: all the same people like Boggs shouldn't be allowed to parade their ignorant presumption unscathed: now that he had this perfectly operating power press he might have the time to polish him off with a little satirical piece: he was going to sell the old press and put an ad in the local paper... it was a pity we didn't live in Kansas City: the satire was turning out well and he was going to publish it on the new press, a real slap-up job that would wipe the odious Boggs off the face of fandom. (The satire, a beautiful little book called *Egoboo* about a character called, mysteriously, Vermillion Swampwater, was certainly the most impressive piece of ordnance ever to be used in a fan feud. Redd Boggs, however, is still around, fortunately, as Manly was soon to agree.) He was crating up his old press and sending it off to us. Would we see about an import licence.

I demurred by airmail, aghast at the sheer expansiveness of this gesture, but Banister would have none of it. This was what he wanted to do, and he was going to do it. Still stunned, I arranged about the import

licence and we settled down to the long wait as the press made its way to New Orleans and across the Atlantic. It finally came to rest in Belfast that November, and even Banister's previous description, quoted above, had not prepared us for the sheer massiveness of the thing. Partly because over here we're not accustomed to measuring large weights in pounds. Between us James and I inched it up the stairs, where we spent some ecstatic hours assembling it and running off a printed letter to Manly to let him know it arrived safely. We set it up on the crate it had arrived in, a piece of Banister carpentry so substantial that I am still using it as a workbench. One other thing proclaims it as a piece of Banister work. It had printed address labels – printed that is with my address and his in 18 point Bodoni.

We now went mad. We were like a man and his bride, like a hi-fi enthusiast with a new and perfect pick-up, like a violinist with a Stradivarius. We now for the first time had not only trouble-free running, but automatic inking and perfect register, so after getting over our first thrill at seeing our printing as clear and perfect as we had never dreamed possible, we could think of only one thing – colour, colour, colour. James gleefully cut three linocuts for his illustrations instead of one, but that was still not enough colour, so we invented striped ink. It was quite simple really, we dogged the inking plate so that it did not revolve and rolled bands of different coloured inks on it. For about twenty impressions this gave brilliant multi-coloured backgrounds suitable for sunset skies, etc., and then the colours got muddy and we had to clean off and start again. It was worth it, though, even if only because it took the monotony out of printing. Every single copy of *Slant* was different and some we thought so beautiful we could hardly bear to mail them out. Even now those covers seem to me quite effective, and those post-Banister issues of *Slant* something to be proud of. Number 5 has forty-six pages and we reached our peak with Number 6, sixty perfectly printed pages, with multi-coloured cover and interior illustrations, including some professional engravings. Those last were the first signs of the end. James's eyesight had been deteriorating and he could no longer do linocuts. Besides we were getting terribly tired of typesetting, and for me article and letter writing were becoming a much more rewarding way of spending my time. So for *Slant* #7 I invented a way of reproducing mimeograph stencils on the printing press.

It worked quite well, but we didn't feel as proud of that issue as we had of the others. And if we were going to have mimeography we might as well get a mimeograph....

Fanzines are like people, their lives are usually anti-climax. The war

hero ends up pushing a pen, the great statesman becomes a senile bore, the boxer turns wrestler: seldom do their lives end on a high note.

But what they were is still the Truth, and Banister's gesture is none the less great because *Slant* no longer exists. Nothing lasts forever and it was in the nature of things that we should eventually tire of the drudgery of typesetting. But not before we had, I think, produced some issues of a fanzine that were a credit to Manly and a lasting memorial to the generosity that can be found in science fiction fandom.

So let's forget that last anti-climactic issue of *Slant* and remember instead those two excited fans in Ireland opening the great crate from Kansas City, a crate as big as the heart of the man who sent it.

April 1962

Christmas Cards from Irish Fandom

Peace On Sol III, Good Will To Mellow Fen

Christmas 1951

In this year of disgrace, 1951, amid a world rent by discord, let us turn thankfully to that tranquil oasis known as fandom. And especially to that haven of peace and tranquillity in the land of saints and scholars – Irish Fandom.

O come with us now to Oblique House. As we wend our way past the snow-laden dandelions on the edges of the flowerbeds, and the icicles on the bicycles, we spy a cheerfully gleaming window. We press our frozen faces to the pane and, through the tinkling of falling glass, we hear the cultured voices of the *Slant* staff.

WALT: For crissake, James, knock Bob's head against the other wall. The neighbours have been bellyaching again.

JAS: He called my new model spaceship "shiftless".

WALT: I know it's all balsa, but why "shiftless"?

BOB: He couldn't put any thrust in it! (He laughs heartily at his own joke.)

WALT: 'Pit in Momma's hand.

BOB: Huh. Bet we see it in The Harp though.

JAS: What I need is lighter fuel.

BOB: I have a bottle of it at home... and flints, too.

JAS: Not lighter like that. Light like a... a... a... A FEATHER! (In the awed hush he goes on.) At least I try to do things, not just read about them.

BOB: Well, you should learn to read too.

WALT: He's never been the same since he joined the BIS and rode in Bulmer's van and Arthur C. Clarke spoke to him at the Con. Next thing he'll be expecting us to buy him a chronometer. (James falls to the floor, foaming at the mouth.)

BOB: There now, you would mention Bulmer's van.

JAS (weakly): It wasn't the van. It was the thought of the unutterably horrible and mindwrecking Bulmer Thing getting out of bed in the morning before it puts on its glasses. (They all shudder.) Anyhow I *can* read – I have just been re-re-re-reading *The Grey Lensman*.

WALT: Still looking for something good, eh?

BOB: Bah. Pseudo intellectual. Just because you *said* you understood *The World of Null-A* you think you're Vince Clarke.

WALT: You're just jealous 'cos Vince never promises to write to *you*.

BOB: Campbell said *Null-A* wouldn't sink in till 2 days after you read it. I waited 2 days and nothing happened.

JAS: It's got to have something to sink *into*.

WALT: Stop rowing, galley slaves, while I open the mail. Hmm. Another letter for Bob from Cartier's solicitors. A postcard from Lee Hoffman. I glee. And an MS. James, an idea here for an illo. You could draw the heroine taking off her clothes....

JAS: No. (firmly)

BOB: But I think...

JAS: NO. (loudly)

WALT: I don't see...

JAS: NO!!! (hysterically)

BOB: There he goes again. James, are you intimating that you don't like the idea?

WALT: Pick him up again. This is as bad as the time he saw that letter from Chuck Harris. Ah, well, put the MS in the reject pile. Can you reach?

BOB: Have a heart. Look what happened the last time we turned that bloke down. Engrams to the eyeballs.

WALT: Where's your editorial integrity?

JAS (ritually): He left it in his other suit.

BOB: Ah, well, so much for van Vogt. Anything else for Campbell this month?

WALT: No, remember we sent the good stuff to Gold for a Christmas present. Which reminds me, what do we have to buy: A piggy bank for the London Circle and a chronometer catalogue for Arthur Clarke, a perpetual calendar for Derek Pickles, a boy scout knife for Chuck Harris, a new gavel for Dave Cohen... and Christmas cards for Manly and Lee and...

BOB: Which Lee? Hoffman or Jacobs?

WALT: Doesn't matter, they're both in Savannah. We could mark it "From the cregs of Belfast to the lees of Savannah".

BOB: Oh no!

JAS: Does he mean what he sediment?

(Enter George Charters, the worst punster of the lot. They cower, terrified.)

GEO: Don't sham pain. Are you working on your magnum opus? I heard the sounds of bottle and assumed you were pouring over some documents....

.....

WALT: All right, let him up now and take the gag out of his mouth.

BOB: You want to use his in The Harp too?

WALT (disdaining him): You know, the trouble with Christmas cards is that there isn't any reading in them. Poor ayjay jobs. Why don't we bring out a little Christmas fmz instead?

JAS: You mean just for a few special friends?

WALT: Yes.

ALL: Let's do that thing, and wish them all a very

MERRY CHRISTMAS!

Christmas 1952

A year has passed since last we visited Oblique House, and now as we join our camera in panning the happy home of Irish Fandom we eagerly look forward to sharing once again the life of these simple unspoiled fans with their innocent unworldly ways. But stay! What is this? Who are these languid sophisticated figures so strenuously ignoring country fan George Charters? What terrible transformation is this? Where are the schmoes of yesteryear?

JAMES, putting down his coffee cup: Ah, but there's no one can make coffee like the French. They have a certain *je ne sais quoi*, you know.

MADELEINE: I tried to get some but the shops had never heard of it.

JAMES: Of course, of course.... Mon Dieu!

WALT: Yeah, the stores over here are sure kinda colourless.

GEORGE: I had my name in hard covers.

JAMES: True. Why, on the Boul Michel –

WALT: Or Sunset Boulevard –

GEORGE: I had my name in hard covers.

JAMES: What is the peasant talking about?

WALT: Some book by Darrell C. Richardson. He wasn't introduced to me. Apparently everyone who buys the book gets his name mentioned in the acknowledgements.

JAMES: How quaint. By the way, was Gold annoyed because I haven't been sending him any of My Work?

WALT: No, because I wouldn't help him edit *Galaxy*. It was a Horace of a different choler.

GEORGE: That's the last straw. I'm going to live in London. To hell with you soft cover upstarts anyway. Ephemeral, that's what you are!

Enter BOB SHAW: It's not worth while going to London now, George. I'm not there any more. Hi Walt.

Hi James. Look, I'm back. Aren't you glad to see me? (Long pause.) Yes, I know you're just too overcome with joy to speak. Can I have a couple of these sandwiches?

WALT: Er... written anything recently?

BOB: Only a minor masterpiece for "-" about me being thrown out of London and a little gem for Vin¢. Can I have a few of these scones?

JAMES: But aren't those for *fanzines*...?

GEORGE: Bob, I had my name in hard covers.

MADELEINE: Put down that megaphone, George, and comb your hair. He's sitting right beside you.

BOB: Yes, George, hard covers. I knew your name was *bound* to appear. (He bursts into loud laughter.) Can I have a few of these biscuits?

GEORGE: There have been great and terrible changes here, Bob. They don't hardly ever talk about rain on Venus at all at all. Just about some penthouse in Chicago or some dirty little caveau in Montmartre. And what with mispronounced French and phoney American I can't understand a word.

BOB: I had the same trouble with Arthur and Bill. Can I have a few of these cakes? Arthur sometimes gives the impression he's been in America, too, and of course Bill is still crazy about his Babs. As Ken says –

WALT: Ken Slater?

BOB: No, Bulmer.

ALL: *KEN BULMER*?

BOB: Shure. I mean, sure.

ALL: Not THE Ken Bulmer! Editor of *Nirvana*? The inventor? The columnist for SFNL?

BOB: Why yes. Ken is democratic you know. Even let me slipsheet a page of *Nirvana*.

JAMES: Gosh.

GEORGE: Gad, man, how you've lived.

WALT: *I* met van Vogt and Bradbury and Gold and Smith and Smith and Schmitz –

JAMES: Buried here in the provinces we don't get much chance to hear about really important people. Tell us all about Bulmer. Is it true he's seven feet tall? Did he really speak to you?

WALT: – and Boucher and Bixby and Campbell and Simak and Ellsbery and Ellison –

JAMES: Ah shaaadddap.

BOB: I'm afraid I can't release any information about Bulmer until the publication of my biography. The Government is putting on some sort of a show next June to coincide with it. However I reminded him of your existence and he sent you his kind regards. Can I have another cup of coffee?

JAMES: Gee, that was nice of him. Do you think we dare send him a Christmas card? And could I have that sandwich back? I hadn't finished eating it.

BOB: Oh shure. I mean, sure. Any more buns left? You mean like that little one-shot we sent out last time?

WALT: Yes, just for friends like Gregg and Chuch –

JAMES: Over my dead body. None for Harris. You said friends, not fiends.

WALT: Come now, good will to all men –

JAMES: Since when has that included Harris? Why on earth did you stop me that time? I could have saved you a 1½d stamp. You know how I hate him, er, it.

BOB: It, er, he isn't as bad as all that. In fact, he sent you a Christmas present. It wants to declare a truce.

ALL: NO!

BOB: Yes. Look, here it is. But you're not to open it until Christmas. He said something about a half-life....

JAMES: Half alive indeed. These Londoners are all the same. Let's see what it is anyway. I hope it's not another book on... er, anatomy.

BOB: Nothing left to eat? (He leaves the room, whistling.)

JAMES, opening the box: A clock, eh? I must have gone up in his estimation –

(There is a terrific explosion and James disappears through the roof.)

WALT (Peering upwards): He's gone up in my estimation, too. Ah, these rising young authors. Won't Arthur be sore if he beats him to the moon after all.

GEORGE: No, he hasn't attained escape velocity. Look, he's going into an orbit. Isn't it terrible to think of him stuck up there circling the Earth for eternity, looking down on us all?

WALT: Yeah, it was bad enough when he was just stuck up down here. But it's all right, he's got his waterpistol with him, like a good member of the BIS. A few sharp bursts into outer space... there, he's fallen back to Earth. Looks as if he's landing in Bob's back garden.

Enter BOB SHAW: Well, if that isn't the limit! White has got his hands on *another* one of my plots!

WALT: Was he hurt?

BOB: No, landed on his head. A perfect one-point landing.

Enter JAMES: An infernal machine. Of all the dirty mean underhanded tricks –

WALT: Oh, I don't know. He might have sent you his duplicator.

(The room lights up brilliantly for a moment and the Earth shakes.)

GEORGE: That looks like an "H" bomb.

JAMES, reflectively: Hmm. There must be an evening postal delivery

in Rainham.

WALT: Oh James, you didn't!

JAMES: Heh heh heh. I think I've won my second clash with harris all right.

WALT: I think that's going too far.

JAMES: Oh, no. The postage wasn't so much. I sent it by second clash mail.

WALT: No, I mean sending a hydrogen bomb. It seems kind of vindictive. Wouldn't an ordinary atomic one have done?

JAMES: For someone as thickskinned as harris? ...But maybe you're right. After all, it is Christmas. I wish I hadn't done it now. Or at least sent a greeting with it.

(There is a konck at the door and a Post Office messenger delivers a telegram.)

JAMES: Who was that?

WALT: Western Union.

JAMES: Well, isn't knocking at the door good enough for them? What did they have to go and konck at it for?

WALT: Because I'm running out of correction fluid of course.

JAMES: That's all very well, but we can't have people going around koncking at people's doors. I mean, where is it all going to end?

WALT: Right down at the bottom of this page. Look, this telegram's from Chuch.

JAMES: What does it say?

WALT: He's typed it all out in capital letters. He says to thank you for the hydrogen bomb, it's made his duplicator start working. He'd always figured it would take something like that. He's so pleased he warns you not to drink the bottle of soda water he sent you because it's really swampwater, and he hopes we all enjoy our Christmas as much as he will experimenting with means of reproduction.

JAMES: Hmmmm.

WALT: You have a dirty mind, James. I'd like to give all our friends the same message, as Spokesman for the Wheels of IF.

BOB: That, in case you missed it for the *fourth* time, was a pun.

Christmas 1953

Yet again as the season of Christmas draws near the eyes of the world turn anxiously toward Oblique House. What will be the Message this year from the land of Saints, Scholars and Actifen? What is the word from this last great bastion of Sixth Fandom? As we hack our way through the garden overlooked by the house, and too obviously by its owner, we hear voices from the brightly lit window of the front attic. James White has just arrived, first as usual.

WALT: Is there aught of import, or export?

JAMES: Naught.

WALT: Not even a dejection slip? Not even another story started on its peregrinations?

JAMES: Not a sausage. I've a good mind to break into my postman's house some night and tear up his floorboards. Any egoboo?

WALT: Nothing that won't keep. Help yourself to a bat out of the belfry.

(There follow sounds of scuffling feet, gasps, sharp blows, and shouts of "dead!" Alarmed lest Irish Fandom is being wiped out by internecine strife, we clamber up the drainpipes and press our frozen noses to the window. Through the cracked pane – our noses must have been more frozen than we thought – we see that they are all right after all – physically, that is. They are merely playing a furious game of Walt's invention called ghoodminton, with pingpong bats, a shuttlecock and virtually no rules. James has developed a devastating new technique for scraping the shuttlecock off the floor and back over the table before it has quite ceased moving, and has won the first game 21-17 when Bob arrives.)

JAMES: Hiya Fyodor. How's life?

BOB: What is Life? What is Death?

WALT: Did you get that cover finished for Hamilton?

BOB: Yes.

JAMES: Did you do anything more with that story?

BOB: Yes.

WALT: Well, where *are* they then?

BOB: I tore them up.

JAMES: What, again!

BOB: They were meaningless, futile. Life life. What is the meaning of it all? Nitchevo. (He moves to the fireplace and sits down, staring

moodily at the accumulation of empty cigarette packets, old stencils and inky rags.)

WALT: I wish Groff Conklin had never said he was a second Dostoevsky. (He picks up the propeller beanie Rich Elsberry gave him at the Chicon and puts it on Bob's head.) There. I defy him to behave like Dostoevsky wearing a helicopter beanie.

(James makes a note of the remark on the interlineations sheet hanging on the wall. Bob takes off the beanie and looks at it, brightening visibly.)

BOB: I wonder how they make enough propellers to go round?

WALT: See, he's all right now. He's made a joke.

JAMES: He may be all right, but what about us?

BOB: Come now, it wasn't so Dostoevsky. At least it was a revolutionary joke.

WALT: That's just Tsar grapes.

(There is a clatter on the stairs. Enter George Charters, country fan.)

BOB: Ah, a revolting peasant from the steps. What news from the Good Earth of Mother Northern Ireland, Gregor Gregorovitch?

GEORGE, flourishing a stencil: Look, another page of *The Enchanted Duplicator*! How do I do it? Why am I so gifted?

BOB: Did you use a pink stencil with white correcting fluid or a white stencil with pink correcting fluid?

GEORGE, indignantly: I resent that remark, coming from someone who never cut a stencil in his life. Call yourself a fan. You're not worthy to wear that beanie, you... you Shaver illustrator. BRE Bergey! Vile pro! AMERICAN SCIENCE FICTION indeed.

BOB: Let me tell you, when the day comes for the honours to be awarded in the Fannish Hall of Fame, I will have a niche.

GEORGE: You could always try DDT.

WALT: Don't get your rag out, George.

GEORGE: Of course I'll get my rag out. Isn't it outrag-eous?

JAMES: Well, you needn't get into a *stew* about it. (He snorts with laughter. Walt gets up and opens the window.)

BOB, tiredly: I got the outrag-eous one, though I didn't want it, but what's this about stew?

WALT: "Ragout" appears to be French for "stew". Heaven help us all.

(There is a knock at the door.)

BOB: I hope that's Little Mother with the samovar. Who's there?

VOICE: An Agent of the Galactic Federation, with tea.

BOB: It’s Madeleine, all right. Open the door someone.

(James gets up an opens the door. Enter Madeleine with a tray.)

ALL: Mind you don’t trip over the foot of this page.

(As they sit drinking their tea the sweet sound of childish voices raised in plaintive song is wafted through the open window.)

WALT: Do you feel a waft from that window?

JAMES: Yes, it almost sounds like childish voices raised in plaintive song.

WALT, looking out: So it is. Why it’s Seventh Fandom. Listen...

CHILDISH VOICES:

Good King Charlie Wells looked out
(He surely was a grand homme)
(JAMES: This must be a French window.)
He watched Lee Hoffman gallop past
And founded Seventh Fandom.
(BOB: Has anyone here seen Kehli?)
Hari Silverberg has said
That cycles run in fandom.
But surely *Q*’s one isn’t dead?
That cycle was a tandem.

WALT, pleased: Why, I think they want me to accompany them on The Harp.

BOB: Are you going to?

WALT: Yes, in the new *Oopsla!*. Let’s all try to be Big Wheels in this new cycle.

JAMES: Hear hear. Are we disenchanted?

ALL: No! (They join with the singers outside for the next verses of the carol.)

Friends, the night is darker now
The prozines help no longer.
(WALT: Except good old Bill’s *Imagination*.)
But alone we’ll show them how
We’ll make fandom stronger.
London, L.A., do not panic
Rally our resources
Frisco, Glasgow, join in fanac
Our 1954-ces!

A MERRY CHRISTMAS AND AN ACTIFANNISH NEW YEAR TO EVERYBODY.

This “card” – published in furtherance of the More-Reading-On-Christmas-Cards movement – is from me to my special friends, but Madeleine, James, Bob and George have all had an inky hand in it and would like to be associated with the good wishes it sends.

WALT – Spokesman for the Wheels of IF

Christmas 1954

Come with us again to Oblique House, a name whose origin is lost in the mists of fantiquity, situated on the North shore of the Upper Newtonards Road, Belfast. It is raining. We tread the well-remembered path, tripping over the crazy mixed-up paving laid since our last visit, and debate whether to mount the inside stairs or climb up the side of the house. We choose the ladder. Leaning it against the wall we climb rung by rung to the fanattic window, all agog for 1954's Christmas Evesdroppings....

WALT: I got a Christmas Card from Japan yesterday.

BOB: That was nice of them.

WALT: Not from the Japanese Government you clot. Why they're not even on our mailing list. It's from Eney with the US forces there. You know it's time we started thinking about our own card.

BOB: I've been saying that for weeks.

WALT: Well, give me some ideas then. You haven't said anything immortal since you came to live here.

BOB: Nonsense. I'm always saying brilliant things. To summit up, I am the Tiger Tenzing of the joke world.

WALT: You want Thibet? More often it's just yak-ity-yak, not anything Hillary-ous.

Enter JAMES: Are you calling Himalaya?

BOB: Hi. Going to the con at Easter?

JAMES: No, I'll be on my honeymoon.

WALT: Fake fan!

BOB: You could get married at Kettering?

JAMES: I don't want my wedding to be part of any Convention Programme.

WALT: He's afraid they might cancel it.

BOB: Pity. We could have thrown Confetti and tied fertility symbols onto his taxi, like old shoes. Ah well, I don't care what happens at the Convention as long as the kettering arrangements are satisfactory.

Enter JOHN BERRY: By Jove, I thought of a smashing pun today. It was brilliant, honestly it was. You see, this chap said he –

WALT: Why are shoes a fertility symbol?

JOHN: – wasn't leaving the baking trade because he kneaded the dough and I –

BOB: You know, potent leather.

JOHN: – said, “Are yeast still at it then!”

WALT: Did anybody hear anything?

JOHN: Crikey, didn’t you like it then?

BOB: Yes, it’s George...

JOHN: Charters. Hi George, how’s the hard cover racket these days?

GEORGE: Terrible, terrible. It’s dreadful when a person of my standing (who also stencilled *The Enchanted Duplicator*) has to go slumming in ordinary fanzines.

WALT: Is it true you’ve been reduced to sending round autographed copies of the Bangor Directory this year?

GEORGE: Well, they published an address of mine.

WALT: Anyone for ghoodminton? Or would you rather help me run off *Hyphen*? (He steps hastily aside as Bob sweeps the stencils off the table, John drags it to the middle of the room, James sets up the net and George puts the Berry-proof board across the window.)

WALT: Well, make up your mind!

(Before starting, the players sing the Ghoodminton Anthem.)

ALL:

Spirit of Ghoodminton, stand by our side
Strengthen our sinews when fierce bats collide
Give us the strength to continue the fray
Till Sadie and Madeleine bring up the tray.

Watch over also the players of yore
Now pining away on the drear foreign shore
The Bulmers with whom our best couldn’t cope
Mighty Harris who broke the mimeoscope.

These and the other friends who haven’t come yet
Spirit of Ghoodminton, do not forget!

(The titanic struggle which now develops culminates in a dreadful crash as four bats meet in midair. James claims that the shuttlecock was hit out by his opponents but despite a thorough search it cannot be found.)

BOB: It must have been projected into hyperspace.

JAMES (firmly): Hyperspace is *out*.

(In the heated argument which follows the adumbration of this new rule Madeleine and Sadie enter with the Teapot and a tray.)

BOB: Goody goody! Crottled greeps!

JOHN: I’ve started on a new series of –

SADIE: Sneakhead! You said you didn’t like greeps when I gave you them.

JOHN: – articles. They're all about the –

BOB: Well, you didn't do them properly. They were only crottled on one side.

JOHN: – Old Guard of Irish Fandom. I know they wouldn't do for *Hyphen*, but I can send them to some other fanzine. (There is a silence.)

BOB: You mean you're writing us all up?

JAMES: In another fanzine?

JOHN: Yes.

WALT: How are you getting the material?

JOHN: Oh, that's easy. You see I'm carrying a taperecorder disguised as braces and a miniature movie camera concealed in my moustache. Every night I run off the reels and write another couple of thousand words. They'll be a reel surprise.

BOB: Ha ha. Terrific. "A reel surprise"! Did you get it James? Subtle, huh?

JAMES: Brilliant. Like that one about yeast.

WALT: Aren't you lucky to have friends who appreciate you John? If we were writing you up we'd say all sorts of nice things.

MADELEINE: Have some more tea John.

JOHN: Gosh thanks. But my puns don't seem to fit in as well as you people's somehow.

WALT: Oh that's just because you don't lead up to them properly. You need to lay a little groundwork. For instance... Bob, remember that tin box you used to keep your collection of Queen Victoria halfpennies in?

BOB: Yes?

WALT: And remember you told me to keep my type in it and asked me how many founts I had and I'd only two?

BOB: Yes!

WALT: Well, I bought another one like I promised. You can say it now!

JOHN: What's all this about?

WALT: Don't you see? Just a little bit of scene-setting. Bob, I now have three founts of type in a tin that used to hold halfpennies. Come on Bob.

BOB: THREE FOUNTS IN A COIN TIN!

GEORGE: Omighod.

JOHN: Crikey.

JAMES: Suicide, anyone?

MADELEINE: I feel like bloodshed. What about another game of ghoodminton?

BOB: She wants to cut another notch in her bar.

WALT: Now we're back to Japan again.

BOB: Huh?

WALT: A notch girl. I'll really have to get to work on that Christmas Card.

ALL: Mind you wish everyone a Happy Christmas from us.

WALT: I'll do it right now.

To all my friends I send sincerest Christmas Greetings from all of Irish Fandom – James White & Peggy Martin, Bob & Sadie Shaw, George Charters, John Berry and Madeleine and me... and Honorary Irish Fan Chuck Harris who we hope will be with us when you read this. Roscoe, Foo-Foo & Ghu bless you and bring you lots of egoboo in 1955.

Love, Walt – Spokesman for the Wheels of IF

Christmas 1955

CHRISTMAS AGAIN. Season of big bumper issues that bump in after Boxing Day; of deliveries of mail at fantastic times; of SPECIAL DELIVERY parcels consisting of two shreds of brown paper and a Post Office form; of counting of friends and airmailed afterthoughts; of happy parties where blog, bheer and nuclear fizz flow like blood in the N3F and the quotes come too fast and funny to write down; and of lonely fans catching up on their correspondence. To them especially goes this cordial invitation to join us once again at Oblique House, stately Home of Irish Fandom.

In the front attic Walt & Madeleine are waiting for the fans. Walt is cutting a stencil and Madeleine is knitting a tiny garment: both are expecting to be shortly blessed with issue.

MAD: What about the Christmas Card? Eney's arrived weeks ago, you know, all the way from Japan.

WALT (hopefully): I suppose it couldn't have been an extra one from last year?

MAD: No, dear, it was December, remember? Didn't you feel a Nippon the air?

WALT: This room always gets cold as soon as the summer's over. Ask me why. Go on, ask me why.

MAD (resignedly): Why?

WALT: It's autumn-attic, that's why.

MAD: I'm glad there wasn't anything in dianetics; I'd hate to think of the engrams this child would have.

(Enter Peggy, followed by James, George and John.)

WALT: Well, look, here's the three wise men from the East, a bit early. Where's your gold, frankincense and myrrh?

GEORGE: Here's the *Sunday Pictorial*. I'll try to bring you the *Daily Myrrh* on Tuesday.

WALT: George, myrrh is a kind of spice.

GEORGE: What do you think I read the *Daily Mirror* for?

MAD: According to the dictionary, myrrh is "an inspissated sap".

WALT: So you did bring it after all. Hello John.

MAD: Why don't you ask John to do the Christmas Card this year?

WALT: I'd be afraid to turn John loose on Christmas. We'd probably end up with a new New Testament and a whole new religion. Still... how

about it John?

JOHN: Me? The Christmas Card? Crikey: no, yule do it Walt. I leave it holly in your capable hands. Did you get that James? Yule. Holly. Wasn't it brilliant?

JAMES: Well, it was clean. Where's Bob and Sadie? Don't tell me they've gone to Canada already?

WALT: No, not till the 7th of January. Last I saw of them they were still getting ready. Bob was reading a book about sports cars and a Canadian dictionary, and Sadie had tied Lucifer and the cat next door to the sandbox and was standing over them shouting "Mush!" Real pioneer stock, that girl.

JOHN: Yukon say that again.

GEORGE: Pioneer stock? is that what savages make soup out of?

PEGGY (trying desperately to change the subject): I didn't know they used cats in Canada to pull sleighs?

GEORGE: Yes, but of course mainly for hunting for moose.

WALT: No, Peggy, but it was all right because Lucifer had a cold.

JAMES: Oh no, not that old joke about him being a little hoarse or having caught a colt!

GEORGE: A draught hoarse?

WALT: Of course not. I was merely going to say he was a little husky....

JAMES: Oh, *that* old joke!

WALT: I hadn't finished, had I James? – So much so that I was nearly going to ask Jan Jansen over to interpret for him.

GEORGE: I suppose someone will have to ask him why.

WALT: Because his voice was phlegm-ish. (George opens the window.) No George, don't jump out again. I'm sorry.

GEORGE: I was merely intending to draw your attention to an unusual manifestation in the front garden which might ordinarily be regarded as coming within the category of inexplicable phenomena.

JOHN: Is that Flemish or Double Dutch?

JAMES: All right George, I give in. What is it? It looks like Bob's bicycle in bed with his typewriter.

GEORGE: What a horrible thought. Suppose the union were fertile and the Earth overrun with a race of malevolent miscegenated machines?

JAMES: Somebody pick John up. Go on George, what is it?

GEORGE: That is the latest product of the ingenuity of the firm with which I have the honour to be associated – the prototype of the Flying Bedstead, the PDQ. It'll be quite easy to put into production once the

mattresses are cut.

JOHN (faintly): I thought it was the PD2?

GEORGE: No, the PDQ, for Pretty Damn Quick. The speed was pillow expectations, so they added a bolster unit.

JAMES: What did you bring it for, apart from a pretext for those horrible puns?

GEORGE: Well you see, Walt wants me to be Father Christmas this year. I've replaced the castors with sleigh runners and we're going to fix four tin reindeer on the front and I'll fly around with all the Christmas presents.

JOHN: How many have you got?

WALT: Well, let's see, there's a dictionary and a false beard for Ted Tubb, a long green cigarette holder for Joy, with a supply of long green cigarettes for same, a record of Yma Stumac* singing "Then heigh ho the lolly, This life is most jolly" for the rest of the London Circle, an automatic slipsheeter for Dean Grennell that Good Man, inscribed "Souvenier from Ierland"*, two stuffed TAFF ballot boxes for Lee & Forry, a Carr fender for a Ford, a bust of Irene Gore for Gregg Calkins, a mimeographed copy of King's Regulations for Ken Potter, with illos by Dave Wood, photos of Pamela Bulmer for Bob Pavlat, Dick Ellington, Ted White and others, a heavy-duty horsewhip for Ken Bulmer, a copy of the current *Who's Who in the London Circle* for Ethel & Frances, British Empire Medals for Mal & Tom, a Cyp-riot proof tent for Joan & Sandy, a two-month alarm clock for a certain Cultured English Gentleman worth his weight in begonia seeds, a new hectograph for damon knight, a "Klein" Four-Dimensional accordion for caravan-dweller Archie Mercer, 500 invisible brassieres for William Rotsler, money for Derek Pickles, a bottle of the Liverpool Group's patented new aphrodisiac, Snog-Blog, for Nigel, care of Helen Highwater, a –

** This is "...an allusion to Stuart MacKenzie, editor of the London Circle fanzine, who is reported to have vanished with the money.... Dean Grennell has consistently misspelled 'souvenir'." (WAW, 1989)*

GEORGE: Stop, you're giving me santaclaustrophobia.

WALT: Oh George, I still haven't mentioned Bob & Bob & Redd & Rory & Harry & Dick & Bea & Vernon & Rick & Eric & Vin¢ & John & Ron & Terry & Mike & Ellison & –

JAMES: Ellison? Oh, you mean *Harl*?

(Enter Bob, singing "Alouette of Valeron".)

PEGGY: You're still going to Canada then?

BOB: Yes, unless they declare war on us or something.

JAMES: They're hardly likely to do that until after you've arrived.

JOHN: Just think, in a few weeks Bob will be a far-flung outpost of empire.

GEORGE: He'd have been even farther flung if he'd approached the Australian Immigration people first.

WALT: Who do you think sent him the booklets about Canada?

BOB (haughtily): You'll appreciate me when I'm gone. Walt, I was walking round the garden on your tennis rackets when I bumped into a bed.

WALT: I told you to keep off the flowers.

BOB: No clot, I mean a real bed, with knobs on and everything. Out in the garden. Is Wansborough coming?

WALT: No, it's a Flying Bedstead George is going to use for a sleigh.

BOB: A sleigh!! (He dashes out of the room.)

JOHN: Doesn't stay long these days, does he?

(There is a whirring sound outside the window and Bob puts his head in.)

BOB: Thanks boys, a bed-sleigh is just what we needed for Canada.

GEORGE: Hey! That's mine!

BOB: Nonsense, it's a bob-sleigh now. I'll send you a Cadillac when I hit *Esquire*. (He disappears rapidly in a westerly direction.)

GEORGE: My Ghod, that's disgusting.

WALT: It certainly is; it's easy to see he'll come to a sticky end in Canadian fandom. He should have said an export Jaguar...

And that's why you got such a disappointment when you looked in your stocking – we'd put our foot in it. But Irish Fandom... and that include Honorary IFEN Chuck Harris & Arthur Thomson... do send you best wishes for Happy Christmas and a prosperous and egobootiful New Year.

Christmas 1956

1951... 1952... 1953... 1954... 1955... 1956. As the years of the sixth decade of the 20th Century stagger by, the rest of the world looks in vain for some sign of stability, some eternal verity to shore up its chaotic values. But only to this fortunate microcosm is such a portent vouchsafed, only the favoured few of fandom glimpse such a steady gem-like flame of beauty and inspiration constantly year by year. Yes, the Oblique House Christmas Card. And so we invite you once again to join this isolated but (or do I mean and) happiest of fan groups.

James, Walt and Madeleine are sitting in the front attic, entirely surrounded by duplicators. (Walt has been to an auction again and bought Lot 899, two – count 'em, two – Gestetner duplicators. Oh, the serendipity of it all.) There is a sound like an avalanche falling upwards and John enters.

JOHN: I've done it! I've done it!

WALT: Done what? Learned to spell calendar?

JOHN: No, I've made an *arrest*. I'll get promotion for this. I think it's a cat burglar.

JAMES: You mean he was trying to steal Lucifer? A kit-napper?

JOHN: All I know is he was hiding in the tent in Carol's room, and that's a felony.

WALT: Are you sure?

JOHN: Sure I'm sure. It says so in my How To Be A Policeman In Six Easy Lessons. Loitering within tent. He's probably a Communist saboteur, too. He's got a red cloak and a beard and a suspicious-looking bag.

WALT: John, what have you done? Carol and Bryan will never forgive you. I've a good mind not to let you have any of my Gestetners. Bring the old gentleman in.

(John leaves and re-enters with a dignified and venerable figure.)

WALT: Our apologies, Sir, for the misguided zeal of this corroded copper. I trust it will not discourage you from your noble work. I happen to know a little boy not far from here who has asked for an electric typer for his first Christmas to use with his father's Gestetner –

VENERABLE FIGURE: Fear not, children. Not rain nor snow nor drip of any sort shall stay me from my appointed rounds.

JOHN: I tell you he's a phoney, Walt. There's no such person as

Santa Claus. Colin told me. Besides, look at this piece of paper sticking to his bag. It says “À Bas”. He’s a fan!

VENERABLE FIGURE: Cease this ignorant outburst. That is merely a label. “À” is French for “to” and “bas” is stockings; it means that these gifts are for stockings.

JOHN: Jean Linard’s feet couldn’t be as big as that. Come on, confess. You’re a spy from Canadian Fandom aren’t you. Looking for a hold over BoSh to make him write for one of your fanzines, isn’t that your game? What are you after, Madeleine’s recipe for coffee kisses? Come on, talk!

VENERABLE FIGURE: By what right does this corroded copper try to give me the verdigris?

JOHN: Only one person could make a pun like *that*. Come out from behind that unnatural growth. (He pulls at the Venerable figure’s beard. It comes off, revealing the face of George Charters.) (Surprise, surprise!)

GEORGE: Oh, dear, and I was hoping to keep it a surprise. When he got his Hillman Minx, Bob sent me back the flying bedsleigh he took last year and I was going to fly around with presents like I meant to do last time. I was just copying the addresses off your fanzines. It was a cruel disappointment when the Goon knocked over the tent and found me.

WALT: We’ll christen it the Marquee de Sad. What presents have you got, anyway? Lessee... a crate of lettuce, a bottle of unfermented grape juice and a pair of sandals for Ted Tubb, a packet of envelopes for Archie Mercer, transatlantic plane tickets for 100 American fans, a tray-crane for Joy and Vin¢, Bob Chazim’s head for Bobbie Wild, a box of matches for EEEvans, a fantechnicon for Paul Enever – How could you afford so much? Why this ticker-tape machine for Jan Jansen alone must have cost a fortune. Did you sell your Clayton *Astounding*s?

GEORGE: No. As a matter of fact what happened was that the Ministry of Finance got to read some of John’s articles and scheduled me as an ancient monument.

JAMES: Is that why your boots are full of cement?

GEORGE: Yes, very literal minded some of these civil servants. However they pay me a very generous allowance as caretaker, living in, and of course I get tips for showing people around me.

JAMES: You mean, we have to pay to look at you?

GEORGE: No, I’m off duty right now. I don’t go full time until the summer, when I’m supposed to go down to the airport and accost American tourists. That way they won’t just not have to get out of their cars, they won’t even have to get out of their planes. We’ll be the first

country with Fly-In Scenery. If it’s a success they’re going to put Dunluce Castle and the Giant’s Causeway on wheels next year and have them down there too.

JAMES: Well, it’ll be nice for you to have company.

GEORGE: You can laugh. I hear that eventually they plan to put the whole of Northern Ireland on wheels and go on tour in the States every summer, coast to coast.

JAMES: Well, let’s hope they play South Gate in 1958.

WALT: Yes. Though of course we hope to be meeting all our US friends before that – in London in 1957.

ALL: Hear hear!

HAPPY NEW YEAR

Greetings from Irish Fandom: George Charters, Bob Shaw, James & Peggy White, John Berry, Walt & Madeleine Willis... and Honorary Irish Fans Chuck Harris, Arthur Thomson and Ken and Pamela Bulmer.

Christmas 1957

AND NOW, for the eighth year running, we follow the well-remembered road to Oblique House for our Christmas Evesdroppings on Irish Fandom. Slowing down to a walk we think to ourselves what an eventful year this has been. What, we wonder as we surmount the Bryan-proof fortifications in the front garden, what will they be talking about this time? The satellites? The Worldcon? The visits from Chuck, Arthur, Rory, Steve and Boyd? George Charters walking through a metal door, buying a tape recorder and joining the FAPA waiting list? James' buying a trainset and a telescope, his being published in Germany or – the result of an acceptance in Ireland – the birth of his daughter Patricia? We put our eager ear to the attic keyhole...

Silence.

What's wrong? We peer round distractedly. There, pinned to the yellow door just above the Atomillo, is a note:

NOTICE TO HYPOTHETICAL
OBSERVER
WE'RE AT JAMES'S HOUSE THIS YEAR

Some hours later, tired and muddy, we are at the White's neat semidetached villa halfway up the mountain on the other side of Belfast. We peer through the big window into the living room...

GEORGE: Well, we're having a White Christmas this year.

MADELEINE: You mean because we're at the White House?

GEORGE: No, because it will have been in Yule Tide. Not to mention Fabulous.

MADELEINE: Any more puns like that will be at your own persil. Gregg Calkins will have you thrown out of FAPA even before you get in. You'll be all washed up.

GEORGE: That'd be no detergent. I'd just join another APA. Omo Saps, that's me. Anyway, sure this Christmas Card is the only time we really let ourselves go with puns these days. By the way, aren't you going to let Walt play with your train set this time?

(James takes the various items of rolling stock and temporary way out of their velvet lined cases and assembles them, the work of a mere forty minutes.)

WALT: Oh, you shouldn't have bothered, James. (He borrows

James's peaked cap and works the controls. The two engines dash madly around the tracks.)

JAMES: Careful, don't have them going in opposite directions.

GEORGE: East is East and West is West and never the twains shall meet.

(While James's attention is distracted, as he works on a complicated pun involving Orient, accident and cardinal points, Walt twiddles a knob and moves two points: the two trains, gathering speed from each end of the layout, meet in the middle with spectacular results.)

GEORGE: Another engine bit the dust.

JAMES, aghast: How could you, Walt. Now I'll have to get it repaired.

WALT, generously: I'll see to it, James. I'll send one of the girls from the office down with it on Monday morning.

GEORGE: It'll be Gloria you send, of course.

WALT: Yes. I'll make a note of it. Sick trainset Gloria Monday. (There is a short silence, during which James's eyes begin to glare wildly through his spectacles.)

JAMES: You two arranged that crash just for that multiple pun!

GEORGE: You mean you suspect collision? That's a fowl canard; I canardly believe it.

WALT: Canard? That's a shipping line, isn't it?

GEORGE: No, you're thinking of what people are doing when they're waiting to get into the pictures on a wet night.

(James's attention is again effectively distracted. After some moments' silence Peggy opens the dining room door and calls "Grub's up!")

WALT: Ah, do you remember Bob's answer to that... "I hope it's home cocoon"?

ALL: Ah, good ol' Bob. (They look fondly at the empty place round which all the foodstuff is symbolically grouped.)

JAMES: All right George. I give up. What was it?

GEORGE: Queuein' hard.

JAMES: Oh! Oh.

WALT: These little sausages with the stakes through their hearts. What are they made of, vampire meat?

GEORGE: It's home skewered anyway. Peggy's good with sausages, isn't she?

JAMES: I married her for better or for wurst.

WALT: Notice how since he sold in Germany he's even got a gutteral

accent?

GEORGE: That's not selling to Germany, that's where he was brought up. You notice it when he's spouting. They smell even nicer than your usual sausages, Peggy.

JAMES: I told you they were German. They must come from the Eastern frontier.

GEORGE, after a long pause: All right, I give up.

JAMES: The Odour-Nicer line. Nyaa, you and your queuein' hard ones.

GEORGE, fighting back: That's a park in London where they have lots of flowers and things.

WALT: You're thinking of where American leopards live. (There is another pause.)

JAMES, sadly: I must be slipping. What is it?

WALT: Cougar dens.

JAMES: How on earth did you get there?

WALT: By way of Kew Gardens, from "queueing hard ones".

JAMES: Oh, curse it – I was on the Oder-Niesse line.....But I still can't see how you're going to get out of cougar dens.

GEORGE: Neither do I; I think we're trapped. Say, why don't we ask the hypothetical observers? They've been shivering out in the cold for eight years and nobody thought of inviting them in.

WALT: Good idea, George. COME IN there!

ALL: Hi.

WALT: And a Merry Christmas. This is a game Irish Fandom has been playing for years – a sort of subthreshold punning – and we thought you might like to join in. But however you spend your Christmas we all hope you have a pleasant one, and a happy new year.

Christmas 1958

Come with us yet again to Oblique House, stately home of Irish Fandom: not a prize house, but an honourable mansion. It hasn't changed much in the nine years we have been visiting it for these annual Christmas Evesdroppings. Between the 18hp Borgward belonging to 172 and the two Hillman Minxes in front of 168 there now proudly stands a third-hand Vespa motor scooter, the broken steps have been fixed and there is a fibrous covering in the front attic which is reputed to have once been a carpet, but there are few other evidences of vulgar ostentation to indicate that the Willises have been carried away by the intoxicating torrent of wealth resulting from *Nebula* having gone monthly. Listen to them now (and I promise the sentences will be shorter) as they and James White look out at the snow mercifully concealing the garden....

WALT: Snow – the velvet glove on the iron hand of Winter.

JAMES: Oh, I say. Are you trying to get into the fillers in the *Reader's Digest*?

WALT: Sir, we do not mention that magazine here. Besides, I don't think they pay for fillers, do they? No, it was just a phrase that occurred to me while I was reading a story by Harlan Ellison.

MADELEINE: I must say it's not the sort of phrase that occurs to *me* while I'm reading a story by Harlan Ellison.

WALT: Now now, remember you're a lady. Besides this is Christmas time and our message to fandom should be one of peace and brotherly love. We must think of something to say that will fill fandom from Inchmery to Berkeley with the milk of human kindness.

MADELEINE: Drowning New York in the process.

(There is a knock on the door.)

WALT: My Ghod what did you want to mention them for? Here comes one of them with a writ.

Enter BOB: What were you talking about? Fill me in.

MADELEINE: Supper isn't until nine.

BOB: Tch tch, you keep forgetting; I'm on a diet, to regain my slim youthful figure.

JAMES: Always thinking of your sylph.

WALT: Why, has Sadie gone back to South Gate? No, actually we were talking about Harlan Ellison and the milk of human kindness.

BOB: Sounds rather fattening, protein and carbohydrates together.

No, I know what it sounds like – the title of a fairy story. Harlan Ellison and the Milk of Human Kindness, in three volumes.

WALT: Oh yes, one of those quest sagas. How the young hero escapes from the ogre's den with the Enchanted Shorty Rogers Album and goes in search of the Magic Milk that will make people love him. There'd be a wonderful scene of him being chased through the dark forest of Seventh Fandom by packs of mad dogs trying to knee him in the groin.

BOB: We'd better stop or we'll be writing another *Enchanted Duplicator*.

Enter GEORGE: You can get somebody else to stencil it this time. Ghod save all here. How did Harlan Ellison get into this conversation?

WALT: It's really your fault for lending me that copy of *Saturn*.

BOB, reflectively: *Saturn*, eh? I'll bet the authors in that magazine can write rings around the ones in *Planet*.

GEORGE: Ho yes, that's our Bob. The bhoy is back.

JAMES: Yes, even Walt's puns sound better now.

WALT: Let me tell you, my puns have stood the test of time. Look at the one on the Christmas card.

MADELEINE: About time you got around to that. The last one was so late Dean Grennell wasn't sure what Christmas it was for.

WALT: I'm not to blame for what he's done to the Fond du Lac post office. It was all right when I left it.

MADELEINE: Yes, we all know you were in Fond du Lac, also Cheyenne, Oshkosh and Tallahassee. What about the Christmas message?

WALT: I saw another Greyhound bus in a movie... that's what they call films you know... last night. (Nostalgically) I almost broke down.

JAMES: OK, so you haven't lost your sense of wonder. What about this message that's to flood fandom with the milk of human kindness? It'll have to be condensed milk at this rate.

WALT: Well, first of all I must ask all of you to keep absolutely quiet for a few moments.

WALT: All right, carry on.

JAMES: What was the idea of that? Were we supposed to listen to the cogs whirring around in your fannish brain?

GEORGE: Crifanac, and let loose the cogs of WAW.

WALT: Eney pronounces that *criff*anac, so you'd better write and explain that pun to him, George. No, what happened was that I slipped up

and went onto p.7 here straight from p.5, and I don't trust my correcting fluid. It sort of curdled while I was gafia.

JAMES: Like that milk of human kindness by now, you udder clot.

WALT: You won't cow me by those heifer-vescent witticisms. You try and type seven wee bits all higgledy-piggledy.

JAMES: Well, at least wish everyone a happy Christmas from all of us before we fall off the bottom of the page.

WALT: Yes, it's not a very original message, but it's sincere. And let's hope that next year more people remember that fandom is for fun and have lots of it in 1959.

A MERRY CHRISTMAS
AND A HAPPIER NEW YEAR TO
ALL OUR FRIENDS

Christmas 1959

It's been quite a year for Irish Fandom... two new members, a new son to James and Peggy White, a car and a new house to Bob & Sadie Shaw, a new tape recorder to George Charters and three eager purchasers for Oblique House. But the new fans live 100 miles away, the son won't sleep, the house isn't finished, the tape recorder won't work and Things seem to happen to the purchasers. The first went bankrupt, the husband of the second became an alcoholic and we haven't dared find out what happened to the third. All we know is that when we dial the number we get the Medical Officer of Health screaming "Unclean!" It is as if Roscoe did not mean Oblique House to be sold. So this Spacious Semi-Villa (elevated site, southern exposure, all mod. cons, including ghoodminton court, £1600 or the April '43 ASF) is still the end of the journey we invite you to make this year for the tenth time running (or, since some of us are getting a little older, walking) for your Christmas Evesdropping....

In the front sitting room Carol is doing her Latin (yes, she got the 11-Plus thanks), Bryan is building a Tower To The Moon from orange juice cans (a telling counter blow to California), and Madeleine, James and Walt are continuing the discussion on Broad Matters of Policy they started in this very room in October 1947. The discussion is typical of the finely coordinated organization and serious teamwork of this dynamic fan group..

MADELEINE: Only 25 stencilling days to Christmas, Walter. Time you did the Christmas Card. Better start digging for puns in that mine of yours.

WALT: Oh no, I'm out of practice on Christmas Cards – must be nearly a year since I did one. I wouldn't know a mine from a hole in the ground.

MAD: Oh go on, try. I'll take them all down in shorthand – Pitmans of course. What about you, James?

JAS: I'm torpid from too much tea.

WALT: Hi. I'm Willis from Belfast.

MAD: You know, the well known extinct volcano. Go on, work yourself into a lava.

WALT: Right enough, I would like to get active in fandom again. I miss it. Nostalgie de la egoboue as the French call it, eh James?

JAS: I should think about three fans will get that one, and I'm not one of them. You must be desperate.

WALT: It just occurred to me that maybe the resources of the English language have become exhausted.

JAS: You mean your defence is that you didn't realize the load was gone dead?

MAD: Hey, not so fast. I can get the questions down OK but I'm not sure if I'm getting the anthracite.

JAS: Ouch. You'd never have dared to say that if Bob was here. Hey, wasn't that the front of his car that went past?

MAD: I didn't hear anything.

WALT: You don't *hear* Bob's car. At 60 mph the loudest noise is the covers of his wallet rubbing together. Yes, here's the back of it now, I can see Sadie walking to the door.

JAS: He should have kept his moped for short journeys like that, but I suppose it would have smacked of vulgar ostentation.

WALT: But it's a Triumph, not an –

JAS: We know, we know. Anyhow they're out of it now. (Pause)

MAD: Hi Bob. Hi Sadie. How's the house coming along?

SADIE: Oh, there was great excitement last week. Someone came along and put on another slate. Any year now they'll be doing the ceilings.

BOB: I understand they have a kind of wax for that. What's going on here?

JAS: We were just talking about the Christmas Card.

BOB: Hmm. This calls for a cerebration.

MAD: Walter is suffering from homesickness for fandom and is going to do some work for a change.

Enter GEORGE: Have pain, will travail? Say, do you know there's a big black car outside with Eire numberplates playing bookends with Bob's?

Enter JOHN: Suffering catfish, Walt, there's a couple of suspicious characters lurking round the side of your house putting on a disguise or something. Don't you think you ought to call the police?

(Enter Ian McAulay and Johnny Hautz. They are wearing soft floppy hats, smoking clay pipes and have their trouser legs tied with string.)

IAN: The tap of the evening to yez, bedad.

JOHNNY: Faith and begorrah to be shure.

JAS: Who are these two Gibbers speaking such fluent gibberish?

IAN: Och shure tis the Oirish in us Mr. White sor, like you said in *New Worlds*.

JAS: Back to your Southern cesspool, you cotton-picking bog-trotters. You know fine well Carnell stuck that in my autobiography over

my unconscious body. I'd sue him if he wasn't a friend of Kyle's.

IAN: I thought you were paving the way for a serial, *Second Stage Irishman*.

BOB: No, but he'd blow Carnell to E.E. Smithereens if he could.

IAN: If I were you I'd have gone for him baldheaded.

JAMES: And you've got just the equipment for it. I'll bet it was you who put him up to it, you Dublin-crosser, in one of those anonymous letters you keep signing your name to.

IAN: A fowl canard! We make this hazardous expedition from the capital to defend the honour of Ireland, accompanied only by native porters –

JOHNNY: A dozen Guinness and a case of Caffrey's.

IAN: – to the out and out lying provinces and you as good as call us SOBs. Shame!

JAMES (solemnly): I assure you that not for anything would I insult your wire-haired mother.

WALT: Good. Now maybe we can send greetings to all our friends from this happy united all-Ireland fandom?

ALL: Merry Christmas! Cead Mille Failte!

IAN: Hey, wait a minute

Christmas 1960

After 11 years of Oblique House Christmas Cards you must know your way there by heart, so we've time to pause for a look at Belfast as it is on this December evening of the dying year 1960. The low grey city spreads out from the estuary of the River LAgan, like Cobbett's London, poured out over the land as if someone had forgotten to say "Wen", until it laps at green hills and blue mountains. On the slopes of Divis Mountain Peggy White prepares to dish out a diabetic dinner, and in the Parliament House in the Holywood Hills across the city Walt Willis drafts another abstruse Regulation before hurrying home: while 12 miles along the coast George Charters of Bangor, one of the Night People, bolts his breakfast and brings out his bicycle. But even in the smog of Belfast itself, the constituents of which Ian McAuley is even now measuring in the University Laboratory, we can see still burning the few hard gem-like flames of other fannish spirits. Spirit lamps, you might say, like svelte, soignée Sadie Shaw sedulously selling stiletto shoes, her husband huxtering Harland helicopters, Sgt. Berry brushing up his Bertillon and James White cajoling a Co. customer into a cut price coat, while his extra-brain* alternates between his newest novelette and that diabetic dinner.

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* *An oddly punctuated bodily feature of the superman hero of A.E. van Vogt's* The World of Null-A. *[Ed.]*

Within two hours all of these good people will be at Oblique House, where Madeleine Willis is now getting tea ready for Ian and Walt....

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Walt wedges his Vespa into the washhouse, reflecting it is just as well the kickstarter fell off when it did, and making way for Ian's car. Ian neatly manoeuvres his fake-fawn Ford into the narrow yard (it's one of those Adroit Barges) and past the scullery door, just in time to intercept a bowlful of discarded lettuce leaves on their way to the garbage can.

IAN (wiping wet lettuce leaves off his face): You might at least have shouted "Fore!"

MAD: That would only be for mashied potatoes.

WALT (emerging from the washhouse): What a disgusting exhibition of greed. Can't you even wait until you're in the house before you get stuck into the lettuce?

MAD: Sorry, Ian, I meant it for the garbage can.

WALT (eyeing Ian's car): A natural mistake.

IAN (with as much quiet dignity as is possible to one covered in wet lettuce): That is an insult which can only be wiped out in Scrabble. And take off that crash helmet – you look like an overgrown snail. Come to think of it, though, that's appropriate enough for that wreck of a bike of yours.

WALT: I can't even wait to hit you with a seven-letter word.

The game, No.95 in the 1960 League, is drawing to a hard-fought close when Peggy and James arrive.

IAN: Utelcet? Celtute? Cuttlee... one who is cuttled? Excuse me a minute, Peggy, I've got something on my mind.

JAMES: Yes, I can see it from here – a green crinkly thing. Is that your brain showing through? Don't tell me you're losing your *skin* now?

IAN: Oh, it must be a piece of leftover lettuce leaf. LETTUCE! That's it. Seven letters and I'm out.

WALT: He's even taking the stuff externally now, James.

MAD: I must say I like a man with a fine head of lettuce.

Enter Sadie and BOB: What's Ian doing with that little green crown – he looks like an Eastern potentate.

JAMES: Mongolian, anyway.

WALT: May I present His Highness, the Khan of Garbage.

IAN: That reminds me, James, any word of that story you sent to the States?

Enter GEORGE: I told you, you should have spilt some Chanel No.5 on it and sent it to *F&SF*.

IAN: One scent for 30,000 words isn't enough.

GEORGE: But it might turn out to be a best smeller.

CAROL: There's a man at the door. He looks like a brush salesman but he sounds like he was collecting for the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Catfish.

Enter JOHN: Hello. I got an anonymous letter from Arthur that there was fanac going on in this house.

WALT: Welcome, John... we haven't seen you here since Andy and Ian were discussing rates of adiabatic expansion.

JOHN: Well you see, I was going to write it up for *RET**, the Plain Man's *Hyphen*, but I haven't been able to decipher my notes.

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* *The fanzine* Retribution, *edited by John Berry and Arthur Thomson. [Ed.]*

WALT: No wonder, with one of them eating chocolate in a hair mattress and the other talking through layers of lettuce.

IAN: Say what you will, it is due to lettuce that I leap out of bed every morning with unbounded energy.

BOB: If my bed was full of lettuce I'd do that as well.

WALT: Well, before this Christmas Card gets full of lettuce too, let's wish all our friends, from Forry to Nikki, the happiest of Christmases.

ALL: Merry Christmas!

Christmas 1961

Christmas, 1961, the eve of a new decade: the anniversary of the birth of Christ and the winter solstice, when nature is most hostile to humanity. The season means different things but its message of goodwill among men means everything to us all.

There is plenty of goodwill in the world tonight, but few more happy examples than the tiny but world-wide group of friends we know as fandom. So be our guest again tonight at a big house on this tiny island between the new world and the old.

Walt and Madeleine are studying their well-thumbed map of America while George Charters, James and Peggy White, and Bob and Sadie Shaw read the mail. Enter Ian McAulay, carrying two cans of beer from the fridge and looking at his watch.

IAN: Seventeen point five minutes. In furtherance of this research programme of ours into the properties of semi-refrigerated enzymes, Bob, how about another beer?

JAMES: He's just had two.

BOB: Don't you know you're liable to get a horrible disease if you stop at two beers? You've heard of two-beer-culosis.

GEORGE: You beer-sodden hulks should be spending your money on science fiction.

IAN: At your prices? I'd rather drink myself into the workhouse.

WALT: They only read *Stupor Science Fiction*, George. There's no market for your six-shilling *Astounding*s.

GEORGE: I remember in my young days selling twelve sf mags for a shilling.

BOB: You should have charged at least a groat.

WALT: You shouldn't mention your age in front of him, George. It's like waving a red china shop in front of a bull.

BOB: You know, it's not generally realized, but a red rag doesn't annoy bulls at all, just cows.

IAN: Well, why do they get angry then when you wave one at them?

BOB: Wouldn't you be annoyed if you were taken for a cow?

(Enter John.)

BOB: Ah, here's John Berry, the distinguished man of letters we all love and admire. Now we can open the presents.

JOHN: Sorry I'm late folks. On the way here my motor-assisted pedal cycle had a nervous breakdown.

JAMES: How do you know it was a nervous breakdown?

JOHN: Well, it just sat there and *moped*.

JAMES: I knew I shouldn't have asked. Ah, well, I'm sure it'll Raleigh if you put it under a trick-cyclist.

JOHN: It was nice of you to wait for me before you opened the presents. What's that thing over there beside Sadie? I thought it was Eric Bentcliffe for a moment.

WALT: Don't mention it, presents make the heart grow fonder. No, that's not Eric, it's a life size stuffed monster from Forry with 915 tentacles.

BOB: 915 tentacles. That's not too many. Doesn't it arouse your Sense of Wonder?

WALT: It certainly is a wonder-full Thing.

MADELEINE: Let's open this pile first. It seems to have more things in it.

WALT: It certainly is a thingfuller one.

MAD: Save that chitterchatter for fabulous New York fandom. Look, here's a box of crumpets from Andy Young. I wonder why he sent them.

JAMES: You remember we had that argument about them. He didn't know them from muffin.

WALT: They were a bun of contention.

IAN: That was the night John was asking about positive and negative curvature of space and Andy explained it to him by telling him the space-time continuum was shaped like Marilyn Monroe.

JOHN: I've felt a new interest in astrophysics ever since. What I'd like to know now is exactly where we are on her.

WALT: You must have delusions of grandeur, John. But here's something for you, in plain wrappers. Why, it's postcards, unretouched photographs of Irene Potter's toenails.

JOHN: Phew! I wonder how they got past the postal inspectors.

WALT: As first class nails, of course, how else? Let's see what else we've got. A long playing record of Sam Moskowitz reading *The Immortal Storm* from Harry Warner, a book on figure drawing by John W. Campbell with a plastic model jeep, a bloodstained can of Californian orange juice bought by Wally Weber in a Florida supermarket, a geiger counter and a stone ax from Robert Heinlein, a loaf of bread from Mike Deckinger –

JAMES: I like those nice broad green leaves on your Christmas tree.

WALT: Those aren't leaves, those are the most fantastic present of

all, 1,500 dollars from American fandom.

BOB: 1,500 dollars. That's not too – If they're real, you'd better wake up and put them away before somebody pinches them.

WALT: Don't anybody do any pinching or we'll all wake up. Actually I think they were run off by Ted White on his Gestetner. Where else could they possibly have come from?

MADELEINE: Well, we're going over there to try and spend them anyway, and until we meet all these old and new friends, let's wish them a Merry Christmas. See you all in the Happy New Year!

Christmas 1962

Romantic Ireland is covered with a soft mantle of slush... Well, maybe it isn't at the moment, but it was on Christmas Day, 1950, when I wrote the first instalment of a column called The Harp That Once or Twice, and that's how I started it. A lot of things have happened to Madeleine and me in the 12 years since then, largely as a result of that column, so Christmas is a fannish anniversary for me. But I think it is for most of us, for it's when people think of absent friends... and what are we all but so many absent friends?

So here again is this little "card" to send you our greetings, more sincerely and personally than a shop card can, and to let you know how things are with us. With puns tactfully made even more outrageous than usual so you won't feel bad about not actually being here.

We wish you were though....

Oblique House is as old and shabby as ever, but comfortable. There's a fitted carpet in the living room now, cut down to size by Madeleine from one from the banqueting hall of some stately home of the crash-landed gentry. She bought it cheap at an auction – those big old fashioned carpets are a drugget on the market – along with the enormous sofa and chairs we're sitting in, the bidder suite. Walt is typing the 17th chapter of his trip report and Madeleine is cutting stencils for *Hyphen* on the typer she bought expressly for the purpose. (Yes, at an auction too – just call her Lot's wife.)

WALT: No, it's spelt "night" here. Face up to it dear, we're not in America any more. Accept it.

MAD: What do you mean? I have accepted it. I'm completely adjusted.

WALT: All right then, can I stop putting the jam in those little plastic boxes.

MAD: But all the jam dishes are full of cole slaw. Oh well I'll put that in Sid's bowl in the freezer.

WALT: Honey, we haven't *got* a freezer. Let's go back to our simple homespun Irish ways and just put it in the fridge.

MAD: Funny how life went on after America, wasn't it?

WALT: Yes, I hadn't figured on it doing that either. Strange, a future without one big thing like that looming up.

MAD: But it's nice to look forward to meeting all those nice people again in Ireland and giving them as good a time as they gave us.

WALT: Meanwhile we'll put out *Hyphen* together, just the two of us.

MAD: Yes, publishing a fanzine together is the second friendliest thing two people can do.

WALT: I think I hear James in his new Reliant Mark IV three-wheeler which he bought from the proceeds of a sale to *F&SF*.

MAD: Gosh I certainly admire the subtle way you fill people in.

WALT: Well they'd hardly gather all that from the way it goes "Avroom! Avroom!"*

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* *Avram Davidson was then editor of* F&SF. *[Ed.]*

JAS: Greetings one and all. From my house to yours between *Mr. Magoo* and *Z Cars*, with one up.

PEGGY: Surprise, surprise.

MAD: Well hello Peggy, glad you could make it. Nice to have both of you.

JAS: Yes, two and one make glee, but two and two make euphoria. And it's all thanks to my three-wheeler. I wonder if those cars are made in the Isle of Man. You know, three legs.

BOB: You're thinking of the Hillman Manx.

JAS: Well hello Bob & Sadie. I didn't hear you in your big expensive Triumph.

BOB: Yes, there's just the faint susurration of falling rust. That grinding noise isn't the back axle, it's my bank Manager gnashing his teeth. But hark, I think I hear George Charters in his new Morris Minor, which he bought with one of the buckets of money from under his bed after he had that illness but before he went into the hospital for his recent operation for detached retina which was completely successful.

MAD: You're nearly as good as Walt.

SADIE: How do you know? You haven't read Bob's great Ulster sex novel yet.

MAD: Hi George. For a moment I thought you were Jim Warren in those dark glasses. Are you really going to America next year instead of waiting till 1975?

GEORGE: Yes, I'm going to look for the rest of the front cover of that 1933 *Astounding* you brought me from Forry's garage.

WALT: Well, any advice I can give you... like, mainly, TRAVEL BY TRAILWAYS.

GEORGE: Don't scream, Walt. I've already bought a long chain to

attach myself to my luggage.

BOB: You're only taking an attaché case?

GEORGE: And a crate for books. Talking of crates, isn't that Ian's superb and luxurious Ford I hear disintegrating outside?

IAN: Hello-everyone-not-too-early-for-a-beer-is-it-Bob?

OLIVIA: Can I have one too? He won't give me any since we got married.

IAN: I found her putting it on her *hair*.

BOB: I hear they have a special kind of beer for that now that you spray on. It's called hair lager.

WALT: I suppose you buy it from a quaffer.

OLIVIA: Ian doesn't mind my hair having an intoxicating fragrance, but he mourns the waste of beer on my scalp.

IAN: Parting is such sweet sorrow. Pour out another one Bob. I hear Berry's bike creaking outside.

JOHN: Sorry I'm late folks. I've been transferred to traffic duty for the Christmas rush. You should see the jam downtown.

WALT: Shh. Madeleine will be wanting me to put it in a little plastic box.

BOB: We were just thinking of you John. Now that the rest of us have got cars we were thinking of all driving up and down Campbell Park Avenue, tooting our horns ostentatiously.

WALT: And don't think it would have been easy, without an Austin among us.

JOHN: I'm not jealous, I'm too dedicated to my work. That was all I thought of when I saw that row of parked cars outside. Here you are, Walt, James, Bob, George, Ian.

GEORGE: What are they? I can't see without my glasses.

WALT: They're parking tickets. I shall never live this down at the Ministry.

JAMES: Shouldn't mine be triangular?

BOB: Give me back that beer.

IAN: I'll flee the country again.

JOHN: It's all right folks, I ran them off myself as my contribution to the festive season.

GEORGE: What does it say?

WALT: Just what we all wish everyone....

"A HAPPY CHRISTMAS!"

Christmas 1963

Come to Ireland for Christmas. Let your thoughts wander between the blue hills of Antrim and the green hills of Down: along the smoky valley of the Lagan to Belfast, the cradle of Irish Fandom. Both the city and its children have changed in the last fourteen years. Belfast is now lit up with all the extravagance of Butte, Montana, during a depression, and the bicycles on which young fans once pedalled their way to Oblique House are now creaking ghosts in the cycle sheds of time, clanking their rusty chains down the wind of changes. Instead we see, converging on the Upper Newtonards Road from North and South along dual carriageways, a black Morris Minor bringing George Charters and a grey Wolseley bringing Bob and Sadie Shaw, while along the new motorway, with its shamrock-leaf interchanges come James and Peggy White from the West in their new fawn Fiat. But their welcome, and yours, is as warm as ever at Oblique House, where Walt and Madeleine bask in the sepia glow of their dying tube, watching *Z Cars*.

WALT: Did you see Bill Harry on tv last night? And Carol tells me one of the Beatles is called Harrison. I tell you, the Liverpool Group have gone aboveground and are taking over the world.

MADELEINE: Well, I suppose it's easier than publishing a regular fanzine.

WALT: Oh I don't know. We've been publishing a regular fanzine for fourteen years now, this one. To have a record like that behind you is not to be sneezed at.

MAD: I'll make a stern-notation of it.

(Enter George, James Peggy, Bob and Sadie.)

JAMES: We decided to come all together this year to save you the trouble of cueing us in. Besides we wanted to see *Z Cars*. What's happening?

MAD: Nothing much. Inspector Barlow is in a Chinese restaurant waiting to be served.

PEGGY: I wonder how *Z Cars* would be as a musical for the Choral Society.

JAMES: You could have him singing "I wonder why you keep me waiting, Chow Mein, my Chow Mein."

WALT: No, *Z Cars* has got its feet too flatly on the ground. I read in a fanzine the other day that British tv is better than American tv because

you can hear people using the toilet.

BOB: *That* must make the BBC feel flushed with triumph.

JAMES: I've hear of programmes being panned, but that's ridiculous.

WALT: Personally I think it's just that British toilets make more noise.

GEORGE: Don't you know they're trying to communicate with us? Remember that fanzine article "My Ablutions Talked to Me"?

WALT: Probably mutterings of revolt. Water closets of the world unite, you have nothing to lose but your chains.

BOB: Maybe they're in collaboration with the Wallthings, preparing for the count-down. Then it'll be "All Cisterns Go!"

GEORGE: What Wallthings?

WALT: Oh that was while you were in America snubbing fans. We found a book rack in Smithfield with all the books turned inwards and figured they must be for these two-dimensional creatures that live in walls. Matildas, we called them.

GEORGE: Why, because they were Aussiefied?

WALT: Come George, you're slipping. You must have heard of Wallthing Matilda?

GEORGE: I'm glad I was in America at the time. And by the way I didn't snub fans, it was just a case of too little time and too many relatives. I believe Einstein has a theory which accounts for it. But now I know the way I'm going again next year.

WALT: This time pack your cowboy suit and go West. By the way, I see Redd Boggs says you Max Brand fans are subliterate.

GEORGE: Hnmmh. I'll take a real sixgun.

WALT: Good idea. I'll tell you where you can track down this blackhearted Brand-besmirching Boggs. He's hiding in an office at 245 West 50th St., New York, marked "Boggage Department". Shoot him down like a dog.

SADIE: It's not like you to be so callous.

BOB: That's right. Corn maybe but not callous.

WALT: It's the hard life I've had that's made me all bitter and twisted inside. Run over by a bus in 1940, had "Sequoia" disallowed in Scrabble in 1962.... Sometimes I wonder if it's worth going on. And hark, I hear the Superb and Luxurious rattletrap of the man who did it.

(Enter Ian and Olivia McAulay.)

IAN: Sorry we're late folks. Had to slow down to 70 through Drogheda. Any beer left, Bob?

WALT: Now there's a self-answering question if ever I heard one.

BOB: Well, er... Why did you run over Walt?

IAN: I never, even after he disallowed “tequila”. Run him down, maybe...

OLIVIA: He hardly runs over anyone these days. He’s settled down, you know.

WALT: Like scum on a pond. Tequila wasn’t in the dictionary. Sequoia was.

IAN: With a capital letter, heh heh. But enough of this bloodstained badinage, on to matters of importance. Is there any beer left, Bob? I mean, you might be sick or something. I can dream, can’t I?

WALT: Never mind the beer, it’s space we’re running out of, to wish everyone

HAPPY CHRISTMAS

Christmas 1964

Come with us once again to romantic exotic Ireland, this typical December day in Belfast. The sun has long since sullenly set behind the gasworks; the time is what the country folk call dayligone. Through the mystic Celtic twilight there threads towards the rolling Castlereagh Hills a glowing topaz necklace, the sodium lights of a new dual carriageway. I'm sorry if this is not exactly how you imagined Ireland, but from our point of view it's better than starving in a picturesque museum. We can't have archaic and eat it. Along the dual carriageway come three status symbols, a sleek black 1959 Vintage MG, a new Fiat and a recently decarbonized Morris Minor. Walt & Madeleine arrive first, are greeted by Bob & Sadie Shaw and together we wait for James & Peggy White, George Charters... and you.

WALT: It's starting to snow. The velvet glove on Winter's iron hand.

MADELEINE: You said that in 1958.

WALT: You can't publish a fanzine with clockwork regularity for 15 years without repeating yourself. Besides maybe more exposure is all I need to get my one line into the charts along with "A rose red city half as old as time". In the hall of fame I tell you I have a niche.

Enter Peggy & JAMES: Well, why don't you scratch it?

WALT: This is no ordinary skin ailment I'm talking about, it's the acne of success. Talking of which, I wonder could I get the London Worldcon Committee to institute a Hugo for poetry?

BOB: I hear Ella Parker already plans to give a special award to Harlan Ellison for dramatic late night phonecalls. My own opinion is they should have left the Drama Award to be voted on at the Convention. The Con itself might win it as the best tv presentation.

JAMES: When George hears about the closed circuit tv he might stay in the Convention hotel for once.

Enter GEORGE: Indeed I might. It would be a nice change to lie in bed watching Sam Moskowitz as well as hearing him.

WALT: With closeups of Wrai Ballard's hands actually brushing the ground as he walks. I wonder how many complaints the BBC will get from other residents for not having announced the programme as unsuitable for those of a nervous disposition.

BOB: Let's all go to the Fancy Dress disguised as Wrai Ballard. I hear you can hire gorilla's legs very cheap.

JAMES: I know I shouldn't ask this, but why?

BOB: Come now, surely you've heard the expression, two ape-knees for a penny?

GEORGE: You should have saved that until we were in London, and then I could have said "Wasn't that very pat, Ella?"

WALT: Trouble is the Americans might not know that pronunciation of ha'penny. You should have suggested a pirate's headdress instead. It's cheap too.

JAMES: I'll never learn. Why?

WALT: It's only a buccaneer.

JAMES: Let's kneecapitulate. If there happens to be a BBC producer in the hotel the Convention might get a contract for a weekly series. *Not So Much a Way of Life, More a Goddamn Hobby*.

GEORGE: Or *Conanza*.

WALT: Or *Cheyenne's Fiction*.

PEGGY: *My Sister Ethel*.

BOB: *The Fuggheadive*.

GEORGE: *Amis and Android*.

MAD: *The Blackball and White Minstrel Show*.

WALT: *Bill and Breen, the Flower-Pot Men*.

BOB: Talking of tv, I wonder is there any news about Mariner? (He switches on the ten o'clock news.)

ANNOUNCER: ...rugged reliability. Why, believe it or not, even a Ford in this condition will still go!

BOB: Why, it's Ian's car!

WALT: I thought they bought it just to keep it out of sight. (The phone rings.) Well, I see he got two shillings for it anyway.

(Bob answers the phone.)

SADIE: What was that? Have they fired Ian's car into space?

JAMES: No, it was just a commercial. The way he drives they figure he'll get there himself one of these days. Like Biddiver in the Sturgeon story.

WALT: Didn't Biddiver* go all hairy? So that's what he's after.

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* *The title character of Theodore Sturgeon's "Biddiver"* (Astounding, *August 1941) drives off by mistake in a car that's also a spaceship and is mutated by space radiation into a hairy, tentacled super-being. [Ed.]*

BOB: Ian says he phoned Ella Parker and she hung up on him. He wonders is she not shouting at him any more.

WALT: I'll bet it was just that thick Dublin accent of his. She must have thought he said he was speaking from LA, not to Ella.

BOB: He wants to know when the next *Hyphen* is coming out.

WALT: Tell him Real Soon Now and ask him how many stencils he can cut.

BOB: He wants to know how we're voting in TAFF.

MAD: Tell him it's a terrybill choice to have to make.

BOB: He wants to know if we've heard about any more Americans coming to the Worldcon.

WALT: Tell him we hope they'll all come. A lot can happen in nine months.

SADIE: You can say that again.

BOB: He says Olivia says you can say that again. He says his time is nearly up and to send his best wishes to everyone in the Christmas Card.

WALT: So's ours, but there's room to wish everyone from all of us

MERRY
CHRISTMAS

and a happy london worldcon year.

Christmas 1965

This Christmas, as always, you are invited to visit Irish Fandom at home.

You follow the familiar road to Oblique House, hub of the Wheels of IF for 18 years, climb the steps through the strangely tidy front garden, pause in puzzlement at the eerie radiance emanating from the base of the cherry tree, and ring the front doorbell. The door is opened by a white-haired old lady whose face is not familiar from any convention photograph.

"You must be The Hypothetical Observer," she says. "Mr. Willis told me you'd be here at Christmas. He left a message, written into the contract of sale. Excuse me."

So saying, she donned a shawl, picked up a bundle of faggots and quavered:

"Go East, Young Fan, and far
Beyond the Sacred Tower
To the grey house by the sea.
Where six roads end
And warrens wend
To Strathclyde, Donaghadee."

Thanking the aged crone, you get back into your Hypothetical Car and follow the signposts to Donaghadee, passing on your way the Tower of The Enchanted Duplicator (known on mundane maps as Scrabo) and the hamlet of Six Road Ends. In half an hour you have reached the rockbound coast of the Irish Sea. You turn left and through two big grey gateposts, and park behind George Charters's new blue and white Austin Cambridge. In the big front room Irish Fandom is looking at the storm-tossed sea and the distant coast of Scotland. Come in out of the cold and join us...

JAMES: You know, everything here is in Cinemascope and Technicolor.

MADELEINE: Yes, it's definitely a high-budget production. Thank goodness the garden is big enough to hide from the bill-collectors in.

WALT: Fortunately, we know we're going to be rich and famous.

GEORGE: How did you find that out? By Walter-divining?

WALT: No. I examined the entrails in the dog's dinner for signs, and I saw my name in lights.

MAD: Another of his shoddy gag stories.

BOB: I can foretell the future too. I know you're going to serve us pastries with whipped cream and chocolate for supper.

MAD: I know I shouldn't say this; but how?

BOB: I'm an eclairvoyant.

GEORGE: I don't believe in clairvoyance myself. There's no future in it.

MAD: He may be able to see the future, but not the pastry. They're meringues.

SADIE: He's got no come-back to that.

BOB: No, they can't be boomeringues.

WALT: I knew he wasn't going to let you gateau way with that. Well, that's the future taken care of. What about the presents?

BOB: Presents? Sure we don't give each other presents for Christmas, just the stimulus of our intellectual conversation.

MAD: Where can we change it?

WALT: It's just that our friends may not have heard from us for so long and we want them to know we're thinking about them. Presents make the heart grow fonder.

PEGGY: You mean you haven't written to anyone?

WALT: Oh I've written dozens of letters, it's just that they may not have been delivered yet on account of my current difficulties. I think I'll have to try and throw the bottles further out to sea.

MAD: He's been boycotting the Post Office until they surrender his copy of *Candy*. We couldn't even get the next *Hyphen* out because it wouldn't fit into the Pepsi bottles Ted White left behind. He refused to try.

GEORGE: They were decline bottles.

WALT: Yes, they were too small for the great spirit of *Hyphen*. Visiting fans should drink djinn.

GEORGE: As a bottle-scarred veteran, I see your point. But they'll be too small for presents too.

WALT: I'm going to use the wine bottles left by Bloch and Elly and Ella, for small gifts like a little lit-up Christmas pig for Carol Carr, and for Pete a condensed version of the book about the man who left the big city to live on a small island, *Half Moon and a Halfpenny*, and for Terry an autographed picture of the Donaghadee lighthouse.

MAD: Of course we'll be able to send bigger presents when we get all the kegs of rum empty.

BOB: It was a great idea to put that light in the attic window for the Busbies. I wonder who keeps leaving all that stuff on our shores?

WALT: What shores?

BOB: Thanks, Walt. I'll have another tot of rum.

GEORGE: I don't wish to know that.

WALT: What do you wish to know?

GEORGE: Well, for one thing, how you're going to get this Christmas Card delivered on time.

WALT: By airmail, of course, just as soon as I can catch 67 seagulls. They'll wing their way across the sea like stormy petrels (or in the case of those proceeding westward, stormy gasolines) wishing all our friends a very

HAPPY CHRISTMAS

Christmas 1966

In an old grey house on the East coast of Ireland five people are sitting round a fire in the big room overlooking the moonlit sea. They are Walt & Madeleine Willis, James & Peggy White, and George Charters, and they are waiting for you to join them for your traditional Christmas Evesdropping.

They have also been waiting for Bob Shaw, author and journalist, and his glamorous wife Sadie, whose two-tone Triumph is even now vrooming up the driveway.

Koncking perfunctorily on the window, Bob follows Sadie into the hall of Strathclyde and takes off his green eyeshade, stringback gloves and sheepskin jacket. Meanwhile in the living room....

GEORGE: What was that funny noise at your window, Walt? It sounded for all the world like a konck. I haven't heard one of those since you last ran out of correcting fluid.

PEGGY: Maybe it was Bob's new car koncking out.

WALT: No, I've a shameful admission to make. My corflu is all dried up.

GEORGE: Is it true that Boyd Raeburn or some other Canadian millionaire is making a take-over bid for *Hyphen*?

WALT: Well at least one of my assets is solid. But you'd better ask his Star Reporter.... Hi, Bob. What kept you?

GEORGE: Ah, the budding author.

JAMES: Hi, bud. You're blooming late, aren't you? Something wrong with the car?

BOB: No, these Triumphs were built to last, like the Pyramids.

GEORGE: You mean the Pyramids were originally enamelled in two colours and chromium plated? They must have been quite a sight, buzzing up and down the Mile.

WALT: What did they use for fuel – Cairosene?

BOB: They must have used water from the river. I know because of something I found in the toolkit.

GEORGE: I know I'll be sorry I asked this, but what was it you found in the toolkit?

BOB: A Nile Phial.

GEORGE: Oh god. The mother that raised him would drown nothing.

JAMES: Oh well, back to the late late Shaw. What did keep you

then?

WALT: Wait a minute James, I don't think we've detonated all the unexploded bombs in this conversation. He couldn't have known we'd ask about petrol for the pyramids. I'll bet he was going to say his car was a Triumph Herod.

BOB: No, Walt, nice try but wrong dynasty. Actually I'm a Two-Tone-Car-Man.

WALT, weakly: Pharaoh enough. Well, press on.

BOB: Something funny didn't happen today; that's what kept me late. No news came into the paper at all. No wars, no strikes, no national calamities. Nothing at all happened in the world for 24 hours.

MADELEINE: But how did that keep you late.

BOB: You underestimate the Press. The Editor said it was the biggest sensation since the Millennium didn't arrive in 1000 AD and we brought out a special edition.

MAD: But what was in it?

BOB: Well we had this banner headline HISTORY TAKES A HOLIDAY, and interviews with experts and features about all the events which had been expected to happen but didn't. It was a pity it was on the streets before we found it was just that the tape machine had broken down.

WALT: Oh well it must have been a more cheerful paper than usual. Sometimes I think you people print the wrong kind of news.

BOB: You mean I should have fallen for that fake handout you gave me last April about the official campaign to outlaw homosexuals? "Her Majesty will cut the first sod", indeed.

WALT: No, like that little item about the twon in Sweden, or as we say, town, where the authorities wanted to put down all the stray cats. They told people to identify their own cats with a red ribbon round their necks, but when the Exterminator came he found all the cats had red ribbons. The children had taken care of the strays. Now if they had killed them they'd have made the front page.

BOB: I see your point, but my Editor wouldn't regard it as much of a scoop if I wrote MAN PATS DOG.

WALT: Well we could do it in fandom, a goodnewzine for Christmas with all the news we should have been writing in letters. Like your new job and new car and your sales to *Analog* and your contract for a novel. And James's new job and his *Watch Below* going into its second printing. And Ian and Olivia's second baby. And for the main feature your famous account of How Arthur Thomson Got His Job As Production Manager.

MAD: And we could have a gossip column, spreading rumours about

how the Grennells and Busbys and Willises were not splitting up.

BOB: Don’t you think that sort of thing might lack piquancy?

WALT: Well, we could have memoirs by some of the glamorous and seductive women who have tried to lure us away, with descriptions of the depraved orgies we had nobly refused to attend.

MAD: And we could have a column of tributes to some of the nice people who are still happily with us, like Forry Ackerman.

WALT: And, for last minute news:

IRISH FANDOM STILL TOGETHER AFTER 19 YEARS! WISHES ALL ITS FRIENDS A HAPPY CHRISTMAS!

Articles and Columns

The Outpost

The first Walt Willis column written for a fanzine other than his own, "The Outpost" appeared in issues 1-4 of Phantasmagoria *edited by Derek Pickles. [Ed.]*

November 1950

Veni Vidi Vinci!
(I Came to See Vince.)

After Mike Tealby of *Wonder* and I had perpetrated the oneshot fanzine called naturally, *Slander*, I put on my bulletproof vest and went up to London to see the Circle we had described. First impressions of the place were that it would be alright if it were in the country. As it is, you can hardly see it for houses. I went to one of these called a lion's cafe (seems they serve people too) to meet Vince Clarke, and in a few minutes he arrived, carrying with him for identification a copy of *New Worlds* and the original Ted Carnell. My Irish charm – I wear it round my neck – quickly disarmed Vince. He only had a rusty old hatchet anyway, and after burying that we went along to the famous White Horse, in Fetter Lane. Incidentally, it is not generally known that this thoroughfare was named in honour of the chain magazine scheme.

I had been told that the White Horse is "always half full of wits" – well it was *something* like that the man said – and right enough there they were, all the extinct volcanoes of British fandom, some of them almost mythological. All standing around, and then standing another round, not so much talking to one another as waiting for an opening. Some of them playing chess, ordinary two-dimensional stuff, others throwing darts, shooting lines, swinging the lead and other traditional games. Some of them even discussing Science Fiction. They were all very nice people indeed. Those that hadn't heard of me pretended they had, and those that had tried very hard to remember where. I met people I had written off as dead years ago.

They seem to stop drinking very early in England, so soon after ten everyone began to go home, their fanning finished for another week. I went with Vince Clarke & Ken Bulmer to the flat known for reasons lost

in the mists of antiquity as “The Epicentre”. It is near Holloway Gaol. In fact I believe it *was* Holloway Gaol, before the League for Prison Reform got going. In the wilder parts of North London, where the hand of civilized man has never set foot, is this long grimy street, sinisterly deserted. On one side is a railway shunting yard. This is known as the good siding. Opposite are Bulmer & Clarke. This is known as the bad siding. In front of their house a watchful corporation has installed a single warning lamp of a shade of green I had not seen since the boat docked at Liverpool. Pausing only to sign a certificate indemnifying the caretaker against any claims by your relatives, you start the long climb to the flat. If your oxygen holds out, and you are not caught in the tangled masses of *SFN* deadlines which cover the stairs you eventually arrive at the door. This must be opened carefully. Heaps of whitened bones tell of the fate of earlier travellers who were crushed by one of the periodic avalanches from the mountains of unanswered correspondence which give the walls that peculiarly curved appearance. In a clearing in the jungle live Bulmer & Clarke, and curiously enough once you reach there you will feel perfectly at home. This is because Bulmer & Clarke are charming people, whose only fault is that they do not let us see enough of them. And you cannot blame them for that. Apparently they get very little help from the rest of the London Circle, and by the time they get home from work and have had their teas they cannot use their typewriters because of a wakeful baby in the flat below. It is this wretched child who is really responsible for the sad state of British fandom. I wish I had time to tell you more of my experiences in London – or my visits to cultural centres like the Casino & the Folies Bergere, of how Ken Bulmer invented the steam engine, of the production of Clarke’s withering counterblast to *Slander*, of the discovery in one of the earlier strata of a copy of the first issue of Ray Bradbury’s fanzine – but I don’t even have the space to mention these things.

Spring 1951

Twilight Over Utopia

For over 2,000 years there was only one s-f plot. It was pretty simple too. The hero was transported by some more or less perfunctory device into a world far removed in time or space from his own, spent some 300 pages looking round, and came back home in the last chapter to tell the tale. From what used to be merely the irritating formality of getting him into

position there stemmed the story of interplanetary flight, the gadget and superscience story, and the whole flood of modern s-f. But these crude forefathers of s-f weren't usually trying even to write fantasy, still less science fiction. After they had sketched in the means which brought the hero to the strange land, with all the painstaking realism of Edgar Rice Burroughs, they just wanted him to go on a sort of Intourist jaunt about the place asking stupid questions so that they could have the natives come up with smart answers, all proving that everything here would be just fine if we got ourselves stung with the particular bee that buzzed in their bonnet – land reform, social credit, the single transferable vote, or some brand of religion, polygamy, nudism etc. I even read one dedicated to monorail railways, "Erene" or something it was called. The author certainly had a one track mind. But what all these stories had in common was the assumption that the world can be better than it is, and very likely will be. With the popularization of science it was only to be expected that the Utopia plot would change and that the heroes would spend more time in transit, but the alien culture plot is still handled wonderfully well by British authors like Stapledon and C.S. Lewis. It is in America that the big change has taken place. In the last few years future and alien cultures have started to deteriorate. Usually they are as bad as our own, sometimes much worse, very seldom better. How Come?? There are two things which can change human society: new things and new ideas. Americans have always concentrated far more on things, on gadgets, than ideas, and 26 years ago it was confidently expected that in a few more years everyone would have enough motor cars, refrigerators, and radios to make him happy and contented. But then came the depression, and a few years ago their ultimate gadget blew up in their faces. To a nation which has scared itself out of its wits with its own atomic bomb it is no use talking about the benefits of scientific progress, and now the only use they can think of for new inventions, like the spaceship, is to bomb somebody with. See *Destination Moon*. As for ideas, if these are not all Unamerican already they soon will be. First Communists, then Socialists, Radicals, Liberals, Democrats – Senator McCarthy is working his way up. The trouble is that Americans have convinced themselves that their peculiar museum piece of 19th Century capitalism is the essentially American Way of Life, and therefore, naturally, the best. If an alien or future civilization has anything different it must inevitably be worse. But most of their futures are just like 1951 America, only more so, to indicate the passage of time. Bigger companies, bigger wars, the Red menace shifted to Mars. A miserable and hopeless prospect, but fortunately implausible. Whatever the world is like

in 3000 A.D. it will not be like present-day America. You have my personal assurance. But if America has lost faith in the future, we haven't. The present situation – decadent reactionary America and optimistic go-ahead Britain (wait till your American subscribers see that Derek) – gives our British authors an opportunity to rejuvenate s-f. Let us have the novel of ideas back in s-f, and make a distinctively European contribution to the field again.

Summer 1951

I wasn't myself for a good part of the Convention – when I find out who I was I'll let you know – the reason being an arch suggestion by that arch fiend Ted Carnell that I should have to make a speech. I do hate to see people suffer, especially myself. However, innocent of the doom hanging over them, the rest of the guests seemed to be having a very good time. In fact it seems to me that the Convention was a wonderful success, from every point of view. Most of the credit should go to three men, Ackerman, Carnell and Temple. Other striking personalities included Alan Hunter and his beard. It suits him too, if not quite down to the ground. And Derek Pickles, with his surprising size. I had expected a lot of Pickles, but not just in that way. I got quite a jar: I suppose it must have been the large economy size. (I know you never thought I would sink so low as to make puns about Derek's name. How little you know me.) But the biggest surprise was H.J. Campbell, editor of *Science Fiction Fortnightly*. His beard made Alan Hunter's look almost like 5 o'clock shadow, and the rest of his hair looked as if it was his ambition to become a Big Mane Fan. As far as I can see this magazine has more hair-raising possibilities than we ever imagined. Seriously, he seemed a very likeable and intelligent chap, and I felt a great deal of sympathy for him at times. Especially during one conversation he had at the White Horse, with a well-known author. Campbell asked him baldly (it must have been a difficult thing to do!) if he would write something for him. The author asked him who he was, though of course he already knew-Campbell explained that he edited *SFF*. "Must you?" said the author rudely. Down in the forest something stirred, but Campbell with an obvious effort smothered the crushing retort he was well capable of making, and listened patiently while the author, of whom I had hitherto held the highest personal opinion, explained exactly how many cents a word he could get for his stuff in America. He was nearly getting two black eyes per word in England. Personally I thought Campbell should

have been invited to speak at the Convention. It may be of course that he was, but refused, and certainly Ted Carnell was generous enough to pay him a well deserved tribute in his own speech.

Other things that stand out in my memory are: TED TUBB's amazing talent as an auctioneer.* Maybe it was his dianetic training that enabled him to clear the table so quickly, and so profitably. TED CARNELL valiantly defending his feature "Post Mortem" against an attack which had never been made. Actually the point Derek wanted to make was that the title "Post Mortem" implied not only that the last issue was dead, but that there was a strong suspicion of foul play. The way FORRY ACKERMAN surpassed our expectations. Not only did he show just why he is Fan Number 1, but there was, unexpectedly, enough of him to make Numbers 2 & 3 as well.

** Walt's comprehensive report on the 1951 Festivention, "The Harp in England", is collected in the TAFF ebook of that name. It includes a long and appreciative account of Ted Tubb's auction technique. [Ed.]*

I could fill 20 pages with this stuff, but as Derek says, paper for *Phantas* is very dear, especially when you think where most of it ends up. Which reminds me that I have a couple of critics to answer. First, that fan-who-is-too-busy-to-fan, Capt. K.F. Slater, the man who founded the SFS and then losted it when with Egerton (Seek Soaked Civilization) Sykes, of *Atlantean Research* and the Ark Lark, he vainly tried to square that London Circle. But Ken's unfair campaign against *Science Fantasy* wasn't restricted to his own magazine. In *Startling*, which has probably a bigger circulation than *O.F.*, even if it doesn't distribute so many complimentary copies, he informed 100,000 Americans that Gillings's new 'zine "wasn't as good as we'd hoped". He then went on to tell Merwin that *SS*/*TWS* would lead the field if they used a different type cover. About this, an occasional correspondent of mine wrote (I leave out the rude bits): "Even if the arse-crawling is ignored, or taken for granted, he has not the slightest right to say 'Not as good as we'd hoped.' How good is good? Who's we? As for the other remark, no comment except that the reason I like bull-fighting is that it's a change to see the bull throwing the man." And now for that Lost Chord of the London Circle, A.V. Clarke. Incidentally, don't confuse this character with A.C. Clarke: he's quite confused enough by himself. First, no one should make cracks about the "A" in anyone's name whose own stands for AUBREY. To those of you who haven't seen the exhibits in the Fetter Lane Fan Museum, which contains some fairly well preserved specimens of the extinct species *Actifanus Londoniensis*, Clarke

is the editor of *Science Fantasy News*, known familiarly as *Sniff*, issue after issue of which used to succeed one another with such bewildering rapidity. I well remember when it turned monthly. Unfortunately it immediately turned weakly and died without issue, except for the few sheets which were used as wrapping for *Convention News* #2. The formula for *Sniff* was very simple as befitted the editor. One third apologies, one third resolutions to do better, and one third gossip given to Clarke by people who had to tell *someone* but didn't want the news to get around for a year or so.

I seem to have insulted everyone in England now, and just to show there's no good feeling I was going to say a few well-frozen words about the Shaver Mystery, "CAVES IN THE GROUND OR HOLES IN THE HEAD?". But space is short, and I wanted to finish by saying that all these fighting words are solely for the lively controversy your editor wants. I have for instance the highest personal regard for Ken Slater, who has done more for British Fandom than anyone either alive today or in the London Circle.

Spring 1952

Carnell Breathes Again

The onward progress of "Authentic Science Fiction Monthly" has ground to a shuddering halt with the publication in the March issue of Roy Sheldon's *Space Warp*, a novel which takes us back to the bad old days when "Authentic" was just a trashy pocketbook. I'm not going to waste your time describing in detail the plot of this lukewarm potboiler. You've read it a thousand times before and if you've any sense you won't read it again. This version of the tedious capture-escape-capture-escape routine of the tenth rate thriller takes place in, another dimension – a transfer, which gives the novel what slight claim it has to be called science fiction, but nothing at all in the way of interest. The characters are straight from stock, consisting of one senile scientist, one dumb daughter, and one muscular moron. They are chased all over the world of the other "dimension", their vicissitudes of fortune leaving the reader agog with indifference. Even when they stop running the heroine remains chaste, thereby destroying the last possibility of relieving the reader's boredom. There seems no good reason why the story should ever end – or indeed have been started – but they finally make their escape, positively and finally, from the inhumanly

intelligent aliens by a ruse which would probably have been dead cunning if worked on a tribe of Australian aborigines. No doubt the aliens were as glad to see the last of them as we are. The writing is too simple-minded to be read by any adult other than a reviewer with a strong sense of duty, but it is not quite corny enough to be funny. Not recommended.

No doubt someone will write in to say that this novel was overwhelmingly popular with hundreds of thousands of *Authentic's* readers and that it wasn't designed to appeal to jaded science fiction fans. But it's for the latter I'm writing.

The previous *Authentic* was something of a disappointment too. Campbell was kind enough to tell me he was writing a book in which I was the principal character – though not kind enough to tip me off when he changed the name of the hero from Willis to Grant – and I was hoping for something as rich in possibilities for satire as *The Moon Is Heaven*. But *Chaos in Miniature* throws away all the glorious opportunities he had to provide ammunition for the London Circle. He should have asked Vince Clarke for technical advice. The book is much better than the Sheldon thing, but it shows many more signs of hasty writing than any of Campbell's previous novels. For example we are told on page 14 that the newspapers are printing the results of football matches on Mars, and yet 90 pages and only a day or so later Arthur C. Clarke is weeping quietly into his orange juice, not because his pools hadn't come up, but because he has had to abandon his attempt to make the first flight to the *Moon*. The reason for this Ego-boohoo is that the Moon has disappeared, having been the victim of a recklessly wielded "reducing ray". This apparatus is the basis of the book's plot, but the logic and details of it are not worked out at all. There are so many inconsistencies and outright absurdities that the book must be classed as "fantasy" and not science fiction. Incidentally, by a curious coincidence a story with a very similar plot (Hubbard's "The Professor Was a Thief", *ASF* Feb. '42) was recently broadcast on *Dimension X* over AFN. *After* the publication of *Chaos in Miniature*, I hasten to add.

The Gold War

For months now H.L. Gold has been digging at John W. Campbell in his *Galaxy* editorials. It all started when Street & Smith sabotaged his *Galaxy* SF Novels by refusing to release Hal Clement's *Needle* for republication. Gold showed his annoyance over this very openly, and more recently he jeered at *ASF* for imitating his cover layout, asking them whether they

wanted him to send over the rest of his new ideas, or would they like to wait until he had tried them out for them. He also poked fun at the way they reviewed books which had first appeared in *Galaxy* as serials without mentioning their source. Now in the March issue he has taken the offensive, with a little tongue-in-cheek paragraph in his editorial assuring his readers that he is not likely to fall for any "pseudo-scientific fad". This deadly allusion to dianetics, Campbell's greatest mistake, is different in kind to his other gibes. They could have been interpreted as attacks on Street & Smith, but this is a blow at Campbell himself-and at a very weak spot, for Street & Smith are said to have taken a poor view of dianetics themselves. Or at least at its effect on their sales.

When is Campbell going to hit back? He's been taking it all lying down so far – the same position from which he seems to edit his magazine – but surely this must shake him out of his lethargy. It's about time something did, for the current issues of *ASF* are nothing but an example of how long a magazine can continue to exist on its reputation alone. Look at the March issue: a cover style stolen from *Galaxy* and a desperate appeal for subscribers (next thing they'll be advertising in *Galaxy*), another of JWC's rarefied editorials, the first instalment of a serial which would have been a thought-variant in 1940 (in fact it was), a Things to Come in what might be a parody of the offhand Campbell style, ending with the inevitable exclamation mark, a short by a new author which consists entirely of a mathematical proposition disguised as a story, another of H.B. Fyfe's shoddy pieces of ill-written rubbish, almost impossible to follow even if it were worth making the effort, another refugee article from the *Scientific American*, another undistinguished short with a plot that was done better in a 1950 fanzine, a barely competent re-write by Williamson of one of the better stock plots, a story by Merwin which he would have rejected from *TWS*, a book review section which succeeds in reviewing *The Puppet Masters* without mentioning *Galaxy* (I'm waiting to see how they perform this feat with the *Galaxy Science Fiction Anthology*), and another of those Brass Tacks where projections of Campbell tell him how wonderful he is. Incidentally, how long is it since there has been a hostile letter in *ASF*? They're getting them all right.

I know Campbell was a great editor, and that he made science fiction as we know it and love it, but is he a good editor now? Do you get in *ASF* the impression that JWC is toiling mightily night and day to give you a better magazine? Or do you get the impression that he is rather bored with the whole thing and would far rather be happily auditing at home? If this campaign of Gold's has the effect of putting new life into Campbell it will

be the best thing that has happened to science fiction since Campbell took over *ASF*.

November 1950 to Spring 1952

The Mind of Samuel Merwin

At this time Sam Merwin Jr. was the uncredited editor of Startling Stories*, and reviewed fanzines there as The Editor. Rog Phillips's "Club House" fandom column, also mentioned here, appeared in Howard Browne's* Amazing Stories. *[Ed.]*

Sometimes one gets the idea that Merwin hates fandom's guts – that is, if he thinks it has any. Not that you could blame him, when you consider that he has read through more fanzines than any man still alive and sane, not to mention countless silly letters about trimmed edges and covers and such from people who should know very well that he is tied hand and foot by the publishers in those matters. So you can partly understand his temptation to be absolutely rude to even the most well-meaning correspondent; nor is it safe to write him down as one who hates his fellow man, because he yields to it so often. He actually means no harm, as you can see from his occasional expressions of naive wonder as to why people so often stop writing in to his magazines. He has no conception of how irritating it is to some people to have their meanings deliberately misunderstood for the sake of a smart crack, or to be held up to ridicule in front of some 100,000 people without the slightest chance of being able to hit back. To him it is a contest between equals, and he will bring as many guns to bear on a miserable fanzine editor with a circulation of 70 as he would on someone of his own size. And, to his credit, he has a heart of gold. He publishes dozens of shameless letters from English fans too lazy or stupid to search for books or to exchange for 'zines they want. Not only does he print this panhandling, but urges his readers to rally 'round, as indeed he does himself in more deserving cases.

The only thing it is safe to predict about the nan is that he will be unpredictable. Take, for instance, the case of the unfortunate fanzine editors who expostulated about the random character of his reviews. You night reasonably have expected him to do one of three things: First, print the most unguarded letter in full, with a scathing commentary on it, gaffe by gaffe – he has a positive genius for this sort of thing – ask the wretched authors of the open letter to the Saginaw Insurgents. Second, write a friendly and contrite personal letter to the victims, and probably cut their fanzines to ribbons next time. Or third, publish a handsome apology as he did to the *Burroughs Bulletin* on receiving Mr. Coriell's dignified rebuke.

But, of course, he does none of these things. Instead, he says, like a sulky boy: I'll say either nice things or nothing at all. You might think this to be a brilliant piece of tactics. At one blow he has saved himself the trouble of reading all the stuff to find something to say, whitewashed his reputation for savagery, and thoroughly discomfited the unfortunate correspondents by diverting on their heads the wrath of the editors whose 'zines will now be dismissed with a dishonourable mention and of the ordinary readers who got a lot of fun watching Merwin lay round him with an editorial pikestaff. He *may* have thought all this out, but I doubt it. I don't think he's the sort of cold-blooded character who would work out a Machiavellian move like this. He is a bundle of contradictions and to find any common motivation for his various actions is impossible. A creature of impulse, he says what he feels, and looks for the reason afterward.

An extraordinary character – and in some ways a very likeable one – we really know very little about him – even his name is a secret, in theory – but he does occasionally drop a revealing remark from which one can try to make a mental picture. He is well read, as witness his stray allusions to people like Cyril Connolly, but he is probably largely self-educated, because his learning is often inaccurate. He quotes French phrases with relish, but he spells them wrong – "chacun a son goute" for example. Even his English spelling is apt to be eccentric – "just desserts" – "all star caste" – it's the easy words he gets wrong, you note. I would guess that he missed a lot of schooling, through illness or other misfortune, but did attend a university, maybe working a way through. He has not the introverted character of the invalid so I would guess his misfortune to be an unhappy home life. He gives the impression of someone who has knocked about the world a bit, and been knocked about by it a lot. He can be bitter at times as if he had had the whole world against him and hasn't forgiven it. He has fought his way up the hard way and you can still see the marks in the way he resents the pampered adolescents who criticize him. He says he doesn't mind, but look at his comments when one of them hits a sore spot. I should think he worries about his job. Thore is an air of tension about the fan sections of his magazines. Phillips just wanders on in his "Club House", occasionally talking the most ridiculous rubbish, often being brilliantly entertaining, but always exhibiting a likeable and easy-going personality. Merwin, on the other hand, is always on his toes, searching for something witty to say, forever impressing with little bits of erudition, but never coming down to the common level with the readers, as Phillips is not afraid to do. The fan sections are probably done with the copy boy standing at the door, and it's not surprising he sometimes lets rudeness

take the place of wit and patronage of sympathy. Which of us could do better in the spare time from a full-time job?

So what have we got? A deprived child, maybe even a depraved one, left to fend for himself at an early age, and meeting a lot of hardship in the process. Self-made, he's determined to show the world he did a good job of it. Toughened by adversity and sometimes thoughtless of the feelings of others, but the soul of generosity when he understands. Not such a bad guy on the whole.

April 1951

How I Write My Columns

I got a fanzine the other day in which the editor had scrawled: “How about something from your talented pen?” Now, I hate to disappoint people like this, but I’m afraid I’ve lost my talented pen. I have other pens, of course, but none of them has half the talent that that one had. It was the most talented pen you ever saw. For one thing, it could write in any colour you liked. Just choose your colour and that pen would write in it; provided of course you used the right ink. Furthermore it was one of those you can empty by pushing a little button at the top. If you ever got into a fight you could just draw your pen and let the enemy have it, a deadly deluge of ink all over his face. Talk about the pen being mightier than the sword? Why, you could leave your adversary blue-black! Another thing about this pen was that it has more things to unscrew than any simple article you ever saw. This was a tremendous asset to someone like me, who spent the best years of his life absent-mindedly unscrewing things and taking them apart. (Once I went on a long bus ride through very dull country, and the Company is still wondering whatever became of that bus.) Not only did the cap of this pen screw off in the usual way, but the cap itself had a little cap you could screw off, and then you could unscrew the clip. Nor did even that exhaust the resources of this wonderful pen. The barrel unscrewed in two so that the morbidly curious could peep at that obscene-looking sac that grows inside fountain pens, and on top of that there was the cap over the plunger. I spent many happy hours screwing that pen. There should be more pens like it. Every young man should have some such innocent occupation to distract him from the temptations of this wicked world. I venture to say that if everyone spent their time unscrewing fountain pens the world wouldn’t be in the state it’s in today. It would be a lot inkier.

But enough of Willis the thinker. As I was saying, I lost my pen and had to fall back on the typewriter. A very painful thing to do, let me tell you. It made quite an impression on the typer, too, and for a while it would only write Laney-type articles. Sometimes I think the experience must have warped it. If there are any faneds in the audience tonight who want me to write them some really good material I suggest they send me a portable typewriter. After all, the more enterprising faneds send their writers stencils. Why not do the thing properly? Why stop at stencils? What’s the use of stencils without something to type on them with? I

should like to see all faneds sending their contributors typewriters. Especially me. And now I come to think of it, McCain, the next time you want me to write something for *Wastebasket* you can just jolly well send me that linotype machine of yours. I promise faithfully to return it, when I've finished with it. Shouldn't be more than a few years.

However, I'll settle for a nice portable typer. A talented one if possible, but I don't really mind as long as it's nice and light. I could write a good many more articles and columns and things if I had a lighter typer. You see, the one I have weighs roughly six tons without the paper in it, and I can't rest it on my knees. At least I suppose I could, but then I might want to walk again. This typer was built in an age when they made things to last, probably Ancient Egypt. When they'd got themselves well limbered up building the pyramids they turned to and built this typer. I'll bet that when this planet is nothing but an asteroid belt circling a dying sun, one of these asteroids will be this very typer. I am pretty sure that when it was first made it had little chisels at the ends of the keys.

Incidentally, it has a carriage exactly a yard long.

I remember I once pressed the TAB key.

I will never do *that* again.

Never.

(Who is this guy Vick?)

However, if anyone here is interested in a spaceship drive, let them come over and press this TAB key. Just as long as they let me get well away first. I don't like to talk about it much, but when you press that TAB key things *happen*. There is a roaring noise like an express train thundering over your eardrum, the carriage whirs past at roughly three times the speed of light, and then the entire structure of the universe shakes as the irresistible force meets its old friend the immovable object. I don't like to raise anyone's hopes unduly, but those earth tremors that were thought to mean a Russian atom bomb test occurred just about the time I pressed the TAB key on my typer.

Well, as you know, all typers with built-in interstellar drives are inclined to be on the heavy side, so I keep this machine on the big table over by the window. But it's cold out there, and the chair is hard. Usually I find myself deciding that the article isn't gelling nearly as well as my blood, and that I'd better take them both over to the fire. That's the end of the article for the evening. Then one day I had a brilliant idea. Anyone looking at me at the time would have seen a little balloon floating over my head with "!" in it. I would make a little bedtable for the typer – just a piece of wood with two shorter pieces for legs. I would be able to sit on

the sofa in front of the fire with the typer over my knees and hammer away happily at it. I might even put the hammer down now and then and do some typing. It was a wonderful idea. Only six hours sooner said than done. Now, I thought to myself, having no other espers to think @, I will be able to *write*. Fandom will ring with the name of Willis. Fandom will be deluged with high-grade Willistuff, fine hotblooded material full of life and warmth. Deep, penetrating, profound and subtle, yet withal touched with sympathy and warm human interest, and lit with a saving grace of humour. I sat down on the sofa and placed the trestle over my knees. It was perfect, steady as Redd Boggs, and yet I had plenty of room to move about. There was even room on the trestle for fanzines and ashtrays and other of the columnist's simple needs. I was just ready to start when I realized that the typer was still away over there on the table. Silly of me, hah hah, but of course it was just a matter of putting the typer on the trestle and carrying it back. I lift the typer onto the trestle. I stagger back to the sofa. Comes the grey dawn of disillusionment. That typer is really *heavy*. I can lift the typer plus trestle all right, even walk a few steps with it, but I dare not sit down with it. Our sofa is one of those deep ones. People have to be pulled out of it with ropes. I knew quite well that if I tried to sit down holding that typer I should either finish up in the foundations of the house or that the momentum of that enormous mass would spread me in a thin layer over the back of the sofa. And that would never do – Madeleine had the sofa cleaned the other day. The outlook was grim. But was Willis daunted?

Yes.

Nevertheless I tried again. The thing to do was obviously to lift the typer onto the trestle while it was in position. I moved a chair over to the sofa, put the typer on it, and put the trestle over my knees again. Then I tried to lift the typer onto it. Alas for the vain hopes of mankind. I just could not lift that typer. I had to reach up over the arms of the sofa, a position in which I could get no leverage. If I sat too far up I would knock over the trestle and find myself holding the typer with no place to put it, crying weakly for help. So, here I am back at the window, feeling like a prozine editor getting into training for Tuktoyuktuk, and casting about for a faned with a slightly battered portable typewriter. In return I can offer one solidly constructed bedtable, only slightly soiled with blood, tears and sweat.

April 1952

A Fan at Sea

You know, it's getting harder for me to think of things to columnize about. Time was when all I had to do was drag out a few fanzines, find someone who said something I can disagree with, and then insult them for a bit. It was always good for 500 words – I mean, it went on for that long. But nowadays no sooner do I pull someone's leg than I find they have just cut off their right arm and sent it to the Chi fund.* Of course ShelVy tactfully hasn't told me who all the contributors are – I suppose he's afraid I might spend time writing letters of thanks instead of his old column – but I can't really feel safe with anyone. Except maybe F. Towner Laney and maybe if I pull his leg too much even he might contribute just to get his hands on me.

** Organized by Shelby Vick (ShelVy) to bring Walt to the 1952 Chicago Worldcon. [Ed.]*

So I've decided to make a great sacrifice for fandom. I am going to the London Convention. After my report last year you'll realize this is a mad, foolhardy, reckless thing to do, but I feel I owe it to My Public. No applause please. If I ever come back I should have enough to write about for a week or so. In case I don't, I have been putting my affairs in order. I'd already made my will after writing the last report, so it only remains to tidy up my effects. I clean up the debris of the *Hyphen* mailing and empty the wastebaskets and give the contents to the paper salvage collectors. (Three newspapers have already announced they are tripling their size and there have been riots of unemployed lumberjacks in Canada.) Then I came down and started this column. If you never get to read it you'll know that the London Circle have done away with me and you can ask ShelVy for your money back now instead of waiting until after the Chicon. I'll take a notebook with me and try to remember to jot down my impressions. There'll be no one to distract me this time because I'll be travelling alone. Bob Shaw can't come, James White is in Paris, and George Charters – our local plutocrat fan – is flying over.

Thursday Night. Here I am near the bottom of the Irish Sea – this berth of mine is way down in the bowels (if Russ Watkins will excuse the expression) of the ship, so far down that if there was a porthole I'd expect to see Professor Piccard any minute. I would go up on deck only there's a cold wind blowing. Three people who stayed up there too long have

already had to be chopped down and the rest give a tinkling noise when tapped. In the restaurant there is a rowdy group of English soldiers coaxing a Dublin man who is slightly less drunk than they are but only if you don't count the start that Dublin people have on everyone else from birth. They are coaxing him to "sing an Irish song". He obliges with "The Cruiskeen Lawn" in Irish. This is not what they wanted. They express their dissatisfaction. Seemingly they meant one of those fine old Irish ballads like "When Irish Eyes Are Smiling", written by stalwart Irishmen with names like Levinsky and Higginbottom. They accuse him of singing in Russian. He is very indignant.

Here in this cabin the scene is one of the ultimate in human misery. On my left is a man holding his head and groaning softly. On my right someone is being sick at the top of his voice. In front there is a man reading *Fantastic Adventures*. I feel sorry for them all. For a moment I toy with the idea of telling the man in front about the finer things in life, like *Amazing*, but he doesn't have a sensitive fannish face. Besides, for all I know he may be reading *FA* because he prefers it. I hope I'm not shocking anyone by talking of such subjects in mixed company but I have been assured by a well known psychiatrist that such people exist. And, friends, it is not for us to point the fingerbone of scorn at them. These people are more to be pitied than anything else, and after all, let us remember that in Ancient Greece...

But enough of this morbid subject. I go up to the deck above, and pace up and down. This is the blunt end of the ship, but it seems very narrow. I wonder vaguely how wide it is and start pacing it out. (It is time for stern measures.) This is difficult because the deck keeps changing altitude, and I am so engrossed in my work that I bump into a sailor carrying a peculiarly-shaped object like a cross between a model spaceship and a large corkscrew. Curious, I follow him up to the top deck where he goes to the rail and throws the thing into the sea. "Ah well, back to the old drawing board," I think. But no. It seems he had a piece of string tied to it, the cheap skate.

On the other end there is a thing like a voltmeter which he clamps to the rail. It says ELECTRIC SHIP'S LOG. Funny, I thought this was a steamship, and anyone, isn't a ship's log more a book-type thing? But a couple of feet down the string is a wheel and I get the idea. The corkscrew thing in the water twists the string and this turns the wheel and the voltmeter counts the number of turns and thus the distance the ship travels. It seems a crude contrivance. They will have to think up something better for spaceships. The ship is moving all right, but the wheel isn't turning.

The sailor is annoyed. They *do* care sometimes. He gives the revoltmeter a couple of vicious jabs but nothing happens. He calls an officer. The expert hits it a particularly savage blow and the wheel starts to spin round furiously. Naturally – I'd be furious if anyone hit me like that.

About 30 seconds after the sailors have gone away the wheel stops again. Maybe a shark has swallowed the corkscrew thing – a bottlenosed shark maybe. I begin to feel a sense of responsibility for My Ship. Should I go and tell someone? If I do it will undoubtedly have started again by the time they come and I shall look very foolish. If I don't I can visualize the scene in the morning. The Captain wakes up and calls the First Mate. "Mate," he says, "how far have we come?" The Mate dashes up and looks at the log. "We haven't at all," he says. "Bother," swears the Captain foully, "I'd better order FULL SPEED AHEAD." "Oh, sir," protests the Mate, "you promised I could pull the handle and ring the bell the next time." "Oh very well," says the Captain crossly. "But remember, I get to blow the hooter." The Mate dashes up to the bridge and rings the engine room telegraph for FULL SPEED AHEAD. There is a horrible splintering noise as the ship crashes through the Liverpool dock area and piles up in the Fazakerly Road. "And am I to understand, Mr. Willis, that you saw this vital item of ship's equipment out of commission and omitted bringing the fact to the attention of the responsible authorities? I put it to you..."

Before his cross-examination gets any crosser I reach out and give the wheel a little push. To my joy it starts to whirl round again and I relax and look at the view, feeling like a master mariner. Last year it was dark at this time and there was nothing to be seen but a lot of mysterious lights, but this time there's a fine view of the Co. Down coastline and the hills of County. Antrim. It looks rather nice. Out to sea there is distant land which is probably the Mull of Kintyre in Scotland and further out the characteristic outline of the islands in the Hebrides known as the Paps of Jura. They would do Rotsler's heart good. This is the leeward side (hiya Hoffman) of the ship and the deck structure keeps the wind off. It's a super structure. But as the ship ploughs further into the deep water and turns towards the Isle of Man the wind begins to hit us sideways and the ship starts to roll alarmingly. I don't feel so bad about it – maybe I'm getting my sea legs. I would prefer my old flesh and bone ones though, and I decide to turn in.

Friday. I wasn't sick but I didn't sleep much on account of the cold. At about 5:30 the engines begin to stop and start and I know the ship is docking, so I stagger up to the deck about and look out. There is a notice saying PASSENGERS ARE WARNED IT IS DANGEROUS TO PUT

THEIR HEADS OUT OF THE PORTS WHILE THE VESSEL IS DOCKING but I figure it should be all right. I haven't a very long neck and Liverpool is a pretty big port. The only thing I can see is an enormous brick wall about two inches from my nose.

The ship is moving very very slowly – upwards. We are in a lock. After a couple of hours of shuffling backwards and forwards and sideways and up and down the Captain loses patience and in desperation aims his ship at an impossibly narrow space between two massive stone piers, and breaks through to the landing quay. We have arrived. It is, of course, raining. It is always raining in Liverpool. I shuffle down the gangway with my suitcases. "Oh, to be on dry land again," I think, stepping ankle deep into a puddle. I drag the suitcase a couple of hundred yards to the bus stop and sit down to wait a couple of hours for the bus to London. I would like some breakfast, having had nothing but a cup of tea made from bilgewater, but I'm damned if I'm going to carry those suitcases up into the town. But after half an hour the night bus pulls in from London and I take it as far as the depot. There I book my seat on my bus and have hot buttered toast beside the fire in the drivers' canteen. My pleasure is quite spoiled by the thought of all those other passengers huddling in the rain down at the docks. Haw!

At 8:45 we start on the ten hour journey to London. The train does it in three but it costs a lot more than the four dollars the bus people charge for the 200 mile odd journey – return. All day we trundle through the English countryside – Birkenhead, Chester, Birmingham, Kenilworth, Warwick, Stratford on Avon, Oxford – with occasional stops for imports and exports. Soon after 7 we arrived in London where Vince Clarke is waiting to meet me, and where I'll have to break off this account if I'm to meet ShelVy's deadline.

June 1952

Hoaxed!

Fandom is funny. This profound thought comes to me as I notice the way everybody is jumping up and down on Peter Graham for his Willis death hoax, and think of how I've gotten away with some of the things I've done. I pull the collective leg of the Baltimore Science Fiction Forum, and get nice letters from Newton and Clarkson thanking me for the publicity. I satirize Lloyd Eaton's *Rhodigest* booklistings and get an amiable letter from the good doctor himself asking if I might have any of the books in *my* collection. I even poke through the bars of FAPA at the ferocious Laney himself and live to pull the tail. Sometimes I think all my enemies must be lying low until they get me in Chi, and the whole affair is just a gigantic ambush.

But to get back to Peter Graham. I got a postcard from him the other day which I'd like to quote.

> Dear Mr. Willis, ((!))
>
> I wish to offer you my sincere apologies for the card about your death I sent out. It was a stupid, asinine thing to do, and I realize this fully. I am truly very sorry.

That's a handsome enough apology to satisfy me even if I had been sore, but I wasn't. For one thing I thought the pc was quite funny – that bit about the auction being limited to quiet bidding, and the improbable reactions of fandom – and for another I didn't think anyone would have been fooled by it. Though of course I knew I wasn't dead, which may have tended to make me a bit more incredulous about it than most people. And of course I had just been hoaxed by experts – a story which I am now able to tell.

I've been the victim of one of the most cunning and daring plots ever hatched by the mind of fan. Redd Boggs, clear the "Hoax" page in your new edition of *Fancyclopedia*. I still feel like a van Vogt hero discovering that All is Illusion, or like Tucker after his first meeting with Hoffman, but apparently it all started when Mike Wilson, a young member of the London Circle, was conscripted into the Army – and drafted into an M regiment stationed in Northern Ireland. He told this at the White Horse, adding that he meant to look me up when he got over. It was at this point that the fiendishly clever mind of Vince Clarke started ticking over. He know I'd only seen Wilson once, and then at a Convention. He conceived

the audacious idea that Wilson could visit me under an assumed name and pass himself off as a neofan. The masterminds of the London Circle got together and briefed Wilson for hours until he was word-perfect in his role, primed him with all the necessary information, loaded him with equipment and aimed him in my direction.

The result was that one sunny Saturday afternoon while I was lying on the lawn at the tennis club Madeleine brought round a young soldier called "James Wainwright" who had, it seemed, just seen the review of / in the BRE of *Super Science* and was all thrilled to find that there was an organization of people who were interested in science fiction and could I tell him all about these "fans"? He seemed so keen and he had come so far – all the way from Ballymena – that Madeleine hadn't the heart to ask him to wait till I got home. I brought him home and gave him the usual treatment – exposure to *Quandry*, *SFN*, *SFNL*, the *Fancyclopedia* etc. – and so on. And answered his innocent questions, every one of them a deadly trap, painstakingly designed by the fiends of London. During the later counter-intrigue I got my hands on a copy of Vince Clarke's last-minute instructions to his spy, which shows you what I mean.

> OPERATION SHAMROOKIE
> SECRET INSTRUCTIONS
> CHEW UP AND BURN WHEN READ
> ...I'm enclosing the SSS with the / review. THE INFORMATION THEREIN IS ALL YOU KNOW ABOUT WAW.... The great thing to do is keep him off his balance right from the start. Produce that BRE junk pretty quick and offer him a couple as a sub to /. It says in the review that he is giving it for current prozines. When he fetches a copy turn it over with a disappointed expression and say "It's not very big, is it?" You'd expected something like *Amazing*. "Now there's a really *good* magazine." Incidentally I notice SSS only says he publishes it. Ask him some time who edits it. Ask him what promags Bob Shaw and Clive Jackson have appeared in. Ask him does he write himself and if so where he sells.... You've heard of the London Circle (those adverts in *New Worlds*) but you think it's all pros and dealers.... I've changed my mind about the story. I'll send you something. What we want is a couple of hundred words that he can slip into the coming ish. Our aim must be to get you into print as WAW's marvellous discovery that the London Circle has overlooked. It's the sort of thing that would appeal to him. Also we want the story of how WAW welcomes neophyte

> fan and some inner details of the household tricked out with some funny comments.... The ideal we should aim at is a full page spread in the next *SFN* – I WAS A SPY FOR THE LONDON CIRCLE....

Unfortunately I didn't dash into print with my discovery of this new fan, but I could easily have. When he showed me the piece he said he'd written I was delighted. I'd unearthed an amazing new talent! This fragment, small as it was, was really good. Not only that it was fan-type humour, puns and all. Why it might have been written by Vince Clarke! I was so pleased at finding this natural born fan-type critter that the very next day I sent Vince Clarke's own work back to him with an enthusiastic note about my discovery, looking for congratulations!

The next Sunday "Wainwright" came down again, and this time he was even more daring. He had me describe everyone in the London Circle, and listened awed to my replies to his questions about the pro-authors I'd met. Still I didn't suspect. The utter grandeur, the breath-taking scope of the thing, was blinding me. Ghod help me, I even made the laughable suggestion to "Wainwright" that he might be a member of the London Circle in disguise. Honest, I did. Wilson must have got over-confident then – no wonder – and he started making mistakes. One of them was to show me a story that he had written himself. After he'd gone I began to wonder how such a corny thing could have been produced by the Clarke-type piece. One doubt led to another and in a moment I was bathed in a cold sweat. Like a drowning man, everything I'd said in the last couple of days went flashing through my ears.

Bob had left with "Wainwright" but when he came back again I told him my suspicions. He was very relieved. He'd suspected sooner than I had – his artist's eye had remembered Wilson's face – and he'd accused him directly. He'd been given a card signed by Vince specially prepared for such an emergency, calling on him in the name of the great hoaxters of history – Speer. Singleton, Tucker and Hoffman – to keep the secret. Bob and I agreed the best thing to do was to let Vince think everything was going according to plan but to feed Wilson with increasingly false information, leading up gradually to some sensational imaginary event over here about which the London Circle would foolishly rush into print. Bob wrote Vince a conspiratorial letter congratulating him and promising support.

But the London Convention came along then, and I went to stay with Vince for a week of bluff and counterbluff. And then when I came back full of plans I found Wilson was being posted back to London, and we had

to give them all up. Wilson came up one last day as “Wainwright” and we “allowed him” to do a few dirty jobs about the / pressroom and sent him off with a “letter of introduction” to Vince. But it was a poor substitute for the schemes we had. No, we have to admit that those lazy Londoners put it over on us. That time.

August 1952

The Immortal Teacup

1930-1936 *The First Fans; The First Fanzine; The Rise of Northern Fandom; The Beginning of London Fandom.*

One day in 1927, a 15 year old schoolboy called Walter Gillings came upon a peculiar American magazine called *Amazing Stories*, the March 1927 issue, to be exact, featuring "The Green Splotches". This tiny seed of corn did not fall on stony ground. Almost immediately the boy who was to become the most influential figure in British s-f began producing little amateur magazines featuring amateur s-f, anticipating the first American fanzine by more than two years. In 1930 he started the first known British fan group, "The Ilford Science Literary Circle", and was agitating in publishing circles for a British prozine. In both these efforts he was too far ahead of his time and for a few years, his interest subsided.

Gillings had more to contend with than the natural conservatism of publishers. In the 1930s ships coming from America to Britain, carried a lot of ballast in the form of waste paper. For some reason, this paper consisted mostly of remaindered copies of s-f prozines which were sold in Woolworths all over the country at five cents a copy. Naturally home publishers assumed that this competition spoiled their own prospects and the first British prozine had to wait until British fandom organized itself to fight for one. With a branch of Woolworths in every large town, there must have been thousands of people reading s-f pulps every month – I still vividly remember myself going without my lunch and walking home from school with armsful of *ASF* – and it was only a matter of time before they got together. The process was catalysed by the founding of the British Interplanetary Society, in Liverpool, in October 1933, and by the Science Fiction League, introduced in the May 1934 *Wonder*. By 1936, the BIS had members all over the country and there were chapters of the League in Leeds, Nuneaton, Glasgow, Barnsley and Belfast. British fandom was steadily reaching critical mass.

Then, in March 1936, a fanzine appeared. Its name was *Novae Terrae*, and the editors were Maurice Hanson and Denis Jacques, of the Nuneaton SFL. They must have prided themselves on having published the first extra-American fanzine little knowing that their distinction was being stolen under their very noses – literally. While they were hard at work on their fourth issue, a fanzine arrived from New Zealand, published on February 16th. Having carved for themselves this tiny niche in the hall of

fame, New Zealand fandom promptly collapsed, never to be heard of again.

Novae Terrae, on the other hand, published 29 issues before it was translated into Ted Carnell's *New Worlds* in January 1939. In those 35 months it made history. Carnell himself appeared as early as the second issue, in which he began a long and sensational career as a fan columnist with a report on the Hornig-Wollheim/Sykora feuds, for which he had to apologize to everyone, in the fourth issue. Carnell was at that time well known to American fandom, but had not met any English fan. That omission was soon to be repaired. Early in 1936, he got a letter from Les Johnson of Liverpool saying that he and Eric Frank Russell were coming to London on business and perhaps they might see Carnell. Eagerly, he intercepted them at the railway station, and tagged along with them to Gillings's home, where he listened spellbound to exciting news of a proposed British prozine, and a printed fanzine – news which he promptly passed on in *Novae Terrae*. Of the four who met here for the first time, Gillings was to become Britain's first prozine editor, and to remain #1 fan for many years, until supplanted by Carnell. Johnson was constantly active for the next 15 years, and through his dealing business (S.F. Service) was to bring more people into fandom than anyone until Ken Slater (and, incidentally, if anyone recalls my 1951 LonCon Report, was the Liverpool Master of Mimeography, who saved the Convention Programme). and Eric Frank Russell is *the* Eric Frank Russell, still half in and half out of fandom.

In its sixth issue, *Novae Terrae* published its first contribution from an American fan. It was an article by Ackerman about Esperanto, and the controversy it caused is covered very fully – maybe more fully than it deserves – in *The Immortal Storm*. Moskowitz says that Ackerman became unpopular in England on account of this but, really, I don't see how anyone could have harboured much of a grudge against him, after this disarming tailpiece to his reply:

> "In conclusion, just want to warn any other fans reading this – English or otherwise – who for real or imaginary reasons dislike me, that they'd better watch out! 'Cause Ackerman's a ferocious fellow. I go out to KILL my enemies – by making friends of them."

In England, at least, he carried out this threat perfectly. *Novae Terrae* published 9 issues, in the remainder of 1936, and grew immensely in influence, but the editors were only a small group in a small town, and the real leadership passed to Leeds, home of the biggest and most active SFL

chapter in the country. They were now producing a mimeo'd bulletin of their own, they had a permanent clubroom open day and night, and they were making plans for a national Convention. To the north of them, the Barnsley, Glasgow and Belfast chapters showed no life. To the south, there was no organized activity at all beyond Nuneaton. The entire south of England, containing half the population of the country, seemed to have only two active fans. And Gillings was engaged in a grim struggle with publishing firms, and far too busy to intervene in fandom. The position of the Leeds-Nuneaton axis seemed unchallengeable. It would have seemed incredible that within a year, the Leeds group would quickly have split – the Nuneaton group dissolved – the Liverpool group reduced in importance – and that London fandom would not only be publishing *Novae Terrae*, but would also be building the most powerful fan organization the world has yet seen.

And yet, the portents were there, and could have been seen in Carnell's columns. Each of the blows that shook the foundations of Northern fandom was forecast by him with deadly accuracy. It may have been because he was working busily behind the scenes to deliver them, but more probably that he had his ear fixed very firmly to the ground. The Liverpool group was the first to fall. In August Carnell had reported a movement to transfer the BIS headquarters to London and at an historic meeting in Professor Low's office in Piccadilly that October, the deed was done. One Arthur C. Clarke, an old-time B.I.S. member, was appointed treasurer. After the meeting, Clarke, Carnell and Gillings adjourned to a nearby café and London fandom was born.

1937-1939 *The First Convention; The Decline of Northern Fandom-; The Science Fiction Association; The First British Prozine; The Golden Age of London Fandom.*

The world's first Science Fiction Convention was held in Leeds on January 3, 1937. Moskowitz gives that honour to the New York-Philadelphia meeting of October 1936, but that was merely a regional conference *[held in a private house and retroactively declared to be a convention]*. The Leeds event was truly a national convention, and every important fan in Britain was there, except leading fan journalist D.R. Smith of Nuneaton who, like Harry Warner, could never be tempted out of his home town. The visitors included Hanson of *Novae Terrae*, Johnson and Russell from Liverpool and Gillings, Carnell and Clarke from London. At the convention it was agreed to form a new national fan organization, the Science Fiction Association. The head was Meyer of Leeds, the headquarters of the organization were to be in Leeds, and *Novae Terrae*

was to become its official organ. This was the very pinnacle of Leeds's achievement, and almost immediately it began to topple. Rosenblum and other important Leeds fans seceded from the SFA, rather than sever their connections with the American fan organizations, and within a few weeks Gillings was to bring immense prestige to London by producing the first issue of his *Scientifiction – The British Fantasy Review*. And during the rest of 1937 London fandom continued to grow. In September the death knell sounded for the Nuneaton group as Hanson moved to London taking his mimeograph with him. Without him the Nuneaton group faded away, leaving only D.R. Smith as a lone wolf, and the October *Novae Terrae* appeared under the joint editorship of Hanson, Carnell, and Clarke.

Duly heralded by Carnell, a London branch of the SFA was formed, with more founding members than the entire fan population of Leeds; and Carnell was already suggesting that the next convention be held in London. It was. And at it, the executive of the SFA was formally transferred to an all-London committee.

Meanwhile, Gillings had been frantically active. His professionally printed fanzine had served its purpose of convincing a publisher that there was a market for a British prozine and that Gillings was the man to edit it. *Tales of Wonder* duly appeared, and was well received by fandom. The publishers, however, were not quite so happy about it and there was a delay of nine months before the second issue came out. When it did, the publishers promised to go on a quarterly schedule and Gillings promptly abandoned his fanzine for his prozine. *Scientifiction* was taken over by the SFA, who combined it with their year-old *Tomorrow*, which at once went professionally printed.

With this the SFA reached an incredible peak of activity. In addition to *Tomorrow* and *Novae Terrae*, they were publishing a British Science Fiction Bibliography, and two other fanzines – *Amateur Science Stories* and *Science Fiction Gazette* – and supplying their members with numerous services. Their total membership was well over 200 and Wollheim was suggesting that American fandom join the SFA en masse in default of a worthwhile American fan organization. London was the fan centre of the world. It was as if a whole city of fans had suddenly gone nova.

Having become the centre of gravity of British fandom, London became its centre of levity. *Novae Terrae* became the world's first *Quandry*-type fanzine. The influence of its new co-editors became obvious almost at once. Hanson had tended to pomposity in his editorials but it was soon taken out of him, and for the first time *Novae Terrae* began to print the type of material we expect from a good humorous fanzine today –

satire – personalities – wit – parodies – and general fannish humour. When William F. Temple joined the editorial staff halfway through 1938, *Novae Terrae* had in him and Arthur Clarke the most brilliant editorial board of any fanzine ever published, or likely to be. It is a pity that much of the material in *Novae Terrae* isn't suitable for quoting – because it is buried in reviews of forgotten films or books – or skits on half-forgotten stories or fans but I will pick out a few pieces as an appendix to this article.

From *Novae Terrae* August 1938, Second Anniversary Issue. (Excerpt from D. R. Smith's story "In The Grand Manner")

Something glittered on the alien blue-green sward not fifty yards from the ship. Intensely intrigued, all rushed to it.

"Why, it's only a cogwheel" cried Madeleine. Steve gave her a glance from which love and respect were conspicuously absent.

"A left hand helical mitre gear," he said, with emphasis on the last word. "Involute tooth form, helix angle about twelve, ground after hardening," he went on didactically.

"What does all this mean?" cried Madeleine hysterically. Steve regarded her irritably.

"It means I know more about gears than you do."

September 1952

All the other quoted material was by Arthur C. Clarke, whose agents charge high permission fees even for fannish trivia. See Science Fiction Digest *#7 at Fanac.org for omitted text. [Ed.]*

In Defence of the Pun

In the last FAPA mailing but one Harry B. Warner said something so dreadful that I can hardly force my hand to write it down. (Three of my fingers are willing enough, but my thumb and forefinger are opposed.) He said – Ghod forgive him – that the pun was "the simplest and lowest form of humour". Comes the next FAPA mailing and I see that Warner is still alive – by FAPA standards anyway. He has not been struck down. Obviously Simon Salt Peter, patron saint of punsters, has left it to me to warn the Warner, and to prove that the pun is not only the most complex, but the very highest – I might even say the all-highest – form of humour.

1. The Argument from Authority

In the two most famous books in the world, the humour consists almost entirely of puns. Everyone knows that this is so with Shakespeare, but the Bible is an even more striking example. This is not generally regarded as a humorous work – not by Christians anyway – but there is one joke in it, and that joke is a PUN. I refer of course to the famous verse: "Thou art Peter, and on this rock I shall build my church." If I may say so without being impious, this is not a very good pun, but then it has lost in translation. In the original language of course the word for "Peter" meant also a rock or stone – c.f. the Latin "petrus" or the French "pierre". It was on this pun that the whole structure of organized Christianity was based, and on it the Roman Catholic Church maintains its claim to the apostolic succession. Can anyone doubt that the history of Christianity and the Western World would have been very different if Peter's name had happened to be "Sandy"?

Truly, as Ackerman said in the *Fancyclopedia*, "the pun is mightier than the sword", and now that it and it alone of all forms of humour has approval at the very highest level there hardly seems to be any need to look for any other recommendation. I might just point out that puns occur throughout the highest works of English literature, from stray lines like "tread softly, for ye tread on hollowed ground" to the later works of James Joyce which consist almost entirely of puns and wordplay. I might also quote, without looking in any particular direction, the following passage from Fowler's *Modern English Usage*:

> "The assumption that puns are *per se* contemptible... is a sign at once of sheepish docility and a desire to seem superior. Puns are good, bad, or indifferent, and only those who lack the wit to make them are unaware of the fact."

2. The Argument from First Principles

In the "Preface to the Lyrical Ballads" Wordsworth came off with one of those statements so profound that one remembers them all one's life and applies them to every situation. This statement was to the effect that the basis of all aesthetic satisfaction lay in the recognition of similarity in dissimilarity and vice versa. This is very true when you come to think of it, and it might also be an actual definition of the pun. But the pun is not only the most artistic form of humour, it is different in kind and superior to all other types. The origin of laughter, I suggest, is in the savage's abrupt release of breath in relief at the unexpected downfall of a dreaded enemy. The most primitive form of humour is therefore the spectacle of the "boss symbol" slipping on a banana skin, and almost every form of humour is a variant on this. All depend for their effect on the discomfiture of other human beings – mother-in-law jokes, jokes about foreigners, jokes about people at a disadvantage in sexual positions, jokes about deaf people or morons or lunatics. All jokes are more or less sadistic. Think of any joke you know and see how true it is. There are only two exceptions, the shaggy dog story and the pun. Even the shaggy dog story is suspect, because you are enjoying the discomfiture of your audience when they expect a point and find none. This leaves only the pun as the representative of humour in its most advanced and complex form, the very punnicle of civilization.

3. The Argument from Practice

The pun is one of the most genuine forms of humour because it is usually spontaneous. The opportunity comes and passes and only the quickest mind can seize it before it vanishes never to return. It is seldom prefabricated wit. For the same reason it is difficult to quote, because it usually needs an explanation of the circumstances, which spoils the element of surprise. As an illustration take the complaint in *VOM* about the artist who kept defaulting on his obligation to produce a cover. Ackerman's comment was: "He's got ain'ts in his paints." Ackerman kept up for years a barrage of puns like this. Not that he only made good puns.

He made them ALL. But among them were some that deserve to rank with the greatest in history, puns that are remembered not just because they are clever in themselves, but because they add meaning as well as amusement. I would hate to have to choose Ackerman's best pun – it would be a life's work – and otherwise the best example I can give is from a speech by an Irish MP in the late 19th Century. He was making an impassioned attack on Irish absentee landlords when someone shouted "Treason!" Quick as a flash he retorted: "What is treason in England is reason in Ireland, because of the absentee!"

It could be, of course, that he had a confederate in the audience. Most people who like puns have some in reserve that came to them as it were in vacuo, and which they file away in their memory banks to await the appropriate set of circumstances. For instance, the next time I come across one of those old-fashioned washing sets – a jug and bowl on a chest of drawers – I shall say: "Ah, ewers of water and drawers of wood!" And Bob Shaw here brought off a beauty the other day. While staying with friends he asked where the salt was and they told him it was in a jar on the shelf. When he looked the jar had fallen over and the salt spilled out. This was it. The chance of a lifetime! "The salt, dear Brutus," he said, "lies not in the jar, but on our shelves."

1953

Fandom at Sixes and Sevens

or

Some Observations on the Application of Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle and the Laws of Statistical Probability to Phenomena in the Microcosm

A snappy sub-title if there ever was one. Well, don't all sit there with your mouths open. Rise to your feetbones as a token of respect for the new Willis. Farewell to the old playboy Willis, mocker of N3F and other sacred relics. This is the new Willis, Willis the Thinker, striking the serious constructive note with as deadly accuracy as any current fanzine. Show him a Trend like this Seventh Fandom and there he is, right in there analysing.

But before I start dazzling you with Heisenberg and all that stuff which you younger fans can show your parents to convince them that fandom is really an educative hobby and not just a vast Room 770 filled with tight men and loose women, let's see what the real differences are between Sixth and Seventh Fandom. Sixth Fandom, the one that grew around *Quandry* and the Savannah-Belfast axis, was, I think, more fun to be in than any fandom that ever existed before. It was intelligent but not stolid, wacky but mature, lively but not feud-ridden, and sophisticated without being decadent. But what distinguished it more than anything else, I think, was its close-knit and intimate quality. In any fan group between Los Angeles and London you were among friends who thought the same way and appreciated the same allusions. Van Couvering walking through a glass door in Los Angeles or Tucker and Oliver discovering the center of the universe in a bar in Columbus, Georgia, were quite as real events to Belfast fandom as the ceiling falling on Bulmer and Clarke in the Epicentre. Sixth Fandom was coming to be like one of those rare parties at a Convention where you actually succeed in getting together in one room all the people you want to meet and shutting the door against gatecrashers who don't have the password. Unfortunately the people left outside are annoyed, and the longer the party goes on the more of them there are and

the more annoyed they get. They knock the door first, and if they don't get in they start knocking the party. This happened when Lee locked the door to *Quandry* by putting it on a "subscription by invitation only" basis. The word began to go around that *Quandry* was cliquish. Lee didn't mean to be cliquish, her attitude was simply that she could only print so many copies of *Q* and she wanted them to go to people who would appreciate them. The people outside didn't really want that kind of party and if they would have gotten in they might have destroyed it. A fanzine like *Q* is a very personal thing, like a conversation in the editor's house among a group of congenial people. Just as you can't carry on a fannish conversation in the presence of non-fans, at least not with politeness, so Lee couldn't publish the type of fanzine she wanted to publish – and any one person can only produce really well one type of fanzine – if she'd felt that a large number of readers had paid for and were expecting prozine reviews or Ralph Rayburn Phillips artwork or rejects from the lesser prozines or articles about dianetics, flying saucers, the Shaver Mystery or the influence of science fiction on the modern cultural pattern. If she'd taken their money she'd have felt under some kind of obligation to change her fanzine to suit them and we'd have had a *Quandry* that wouldn't really have pleased anyone. Many fanzines try to be all things to all fen and succeed in being nothing much to anyone. *Quandry* tried to appeal to a certain type of fan and succeeded supremely well. This didn't mean it was cliquish any more than fandom itself is cliquish. Fandom seems peculiar and exclusive to the outsider, but anyone whom it appeals to has no difficulty finding his way in. Similarly, any neo who showed signs of being what we thought of semi-seriously as a "true fan" had no difficulty getting copies of *Q*, even if he couldn't afford to subscribe. One of the signs, I used to think sometimes, was that he shouldn't be annoyed by things he didn't immediately understand, like Lee's interlineations. An interlineation is a supremely fannish thing in any case, not meant to be immediately understood but rather to be mysterious, provocative, and tantalizing. The proper attitude is one of baffled fascination, as expressed once in a letter I had from Vince Clarke about *Quandry*'s interlineations ending with the awed sentence, an interlineation in itself, "The dotted ones are the worst." *Quandry*'s interlineations were a particularly good test because usually only people like Tucker or me had any clue to their meaning, and often they were intelligible only to Lee herself. She didn't have any ulterior motive for putting them in – she just liked to baffle people – but I always felt they acted as a sort of charm to ward off the type of person we've all had experience of, who hates things he doesn't understand and resents

people enjoying something he doesn't appreciate.

Now I may be wrong, but I don't think this type of person is going to be any happier about Seventh Fandom than he was about Sixth. He really shouldn't be in fandom at all but at the moment among all the new fans and new faneditors he doesn't notice that he's different. He probably thinks Seventh Fandom as it exists at present is just about ideal. However, as the new fanzines improve and their contributors develop he will find his unimaginative articles more frequently rejected and his dull letters more ruthlessly cut until he resentfully drops out of fandom or into some form of fanac that requires no talent whatsoever. Who remembers now the names of any of the original contributors to *Quandry*? It's my guess that it will be a startlingly short time until accusations are being flung around that Seventh Fandom is "cliquish". Don't forget that it's growing up in an era when the prozines have virtually withdrawn their support from fandom, whereas Sixth Fandom flourished at a time when prozine fan columns were drawing dozens of new people into contact with fandom every month. The only thing that's delaying the development of Seventh Fandom is the fact that the leaders are mostly new fans and don't know each other very well yet. The impulse towards "cliquishness" is there all right, as witness the gallant attempts of Cantin and Wells etc. at fannish fiction and satire, but who knows enough yet about the personalities of Nydahl, Touzinsky, Olsen, Mittlebuscher, Stewart, Wells, Grennell, Magnus, etc. to be able to write entertainingly about them?

No, I don't think Seventh Fandom is essentially different in character from Sixth; it's just at an earlier stage of development into a fully self-sufficient fandom, just emerging from the serious constructive chrysalis. What is really unusual about it is that it's the first fan trend to be fully selfconscious. This is all due to Bob Silverberg and his speculations about the "Seventh Fandom" that would follow the folding of *Quandry*. They were still fresh in everyone's mind when Sixth Fandom was struck down at the height of its achievement by a series of coincidences. Lee Hoffman fulfilled one of her lifelong ambitions by buying a horse and suspended *Q* while she galloped happily round the Savannah countryside, the first fan ever literally to leave fandom on a high horse. Max Keasler got caught up in examinations. Shelby Vick took a long-scheduled rest. Several other prominent fans gave up or slackened their fanac for unrelated reasons. I caught pneumonia and had to give up fanning altogether for some months. The back cover had hardly fallen off the last issue of *Q* when a horde of new fans started rampaging about under the banner of "Seventh Fandom". Wells called his fanzine the herald of it. Dave Wood was running about the

London Convention with a beanie marked “Seventh Fandom” at almost the same moment as someone else was doing the same thing at Indian Lake. There were grave exhortations from columnists in the new fanzines that “Now is the time to seize power”.

Well, you know, fandom is too small to be able to do this sort of thing without repercussions. If I may introduce old Heisenberg now, who has been waiting patiently in the wings all this time, he proved that the movements of any particular electron, just like those of any particular person, cannot be predicted with certainty. It is not inevitable that a kettle should boil instead of freeze when you put it on the stove, it is merely highly probable. It’s highly probable only because there are so many electrons involved. In the same way, every man and woman has free will, and yet statisticians can predict exactly the number of them that will get married in a year or throw themselves off high buildings or do something equally foolish. But the predictions are only valid if the community is large and if the predictions don’t themselves influence the phenomena. In a small community, for instance, the men and women might get sore at the statistician’s smug prediction that 13.647% of them would get married during the year, and make his face red by living in sin until New Year’s Day.

If Seventh Fandom had kept quiet about itself and just sneaked imperceptibly onto the fannish scene as its predecessors did, nobody would have realized that we were at a crucial moment in fan history. Sixth Fandom would have faded quietly away without its leaders knowing a thing about it. But its exit was accompanied by such a fanfare of trumpets announcing the arrival of Seventh Fandom that everyone looked back to see what was happening. The result was that some of them started to come back, partly because they hated to think that Sixth Fandom should perish altogether, and partly to show that they were free agents and not cogs in the wheels of some historical cycle. Bloch wrote uncharacteristically sombre letters bewailing the change that was coming over fandom, Tucker in FAPA looked to British fandom to carry the torch, Lee Hoffman revived *Q* if only on an if-and-when basis, and I’m just waiting till the autumn to plunge back into the mailstorm of fan publishing.

It’s possible that we might all have a lot to thank Bob Silverberg for. Hitherto eras in fandom were rather like the civilizations in Asimov’s “Nightfall”. A fandom would rise, flourish, and then suddenly collapse in ruins. There is a period of chaos, with the survivors eking out a precarious existence in the ruins or retiring to the Shangri-La of FAPA, until a new fandom is built up slowly and painfully from nothing. Take the *Spacewarp*

era. Rapp's fandom seemed solid, rooted in strength. Then came the Michigan Bomb Plot, Rapp's enlistment, the climax of the last *Warp* presided over by the ghoul-like Insurgents, and then the dark ages again, the columnists, contributors and readers of *Warp* dispersed to the four winds. Then the age of chaos, with watchers peering into the darkness at each little flash of light in case it is a new dawn. The awakening of interest as it is gradually realized that *Quandry* is the new hope. The gradual building up of *Quandry*'s sphere of influence to restore all the *Spacewarp* heritage, culminating in the recall of Burbee and Laney from the wilderness of Los Angeles, and simultaneously the conquest of new territories – The Outlanders, British fandom, etc. and the rediscovery of legendary ones like Tucker and Bloch. Until finally the new civilization contains not only everything that made the old one great but a lot more besides. But at what a cost of time and effort. No one can assess the talent lost and the opportunities missed in that long period of transition. Bob Silverberg may have given fandom as a whole the all-important faculty of "time-binding", the ability to pass on accumulated knowledge and experience from one generation to the other. It's possible that Seventh Fandom may build directly on the legacy of Sixth Fandom, assimilating its survivors and building with them a greater fandom than any before.

1953

Introduction to The BeaCon

"The BeaCon" was James White's report for Hyphen *#4, October 1953, on US fan and editor Bea Mahaffey's 1953 journeys in Ireland (including a visit to the Willises) before the London convention later dubbed the Coroncon. Walt Willis wrote the following prologue to the White report. [Ed.]*

Stopping only for the usual reasons, and to send a postcard to Robert Bloch from Birr, Co. Offaly, reading simply "It's cold", Madeleine and I arrived in Limerick by nightfall. Next morning, having bought some postcards for Bea to send to her limerick collecting friends, we set out for the airport.

We were a little late because I'd had trouble manoeuvring the car safely out of the hotel garage – I'd only just learned to drive and the car belonged to my father-in-law who knows the history of every tiny scratch on the paintwork and keens over them individually every night – but we arrived in time. Only to find that my baleful influence over all forms of American public transport extends to their transatlantic airlines – Bea's plane would be two hours late. I went back to park the car properly in case one of the big ones ran over it, and we hung about hoping desperately that the weather would clear so that Bea would have a good first view of Ireland and that we'd be able to see her plane coming in. At about one o'clock, as we were scanning the sky keenly towards the West, a fitful sun came out and an aircraft landed from the direction of Constantinople. On the distant tarmac an apparently endless stream of people got out of the Consternation, as from a taxi in an early Mack Sennett comedy, but none of them looked like Bea though we waved at everyone just in case. Even when she came into the arrival lounge I didn't recognize her. She had changed. She was wearing a blue costume instead of the black dress she'd worn in Chicago. Also, she had put her hair up and was wearing glasses. Furthermore she had an American accent I'm sure she didn't have the last time I was talking to her. But it was Bea all right – I recognized the little mannerism she has of extending her left hand daintily in front of her, palm upwards as if she were patting a very large dog or gently repulsing the advances of a very small fan.

Over coffee we talked nervously in the atmosphere of tension that pervades airports and railway stations – people feel they are missing

something all the time – and then we led the way to the car, warning Bea not to trip over it. I drove assuredly along the broad concrete road and past a notice marked ALL VEHICLES TURN LEFT AND STOP. Unaccustomed to being a vehicle or to obeying notices for which there seemed no obvious reason I kept right and went straight on. There was a frenzied wail and a Customs policeman dashed out of his hut like a sabre-toothed tiger out of its cave. I stopped the car, switched off the engine, and listened miserably to his stern reproaches. Useless, I thought to myself, to explain to Bea that this little corner of easygoing Ireland must have been contaminated by foreign efficiency seeping from the airport – she must be terribly disappointed, However as we drove off again Bea, always the soul of tact, said happily, “He was MUCH nicer than a Chicago policeman.”

Things hadn’t gone very well so far, but the sun came out as we neared Ennis, Co. Clare, and we thought we might have a picnic. We bought a couple of pounds of steak in Ennis and stopped at the entrance to the grounds of Loughcultra Castle a few miles further on. I got out the primus stove and started to light it. Ten minutes and twenty matches later I declared that the resources of modern science had been defeated, and began to gather wood. I had a nice fire going and the tender promise of steak was beginning to pervade the air, when it started to rain. Almost immediately afterwards it began to pour. The fire was obviously losing ground. We put everything back in the car except the fire and the steak, donned raincoats, and sallied forth again to fight for our existence like primaeval man. Madeleine cooked, I prowled about looking for dry fuel, and Bea crouched gallantly on the grass holding an umbrella over the fire. Well, I thought ruefully, at least it must be a change from New York.

However she seemed to enjoy the experience nearly as much as the steak, and we set off again. It was really raining now, with a determination worthy of a better cause. Nothing was to be seen but an occasional picturesque ruin by the side of the road. With vague memories of a hastily leafed-through guidebook, we authoritatively identified as gazebos all the ones that weren’t big enough to be monasteries or castles, until Bea was tactless enough to ask what a gazebo was. After that we merely pointed them out as picturesque ruined Things.

From Galway we took the road into the wilds of Connemara, through Oughterara and Maam Cross, and at Recess branched off on the mountain road by Lough Inagh to Kylemore. It was not a good road, even by Irish standards, though sometimes we hit up to 10 mph. Many of the most scenic roads in Ireland are like this, and I suspect it’s a deliberate policy of the Irish Tourist Board’s. Ireland is a small country, and they have to spin

it out.

The clouds were lifting now, and we could see the lower slopes of the mountains towering dramatically into the mist. About nine o'clock we reached Kylemore, a faery-like Gothic castle on the brink of a sheltered little lake. (The grounds also included two more lakes, a mountain range, and several hundred acres of woods.) I slowed the car on the entrance drive at the point where you see between the trees the castle mirrored in the lake and, just as I'd been subconsciously blaming myself for the rain, took as much pride in the fabulous thing as if I'd built it myself. I'd wanted to get Bea here for the first night after her long and hectic journey because it's the most restful as well as one of the most beautiful places in Ireland. Admittedly the bus from Galway now passes the gate-lodge twice a week instead of once, but in spite of this hectic onrush of civilization the people seem to have all the time in the world. As we waited for them in the huge panelled entrance hall with its great oak staircase and gallery it occurred to us, being fans, what a wonderful place it would be for a convention; and after we'd been shown to our rooms Bea called us delightedly down the corridor to look at hers. "Look," she said, pointing into the enormous interior, "Four beds!" It was the clincher. We decided to start a campaign for Kylemore in '54 and next morning sent poctsarcds to Tucker and Bloch pointing out among other things that they hadn't really lived until they'd dropped bags of hot water from a *battlement*.

But I'd better get on if you're to meet James on page 5. Actually nothing much happened during the next two days except that we had a lot of fun and saw a lot of scenery. We toured through Leenane, Westport, Castlebar, Ballina, Sligo (with a detour to Lough Gill to show Bea the Lake Isle of Innisfree), Bundoran and Ballyshannon, and at noon on Sunday we were parked in the market square of Donegal Town looking out for James's bus.

While we're waiting for him maybe I'd better explain a couple of the allusions in his report.

First, all this talk about people trying to poison him doesn't mean that he's got a persecution complex. The fact is that many years ago in an over enthusiastic endeavour to emulate H.G. Wells he acquired a mild form of diabetes. The result is that sugar doesn't agree with him. As Bob explained it once, soon after James takes sugar his temperature drops and he gets stiff all over. This is known as rigor mortis.

Then there's the reference to the "guilty secret" under the bonnet of our car. I should explain that the designers of the Morris Minor Car have in their infinite wisdom provided a space among the intricacies of the

engine just large enough to accommodate a tea-kettle. However surprisingly few people know what this space is for. This ignorance of the finer points of automobile design extends to the garage attendant in Collooney, Co. Sligo, where we stopped for oil. The youth opened the bonnet and stood for a moment transfixed with astonishment. You could see him reviewing in his mind all his knowledge of the various types of internal combustion engine and associated machinery. This apparatus did not seem to be connected to anything, but he thought he knew what it was. Coming to a decision he sidled round to my window and dropped his voice confidentially. “Do you know,” he asked tactfully, “that you have a kettle underneath your carburettor?”

“Yes,” I admitted with manly frankness, “I do”; and drove off amid giggles and a flood of jokes about Mavericks, stray kettle, and steering.

But here is James now....

October 1953

How to BNF Without Tears

At this title I suppose there will be a howl of derision from the Neofans in the audience. (If there are any, that is; Neofans are as rare as ladies over forty.) What, they will shout with indignation, has a bloated BNF to complain about, compared with the wretched Neofan?

Very well, let's consider a day in the life of this wretched Neofan. Brighteyed, the little fellow wakes early, listening for the tread of the postman. His ears are so sensitive to this faint sound that he will leap out of bed, every nerve quivering, when the man is a hundred yards away... whereas before he became a fan a whole battery of alarm clocks barely fluttered an eyelid. (Observe, parents, how the manly and educative hobby of fandom not only improves the mind, but sharpens the senses. No other hobby can make this claim.) While he waits he takes from under his pillow that wonderful letter he got yesterday and rereads it for the 85th time, savouring every intoxicating word. "Saw your letter in *Peri*," it says, "Wasn't bad." Such adulation! What egoboo!

He has read it only fifteen times more when he hears the nerve-shattering sound of the postman's rubber heels rounding the corner at the end of the street. He dashes downstairs, but waits behind the door. He fancied the postman looked at him a trifle oddly the last time he met him half way down the street in his pyjamas. It may have been only because it was snowing at the time, but all the same he doesn't want to run the slightest risk of offending the postman.

Instead he lifts the flap of the letterbox and peers through. He does this more cautiously than he did yesterday, when he got the morning paper shoved halfway down his throat. Some mornings the postman passes callously by, and the whole day is ruined. All that is left is to watch him despairingly out of sight in the hope that he'll realize his mistake and turn back; and then go back to bed full of a black hatred for the inefficient bureaucrat and the people who are getting his mail. But this morning the postman, that great-hearted and intelligent public servant, undoes the latch on his garden gate and comes up the path. The Neofan gazes hungrily at the bundle of letters in his hand, trying to guess how many of them are worthless trash and how much is real fan-type mail. Then he retreats hastily into the hall. One day last week the postman wondered why he wasn't hearing any sound of the letters hitting the floor inside, and peered through the letterbox himself. Guiltily the Neofan remembers the

unfortunate man's scream when he saw a pair of gleaming eyes two inches from his own staring at him from the darkened porch. So he lets the letters hit the ground before he pounces upon them. There are no less than three this morning – oh joy! But bitter disappointment supervenes. The first two are heartless frauds. No one can estimate the hate that rages in fannish hearts for football pool promoters and detergent manufacturers.

But the third is a real letter. He tears it open. It's from Ken Potter himself! The Great Man writes, with a truly democratic lack of condescension and what looks like the burnt end of a wax match; "Liked your letter in my last issue. If you want to try an article I might consider it for publication in my next magazine."

Fame! Glory! Immortality! Never taking his eyes off the letter, the Neofan floats upstairs, into his clothes, and eventually off to work or school. Here he spends the whole day in an ecstatic daydream in which he turns over in his mind polished phrases and pungent epigrams for The Article. It will set fandom by the ears. It will make history. Fearless, trenchant, outspoken, it will make his name ring through fandom. That evening he writes it out and sends off the eighth version, special delivery, registered. Then to bed to count the days that will elapse until publication, every one to be filled with the delicious pleasures of anticipation.

Consider now a day in the life of the BNF. He too is driven from pillow to post, but since he was up to two o'clock in the morning finishing an article he had promised for ten days ago, the postman has to knock twice to waken him. He staggers down the stairs, observing with a sinking feeling that the porch is covered with a layer of various sized envelopes. Kicking them aside he opens the door to see what the confounded man is still knocking about. It is three more letters from America on which excess postage is due. He totters upstairs for the money, wishing that American fans knew as much about their postal regulations as he does. Then he gathers the mail off the floor, looks at the return addresses, and stacks it on the hall table while he goes to shave. Judging by some of those names it'd be safer to have the razor out of his hand before he opens their letters.

Later, fortified by his first cup of tea, he nerves himself to start on the mail. Some of it he can put to one side without opening. A complimentary copy of a US prozine, for instance. It was nice when he began to get free issues, but his conscience demands that he send a letter of comment on each one, and he hasn't had time to read last month's yet. Some of the letters are from his friends, and he puts those in his pocket to be enjoyed later. Some are from self-appointed enemies, and he puts those aside until he feels stronger. The rest are from Neofen. Some of them want

subscriptions to his fanzine. Some want information. Some want material for their fanzine. Nearly all of them are rude. He wonders for the hundredth time why so many Neofen are rude. Probably each of them thinks that all the other Neofen write servile, adulatory letters, and that the BNF receiving this refreshing piece of impoliteness will be so impressed with the writer's fine independence of spirit that he will fall over himself to cultivate his acquaintance. He puts the letters aside and starts on the fanzines, opening the right staples with unerring instinct and a nail file. Some interesting first issues, one containing an article by himself. Part of it is almost legible, and contains only 15 typos. Hello, here's a copy of Potter's latest magazine, and there's an article about himself by some Neofan. Oh dear. It's one of those fearless, trenchant and outspoken ones, resounding with phrases like "not afraid to criticize"... "high and mighty BNF"... "egoboo-sated"... "over-rated"... "the so-called Big Names".... He wonders for the hundredth time why so many Neofen think that the way to the top is by pulling other people down. More trouble.

Now, on the way the BNF handles this mail depends whether he shall stay in fandom or retire suffering from chronic disenchantment like so many others. To a certain extent it also, which is more important, determines the future of fandom itself. And this is a responsibility that some BNFs take quite seriously; some of them spend more than half their time dealing with Neofen. Since their names and addresses are widely known they are the first contact many potential fans have with fandom, and in addition their reactions to new fanzines carry undue weight. So I am going to suggest some rules which you might consider following when you become a BNF. (All that is necessary to become a BNF is to maintain a reasonably energetic standard of fanactivity for approximately two years.)

Fanzines. You won't be able to comment on them all, but try to comment on as many first issues as you can, and always find something to praise. Of course you might get a sarcastic letter back saying the faned knows his zine was lousy and you must have damned bad taste. This has happened more than once to me, but never mind, you may have given just that necessary encouragement to some budding Lee Hoffman. No first issue is a true criterion of a faned's worth. Bob Tucker's first fanzine was by all accounts one of the worst ever published.

Requests for material. Here you'll have to select the fanzines that look most promising, and most congenial to your style of writing. And of course you will have to consider yourself. Absence of typos, promptness of publication, presence of reader's letter section for egoboo, and so on. But there are a couple of general rules. First, never write for a hectoed

fanzine. They have no future, and the sooner the editor realizes it the better for him and everyone else. Besides, their circulation can't be more than a few dozen, so you're wasting your time. Second, never write for a first issue. Most first issues are never published, most of those that are published are illegible, and most of those never see a second issue. Let the editor prove himself first. If he can't produce a first issue single-handed in the fine old tradition he can't have the vocation to make a good faned. (There are exceptions to this rule, of course, as when you know the editor well enough to have confidence in him, or he knows you have just embezzled the Trans-Atlantic Fan Fund and have booked your passage to South America.)

Letters. Always be polite and kind to Neofans. The usual result of this is that the ones who wrote you a polite first letter, write a second just as rude as the usual first one, but that's because they are trying too hard to be fannish geniuses. Persevere and usually they begin to write naturally and may turn out to be quite nice people.

Feuds. Humorous attacks on you should be encouraged – they add to the interest of fandom, rank as egoboo, and might give you something to write about. Malicious attacks should be ignored, unless they're from another BNF. If there is some misunderstanding you feel should be corrected, write a short mild letter to the editor of the fanzine that printed it. Don't make it long, or faneds will use this as a means of getting material; and don't be vicious or you'll be accused of bullying. Humorous remonstrance is the right approach, if you can manage it. It's hard though, for while egoboo soon loses its effect on a BNF, malice always hurts.

If you exercise never-failing tact, be kind and helpful to everyone and preserve a high level of fanactivity, you may be able to maintain your position in fandom without losing ground – until Convention time. This will be your worst hour of tribulation. It's hard for a BNF, especially if he's normally rather a shy person, to remember that for these two days every year he is a celebrity and must try to master the technique. Everything you do will be noted, misunderstood and held against you in the Conreports. If you spend your time with another BNF you will be accused of monopolizing him/her or being monopolized, depending on which of you is the more famous. If you stay quietly among your own friends you will be accused of cliquishness. If you run around introducing yourself to people you will be accused of conceit. If you just sit quietly you will be accused of being aloof and stuck up.

The only really satisfactory way of coping with Conventions is to stay away, following the precedent set by oldtime BNFs D.R. Smith in England

and Harry Warner in America. But if you feel you must go wear a false beard. Unfortunately this method is now impossible for British Conventions, on account of the danger of being torn to pieces by bloodthirsty provincials in mistake for Bert Campbell. Frankly, I don’t know what the answer is for British Conventions now. I suppose the only thing to do is keep in the background as much as possible, while grinning vaguely at everyone all the time. In other words try to remain only half aloof from the proceedings. It may not be as successful as the old method, but... er... half aloof is better than no beard.

April 1954

The Lost Planet

Turning to another serious subject, I'm getting worried about 13th Fandom. It all started when I began to follow the serial *The Lost Planet* on Children's Television. Now I wouldn't like you to think that I habitually watch children's programmes: actually I never bother to look at them except when they have *Sooty* or *Muffin the Mule* or *Whirligig* or *Jack in the Box* or *The Bumblies* or *Billy Bean & His Funny Machine* or something like that.

No, it's just that my 7-year old daughter Carol knows I'm a science fiction fan and every other Saturday afternoon as I am sitting peacefully in the attic waiting for correction fluid to dry she comes storming up the stairs screaming "Daddy! *The Lost Planet*! What you're intressed in! SPACESHIPS!" and I have to run downstairs so as not to disappoint her. I already feel guilty enough about the handicap I'm placing on the child by being a fan. You see, poor Carol hasn't yet realized that there is anything wrong with our household. She thinks that everything that happens here is part of normal family life. The other day for instance one of her little friends asked what the pile of paper was in the corner. "Those are fanzines, silly," said Carol. And only last week I cringed to hear her loftily correct another little girl who'd mentioned her mother's badminton racquet. "It's ghoodminton," explained Carol, "and you play it with a piece of cardboard."

However, as I was saying, I go down and watch this *Lost Planet* thing. The lost planet is called Hesikos and people are always tearing backwards and forwards between it and Lime Grove. Every single trip is good for a whole half hour programme. I don't mind this so much... after all they've built a spaceship set that must have cost every penny of 16/9d and they're entitled to get their value out of it... but it's the way they do it. First the daddy-scientist gives the crew a long but inaccurate lecture on the principles of space flight as misunderstood by the author of the programme, one Angus McVicar. McVicar's acquaintance with astronautics evidently stopped short at a period when spaceships were shot from guns, because there is a great deal about something called "escape velocity". Meanwhile the cast just stand around in tense attitudes: either McVicar has never heard of acceleration couches or the BBC's budget won't run to them.

After explaining carefully how important it is that they start off at

exactly the correct moment, the scientist launches into the ritual count, ending dramatically with "...two... one... FIRE THE ATOMIC MOTORS!" Nothing happens. The scientist looks furtively sideways. The camera pans slowly to an enormous switch, like what you see in a signalman's cabin. A hand appears at the bottom lefthand corner of the screen. It creeps stealthily up to the switch, pauses, and then begins to pull the handle down. It is like nothing so much as an aged crone operating the village pump. The same drill is gone through with "FIRE THE ATOMIC JETS!" with the addition of sirens and rows of coloured lights. Finally someone kicks the camera – I expect they have a little plate on it marked "Kick here for spaceship take-off" – and we know they've left the ground... by now, I would estimate, a mere 20,000,000 miles off course.

Now the scientist, undaunted, shouts "FIRE THE ROTATORY JETS!" Two burly technicians lift the camera and turn it round a couple of times, while the cast waggle their cheekbones and bare their teeth. Then they all come right way up again, having saved the BBC a fortune in piano wire, and things go back to normal. Normal, that is, for tv spaceships. Something is continually going "Plank! Plank!" (maybe it's Plank's Constant), something else is going "Plink. Plonk.", and every now and then something else goes "Ponnngggg!" It is like nothing so much as a Les Paul record played very slow. We are now in outer space. We have a brief view of the star-studded velvet of space, like a handful of Ted Tubb stories scattered carelessly across an agent's desk, the ritual encounter with meteors and failure of the oxygen apparatus, and we have arrived in the vicinity of Hesikos.

Now this is the part that worries me. The scientist starts shouting "1,000 feet! 900 feet! 800 feet..." The cast is hanging onto stanchions and things and waggling their cheekbones fit to bust. They look horrible. The picture of Hesikos in the visiscreen waggles about alarmingly. Poor Carol is sitting on the edge of her chair with all her fingers in her mouth. The scientist cries "50 feet!", there is a deafening crash, and someone kicks the camera halfway across the studio. The cast throw themselves all over the place, bits fall off the set and there is a horrible splintering noise in the background like delicate equipment and bones being ground to atoms. It is like a climax in the *Goon Show*. Then, when everything has more or less settled down and I'm about to start a letter to the BBC complaining about showing this stuff to children instead of happy little pieces like *1984*, the scientist emerges from the debris, crawls towards the camera and gasps: "We have landed safely on Hesikos!"

Frankly, I don't believe it. The entire stern of that rocket is obviously

crushed to powder and all the crew are dying from dreadful internal injuries. Carol is no fool either; no doubt she gives the scientist credit for being brave, but if that is his idea of a safe landing she doesn't want any part of it. She must by now be quite convinced that not only are spaceships an extremely dangerous means of transportation, but that they are manned by incompetent morons who don't even know when they're fatally injured. But what is she going to think when she realizes that they don't even exist yet except in the imagination of her deluded parents?

March 1955

Harping on the Past

For the Jack Speer tribute issue of *Fanhistory*

Once upon a time... well, just over two years ago if we have to be specific... fandom was a dark and howling waste through which roamed savage hordes proclaiming themselves, with weird guttural cries, to be something called, “Seventh Fandom”. These strange creatures are now extinct and perhaps it is worth considering possible reasons as to why they perished so ignobly. There are, of course, the statements of the last two surviving leaders – one to the effect that they succumbed to compound fractures of the groin inflicted by the kneecap of mad dogs, and the other to the effect that they were all an elaborate hoax – but I think we can disregard these as being anatomically and logically impossible, respectively. No, the real reason they died, it seems to me, was that like the mule they had neither pride of ancestry nor hope of posterity.

To assure its continuance in the present, fandom must preserve its link with the past. I think it was one Jack Speer who first pointed out that at any one time fandom depends for its existence on a mere handful of people, and if these were to leave it simultaneously fandom could perish. This very nearly happened in 1953, and it’s up to us to do what we can to assure it doesn’t happen again. Like any other civilization, fandom depends on timebinding – the passing on from generation to generation of accumulated knowledge and experience – and this present series of fanhistories is an example I’m proud to be associated with. Incidentally, all this may seem pretty highflown talk about a little old thing like sf fandom, but I subscribe to the Burbee-Ashworth dictum that “Fandom is a Goddamn good hobby” and I’m ready to go to quite a lot of trouble to preserve it. Just as a game is only enjoyable if you play it according to the rules, so any pleasure like fandom is worth taking seriously within its own limitations. This is not to say that the game or the pleasure has any intrinsic importance outside itself: though it could be argued that anything that gives pleasure is pretty damned important.

But to get back to our argument. It seems to me that fancestor worship strengthens fandom all the way through. First, it retains and restores the interest in fandom of older fans; it is interesting and pleasant

to them to be looked up to and written about. Conversely the seventh-fandom attitude of brash contempt for the past only alienates them and drives them into gafia. Such neofen are the prime reason BNFs retire into FAPA. If they only realized it they are selling their own birthright, because fancestor worship can make fandom a more attractive prospect for a neofan. Not only could they have BNFdom to aim at, but immortality. Finally, integration with the past increases the interest of fandom for everyone, by widening its field of reference in time as well as space.

About this last point, way back in 1953 I was crying this message despairingly into the wilderness, and amplifying it with *The Enchanted Duplicator* (first product of Serious Constructive Insurgentism, whose tenets I touched on above), the *Hyphen* of those days with the lighthouse symbol on the bacover, and the reprint supplement. About that, Anglofan Archie Mercer once wrote in to complain bitterly. What was the point, he enquired, of reviving these old esotericisms when it was all he could do to keep up with the present-day ones?

Well, of course Archie had a point. It's already almost impossible for one person to know all the intricacies of fandom, from the First Staple War to the misadventures of Courtney's boat, from Van Couvering's glass door or Harmon's wooden one to Jan Jansen's luminous porridge. But so what? It's just as impossible for one person to know everything about human history, but that's no argument for turning our backs on it. It just makes it more interesting, like a bran-tub with an infinite number of prizes.

Besides, it's not the mere collection of items of information that's important, so much as the attitude of mind. Someone said once that education consists not in knowing things, but in knowing where to look them up. Taking that in the widest sense, it's profoundly true. The mind of a really educated person is not a box full of hard little facts, but a sort of growing tree which can accept them like soil and transform them into an organic unity. In the process the facts get a bit blurred, but while he might not know whether Columbus sailed the ocean blue in 1492 or 1462, he does have a pretty good idea of how important it was.

And if you can think of a better build-up to apologizing for not really knowing much about Jack Speer I wish you had told me about it before hand. Seriously though, I don't claim to be an educated person, but I suppose I know as much about Fandom as most people....and yet if I was faced with an examination paper with questions like what year did Speer enter fandom, how many fmz did he publish and so on, I should probably not get a pass. On the other hand I seem to me to know quite a lot about Speer in some other more important way. I don't mean the big things that

everybody knows about – FAPA, the *Fancyclopedia* – but the sort of person he is and the kind of influence he had on fandom.

As for the latter, he was one of the few great fans who were able to synthesize in himself the sercon and the fannish attitudes and fandom has been the better for him. It's been quite a while since he was active, and yet his influence on present-day fandom – on you and me – is still immense. I don't know about you, but in our group we have a standard indoctrination course for neofen and one of the two most important items, the crucial tests, is the *Fancyclopedia*. As for Speer the person, I have quite a vivid picture of him, built up from a lot of half remembered quotations and anecdotes. None of them sufficiently precise or evocative to be quoted, but all adding up to a firm impression that Jack Speer is someone I'd very much like to meet. I hope you'll feel the same after reading this magazine which is published as a tribute to one who made fandom more worthwhile for all of us.

February 1956

Sporting Supplement

SENSATIONAL DEFEAT OF CHAMPION IN TITLE BOUT STOP
WORLD RECORD SMASHED BY NEWCOMER STOP

Belfast, 10th February 1957.

Your Sporting Correspondent, Walt Willis, reporting:

In a titanic struggle at Oblique House this afternoon, John Berry, recently declared winner of the George Charters Memorial Ghoodminton League Shield for 1956, and holder of the World Tea Drinking Championship, was decisively defeated for his latter title by a comparatively unknown challenger, Don Allen of England and the R.A.F. The previous world record of 11½ cups, set up by Berry in his match last year with Larry Shaw of the United States, was shattered by Allen, who drank no less than 24 cups.

The match opened without incident, except for a mild protest by Berry that his cup was convex whereas Allen's was concave, but the adjudicators ruled that the difference was not substantial and the contest should proceed. Berry, quietly confident, proceeded to build up what appeared to be a commanding lead by drinking ten cups in rapid succession, when his rival had drunk only four. Allen, known to be a novice in big time tea drinking, appeared to be daunted, and some of the spectators thought the contest was over. However, he kept drinking quietly away and eventually reached a total of nine. Berry then boldly drank two more cups, thereby breaking his own world record and appearing to put the issue beyond doubt. Allen, however, continued his steady progress and shortly started on his own twelfth cup. In another desperate attempt to finish off his challenger, the champion dramatically drowned three cups in as many minutes. The attempt was unsuccessful, for the Gateshead boy continued his remorseless attack and again approached Berry's total. At this point the local lad appeared to panic, resorting to a series of crafty subterfuges designed to shake the visitor's morale. Repeatedly he drew ahead in killing two or three-cup spurts, and then would stagger up and down the room in a crouching position, alternately groaning in agony and simulating the noise of running water, and otherwise attempting to induce discomfort in his rival by auto-suggestion. Allen however, showed real big match temperament by remaining unmoved in his seat except when rising without apparent effort to replenish his cup.

As the contest became increasingly grim, however, Berry sat down and, propping himself up on the sofa with cushions and opening his dress, made a valiant effort to fight off this deadly onslaught by sheer tea-drinking ability. The feelings of the crowd, which had formerly favoured Allen as the underdog, now tended to swing to Berry, who was showing the sheer guts which had brought him to the top in the tea-drinking game.

At this crucial point Allen himself applied psychological pressure, sipping his tea ostentatiously with a spoon and evincing every evidence of genuine enjoyment. The climax came when Allen, putting down his 23rd cup, licked his lips thirstily end said, “Ah. That was good. I fancy another cup.” This was too much for Berry, who broke and retired from the contest. Allen proceeded to drink the decisive 24th cup amid scenes of great excitement, and was declared the winner on pints.

Interviewed afterwards, Allen modestly ascribed his success to training on NAAFI tea. Berry handsomely conceded defeat, sportingly making no reference to the difference in shape of the cups, which many influential figures in the tea-drinking world have since suggested might well have been decisive in a contest of this length. He said however that he had seriously underestimated his opponent. He was going into strict training and hoped the promoters would fix a return match shortly.

Four pints of milk were consumed during the contest, supplied by the Co-Op Dairies. The tea used was H&S First Grade and the preparation was in the experienced hands of Madeleine Willis.

March 1957

Sound the Anti-Tocsin!

Friends, have you ever felt persecuted, wronged, the victim of a vast secret conspiracy against you? You have? Well, you were quite right, and you can tell your psychiatrist I said so and ask for your money back. (If you get it, tell some other psychiatrist about him.)

But let's take this gradually, because this is too shattering a revelation to be faced all at once. Have you ever heard or read a phrase, a sentence in some book, or overheard conversation which lodged in your mind like a tiny poisoned dart? You scarcely notice it at the time, but it festers there dully, spreading, growing, until – aaagggh! One night you awake screaming with a monster in your mind, full grown. It happened to Dean Grennell one quiet Saturday afternoon, as he was half listening to a sports commentator discussing the prospects for the day's football games: the voice ambled along innocuously on the threshold of consciousness, and then suddenly tripped over it with the unforgettable words, "No upsets are expected." Poor Dean. His fine, delicately adjusted mind has never quite recovered.

It happened to me in this case way back in 1952, while I was reading *Other Worlds*. I know I have only myself to blame, but this dreadful sentence wasn't in the Palmer editorial, where I'd been on my guard; it was in the Personals Column. It was a little advertisement no bigger than a man's hand, and it read:

> "Phyllis Hollans, 209 Forrest Ave., Redford, Va., would like to correspond with anyone who shares her dislike for S. Fowler Wright."

Well, it so happened that I had other things to think about in 1952 and I dismissed this with a light laugh. Ha ha, I thought, just like that. What a funny idea. No doubt this girl will get in touch with another girl who dislikes S. Fowler Wright, but what then? Will they exchange girlish confidences about the bits they hate most, wallowing in a sort of perverted literary masochism? Or maybe it'll be a boy who answers and, united by this common disinterest, they'll get married and raise their children as dedicated Wright-haters. How dreadful it will be when they find their eldest smuggling in a copy of *The World Below* disguised as *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. You could write a long, turgid psychological novel about a family like this. Or maybe Phyllis will form an organization:

they'll write dozens of rude letters to Wright's publishers under assumed names and put his books behind others in bookshops: maybe there'll even be an extremist wing that wants to capture him and torture him. (Come to think of it, I haven't heard much from S. Fowler Wright recently.) Ha ha, I thought, as I told you. I had considered the matter from all angles and this was my conclusion. Ha ha.

But had I? Was it? As the years went by this advertisement refused to let itself be forgotten. A niggling doubt kept recurring in my mind in that mysterious way such things have (but you know what the Bible says about the way of a niggle), and I kept puzzling about it. Why S. Fowler Wright; he isn't in practically everything but the wallpaper, like Bob Silverberg. Why not Heinlein-haters, Bradbury-baiters, Leinster-loathers, Ellison-enemies, Asimov-abhorrers? Why not indeed? There could be a club for every science fiction author. They might even form a sort of loose federation and publish amateur magazines to spread their gospels of hate, and hold conventions and everything. There would be a National Anti-Fantasy Fan Federation composed of those who hated *all* the science fiction authors.

And then a cold shudder ran through me, leaving me gasping with belated realization. There *was* such a thing! There must be – nothing else could account for all the dozens of hitherto inexplicable facts which leaped to my mind in a terrifying horde. These anti-fans have been ganging up on us. Ever since that advertisement of Miss Hollans's and maybe even before (maybe they just needed more recruits for the anti-Wright branch), these dedicated science fiction haters have been getting together in secret, organizing, conspiring, scheming – and striking. Treacherously, they have been attacking, sniping, sabotaging, kneeing us in the groin while our backs were turned like the famous mad dogs once did to Harlan Ellison. Of course it's only too obvious when you think about it, it's just that we sf fans were too noble and generous-minded ourselves to suspect such a dastardly thing. Even now, a few of you might still be in doubt. If you are, just one example will convince you. Ask yourself this. You know those people in convention hotels who always complain to the management just when you've got a really good party going? Well, did you ever *see* one of them? Of course you didn't. Ha. No fan ever did. They take good care not to show themselves because *they're the same people year after year*. Every September when the sf convention comes round, they book into the hotel, taking care to get a room in the middle of the fan rooms, and punctually at 11:30 p.m. they take up action stations beside their telephones. But of course that's not all they do at a convention. Ho no. Didn't you ever

wonder why so many unpleasant things – damage, thefts, etc. – happen at conventions, when you and all the fans you know are decent, honest, well-mannered and refined people? Well, you know who's responsible now, don't you? And these fiends don't let us alone between conventions either. Oh, no, they never rest in their villainy. You must have noticed that when fans plan anything, like a trip or a meeting, something always goes wrong, like a convention programme. You don't still think those things happen through any fault of ours or of the Convention Committee, do you? With us intelligent, clear-thinking fans? Come now.

Of course, all that is just a sideline to their main work, that of sabotaging science fiction. You will have realized by now how they do it, of course. You must have said to yourself several times a month as you throw the latest issue across the room, "My Ghod, what made John / Horace / Tony / Larry / Bob / Bill / etc. print *that*?" Well, you know now. It was because the last time he ran something by that author he got a flood of appreciative mail from you-know-who. These people scan the new authors for the worst potential hacks they can find and then sedulously build them up. How else do you think XXXXXX XXXXXXX was able to turn pro? Their plan, of course, is to disgust everybody with science fiction, and lately they've been wildly successful.

Too successful. They've overreached themselves and put themselves at our mercy. At the last moment, with victory in their grasp, they can be thrown down in utter defeat. The Russians, of all people, have delivered them into our hands. When the satellite went up, up went the prestige of science fiction fans everywhere. We were the people who had been right all along. More important, we were the people who had tried to save the Western World from the ignominy of being beaten in the race into space, the true patriots. Conversely, the anti-fans are obviously fifth-columnists, un-American, traitors. This gives us a weapon to smite our enemies and destroy them utterly. It may take time, but we can root them out from cover one by one. The next time someone in a cinema jeers or guffaws during a good science fiction film (and to think I used to wonder why people went to see sf films when they didn't like them!), or the next time someone in a hotel complains about your party, you know what to do. Report them to the FBI.

September 1958

Gafia Too Might Be a Way of Life

I'm retiring from FAPA with this mailing. I've too high a regard for most of the members to leave then without a word of explanation, so here goes.

I specially want to make it clear that I'm not leaving FAPA merely to put as much distance as possible between myself and GMCarr. There are far too many good apples in this barrel and, besides, committing hara-kiri on your opponent's doorstep has never seemed to me a particularly scintillating example of repartee.

No, this is a much longer story; in fact it covers most of my fan career. There are two main incentives in fandom, ambition and pleasure. By 1952 I had achieved pretty well everything open to a fan, and I began to find that achievement itself destroys the other incentive. I've never got used to being thought of as what is called a "BNF" and I don't like what it involves. I've thought from time to time of killing off Willis and starting again as a carefree neo under another name, but it would have been very difficult... though if Peter Graham's little hoax had been at a more convenient time I think I'd have taken the opportunity. (I'll bet that would have shaken him!)

Anyway, as I was saying, I wasn't getting the old pleasure out of fandom. The main reason I carried on so doggedly after my trip to the States in 1952 was that I felt it would be mean to cash in my winnings and quit. I still enjoyed much of my fanac but as the years went by there seemed to be more hard work and worry. The sight of a porchful of mail started giving me a sinking feeling, and with a fan, man that's bad. By early 1957 I was beginning to think that gafia too might be a way of life. Since 1952 I had published *The Enchanted Duplicator*, *The Harp Stateside*, *Willis Discovers America*, over a dozen *Hyphen*s and *Slant*s and many apazines and oneshots, written articles, columns and convention playlets, inducted numerous neofen and carried TAFF through to its initial success. I felt I had done as much after the Chicon as before and that in some weird way the books were square.

Then the Outlanders invited me to South Gate. The idea of attending another American Convention, this time with Madeleine, had been until then just a sort of mirage carrot I kept dangling before my nose, but suddenly it begun to look real. And South Gate, of all Conventions. I started fanning again with the old enthusiasm, embarking on another cycle. But then as the prospect got nearer I begin to have doubts. TAFF had been

changed from my ideals of it by the convention fans, but my disagreements with them were just another reason I shouldn't sabotage it. I'd be like someone kicking over the table when they lost a game. So I told the Outlanders I couldn't accept on account of TAFF. To my everlasting surprise and gratitude, they immediately put the position before fandom and invited them to tell me I should come and that it wouldn't affect their support of TAFF. To my further surprise many of them did, including lots of people I scarcely knew, and their letters were so friendly and heartwarming that I was swept right back into the atmosphere of 1952. I told Rick in confidence that we were coming, but not to say anything just yet in case something else turned up. Unhappily, something did. With consummate timing, GMCarr took the chance to publish her allegations that I was anti-American and an embittered loser over TAFF, coupled with sneers at the Outlanders for having invited me. The thrusts couldn't have been more cleverly calculated. It was obviously impossible for me to accept money from Americans when many fans believed I despised them – *Gemzine* has a large extra-FAPA circulation and Bob Leman's letter was evidence of what they were likely to think – or to appear to be competing with TAFF when they thought me a frustrated dictator. As for Madeleine, as she wrote at the time to Joy Clarke, she would never put herself in a position to be vulnerable to that woman.

So that was that. The other reasons I gave at the time for not coming were real enough but this one was the most depressing, I felt something like the disgust Dean Grennell felt after being exposed to the viciousness of Wetzel and for a while thought of getting out of fandom altogether. Early this year I published two issues of *Hyphen* to keep the subscribers quiet and took a vacation from fanac to think it over. Well, I've had my holiday and sitting here knee deep in unanswered letters and unread fmz, it seems to me that fandom is still a damn good hobby, as Mal put it once. But not the way I've been working at it. Henceforth I'm here to enjoy myself. When I can't readily find time to answer letters I shall ignore them with a clear conscience (hitherto I've been ignoring them with a guilty conscience), I shall no longer worry about meeting deadlines and, finally, I shall cut down my fanac.

Why start with FAPA, you may ask idly. Well, for one thing it takes a lot of time to be a good member and causes a lot of frustration when I fail. For another, I think activity in general fandom is more vital just now, In the whole of English speaking sf at the moment there are only two signposts to fandom, the columns by Bob Madle and myself. If fandom isn't to drain away, taking the APAs with it, we've got to offer something

worthwhile to what recruits we do get, and that means good general fanzines *available on subscription*. I hope *Hyphen* will do the job for those of that turn of mind. Finally and more happily, I inveigled George Charters here into putting his name on the waiting list and when he starts his fanzine I wouldn't be surprised if he allows me a little space now and then to renew old acquaintance.

Well, I think that's all except to clear up some debris from the recent fracas. It mightn't have gone on so long, or my name been involved so much, if I hadn't been so fed up I couldn't be bothered opening my mouth. The only comments I ever published about the TAFF election results were two sentences in my mailing comments on *Gemzine*. The one which GMCarr based half her entire campaign read: "Are you satisfied with the TAFF results now the election has been ƀfought on your principles?" The original "bought" was a typo or Freudian slip, but I left the strikeover because I thought the double morning conveyed the truth, and I stand over it. The election *was* partly fought and partly bought, fought by the winner and bought by the runner-up. I could have produced ample evidence when GMCarr challenged me but I didn't want to expose my informants to the vituperations of that literary fishwife and I figured the truth would come out in time. As it has, most recently in the Report of TAFF Administrator Ken Bulmer: "After the ruckus, it was settled pretty satisfactorily that there had been vote-buying by at least one fan." I haven't mentioned his name because there's a chance that his unwanted champion will at last shut up and let him live it down.

The other half of Mrs Carr's case was the remark in my letter in the British fmz *Ploy* about "sex-starved Americans", which she now admits she deliberately misrepresented. (In my simple Protestant upbringing this was known as bearing false witness against thy neighbour.) This may not have been the joke of the century but one thing in its defence seems to have been overlooked. Over here, and everywhere else GIs were stationed or the Kinsey report publicized, it *is* a joke to think of Americans being sex-starved, and *Ploy* is an English fanzine, after all.

Well that's all then, I think, except to thank sincerely the people who took my part... and to offer my sympathy.

October 1958

As Others See Us

"This Madle fellow seems to have it in for you." said Fingal, handing back Boyd's letter. Fingal O'Flahertie is a young neo here who has been burrowing through my fanzine collection, surfacing at intervals to ask questions. "I remember he was insulting you in prozines as long ago as last year."

"I don't think he meant that," I said mildly. "I think he just didn't quite know what 'bombastic' meant: probably thought it had something to do with bombs. At least he seemed quite friendly in London, even though he didn't accept our invitation to stay with us in Belfast. I think this is just an echo of the controversy about whether he deserved to win TAFF. Chuck Harris said straight out in OMPA that he shouldn't have stood because he wasn't well known to British fandom. Naturally Bob is sore about that, and he probably thinks I share Chuck's views."

"Well, do you?"

"No, not on that point," I said. "I think Bob was quite eligible to be nominated. There are no less than 37 references to him in *The Immortal Storm* and he's known to the older British fans, like Mike Rosenblum. As for his record since then, well here's what he says himself."

"Hmm," said Fingal. "Mostly local club activity, and he probably got most of his votes canvassing people who didn't know anything about the other candidates,"

"Well, there's nothing wrong with that from Bob's point of view," I pointed out. "The fact that his friends have never heard of Eney and Raeburn just means to him that Eney and Raeburn are little-known fans."

"But they're big names to me and I'd hardly heard of Madle until he won TAFF." expostulated Fingal.

"So what?" I said. "Bob would say that's because you're just a fanzine fan. The people who voted for him would have said exactly the same sort of thing if he had lost."

"But what chance had I to hear about Madle?" asked Fingal indignantly. "These club fans can subscribe to fanzines if they want to find out about fans in other places. Was I expected to attend the meetings of the Carolina SF Society or whatever it was to find out what a fine fan Madle is? I thought the main idea of TAFF was to further fan activity by rewarding people who did a lot for international fandom?"

"Well, that was my idea," I admitted, "but don't forget Don Ford and

the Cincinnati group were in it right from the start too, and they've always regarded it as more of a sweepstake. At least their idea is to get in a lot of money by selling as many voting forms as they can. They say that if we restricted the voting to people we regard as qualified to discriminate between the candidates – that is, fans who read fanzines – we'd never get enough money in to send someone every year."

"So what," said Fingal. "I'd rather wait to meet Bloch than have someone I never heard of."

"Well, that's your preference," I said, "but we've got to face the fact that the Americans think differently about these things and theirs is the way it's got to be in American elections. We've just got to reconcile ourselves to the sad fact that we're never going to get a British-type candidate like Bloch or Tucker or Grennell or Boggs or Eney or Raeburn – they're not pushing enough for one of these canvassing competitions. It'll always be more the Harlan Ellison type. And after all that isn't so bad. When you think of some of the people who might have won TAFF you'll realize we were lucky to get such a fine representative as Madle."

"Well, he may have behaved himself all right in London," said Fingal grudgingly, "but I don't think it's nice of him to start insulting the people who paid for his trip the minute he gets back." "What on earth do you mean?" I asked. "That business about blankfaced nobodies or what he said in OMPA?"

"Well," said Fingal, "for one thing the fanzine fans contributed enough to bring over a blankfaced nobody named Lee Hoffman. She didn't take it and it was carried over till next year and Madle got the money, so that his trip was paid for mostly by the fanzine fans he despises."

"Oh, come, come," I said, "that's a crude way of looking at it. Don't you lose your temper too. Bob doesn't really despise us fanzine fans – after all he's been one himself from time to time. I'm sure he didn't really mean that about Lee and Shelby Vick and Max Keasler and Rich Elsberry being blankfaced nobodies....he's just annoyed because I said that in 1952 he and Kyle and Moskowitz and Sykora and Korshak and Eshbach and Evans were never heard of for 362 days in the year."

"Well, *were* they?"

"Not by me," I admitted, "but if Bob says so I must have been wrong. Presumably they wrote letters to each other between conventions, or for all I know they turned up in a body at every meeting of the Carolina SF Society. And you've got to admit he's right in one thing – Lee and Shelby and Max are fannishly dead at the moment, while Madle's friends are just as active as they were in 1952."

"I don't admit it," said Fingal stoutly. "Lee and Max and Shelby aren't dead to me. It's those fanzines of theirs you lent me that brought me into fandom, so they live on in me and dozens of other neos all over the world. For all that Korshak and the rest of that ginger group of his ever did to interest me in fandom I would still be reading BREs. When did any of that battery of fannish dynamos ever say anything brilliant or funny or memorable, or even mildly interesting?"

"How do you know they didn't?" I countered. "For all you know the wit flows as scintillatingly in Cincinnati or Carolina clubrooms as it does in South Pioneer Boulevard or Inchmery Road, it's just that nobody tells us about it. Take Moskowitz, for instance. He could hold his own in any gathering of good talkers."

"Well, yes, I give you Moskowitz," said Fingal. "He's a fanzine fan too. But if the rest of that lot are too stupid or illiterate to write for fanzines I'll bet their conversation is limited to swapping dirty jokes."

"Oh, come off it," I said. "There are people in fanzine fandom who aren't all that bright either, and we're in no position to point the finger-bone of scorn. We're far too inclined to write off these non-fanzine fans as rather pathetic fuggheads who haven't got what it takes to write for fanzines and have to scrape around for their egoboo by struggling for power in silly organizations and playing petty politics, while us sophisticated fanzine fans look on at their childish squabbles with amused contempt. But for one thing, don't forget that *they* believe these antics are important, and sometimes they really are. They're not all what we think of as N3F types. As Bob points out, it's mostly they who put on the Big Conventions."

"Who wants Big Conventions?" sneered Fingal. "They're always flops anyway. The only fan organizations that have ever been run efficiently and without feuding are those which have been run entirely by fanzine fans, like FAPA and OMPA, or TAFF before the conventioneering fans got their hands on it."

"That's unfair," I said. "An APA doesn't encourage politics because office involves more responsibility than power, and there was no feuding in TAFF's early days because the confans took no interest in it until they saw a TAFF delegate at a convention and the fanzine fans had all their own way. As for conventions, I know the argument that all we want is someone to circulate the name of an hotel every year but it seems to me that if we want the pros to turn up we've got to put up some sort of official front, if only so they can claim the hotel bills against their income tax. The confans organize that, and it's a useful job."

"They make a heck of a lot of fuss about it, it seems to me. Look at New York. They can't be very good at it, for all their talk."

"How do you know?" I asked. "You've never put on a convention so you can't know what's involved. Anyway the less efficient they are the more trouble they have, so the more they resent us fanzine fans rolling up without a care in the world and having everything done for us and then going home leaving them to clear up the mess and writing snide conreports criticizing the program and the organization which we never lifted a finger to help."

"It was mostly fanzine fans who put on London and South Gate," said Fingal defensively, "and they seem to have been all right."

"They were exceptions," I said. "Detroit in 59 will be back to normal – there hasn't been a prominent fanzine out of Michigan since the Great Bomb Plot blew Rapp into FAPA, and *he* was insurging against the local organization. South Gate in 58 was a fanzine fandom tradition and for once we came down into the political arena and worked for it, putting on London in 57 in the process. But even there we had to rely on the confans for a lot of the fronting and platform work. Most of us are no good at speechmaking or throwing our weight about in public."

"All right," said Fingal, "I'll admit exhibitionists are useful people to have around at intervals, like garbage collectors; but that doesn't mean that garbage collectors are the elite of society or that they've the right to call us fuggheads because we don't take an intimate interest in their activities."

"There's a lot more to it than that," I said. "Try to put yourself in the position of one of Don Ford's friends who has never read a fanzine and you'll see it's a perfectly understandable point of view that we are fuggheads. To him we fanzine fans are just queer dim strangers who hang around aimlessly at conventions not doing anything to help and sitting in the wrong places and making jokes he can't understand. He feels that at any moment one of us is going to come up and bite him in the leg. Some of us behave like certifiable idiots if we're called on to make the simplest speech and we haven't got what it takes to participate in what he regards as the real soul of the convention – making speeches and raising points of order and organizing things and outmanoeuvring other groups in smokefilled rooms and telling people where to sit and shouting each other down at loud parties. That's his form of fanac and we're no good at it, so we're fuggheads to him just as he's a fugghead to you."

"It's not the same at all," protested Fingal. "We see his fanac but he doesn't see what we do the other 362 days in the year. We can see he's just a loud-mouthed exhibitionist but he doesn't see our fanzine writing, so we

can judge him while he can't judge us."

"No you can't," I said, "because we don't make the effort to get to know these confans at conventions any more than they make the effort to get to know us the rest of the year. If you manage to pry one of them loose from his caucus you'll find more often than not that he's a very intelligent and likeable person. Whereas on the other hand some of us fine minds of fanzine fandom don't look so allfired hot to a group of confans on their way from the bar to a smokefilled room and pausing on the way to exchange a friendly word. Some of us are so shy we won't open our mouths in a crowd. Some of us, like Boggs and Warner, won't even come to a convention at all."

"That's still no reason for them to call us names."

"Yes it is," I said. "Don't you see, they think we're being stupid or unfriendly or both. For one example. I'll bet Anthony Boucher thinks I'm a fugghead. It was that penthouse party on the last night of the Chicon when he and Bixby and Reynolds and Anderson and some other pros were whooping it up in the bar and they wanted me to stay and give them some more imported dirty limericks. I rejected their friendly good cheer and spent the rest of the night in a window seat between two of those blank-faced nobodies. Until then I'd been on very friendly terms with Boucher but he's never addressed a word to me in the six years since that moment. I'm sorry about that, but I'd do the same again. I'd have been happy to stay in the bar if I'd thought I could have got talking to Boucher the way I could talk to Lee end Max in the window seat, but I didn't come 4,000 miles to spend my time being part of an anthology of dirty limericks with a slightly sodden cover. I got bored with jokes and other forms of secondhand humour back home fifteen years ago."

"But those were pros," pointed out Fingal. "Aren't you getting off the beam?"

"No," I said, "I think I'm just getting on to it. The whole difficulty of social relationships at conventions isn't one of the difference between confans and fanzine fans, it's just one of psychological types. It seems to me that the crux of the question is that most fanzine fans are introverts – otherwise they wouldn't feel the same need to express themselves on paper – and that all confans are extroverts – otherwise they wouldn't like public speaking. Both types have different ways of enjoying themselves and neither understands the other."

"You mean that was an extrovert party in the bar in the penthouse." said Fingal. "You preferred the introvert one in the window seat and the extroverts couldn't understand it."

"Yes," I said, "but I've thought of a better example. It was at a London Circle party in the living room of Dorothy Ratigan's house. Half the people there were shouting at the tops of their voices and the other thirty were trying to dance or play cards or just to breathe. I was half deafened and I hate shouting – I never seem to think of anything I consider worth shouting – so I got Vince Clarke and a few other introverts to sneak off with me into the kitchen. We'd been talking there happily for about half an hour when Dorothy Ratigan came in and glared at us and said: 'There have been complaints that there are people in here not drinking.' She was quite serious. She really believed that if we were not shouting and getting drunk we were having a miserable time and being wet blankets at her party. I'll bet she'd have called us blankfaced nobodies if she'd thought of it."

"*Were* you drinking?"

"I don't know," I said. "It never seems to matter with me. I usually have a drink in my hand to be sociable but I seldom drink much of it in case somebody fills it up again, because I hate getting drunk. No matter how much I drink there's always a small clear voice in the back of my head saying 'You're just getting stupider and stupider' and it makes me silent and depressed. You can see I'm a real introvert. A few drinks are a fine thing for most people, until they reach the stage when they only seem clever because their listeners are even drunker, but I seem to be able to get drunk on good talk alone. Literally, I mean. I get so intoxicated with ideas and excitement that I seem to be floating and when I get up I can hardly walk a straight line. You know some of these nights in Irish Fandom when everyone suddenly gets caught up in the current that sometimes flows through here and we find ourselves in another dimension of living when we can spin great shining wonderful webs of fantasy, or play with the language like a toy, or throw up bright lattices of wit, and your mind is racing away with you and the whole evening flashes past in a wild torrent of laughter and after we break up you feel dazed and limp and think what a wonderful wonderful evening and then you almost weep to realize that nobody wrote anything down?"

"Yes," said Fingal, "but you wouldn't get that sort of thing at conventions?"

"Why else do you think I go to them?" I said. "It's more difficult, because you have to know and like the people well, and there can't be too many of them, not more than six or seven, and the presence of somebody uncongenial or phony can kill it stone dead, but it can be done. I remember specially once in the upstairs lounge at Kettering in 1955 with the Clarkes

and Bulmers and Mal Ashworth and Arthur Thomson, before we broke it up to join the big extrovert party so that their feelings wouldn't be hurt. And then there were a few glorious moments towards the end of the London Worldcon when we broke through and made contact with some of the American fans and created the first international gestalt. And then of course there's another kind of gestalt you can get sometimes with only two or three other people, like Lee and Max and I had in that window seat in the penthouse or like one night in Tresco when I talked the night through to breakfast with Ken and Pamela Bulmer, when you seem to be communicating past the ordinary limitations of language. I can't describe it, though probably Sturgeon could, but compared to it ordinary conversation is like ships hooting at each other in a fog."

"Do you think confans get the same pleasure out of their extrovert parties?"

"Yes," I said. "I remember I got it once for some reason at a Liverpool party at the Supermancon in 1954. A different type of pleasure but basically the same. I felt I understood extroverts a lot better afterwards."

"Well," said Fingal, "do you think we have to wait for the same sort of accident to happen to the confans before they realize that fanzine fans are not just blankfaced nobodies who don't know how to enjoy ourselves?"

"I don't know," I said. "We could try transcribing this conversation and see if it helps us to understand one another better?"

February 1959

The Sterling Fanzine

There was this man who used to ride to work every morning on the bus, and the fare was a nickel. (I know you'd hardly be allowed to run behind a bus those days for a nickel but I'm translating this story into American and it just has to be a nickel.) One morning he got onto the bus and gave the conductor his nickel (I know you don't usually have conductors either; but you'll just have to put up with them until I've finished this story) and he got his ticket and 20¢ change.

The man didn't say anything because I'm afraid he wasn't terribly honest, and besides he wasn't quite sure that he hadn't given the conductor a quarter after all. But coming home that evening; on a different bus with a different conductor, the same thing happened again. Next morning he remembered the odd coincidence and made sure it was a nickel he was giving. He still got 20¢ change. It was at this moment that he began to have a weird suspicion, and he got off the bus and waited for another. Again he made a profit of 15¢ and a bus ticket. That was 60¢ cash he had made in four journeys. He called the office that he was ill and spent the rest of the morning riding on buses. In the afternoon he called again to say he was resigning his job. Next morning he went to the bank after breakfast and changed twenty dollars into nickels and spent the day on the buses, calling at the bank again on his way home.

This went on for several weeks and he became quite rich. Then one morning about 11am he was on his first bus (he had reduced his working day to four hours and had a chauffeur to take him to the bus stop) when he noticed he was getting near the end of the nickel journey and the conductor hadn't been round yet. The reason of course was that he was a new man on his first run – there had been a lot of resignations and suicides among conductors recently and the company was desperate for men – and he was fumbling clumsily, giving people the wrong tickets and the wrong change. Our hero got up and pushed towards him rudely holding out his nickel. The conductor, all bemused, gave him a nickel ticket and turned away. Our hero grabbed hold of him roughly. "Here," he snapped, "what about my change?"

"Uh?" said the conductor.

"I gave you a nickel for a nickel fare," shouted the man, indignantly. "Where's my twenty cents change?"

It was at this point that somewhere, something, invisibly, inaudibly,

snapped. The conductor seemed to pull himself together, “What twenty cents change?” he asked.

“I always get twenty cents change out of a nickel,” screamed the man.

“You’re mad,” said the conductor, and the other passengers held our hero while one of them went for the police. I’m afraid he never got a chance to prove he was right because the doctors at the place where they keep him still agree with the conductor.

Well now, I don’t know about you, but I feel that that queer little story somehow illustrates some basic *law*. I told it to Lee Hoffman in Savannah in October 1952 and when Charles Wells came in later on he found us talking about symbolic logic. Don’t let that put you off any more than it put Charles off because everything I know about symbolic logic could be written in the blank spaces in a British fanzine. It’s just that I’ve this idea that Bertrand Russell and his merry band of mathematicians are on the right track and that eventually if they keep on with their equations they’ll confirm something I’ve suspected for many years. It is that all human behaviour is subject to a few basic laws that nobody has ever formulated, simply because they’re too general to be put into words. Tale for another example what happened to me in the Case of the International Money Order....

I have been publishing a fanzine for over ten years and in that time it has occasionally happened that American fans, overcome with pity, have sent me money. I appreciate this gesture more than I can say – as I always put it, it’s not the thought behind a gift that matters so much as the value of it – and it occurs to me that some of you might like to know what happens in that long period between your sending me money and your receiving a beat-up fanzine with a green cover.

Well, if it’s cash you sent it’s quite simple. It usually arrives as I’m setting off for work and I cram the envelope into my pocket, shouting to Madeleine “ONLY MONEY” and roaring off on my scooter. This may be why the man next door, a retired bank manager, looks at me so strangely sometimes. At the office I make out an index card and mail a copy of *Hyphen*. I do all that sort of thing in the office because there’s all the necessary equipment handy, including a Post Office. It’s downstairs in the same building and I’m a very steady customer, and a big help to them in clearing up knotty points about second class mailing privileges and such.

If your money was a dollar bill I just put it in my wallet to be changed at the bank when I hear the wolf padding up the front lawn. It comes halfway between cashing postal orders and borrowing from Madeleine, but alas a long way before changing US coin. The trouble with that is that

apparently the bank cashier has to travel all the way to New York and back with a clinking bag of small change, so they charge an outrageous commission for handling it. So I usually just leave it in my pocket and as time goes by it accumulates until I have a whole pocketful of nickels, dimes and quarters. And very embarrassing it is too. For instance I'm always going into shops or buses with the mistaken idea that I've plenty of change. Then I find I haven't, and have to proffer a diffident pound note for a threepenny bus fare or a box of matches. I look up to find eyes fixed on me with heady dislike, because those nickels and dimes looked to them to be shillings and sixpences. All I can do then is hold out a handful of them apologetically and say, "All American money." This happens all the time and I'm sure I'm getting some sort of reputation. If you ever hear of me being arrested on suspicion of illegal currency manipulation you'll know what's happened.

Coins are bad enough, but there are worse things. And I don't mean cheques on such homespun American institutions as the First Federal Bank of Wabash. Such things can be cashed for a mere ten per cent deduction any time you have an afternoon to spare watching cashiers running around in circles. A restful spectacle, like goldfish. It's pretty to see the little creatures milling around soundlessly in there, surfacing now and then at telephones where their mouths open and shut rhythmically. It's hard to believe that they are in intimate communication with the Currency Commission, the Chancellor of the Exchequer and Mr. Dulles, but they must be because eventually one of them emerges with full authority to give me my shilling and sixpence.

No, the worse things I was thinking of are International Money Orders. (See? I do get back to the point sooner or later: thank you for your childlike trust.) These come in little brown official envelopes no bigger than a man's hand and postmarked Bromley, Kent. This is your first warning that some innocent American fan has allowed himself to be ensnared in the web of international bureaucracy and is going to drag you screaming after him. The snag about those things, apart from their forcing me to make a special sortie downtown to the main post office (I work outside the city) is that there's no indication on them as to who is sending you the money, or where he lives. It just gives the name of the US post office where he did the foul deed, and you have to supply his name yourself before they'll give you anything but a dirty look. The idea is to prevent fraud, but as usual the Government has given no consideration at all to the special problems of fan editors.

It means you have to keep all the letters from all the people who even

hinted they might be sending you money, and hunt through them for someone who lives near the post office mentioned. Then you present the Money Order at the main post office. The clerk goes to a pigeonhole and fetches another document. Holding the two of them like a poker hand he asks you suspiciously to name the sender. If you guess right you got the money. I don't know how many guesses you're allowed, but after having made three once I felt the clerk suspected I had gone into business with a printing press and a list of common American surnames.

But none of this worried me very much until one day I got an International Money Order for £5. Now that's quite a lot of money in the British Isles, especially the part of them behind the hedge at 170 Upper Newtownards Road, Belfast, and I looked at it in awe. No one had ever mentioned sending me a vast sum like that. I checked through the letters in my wallet to make sure. There was one from a fan called Roger Skidmore who lived in the same state as the post office named in the Order, but Roger was just sending me a modest 70¢. I began to make a mental list of all the people in America who were likely to send me $14.00 out of the blue, I was still casting round for the first name on this select roll of honour when a thought struck me. I divided Roger Skidmore's 70¢ by 200 and multiplied by twenty. It came out, eventually, at 5 shillings. Regretfully I dismissed the pleasing hypothesis that some fan of perception had assessed *Hyphen* at its true worth. In this crass world it was more likely that the post office had made a simple mistake, just a matter of a digit in the wrong column.

I had a short struggle with my conscience, and lost. A few days later I heard the wolf breathing through the keyhole so I went down to the main post office and presented the Order, adding quite audibly that I thought the amount was wrong. Turning away half blinded by my halo, the clerk fluttered to his pigeonhole and back.

"Sender?"

"Skidmore?"

"Singles?" He started to peel notes off a wad.

At the back of my mind the gong rang for Round 2 and my conscience came out fighting, "I think there's been a mistake," I said, pinned to the ropes. "It shouldn't be as much as that."

"I'll check," he said. He went away and came back in a few moments, "No mistake," he said cheerfully, "five pounds it is. Pleasant surprise, eh?" . He pushed the small fortune at me like a croupier at Monte Carlo who had fallen out with Prince Rainier, and when I didn't grab it immediately, moved it along the counter to my left. "Next please?"

My conscience's seconds threw in the towel. I gathered up the money and went straight out and spent it all on a splendid new golf bag, one with only one hole for the clubs to poke out from, I was sick of people on the golf course asking me to give them a tune on my bagpipes.

On the way home in the bus with my nice new bag I began to realize I'd been looking at the whole thing in a narrow way. My scruples had boon silly. Obviously this international currency exchange business was a big affair that must be handled by giant electronic computers. It was ridiculous to imagine, I told my conscience, now being carried out of the ring protesting feebly, that any poor clerk would have to pay for my new golf bag out of his wages. All that had happened was that somewhere in those great banks of computers a tube had blown or a cog slipped. Such minor mishaps would certainly have been allowed for in the running expenses and ignored. Perhaps at the end of the financial year an engineer might pull a big red switch and there would be a deep throbbing and myriads of lights would flash on and off and a tape would come out revealing the .0000000001 discrepancy that now housed my golf clubs, but they'd just congratulate each other that it was so small. They'd certainly never be able to trace it. Or if they could they wouldn't bother. Or if they could and did they'd never dare to ask me for it back. I'd told them they'd made a mistake, hadn't I? I asked them to check, didn't I? What more was I supposed to have done? Chain myself to the railings in Downing Street until the Prime Minister consented to accept £4:15? At this the dressing room door closed behind my conscience, cutting off his last despairing cries.

In fact I began to get quite indignant at the idea of the Post Office trying to get their money back. I visualized their inept bureaucratic letters, my polished ironical replies, their pompous threats, my imperturbable answers, their foolish resort to law, my calm assured defiance, the dramatic scene in the House of Lords as the historic case nears its climax. Conducting his own defence with a brilliance that astounds the old Lords of Appeal and which has made him a hero to the popular press, the slim distinguished figure resumes his relentless cross-examination of the principal witness for the prosecution, who has just asked for a glass of water. His eyes move shiftily about the crowded chamber seeking desperately for escape, but there is none. His ordeal resumes....

"Now, Mr. Postmaster-General, I understand you to admit that this case arose as a result of a mistake by your Department?"

"Yes, but –"

"Just answer the question, please. In effect you are asking the

defendant to pay for your mistakes?"

"I wouldn't put it like that, Mr. Willis."

"I am under no obligation to phrase my questions in the manner most convenient to you, sir. But I have no objection. What you are trying to say, I take it, is that the defendant obtained money to which he was not entitled?"

"Yes."

"Now the deposition from Mr. Skidmore affirms that he sent the money to the defendant for copies of his magazine, which is so highly respected in the New World that it brings valuable hard currency into the sterling area. Had you, or have you now, any reason to believe that the defendant did not in the months before your mistake came to light publish 100 issues of *Hyphen* at 15¢ each and send them to Mr. Skidmore?"

"Er... no."

"In that case it would be Mr. Skidmore who had received benefit to which he was not entitled, would it not? Am I to take it that you have taken action against him? That you have asked the Cabinet to declare war on the United States? Or perhaps the only people you ask to pay for your mistakes are loyal subjects of Her Majesty whom you think you can bully and browbeat? ...My Lords, another glass of water for the witness?"

So I bore my new golf bag with a clear conscience. Then one afternoon I was sitting in the office writing envelopes for the next *Hyphen* when a wonderful thought occurred to me. It was about those computers, which I know all about from reading the articles in *Astounding*. Those things don't make arbitrary mistakes like you and me, they're consistent; if there's a tube blown or a cog slipping, the machine will make the same mistake in the same circumstances. That is it would do to another money order for 70¢ what it had done for Roger Skidmore's, and it was probably still doing it because 70¢ is a pretty unusual amount and there couldn't have been enough of them to attract attention. You can see the way my clever little mind was working. Suppose I changed the subscription rate for *Hyphen* to 5 copies for 70¢! Every issue about a dozen people would renew or subscribe at that rate, it being cheaper than the old one, and each 70¢ would be gloriously transformed by the electronic computers to £5, making a clear profit on the next issue alone of about £60, or $160.00. With that I could go lithographed immediately and multiply my circulation. Let's see, a circulation of 2,000, just to start with, that would work out at about 400 renewals per issue at $14.00 each, which would be, let's see –

I was interrupted in these fascinating calculations by a knock on the

door and a young fellow came in whose face looked familiar. I couldn't remember where I used to see him, but I remembered we used to have some very interesting little discussions about audio frequency amplifiers. So I asked him cheerfully how he was getting on with his 6L6's, and he enquired after my phase-splitter, and we had a nice friendly chat just like old times. Though my mind wasn't completely on it because I know he wouldn't have sought me out for that and I kept trying to remember where we used to meet before. Then he asked after my father and everything fell into place with a sickening thud. My father used to work in the Post Office before he retired and this young fellow used to be a clerk in my post office downstairs. I asked him where he was working now, fearing the worst. I was right. He'd boon transferred to the money order department, and this mistake had come to light, and they were going to write to me about it, but he'd recognized my name and his boss had known my father and they figured the best thing was for him just to come up and see me, all friends like. I couldn't say a thing. I just put my best face on it and forked out the money and he gave me a receipt and that was that. We talked a little more about infinite impedance detectors, but my heart really wasn't in it.

Later, I thought the least the Postmaster General could have done would be to have sent me a personal letter of thanks, but he didn't. I suppose he didn't realize what would have happened to him in the House of Lords if I hadn't been interested in high fidelity amplifiers. People are thoughtless like that.

March 1959

From Aa to Zombie

Fancyclopedia II. Richard Eney, 417 Fort Hunt Road, Alexandria, Va., U.S.A. Price $1.25. *186 pages.*

I feel a bit timid about writing book reviews. I think I've only done one once before and the results were alarming for one of a nervous disposition: they consisted of a hurt letter from F.G. Rayer and an appointment to the International Fantasy Award Panel. The latter was under the notorious alias of Fandom's Leading Expert and Critic, a designation cooked up by Les Flood which made Vin¢ Clarke tear his hair. (Yes, sonny, this *was* a long time ago.) I lurked in the woodwork of this Panel for quite a while until the big-time publishers found out I was just a faan and had me turfed off with ignominy and a few other odd bods. I knew I'd only been on it in the first place because they were short of names of people outside America who they knew could read, so I didn't fight for my reputation by doing anything drastic like suing them for $35,000 or even actually reviewing another book. But I'm going to do it now, review a book, I mean, because it's not every day a fan has the privilege of bearing witness to an event like the publication of Eney's *Fancyclopedia*. I feel, as Plato put it when presenting the dialogues of Socrates, proud and kinda humble.

But it's not easy to do justice to a Great Work like this without falling into the pit of Newstatesmanship, the style of reviewing you're apt to get in the back pages of literary weeklies. You know the sort of thing. Some professor has dedicated fifteen years of his life to the study of some abstruse subject and the critic has to write his review in ten minutes. He opens the book once, to consult the bibliography, and from one of the source books listed he turns up some fact so obscure and unimportant that the professor ignored it. Now he's all set. "Professor Wesfestink's study of sewage systems in seventeenth century Siberia is not without merit, but will be something of a disappointment to those of us who have long been immersed in his subject. The superficiality of his approach is indicated by his inadequate attention to the researches of Professors Gerberclanger and Falascaslap (two names picked at random from the bibliography) and he ignores even such vital facts as the sitdown strike in the glauber salt mines of Omsk in 1673." A few sneers at misprints completes the reviewer's task, which has been that of convincing the readers that he could have written the book much better himself if he'd happened to have a couple of

hours to spare.

It's particularly easy to do this sort of thing with the *FanCy* because we're almost all experts on some facet of fandom, but I'm going to try and resist the temptation. For one thing, I *know* I couldn't have done it myself. I had the Project dropped in my lap once by Redd Boggs and a few hours' thought convinced me the task was beyond my energy and capabilities. The torch would have flickered out then and there if Eney hadn't plucked it from my flaccid fingers. I admired his pluck at the time, and now I elevate my beanie respectfully at its magnificent results.

So I'm not going to mention any of the few inaccuracies I've noticed, even such trivialities as that I did *not* write the article which had *Fanvariety* banned, I'll just whisper them in Eney's ear by tape. Nor, having read the book right through from Aa to Zombie, do I feel like making any more sweeping criticisms. It had occurred to me at first that there might be more cross-references. But then I realized that the readers for whom it is designed do not need to be kept as it were on the "q.v.", because it won't be consulted by uninterested strangers impatiently searching for a single snippet of information but by eager fans only too happy to browse along interesting obscurities. For when you come to think of it, even such a simple thing as a description of how fans visit one another may reveal another aspect of our way of life to the newcomer, and the subtle hints on etiquette may help both him and us. No, the more definitions good 'ol Eney, Ghod bless him, managed to cram in the better, and the only ones that I think should really have been left out are those of mundane political systems which can be found in any ordinary dictionary. (But these of course are a legacy from Speer's original.)

By leaving these out it might have been possible to give more information under more fannish headings, but then I'm inclined to think that maybe a *Fancyclopedia* could give *too much*. Do any of us really want all fandom efficiently dissected and served up complete on a slab in neat cellophane packages? "Well, that's fandom, that was. What next?"

FCII may not be a perfect work of reference by mundane standards, but its imperfections are the characteristics of fandom itself. It is fandom, in body and spirit. Here we have, for instance, the histories of the Great Yngvi Controversy and the Michigan Bomb Plot, the arcane recipes for blog, crottled greeps, grunch and eggplants and the hitherto unpublished truth about Nirvana, all presented with wit and cogency: but on the other hand the mystery of Courtney's Boat, fandom's *Mary Celeste*, is left unexplained. Deliberately, I'm sure, because Eney realized that part of the fun of fandom is its mystery – as I did when new fans resented my

publishing a glossary in *Hyphen* because it took away the pleasure of finding out for themselves. A *Fancyclopedia* should not be a warehouse for old facts, but more like a mine where you can dig for yourself as deep as you like and know there is always more to find.

That's the wonderful thing about fandom – there's always *more*!

November 1959

Plumbing the Depths

Er... hello again. Maybe I'd better explain what I'm doing here as a stowaway in Ethel's OMPAzine. You see, when the door of OMPA closed behind me last year I wandered disconsolately down the draughty corridors of general fandom asking myself just why I'd left. I'd liked the people. I'd always been interested enough in what they had to say to join in... no, it was just that I didn't want to have to cut any more of those damned stencils. I hate cutting stencils. I'm an inveterate reviser and I keep changing things as I write them, quite apart from typos, and by the time I've finished with a stencil hours have elapsed and it's hard to know whether it was a white stencil with pink correcting fluid or a pink stencil with white correcting fluid. So it occurred to me maybe I could do a column in someone else's OMPAzine and I asked Ethel and here I am.

She sent me the mailing and I read through it and prepared to make with the comments just like old times. I would enthuse over Spencer's lively little pieces about feuds and fencing and his pseudo-Salinger, Terry Jeeves's brilliant space travel article, especially the stuff about trousers, Caughran and Bjo's greeting cards and so on. I would express incredulous delight at the bedroom farce-type involvements behind the election of WSFS Directors at the London Worldcon and amusement at the Mack Sennett-like spectacle of Sandy hitting Dick Ellington and his mescalin-heightened taste with that home truth about cockroaches, while simultaneously John Roles was clobbering him with that custard pie about his Cytricon lost weekend. (Is there anyone creeping up behind John?) Which in turn would lead me on to an expression of insincere admiration for Dorothy Ratigan's proposed convention amendment and a suggestion that she be awarded a government grant for her laudable endeavour to solve a problem which has baffled the finest legal minds for generations. I was even thinking of starting a campaign to have the Lord Chief Justice elected as OMPA President. Then I caught myself on. This was a matter for the pukka members, not for me. For the time being at least maybe it would be healthier to stick to non-controversial topics. What could be a healthier and more uncontroversial subject (and less likely to be rejected by the editor of this magazine) than hygiene?

The young Queen Victoria, it was reported at the time in awed whispers, had a bath once a year, "whether she needed it or not". But only a few

decades later Rupert Brooke was listing among the admirable attributes of the inhabitants of Grantchester that “their skins are white, They bathe by day, they bathe by night”. Obviously there had been quite a change in the personal habits of the English upper classes.

This is the sort of semi-secret social change that can be a lot more important than it looks. For one thing, it could be argued that it solidified the class structure. The well-bathed bourgeois, fresh from their new and expensive bathrooms, were now in a position to convert their guilt for the plight of the poor into hatred. It hadn’t been so easy when they were all equally filthy, but now the lower classes smelled different. And smell is the most primitive and emotionally charged of all the senses. The honest and deserving poor were replaced by “The Great Unwashed”, a different and sub-human species. The English upper classes acquired the averted gaze, up-turned nose and clipped speech (all symptoms of the avoidance of BO) which characterizes their attitude to the lower classes and foreigners to this day. Of course as a sub-human species the poor were not entitled to ape their betters. “Why give them baths, they’d only keep coal in them”, a process of circular reasoning identical with that used to justify racial discrimination in South Africa and the Deep South.

I was reminded of all this by the recurrent references to baths and bathrooms in the reports by Bob Madle and others of their visit here. Let’s face it, in the eyes of some Americans we are a dirty lot. The difference between the Americans and us may not be as great as those between the aristocracy and the proletariat in the 19th century, but they’re deeper than they look. It’s not just that the average American has a bath or shower once a day while the average lower middle class Englishman has one once a week. At one end of the scale we have William Rotsler of Los Angeles, who actually thinks that baths are dirty. “Sitting in your own mud”, he called it once in *Kteic*. For him, you can’t be clean without a shower. At the other end of the scale I know an English fan family where all the members use the same bath water one after another, a custom which would probably shock Rotsler more than if they practised cannibalism.

That remark of Rotsler’s, incidentally has always fascinated me. Partly because it’s obviously the harbinger of a new social convention and it’s interesting to get a glimpse of the future like that, but mainly because it seems to me a symptom of the strange tendency for the US to get more and more like Soviet Russia. Russians have always been accustomed to wash in running water, which is the real reason the washbasins in Russian trains never have plugs. The absence of these damned plugs was reported over and over again with monotonous regularity by visiting journalists all

through the Thirties as a typical example of Russian inefficiency, which may in its own little way have contributed to the deaths of millions of people. Who can say that if our image of Russia had been less one of a country so inefficient they couldn't even have plugs in the washbasins, we might not have taken them up on their offer to help us defend Czechoslovakia in 1938? The Russo-German Pact would then never have been signed and Hitler would have been committed on two frontiers from the start, with the Czech fortifications and armament works still to be fought for.

The moral is, I suppose, never criticize the shortcomings of another country without finding out the reasons for them. Americans for instance should realize that if we don't wash as often as they do it's not because we like being dirtier, but because we haven't got central heating. This means we don't sweat as much and don't need to wash so often, but the main reason is that the British home and bathroom are so cold for all but a few days a year that taking a bath is an operation calling for the utmost determination and hardihood. In American homes the air is so warm and dry you can take a shower in comfort and be dry again in a few minutes. In Britain showers are virtually unknown and a bath is a frantic shivering affair preceded by several hours organization of the hot water and followed by more hours huddled over a fire trying to dry your hair. Sometimes I wonder why we don't run amok through the streets brandishing the severed heads of our architects and house-builders.

You may be wondering what this has to do with fandom, those of you that is who are not still muttering about how fantastic that suggestion was about World War II. Well all right, maybe it was, but plumbing can be important, and in fandom. It was the primitive plumbing of the Kings Court hotel that led so many Americans to cancel their reservations at the Worldcon in 1957. It was the cancellation of those reservations that led to the London Worldcon losing money. It was the loss of the money on the Worldcon that led to (1) the Kyle lawsuit and the downfall of the WSFS and (2) the gift from the Cincinnati group which precipitated the break-up of the London Circle. It just shows that plumbing can produce a chain reaction, leading to a lot of flushed faces.

Dean Grennell was happily listening to the radio in his car one afternoon when he heard a remark that nearly sent him round the bend. It was a sports commentator discussing the coming baseball games and the shattering remark was: "No upsets are expected." A similar thing happened to me while reading the latest *Erg*. This time the remark was: "Nearly 50 per cent of the population of Britain is sub-normal in

intelligence.” I hesitate to say this of anyone I respect as much as Terry Jeeves, but after several hours in a catatonic trance I’m almost sure this statement is completely meaningless. Normal presumably means average, and in any group half are bound to be below average, aren’t they? Unless of course Terry is thinking of some United Kingdom norm and this is an admission that the people of England and Wales are stupider than in Scotland and Northern Ireland, in which case I leave you and him to fight it out. Ethel and I are too intelligent to commit ourselves.

March 1960

A Clump of Plinths

The "Plinth" column, whose first incarnation mostly comprised serial instalments of Willis Discovers America *and* The Harp Stateside *from 1952 to 1954 in Shelby Vick's* Confusion*, made a 1960 comeback in* Fanac*. [Ed.]*

May 1960

Shute the Liquor to Me, Vicar

Inspired by the Ashworth article in the current *Hyphen*, a well known Pro-fan intends to put together a collection of fan humour and peddle it to a book publisher. Further details are DNQ at present because "it is a noodle-headed idea". I suppose it is, but I wonder. I've read as much mundane humour as anyone, from Perelman to Patrick Campbell, and I think fan humour is just as good, if not better... all along the line from puns to belly-laughs. Take Rotsler's *Quotebook*, for instance: I'm damned if there's not more wit and even profundity in it than in many an anthology of mundane aphorisms. The usual snag of course is the difficulty of putting over the fannish background to the public; they wouldn't stand still while you explained what it was all about. Wouldn't they? Nevil Shute's last book, *Trustee from the Toolroom*, is already a best-seller. It deals with a nondescript suburbanite who finds himself under the necessity of making a long and expensive journey. The gimmick is that he is a keen model engineer, in correspondence with a hundred or so other enthusiastic hobbyists all over the world. To them he is a Big Name and with their help he makes his journey. The book has page after solid page of explanation of model engineering and *its* fandom, and the public laps it up. Maybe there's a fortune for the first of us to dig out a pile of conreports and TAFFtrip accounts and blend them into a picaresque novel, sharing the proceeds with the original writers?

"I'm Not Going to the British Convention: I'm going to Wait for It to Pass By."

Three other cities having been mooted for the 1960 British Convention, the

lot finally fell on London. It struck merely a glancing blow however, for the first choice of con hotel was rejected by an uprising of the fannish proletariat as too expensive. It was at this point that Arthur Thomson drew a rowboat marked "Britcon Search Party" under the *Hyphen* lighthouse and I rushed to get the issue out before the gag lost its topicality. I needn't have bothered – the curse that haunted this Flying Dutchman of a convention was still in operation. Three days before the Con it struck again. This must be the first time on record that a convention has been thrown out of a hotel *before* anyone arrived. Superficially conflicting accounts of the disaster ascribe it to (1) superior over-ruling of manager who made initial arrangements, (2) the management having been supplied with a mimeographed leaflet for attendees in which unguarded references were made to booze and zapguns. However the Committee deserves all credit for booking another hotel (albeit even more expensive than the first one rejected) and by preliminary accounts all ended well, Don Ford being a great hit with his magic lantern.

En Garde!

Recently I made a few remarks in *Oopsla!** about Dave Prosser's artwork, disagreeing with an assessment of it by Alan Dodd. Now I'm interested to see that Robert Coulson is publicly wondering why I didn't disagree with *him* instead. "Of course," he mutters darkly, "Dodd is less likely to answer back." Well, of course, as Bob implies, all fandom is so terrified of the renowned Coulson rapier-like wit and breathtaking command of language that nobody dares to cross him, and it was probably some subconscious survival of mechanism that made me forget his review of Prosser. The fact remains however that all trace of it had vanished from my memory along with no doubt countless other masterpieces of great literature which were too profound for my poor little brain to comprehend. However, now that he has leaped so flamboyantly into the arena, brandishing his weapons and spraying chips from both shoulders like a mechanical chisel, I can't continue to ignore him, craven though I am. So everyone take cover, the Great Feud is about to commence. Whitefaced and trembling, but desperate as a cornered rat, I am about to repeat to the redoubtable Coulson the vicious and hurtful epithets I hurled at the inoffensive Dodd. Mr. Coulson, Sir, you are COSMOPOLITAN! You are a CONNOISSEUR! YOU LIKE PROSSER'S ART!!

Farewell cruel fandom. Morituri te salutant!

* *See* The Harp That Once or Twice, *instalment 27. [Ed.]*

May 1960

"In all the debate over defence and the calm consideration of mass annihilation, I wonder if anyone has pondered this proposition: a single concerted attack has reduced population areas in the US to rubble, and fallout and drifting radiation are wiping out the rest of the country. The decision facing the survivors is whether the undamaged ICBMs should be activated in retaliation. And *why*?" Thus Richard Bergeron, making a welcome return with a fine fanzine called *Warhoon*.

But during his gafia Dick seems to have forgotten that this identical proposition was pondered and answered by Theodore Sturgeon as far back as 1947 in his moving and thoughtful "Thunder and Roses". His answers were "No" and "In the interests of humanity", and they seem to me the right ones. But it's only too obvious that an equally prominent author would fall over himself to get at those ICBM firing buttons. It's curious that the sf field should be able to produce a writer like Sturgeon with enough understanding to see clearly that the only future for humanity or intelligent life lies in cooperation, as all worthwhile progress has since man became a social animal; and also one who sees no future for us but as anti-social animals and no progress but in more efficient killing, like Heinlein. It's not often one sees so clearly exemplified the dual principles of love and hate... or good and evil.

What with "Starship Soldier" and the unspeakable nausea induced by reading part of Leinster's "Attention Saint Patrick" in *ASF*, I turned away retching from science fiction and haven't been able to return to it since, so the rest of this column will be social notes. First, a piece of bad news for everyone who likes George Charters, which means everyone who knows him. This oldest member of Irish Fandom, whose youthfulness and health became an inverted fannish legend, sent word that he was ill with suspected angina. Alarmed, Irish Fandom went en masse to his Bangor home in Ian McAulay's car and found him as cheerful as ever but anxiously awaiting an electro-cardiograph and bemoaning the strict regimen his doctor had prescribed. "He's putting me on a food-free diet," he complained.

On the credit side, Bob Shaw is now comfortably installed not only in a new house (26 Beechgrove Gardens, Belfast 6) but in a new and congenial job, having finally made the transfer from draughtsmanship to

publicity, with his own typewriter, secretary and duplicating department. He hasn't yet dared to say "Take a fanzine," as Koenig used to do, but the other day he phoned the firm's private cinema and ordered a film showing. Sitting alone in a cinema watching a film being projected for you alone gives you an intoxicating sense of power, he reports. The new job means a more arty type of colleague, Bob also found, and the other day one of them asked him his opinion of an avant-garde artist of whom Bob had never heard. Thinking fast, he said weightily, "I am not interested so much in him as an individual, but as the representative of a trend." Satisfied, the questioner nodded wisely and returned to his work. I offer this as an all-purpose reply worthy to rank with Arthur Clarke's "That is a local problem; we are concerned with the overall situation."

There will be great comings and goings in Ireland this summer. In late June James and Peggy White will be holidaying near Dublin, meeting local fans Ian McAulay and Johnny Hautz, and being joined in their last weekend by Madeleine and me, there to see the Canada Cup golf and make the largest fan gathering ever to take place in Southern Ireland. James has already written his report of it, in case he doesn't have time afterwards, and to forestall John Berry.

Then in July the Willis family will be having their holidays in Portballintrae, a town already known to the sf world by being featured in James White's Ace novel *The Secret Visitors* (parts of which were extracted from his BeaCon Report in *Hyphen* #4). Ken, Pamela and little Debbie Bulmer will be staying with us and we'll be joined for a few days by Dublin fandom and as many of IF as can get away. All this will climax in the event of the year in August, when Andy Young will visit on his way back from an astronomical convention in Holland.

Cover Rage

The cover picture of the *Fannish* II, showing Trina Castillo wearing a helicopter beanie and a copy of the *Fancyclopedia* II (closed) is the first original idea in fanzine covers since *Wild Hair* and will no doubt start a trend in other fanpublishing groups which contain decorative femfans. I'm sure Bjo won't let San Francisco fandom put one over on Sh'la, and we can confidently expect an end to the incessant complaints about the covers of *Femizine*. Thank goodness it's not still being published by Joan Carr.

Space Diversions (Shorrock, 2 Arnot Way, Higher Bebington, Wirral, Cheshire, England) is out at last with Terry Carr's South Gate Report.

(That was in 1958, you remember.) In some ways I think this is the best conreport ever written. For one thing, it has dialogue, which most reports sadly lack. And what dialogue!

June 1960

The Cock Robin Case

One of the most remarkable fanpublishing events of all time has been Earl Kemp's First *Safari* Annual, a 107 page symposium on *Who Killed Science Fiction*. Virtually everyone in professional s-f is right in there bitching, and the verdicts range from suicide to death from natural causes. There are many dark suggestions of foul play, and suspects arraigned include the distributors, the Russians, Dianetics, psionics, the writers, editors, publishers, fans, readers, television (graphically indicted by Howard DeVore as "the comic book that turns its own pages") (something wrong with your frame hold, Howard?), Gold, Campbell, newspapers, movie producers... in fact everyone but the butler. Unlike the nursery rhyme, though, there is quite a shortage of confessions.

Amid this landscape of destruction and carnage there can be seen an ivory tower inhabited by one John W. Campbell, standing on a smug little island of monosyllables entirely surrounded by exclamation marks. There is no corpse, says Mr. Campbell, his nostrils plugged with divining rods against the stench of corruption, his eyes covered with Land spectacles in two shades of rose and pink and his ears shielded by rotating discs. Science fiction is better than ever. We never had it so good. All this with a complacency worthy of Mrs. O'Leary's cow on the morning after the Great Fire of Chicago.

This is only the final proof that Campbell never reads the stories in *Astounding*, either before or after they are published. Personally I think there is a corpse, and as a lifelong friend I provisionally identify it as magazine science fiction. After long and distasteful inspection of the mangled remains, I judge it was hacked to death.

Kemp suggests that future postmortem proceedings be carried on in that pro fanzine with the snappy title, *Proceedings of the Institute for Twenty-First Century Studies*. Unfortunately, since then, according to a letter from editor Cogswell, the Institute itself has been bludgeoned to death with, apparently, mallets aforethought. This time there seems no doubt as to the identity of the assassin. According to Cogswell a copy of

his fanzine was sent to the head of the University by whom he is employed with the suggestion that he might like to see what was being produced by the university facilities for a bunch of pulp hacks. Cogswell nearly lost his job. The identity of this professional Wetzel is Walter M. Miller Jr. The more I see of the subterranean spites and jealousies of the pro field, the more I realize what a balanced and kindly crew fandom is.

Oddenda

The diagnosis of George Charters's complaint *was* angina pectoris, but the doctor says he'll be OK in a few months. Meanwhile the patient, ten pounds lighter, is pottering about happily at home reading his collection. A welcome revenant makes an unexpected apparition in an issue of Vince Clarke's *SFNews* dated June 1960. It reports a conflagration in the *New Worlds* building (but everything OK), some SF news, a dig at Kyle ("fuggheaded film show" at the London con), but, more important than any of those, contains an implication that Vin¢ is getting disenchanted with fandom. Of all the results of the WSFS mess, the loss of AVC would be the most disastrous.

September 1960

I must apologize to the for the fact that this instalment will lack the usual sober and profound reflections on science fiction which have distinguished this column in the past, but I've been worried about the apparent disappearance of a well-known G-type star, familiarly known as Sol. I've been out looking for it for the last couple of months, but it hasn't been seen since shortly before the arrival of Ken and Pamela Bulmer and ourselves at the seaside resort of Portballintrae at the beginning of July. I must say I've known holidays that got off to a better start. In the first week it rained all the time, the water supply was cut off (there *had* been a drought), the cooking apparatus didn't work, the baby cried, the electricity supply was interrupted, the sewers got blocked up, and I was shanking my short irons. In time most of these troubles were overcome but the weather was still bad two months later for the long-awaited visit of Andy Young.

It stopped raining long enough for the traditional fannish visit to the Tower of the Enchanted Duplicator, about six miles from Belfast, but the rest of his visit was spent in the shelter of Oblique House talking and playing ghoodminton. Andy showed immense natural genius for both

pursuits. In ghoodminton, as he put it modestly, “Once you understand the principles it’s just a matter of physics.” I wouldn’t like you to get the impression however that this group of high-powered intellects – astrophysicist Andy Young, atomic physicist Ian McAulay and the fine minds of Belfast fandom – frittered away its time in frivolous pursuits. Why, there was a most stimulating discussion on whether some currant buns of Madeleine’s could be called muffins by the most half-astrophysicist which only terminated when the last bun of contention was removed. At another meal, now I remember it, there was a most fascinating cosmological discussion as to whether the Earth might not be a spherical pie, slowly cooking round the sun and about to be devoured any moment by some vast galactic entity. Andy paled visibly at the thought that the recent photographs he took of the arms of the Crab Nebula did look a bit like a fork and then, as we came into the sitting room, I staggered back in horror as I saw a book of Madeleine’s lying there and realized the significance of its title. It read, *Encyclopedia of World Cookery*.

Seriously, we approved of Andy Young and enjoyed his visit so much that if it hadn’t been for the Pittcon the following weekend we’d have hidden his return ticket. He would have made a wonderful TAFF delegate and we were lucky to get him for free. I really must report his visit properly elsewhere. It was too much fun to be forgotten.

When I get some of this pile of fanzines read perhaps this column will get back to normality, whatever that was. Meanwhile things are still happening in Belfast... for on Sunday 5th September Ian McAulay of Dublin comes to live here, having taken a job at the university on research into dust particles. He’ll be staying at Oblique House until he gets settled and has declared his intention of making *Hyphen* go monthly. We’ll see....

November 1960

Suffer, Little Children!

I wonder if there’s some sort of reincarnation among sf magazines, that if when one dies its soul takes up residence elsewhere? I was just reading the editorial in the November *ASFF* there, with a mixture of morbid curiosity and reluctance to start the dreary plod through the rest of the magazine, when it occurred to me that this was exactly the way I used to feel about *Other Worlds*. It wouldn’t surprise me a bit to find the editorial in the next

ASFF all about natural manure. Come to think of it....

Oh well, never mind. In this November issue, for instance, Mr. Campbell takes up 5½ pages to explain that parliamentary democracy shouldn't be expected to work among people who don't understand it, as in the Congo. I'm not going to say this was unnecessary, because I don't know just how many Congolese tribesmen have subscriptions to *ASFF*; nor would I even suggest the space could have been better employed, because I've tried to read all the stories and I wouldn't want any of them even one sentence longer (except Clement's). But I would like to raise an eyebrow at the last page of the editorial, where Mr. Campbell draws our attention to another atrocity nearer home, the case of a woman in California who is actually getting an allowance from the Welfare Department for bringing up her illegitimate children. Mr. Campbell is specially horror-struck at the fact that she's getting more than the welfare worker. Well, I'm not. How many children has the welfare worker to bring up? Does Mr. Campbell think these children should be left to starve in the gutter just because they were conceived out of wedlock? I believe he does, and that it's because he thinks sex isn't nice and these are children of Sin on whom the misdeeds of their putative parents should be visited. So much for the famous logical mind. Actually this unknown heroine in California has been performing with conspicuous success the noblest functions of her sex, those of solacing men and perpetuating the race, and if there are any family allowances going I don't see why she shouldn't have them. I can think of plenty of people who are paid more for doing less. By Street & Smith, for instance.

IFenotes

Bob Shaw apologizes for the fact that a new job, new house and old habits of procrastination have combined to make him lose touch with many friends these last few months. He asks them to grin and bear his defections, making, as he puts it, "a jest of the bad Bob". Meanwhile a week ago last Monday Ian McAulay and I, having produced the first of the new bi-monthly *Hyphen*s, launched it on a stunned fandom. After five days there was a letter from Chuck Harris; after another three, one from Ethel Lindsay. Whipped to a frenzy of fannish enthusiasm by this tumultuous response, Ian and I are ready to start on the next issue... just as soon as we get something to stencil.

George Locke, editor of *Smoke*, visited Belfast recently. Asked if he'd read his last issue, Bob Shaw answered with apparent innocence that

he'd lost it among his files of Stuart Mackenzie's fanzine. An interesting example of the Understood Pun... though of course you have to have been in fandom long enough to remember that Stu Mackenzie published *Eye*.

January 1961

People don't seem to write to me much these days – just because I don't answer their letters! It's this selfish attitude of modern fandom that has discouraged so many of us old BNFs. However it seems there are still sparks to be struck by flinging the occasional brickbat at John W. Campbell... not from the majestic monolith himself, of course but from his fast-eroding flanks. Martin Helgesen of New York, for instance, asks more in sorrow than in anger if I really think that the only people who could benefit from an explanation of the Congolese mess are the Congolese tribesmen. Well yes, Martin, as a matter of fact I do. All that long, and involved editorial said was that Western-type democracy failed there, because the Congolese weren't fit for it. So who's arguing? The Belgians knew it better than anyone, which is why they cleared out so abruptly in the hope of being asked to come back. Everybody else knew it long ago except the Congolese tribesmen and Mr. Campbell, who seems to assume that politics, like the Dean Drive, had not adequately been looked into until he took an interest in it. Now, incidentally, I note he admits he wasted the time of his 100,000 or so readers on a nutty device which could have been adequately tested by anyone with a pair of bathroom scales. Well, at least it's more than he ever admitted about Dianetics.

Martin also asks if I really feel that letting the children starve in the gutter is the only alternative to the situation of the Californian mother of the illegitimate babies. (At this rate one of these days I'll be getting a rude letter from Ripley.) Martin, you'll have to face the fact that I mean nearly everything I say. I worked in a Welfare Department for some years and none of us was ever able to think of a solution to this type of situation that did not strike primarily at the children. If you have one, I'm sure the Welfare Departments of the world will be very grateful. Sterilization is not practicable. Contraceptive advice by Government agencies is blocked by Roman Catholic pressure groups. Putting the children in a Home costs five to ten times as much as maintenance allowances, would be even more of a subsidy to prostitution – at least this way she's otherwise occupied part of her time – and in any case, would have been done already if she weren't a reasonably good mother to them. Let's face it, there's no answer that will

assuage the righteous wrath of the sanctimonious without hurting the children, but as long as the cases are few enough not to threaten the foundations of society – and they are – I don't think the rest of us need to worry too much about them.

Martin implies one accusation which I admit, that I tend to attack Mr. Campbell with unjust ferocity. The fact is, I suppose, that there has been a love affair between JWC and sf fandom for 20 years, and no quarrel is as fierce as a lovers' quarrel. We expect so much of John W. Campbell that our disappointment in him is all the more bitter. I have admired him more than anyone in science fiction and I hate to see him bring so low the magazine that has meant so much to me, and the eager search for which in post-war scarcity brought me into fandom. Having created the science fiction we love he is now in the process of destroying it, and when it seems urgent to call to someone, one can't help raising one's voice.

April 1961

Have Fund, Will Travel

The airletter from Ted White about his plans for That Fund arrived while I was making Ian McAulay's breakfast, and I fed it to him with his Fanac and chips. (Maybe I should explain that I don't usually make the breakfast, but we've all been down with flu in various permutations, and the doctor has been popping in and out of the house like a piston.) He handed back the innocent-looking airletter, looking at me under his eyebrows – an unsettling habit, but he refuses to stand on his head before breakfast. "How does it feel?" he asked curiously. I thought for a moment. "It feels," I said, "like being struck by a pale blue thunderbolt."

The New Shaw

At Irish Fandom's New Year party, Peggy Martin presented Bob Shaw with a birthday cake with one candle on it and invited him to blow it out. (When George Charters's birthday comes along I think we'll just give him one with a 60 watt bulb on it and a hammer.) This was in celebration of the first birthday of the New Shaw, dedicated dynamo. He had announced that he was tired of frittering away his life: henceforth he was going to do two solid hours work every night, or get up at 6 the next morning. It's now late February and the most tangible result of the new regime, apart from a few

Dejection Slips, has been the greatest title for a science fiction story ever conceived. I daren't reveal it, but beats hollow my previous favourite title, which was one I suggested for a story, as yet unwritten, by Ken Bulmer about the Earth being a circus sideshow. It's in the far future when the origins of mankind have been lost in mythology, and there are rival Earths touring the galaxy, each claiming to be the real one. The Title? "The Greatest Earth On Show".

Maybe this more ultimate title will induce BoSh to finish a story for once. At the time the prozine *Two Complete Science Adventure Stories* was appearing I remember suggesting to Bob that all he needed to strike it rich was a new prozine called *Seventeen Half Finished Science Adventure Novelettes,* and he hasn't changed all that much since then. James White and I propounded the theory that it's because while we two have only a vague idea or none at all of how our stuff is going to turn out, Bob has the ability to develop the whole thing in his head. The business of writing it down naturally becomes a mere chore, to be put aside for the next brilliant idea. So we sold Bob on this idea of writing his story before he knows just what's going to be in it and though he confesses to an icy feeling in the stomach at the prospect, he says he's going to try it. I'll let you know how it turns out.

More Trouble with Hacks

I notice that Horace L. Gold is in hospital as the result of two (count 'em, two) taxi accidents, just about the same time as an editorial of his has been published giving details of his ability to foretell coming events. It looks as if he should have stayed in his apartment until he got that precognitive ability fined up a bit....

The Perforated Finger

Formerly a title for the mailing comments section of Walt's APAzines, this was reborn as a full-fledged column in Lighthouse. *[Ed.]*

February 1962

In my testy fannish old age I'm inclined to look askance with a glazed expression on my wrinkled brown features – an old tan, and fired – at these clever-obscure titles for columns. So I'll explain this one and kill all the speculation stone dead. Like the cinema manager did to the tv serial recently in West Germany, incidentally. It was a BBC thriller called *The Scarf* (not Bloch's) and apparently people were staying at home in hordes to watch it. So in desperation this cinema manager published a large advertisement saying THE DOCTOR DID IT. NOW COME TO THE MOVIES.

Well, as I was saying, about fifteen years ago when we were looking for a title for our fanzine, we tried to pick one by sticking a pin in a dictionary, blindfolded. *Slant* was the result of the second attempt. The first one had produced *Pamphrey*, and in a belated attempt to propitiate the gods of chance I later allocated this title to my FAPAzine. Apparently the offer wasn't acceptable, for this title picking method never worked again, and the title of this column (which is also carried over from my previous FAPA incarnation) was meant to indicate this.

OK? Oh well, maybe not: I see another obscure allusion right there in that first paragraph. I thought I'd forgotten that old catch-phrase of Ted Tubb's until my subconscious made a dash for it. I haven't used it since one hot day in Ken Bulmer's garden I came across an old tyre off his van and promptly shook my handkerchief over it. It was one of those times you don't even have to say the gag, because it was only recently that Ted Tubb had written all those faanfiction stories beginning, "He was an old fan, and tired."

I suppose someone will criticize me for explaining these obscure references, but if we don't as it were kill off our old obscurities at the same speed with which we give birth to new ones we'll eventually be knee deep in esoterica. Not that FAPA is as obscure as SAPS, I'm glad to say.

Through the kindness of my editor and favourite obituary writer Peter Graham I have seen the last two mailings and I'm relieved to see that FAPA preserves its Olympian reputation for thoughtful profundity: when I left you, you were discussing friction belt buckles and now you have progressed majestically to ear-wiggling. But having spent so much time in the howling wilderness which is fandom outside FAPA, I feel unfitted yet even to tell Bill Morse to clean his typer keys, so I've been looking round for something else to talk about.

One thing that amused me was the account of the San Francisco beatniks hiring a bus to go and gawk at the squares, and it occurred to me that it might be a fruitful source of material to write articles explaining non-fandom to fans. Which reminded me I had already done something like this many years ago, when I wrote an account of the wedding of James and Peggy White which was never published, for reasons which I hope are not too obvious. (And I'm afraid that last sentence makes it only too obvious that for once this is all first draft stuff; or forced draft, you might say, since I've left it until so near the deadline.) The reception was a reasonably fannish affair, as these things go; there was a spaceship from Rick Sneary on the cake, Bob Shaw made a speech, and the couple were secretly presented by the fannish element with a lewd oneshot cartoon portfolio by Arthur Thomson and Chuck Harris called *Hymen*; but I chose to describe the church ceremony because it was the first time I had ever been to a Roman Catholic wedding and because Chuck was at the time, incredible as it may sound, thinking of becoming a Catholic, having fallen for a Catholic girl fan from Milwaukee who had been at the last London Convention. Which helps to explain why I reported the affair like this: ...

Such a nice afternoon today that I decided to sit out in the front garden and write to you. The only snag is that there's a breeze blowing and one is inclined to type an occasional character on the back of the sheet. There should be some provision for this by typewriter manufacturers. Ah well, any portable in a storm.

Wanted to add something to Madeleine's letter about The Wedding, but she had it mailed before I could get my cortico-thalamic paws on it. While it wasn't really what you would call a fannish wedding (I mean no veiled beanie or anything – as a matter of fact, the only things veiled were the references) it had great fannish potentialities. For instance there's a little filling station for zapguns right beside the door and rows of lighted candles for targets. Also in the foyer there was a little newsstand full of books and magazines, presumably for reading during the intervals of the official programme. Bob gave them a cursory inspection and announced

mournfully, “No sf.” After we’d all been waiting for a while and felt like starting a slow “Amen”, a member of Seventh Fandom entered in an abbreviated nightshirt and began to fuss about in a sercon manner. Then the priest came in wearing a fancy dress worthy of the Liverpool Group and motioned James and Peggy up to the rail. They all went into a huddle there, for all the world like one of those consultations the referee has with boxers before a fight. “I want a nice clean wedding now, no butting in the clinches. Shake hands, and come out plighting.” Then James and Peggy retired to their corners and the official programme swung into action.

I must say I’ve seen better, even by the Medway Group. It seemed to consist entirely of a perfunctory cross-talk act between the priest and the Seventh Fandomer. Their timing was bad and all their gags fell completely flat. In any case there must have been something wrong with the PA system and they talked so low it might all have been in a foreign language. I thought of shouting “Speak up!” but I am sensitive to atmosphere and felt somehow it wouldn’t be the correct thing to do. Audience participation throughout the entire affair was at a low level. Admittedly at intervals during the proceedings people got up, knelt down and did forward bends but apart from this desultory PT the audience’s crifanac was negligible.

Towards the end of the performance refreshments were served. Every one who was hungry went up and knelt at a sort of low bar... which I saw no reason couldn’t have been raised to let them lounge in comfort... and the Seventh Fandomer tore along flinging table cloths over it, knocking people’s glasses off and tossing their hair. The table cloths were fixed to the bar at his side so that people wouldn’t steal them or try and tuck them inside their collars, Apparently they haven’t a very high class clientele. Then the priest went to a sort of meat-safe covered by muslin at the back of the stage and got a lot of little flat round pieces of white bread. Without even buttering them he went along the bar popping them into people’s mouths like someone trying a row of slot machines. He didn’t even say, “Excuse fingers.” I noticed that nobody waited for a second helping and I don’t blame them. All in all it was the poorest example of catering arrangements since the running buffet at the London Convention of 1951.

The service was very poor and I noticed no one left a tip (or even a quotecard). Obviously these people are way behind the times. Their best plan would be to cut out the priest and re-organize the whole business on the cafeteria system. It was clear also that the menu needs improvement. Sadie confided in me that in her church they served shortbread, and if the body of Christ can consist of shortbread, I see no reason why it couldn’t just as well be composed of gingerbread or doughnuts, or even beetroot

sandwiches. The latter would be much more satisfyingly anthropophagous.

All in all I felt the show was poorly done, badly scripted and carelessly produced. I know it was a matinee performance, but I understand it has been running for some time and the company should at least have improved their technique. In its present form I see no chance of its catching on. It all ended even more aimlessly than an ordinary convention without even an auction, though there was plenty of artwork about and at least one book.

August 1963

The other day I started to walk to America. And the day after I abandoned the attempt the FAPA mailing came, and in *Cockatrice* I read "A Letter From Jean" where she describes walking out on a lonely shore at ebb tide in Massachusetts. To me at the moment there is something poignant in the thought of us two fans walking towards one another on the opposite fringes of the Atlantic, unknown to each other but nearer than any other people on the two continents.

But of course the concept is littoral rather than literal, for Jean's letter looks as if it were written in winter: whereas I am on my holidays here on the West Coast of Ireland in June.

We are staying in a farmhouse in a place called Castle Darcy, near Lahinch, County Clare, and next weekend we are moving to another little place further down the coast called Ballyheigue, near Tralee. (Yes, where the rose arose.) We picked this region for what seemed quite logical reasons at the time, but I sometimes wonder if we were not motivated by some deep subconscious urge. For one thing here on the Southwest coast we are about as near to America as we can get without leaving Ireland, and for another we are quite near Shannon Airport, from where we left last August for New York. On our way to Ballyheigue on Sunday we will pass the airport and we shall certainly drive in and show the children the big plane on which we flew to America. It will be exciting to be just five hours away from New York again.

We shall just miss President Kennedy, who will have left from Shannon the day before at the end of his visit to Ireland. Unless of course he has by then already called on us. I cherish this secret thought that perhaps JFK is really a science fiction fan – after all who but a fan would have spent all that money to get to the Moon – and that while we are playing with the kittens in the yard on Saturday afternoon after lunch a

motorcade will draw up in the lane, and a cordon of FBI men will surround Mr. O'Dwyer's farm, and the President will nip in for a few minutes' chat about what's happening to *Warhoon*. After he's gone the reporters will descend on me, but I will be firm and reserved. "The President and I," I will say calmly, "discussed matters of common interest. They were of a confidential nature, but I am able to say that agreement was reached on a question of international significance. I have no further comment to make at this time."

I only hope the reporters don't interview the children, and find that the kittens are called Jack and Nikita. It's bad enough that they are illegal immigrants, having been smuggled across the border drugged in a basket. The children didn't want to leave them behind so we went to the vet and got some tablets guaranteed to put them to sleep for the ten hour journey so that the children could nurse them on their knees – a sort of cataleptic trance, you might say – but they didn't work too well. It just made them drunk: as lively as ever, but incapable. We stopped halfway for a picnic, in a field outside Mullingar, and let them loose. It was a ludicrous and pathetic sight to see those two kittens helplessly burlesquing their own feline grace.

The weather here has been cloudy and cold, another way in which this holiday differs completely from last year's, but that has given us an opportunity to explore the country. If any of you are coming to London in '65 by way of Shannon, it would be well worth your while to have a look round here. Just north of us, at the end of two miles of golden sand, are the Cliffs of Moher, known in mythology as The Great Wall of Thomond, where on a windy day you can hurl quite a large stone out to sea and watch it stop in midair and come whizzing back over your head.

At the other end of the cliffs there is another strand which would gladden the heart of Bjo, Boyd and other beach buffs. Great black cliffs on one side, then a mile of sand and surf, and a tidal pool in the sand like a natural swimming bath, and sand dunes covered with short grass and wild flowers. And at the other end a strange rocky shore, where the land falls in shelves to the sea, the rock so flat you could drive a car along it but honeycombed with little round holes as if bubbling lava had suddenly been cooled. There are also hidden fissures, so that holes yards from the sea will suddenly fill and empty with water after each great wave. This is the fringe of The Burren, the nearest thing Ireland has to a desert. It's a strange wild region of limestone slopes, where rivers appear and disappear bewilderingly so that the map looks as if drawn by a drunken cartographer, and full of prehistoric remains. We found a prehistoric fort ourselves that

wasn't even marked. At least it looked like a fort, so we gave it the benefit of the redoubt.

Then there's another little thing which will appeal to Boyd. No longer will I have to complain on my death bed, "And I never had enough wild strawberries." Three days ago I had enough wild strawberries, with whipped cream. We found them on the embankment of the old West Clare Railroad... single track, narrow gauge, abandoned three years ago. This may be the last appearance this famous railroad will make in literature. It's the only railroad which ever sued a popular song for libel. It was the subject of Percy French's ballad "Are ye right there Michael are ye right", all about how the fireman used to have to get out and dig more peat for the engine and everything, and the railway company sued the composer. The case was heard quite near here in a town served by the railroad, and one day it had to be adjourned because a witness from Dublin did not arrive. The train was late. Guess who won the case?

Talking of libel suits unhappily reminds me of fandom. I see in *Null-F* a cloud no bigger than a fan's foot which seems to presage one of those feuds which could have been avoided by mailing a first-draft. There is no doubt that it is a terrible thing for a contributor to *Cry* to be dropped from the mailing list without explanation, but as a subzine editor myself I can understand it. These things happen. What we are up against, friends, is not the cold shoulder of hostility but the dead hand of bureaucracy. When you are writing out mailing labels your mind goes blank and you can cut off your nearest and dearest friends without noticing it. Why, we published an issue of *Hyphen* just before we left and Madeleine told me our readership had dropped to 160. Whereas I know quite well that there are at least 200 people entitled to *Hyphen* for subbing, contributing or just old times' sake. I wouldn't be a bit surprised to find when we get back that we have unwittingly dropped James White and Chuck Harris. And from personal experience I know that even a fanzine of the stature of *Lighthouse* has dropped from the mailing list a fan from whom they had commissioned a regular column, so that he had to travel quite a distance to New York to get his copies.

November 1964

I went to the doctor the other day and he told me to leave fandom. Well, not in so many words, and he didn't give me a medical certificate for gafia which I could submit to *Starspinkle*, but he did say I should avoid

pressures. And the only other pressure I'm under is my job.

For most people fandom starts as an outlet and ends up as a commitment, a crutch which becomes an encumbrance. This must be so where fandom serves a useful purpose, but in my case the process has gone further than most. So far, in fact, that it has become part of my life.

A very perceptive fan recently speculated with what sounded almost like awe on the degree of my emotional commitment to fandom. He was right: it is intense. Not only has it given me what it has given to most fans, only more so, but it has also given me two unforgettable trips to America. Conversely, I have put into it all the ability I had, and attained in it a minor immortality which would have been impossible to me in the mundane world. However minor, immortality of any sort is not a memorial you feel like walking away from. Nevertheless, if I wanted to I could probably convince myself that fandom and I had broken even, that I could leave it now without either guilt or regret. But I don't want to. I have made too many friends I don't want to lose, met too many writers I don't want to stop reading, acquired too many memories I don't want to forget. A morning in a Chicago penthouse, a day in the Okefenokee Swamp, a party in a Manhattan apartment ten years later, dozens of other cherished souvenirs which I cannot just file away and forget. How can I cut myself away from those fifteen years of my life?

That would be surgery, not medicine, and I don't think it is indicated. But if I stay in fandom I must reduce its pressures. Like the sense of obligation I feel to it; like the compulsion to read everything; like the sense of guilt over unanswered letters and uncommented-on fanzines; and like the vanity or self respect which inhibits me from writing anything for publication which I think is not at least as good as the best I have done before, so that I keep working harder and harder to produce less and less. So with two jars of gaily coloured pills and a determination to settle for first-drafts, here I am again.

When the chemist handed over the pills he commented casually that they would have cost five pounds if I had been buying them privately. When I reflected on the battery of tests and examinations they had given me at the hospital I estimated that altogether in the last month they would have cost me about two months salary. Or, more likely, I would not have gone to the doctor at all in the first place and would have been dead in a few years from a coronary thrombosis. How strange and terrible it would be to visualize a community where health is bought and sold like a commodity. An evil, nightmare world.

And how astonishing to find that even a man as kind and thoughtful

as Rick Sneary does not understand the ethical basis of a civilized community. His comments in *Moonshine* on the Labour Party book so surprised me that the night I read them I couldn't get to sleep, and went downstairs and scribbled down a few notes on what I thought was the basis of our disagreement. Having got them off my chest I virtually forgot about them. But now that the Labour Party is in power in Britain again the question has become even more topical and what I wrote then might be of some interest. Though indeed it sounds to me quite obvious and commonplace, and I make no claims to being any sort of political theorist. On the other hand, I am probably the only contributor to FAPA who ever came within five seconds of being tarred and feathered for canvassing for the Labour Party (in the Catholic area of Belfast during the Spanish Civil War) and I claim to know something of what they stand for.

The policies of the Labour Party in any given situation may not differ substantially from those of the Conservatives but there are two basic assumptions which divide the two.

The first is that human society is dynamic, not static. That is, that any human organization, like any other form of life, is in a process of continual development. The fundamental attitude of Conservatives is that things are pretty good as they are and should be kept that way. To a socialist this idea is wrong, because things are not pretty good for most people in the world. But more important, the idea is silly and impractical, because no matter what we do things will *not* stay as they are – they will change some way or other because it is in the nature of them. A Conservative is like a man trying to steer a car by the brakes, and by brakes that are defective. He will, if he is lucky, merely land up gently in the ditch. (A Goldwater Conservative, of course, will try to crash reverse gear, destroy the engine and cause a multiple pile-up.) Since development is inevitable the aim should be to guide the process, not to stop it.

The second basic assumption is that character is conditioned by environment. The corresponding Conservative assumption, that "You can't change human nature", is childishly absurd, because people obviously behave differently from time to time according to circumstances. To take an extreme example: thirty people in Queens watched a girl being murdered without trying to help; but in the same week three people who couldn't swim jumped into a river to save someone from drowning and were drowned themselves. It is quite conceivable that those three could have been among those thirty. The situation was basically the same, but differed in its presentation in such aspects as empathy with the victim, delineation of responsibility and social approval.

If you accept these two assumptions the problem of politics resolves itself into finding a direction for society which will encourage and develop the best in human nature. The natural trend of capitalism is towards larger production units; the direction in which it should be guided is social responsibility. The profit motive, while indispensable for the development of small units, produces such side effects as crime, race prejudice and war, which become increasingly dangerous. These are all manifestations of the same greed and fear which activate our present economic system and they are as inevitable as that a child raised in a home where these are the dominant emotions will tend to be delinquent.

The ultimate aim of socialism is nothing less than a system of society in which government will become unnecessary, but this is a concept more familiar to the science fiction fan than to the average voter. To him, all the Labour Party seems to be doing is converting private monopolies into public monopolies and paying out his money to do so. Furthermore, posterity has no votes, but private monopoly has great power and influence. Conservative political thought amounts to no more than "Fuck you, Jack, I'm all right", but they have been able to convince a large proportion of the population that their name isn't Jack.

Why, for example, should there seem anything strange to Rick Sneary about the Labour Party's proposal to set up a National Land Commission to buy land scheduled for community development at a value based on its existing use? It is no more strange to me than that they should stop people buying the air I'm going to breathe. The land speculator, the man who just buys and sells without himself using or building, seems to me in no different moral category from the people who kidnapped the children from that French town and held it up to ransom. Rick says the Labour Party proposal would mean that people wouldn't buy land for speculation. Yes, that's right.

As for Rick's other points about the Labour Party: They didn't kick Churchill out; they put him in power after the Conservatives had kept him out for years, and he could have remained Prime Minister after the war if he had accepted the social changes the people wanted. And they didn't go too far with nationalization and get the country into a mess; they got the country on its feet again, just in time for the Conservatives to reap the benefit. The bankrupt industries they nationalized are new making handsome profits. If any of you really believe that a private monopoly is more efficient and more responsible than a nationalized one I suggest that before writing to tell me about it you ask the Greyhound Bus Corporation about my luggage.

February 1965

The clarion but unexpected call for another instalment of this column comes at a time when I have only one afternoon to write it and when the last two FAPA mailings are two miles away, protected by armed guards. I took them into the office to read during a slack period and they're still there this weekend. However, the concept of a quarterly *Lighthouse* seems such a worthy one that I feel I should try and leap into the breach, however many unjustified conclusions I have to jump to to get there.

Viewed from two miles away, the last two FAPA mailings lead me to jump to one such conclusion which may be unexpected to some of you: that the Breen affair has been a credit to fandom. I know that some people under stress have behaved with unaccustomed asperity, but this tends to happen in any argument in which people feel deeply. I think it is a credit to fandom that people have felt so deeply in this one. Take Bill Donaho. I liked and respected him in 1962, but when I met him in Berkeley he made some slighting reference to the "middle class morality" of British fans. I don't know if he had in mind some lack of enthusiasm we may have unconsciously displayed for the petty larceny then acceptable to local mores, but I thought it was unfair. I don't see why the middle class isn't as entitled to its standards of morality as any other, nor that those standards are necessarily inferior. The Breen affair seems, to show that Donaho has now come to accept this view.

To be specific, it seems to me that as far as theft of public property is concerned, the middle class is entitled to protect what it has paid for. And, generally, that any group of people is entitled to apply its own standards of morality to actions which affect them. So that while it is quite all right for Bohemians to behave among themselves with their mutually accepted disregard of property rights and ostentatious sexual unconventionality, they should accept middle class standards in a middle class home or environment. To do otherwise is a form of discourtesy equivalent to slumming, and, like some of their contemporary art, is inclined to lead friendly observers to the perhaps mistaken conclusion that it is due to lack of ability rather than to choice. When fandom moves into the essentially middle-class world of convention organizing, it must to some extent observe the standards of that world. It must put on its shoes in the Convention hotel, if not its collar and tie. (Right, Elinor and Buz?) It seems to me that Donaho has come to accept this and that, whatever criticism one may have had to make about his subsequent actions, he was in fact making personal sacrifices for what he regarded as the interests of

fandom.

So, also, tragically were his opponents. They were actuated also by loyalty to friends in some cases and a hatred of injustice in others, and many by both, but they also felt they were acting in the best interests of fandom and were willing to make personal sacrifices to that end. It is heartening to find so many people willing to leap, so wholeheartedly to the defence of someone accused of something so repugnant to us all as child molestation: when you think of what it was like in mundane America during the McCarthy period I think our microcosm has much to be proud of.

As I say, looking at it all from a distance I think the Breen affair was a credit to fandom. Maybe after thinking it all over a bit more I might even find something complimentary to say about Norman Metcalf.

Talking of morality, I saw a programme on television the other day which really shocked me – and, whatever Bill Donaho may still think, I am not easily shocked. (As I think I mentioned before, I once filled up one of those magazine questionnaires to find out how broad-minded I was and, on turning to the answers at the back expecting to find praise for my tolerance, was told I wasn't fit to mix in decent society.) This particular programme was *The Dick Van Dyke Show*, which does not ordinarily give offense, and which is indeed usually typical of the best in American middle class life. But in this installment Dick had been placed in a situation where he was able to identify two armed robbers who had held up a store and he was afraid to do so. Well, I can accept this, because it is an entertainment convention that clowns should be cowards. But Mary Tyler Moore, with whom I am secretly in love, tried to dissuade him from going to the police, and his son said his friends would call his father a fink. Is this really the way things are in respectable middle class America? It was the most depressing thing I've seen since the Goldwater nomination, and before I could regain my faith in America I had to go away by myself for awhile and think hard about Dean Grennell.

Still on this subject, I came across the other day a full-page advertisement in *The Radio Times* (circulation about twelve million) which warmed the cockles of my cynical heart so much that I read it through twice. Five minutes later I saw my 17-year-old daughter Carol reading the same advertisement and throwing it down with the comment, "Disgusting." So I wondered if you have the same sort of advertisement over there and what you think of it. It's for a product called "Swoop", which is a scientifically balanced food for wild birds. Housewives are advised to throw it out in the garden or back yard along with or instead of

the kitchen scraps they usually throw out for the birds. The advertisers point out that millions of birds are kept, alive every winter by housewives and they may as well do the job right. Madeleine tells me the product is in all the supermarkets and sells well. (We have no back garden and two predatory cats.)

Carol thought it was disgusting that people should try to make profit by cashing in on people's generous impulses. I on the other hand thought it was heartwarming that this generous impulse should exist, on such a scale that people could make vast profits out of it. What I'm wondering is whether the phenomenon is peculiar to Britain and if it illustrates one of the more engaging characteristics of the British way of life; like for example the fact that the entire blood transfusion service is supplied by volunteer unpaid donors.

Later: Well, that's what you get for not first-drafting. Looking over this hastily written piece in the Post Office, I see that by skipping steps in my reasoning I have somehow managed to convey the impression that I think Walter Breen behaves badly at Conventions. I do not. All I have seen of his behavior has been impeccable. Short of completely rewriting, all I can say is that I was simply discussing the difference between Donaho_{62} and Donaho_{64}.

October 1966

In the Beginning Was the Word. It Had Four Letters:

And on Saturday 13th November 1965 it was for the first time used deliberately on television. It was at approximately 11:30 p.m. on the programme *BBC3*, a successor to *TW3*, and it was uttered with admirable *sang froid* by Kenneth Tynan in the course of a discussion on censorship with Mary McCarthy. I don't know how much nearer this has brought the Millennium, but I thought I'd let you know that another milestone has been passed. I'm not quite sure in which direction.

Strathclyde

It used to be the charming custom of fans to describe the environments in which they were writing; since I've recently changed mine after twenty years I suppose I should supply a corrigendum. I'm sitting beside a gas fire

in the front attic of a late Victorian house: going clockwise round the room we have a bookcase, a loudspeaker, a washbasin, two windows with an ottoman in front of them and an R1155 radio receiver, a chest of drawers with a tv set on top, a map of the USA, a bed, the door and a fitted cupboard. So far not much has changed from Oblique House. But through the windows, by moving my head to the left I can see the Donaghadee lighthouse (eerily like the one traditional to the *Hyphen* back cover) and by moving it to the right I can see the Copeland Islands, the northeast extremity of County Down. In between there is nothing but sea and a few foam-girt rocks. Actually, between the house and the sea is a sloping lawn, a road, and a strip of someone else's garden, but all this is hidden by a little balcony. The illusion of being perched on a cliff-top is satisfyingly complete, and every time I see this dramatic view I think of John Keats.

I find it hard to explain to you just why this association fills me with an almost superstitious awe, because the coincidence which impresses me may seem quite unremarkable to you. Well, first, Donaghadee is just a small fishing village and summer resort with no great claim to fame except that it was here that Keats landed on his first and only journey to Ireland. He intended to visit the Giant's Causeway in North Antrim, but while walking to Belfast he got caught in the rain and contracted pneumonia.

Secondly, it was a line of Keats which made me buy this house. Perhaps that's something of an exaggeration, but I think it's essentially true. One may have all sorts of logical reasons for preferring one house to another, but really it's as much an emotional decision as falling in love. I've never had much patience for poetry because it's an effort for me to subvocalize, but when I was a boy some lines of Keats got through to me:

> ...magic casements
> Opening on the foam of perilous seas
> In fairy lands forlorn.

For thirty years I have had that in my mind as the picture of the place I wanted to live, but as "shades of the prison house began to close about the growing boy" the possibility seemed more and more remote. Now here I am in such a house, in a place where Keats walked.

Continent Cut Off from England

It seems there is a controversy going on in Oxford as to whether the study of Anglo-Saxon literature, i.e. *Beowulf*, should remain a compulsory part of the English Literature course. Enemies of *Beowulf* point out that later

English literature is so much more important. Presented with this argument, the Professor of Anglo-Saxon, one Alistair Campbell, made the following deathless statement: “English literature stops at 1830. After that it is only books.”

This seemed to me to have all the engagingly sweeping arrogance of the famous newspaper headline quoted above, which appeared in an English newspaper during storms in the English Channel. It reminds me of a remark I attributed to an imaginary European in my ill-fated book: “America has not got any history, just newspaper clippings.”

How Things Are in Glockamorra

Recently I have had the feeling that this business of nature imitating art has gone so far that the world is being taken over by prototypes: as if the talent of whoever is behind the scenes for creating real individual people were flagging, and we are getting mere hackwork.

I first noticed it when Peter Graham and Wally Weber were here. I had to go on an official trip to the little village of Roslea, County Fermanagh, and I took them with me. While they strolled about I called on the pillars of local society and they turned out to be the following. And remember, these are all their real names:

1.) Mr. Magwood, the village grocer. Big, burly, red-faced, jovial.

2.) Dr. D’Arcy, the doctor. Tall, ascetic, pince-nez.

3.) Father MacManus, the parish priest. In an old grey stone house he sat beside an open fire in a book-lined study watching horse racing on television. A faithful female retainer brought bottles of sherry and Irish whiskey while he told us stories of the local IRA.

I hadn’t believed that this sort of thing existed outside Hollywood. On second thoughts there may not be anything sinister about it. It may just have been the powerful influence of Peter Graham and Wally Weber, because I have noticed in the past that everything here, including the people, all quite ordinary normally, suddenly become terribly Irish in the presence of Americans.

Anyway, would someone pass on the good news to Bing Crosby and Barry Fitzgerald?

Shaw’s Aegis

The other day Peggy White at one of her parties served sausages on sticks,

the sort of longish thin ones called “bangers” in English slang. I was twiddling my second one round its stick with the stick left over from my first one when Bob Shaw asked me what I was doing.

“I’m knitting myself a pig,” I said on the spur of the moment.

“Oh,” said Bob Shaw.

“He doesn’t appreciate it,” said James. “You’re casting purls before swine.”

“That,” said Bob, “comes very close to The Ultimate Pun. But it should have been a hamburger, not a sausage.”

“Why?” we asked fearfully.

“Because,” said Bob, “that’s the way the world ends... not with a banger but with a Wimpy.”

May 1960 to October 1966

Travels with Ian McAulay

As for what was happening while you weren't reading *Hyphen*. Well, the Belfast Office, feeling that live dogs were better than deadlines, went for a Whitsun holiday to the sub-tropical paradise of South Dublin. We arrived there on Friday evening in Ian's Superb, Luxurious and Very Dirty Car, after an uneventful passage through the Customs. This was rather a relief to me, because the dashboard shelf was piled with tobacco tins containing dust samples, which Ian had omitted to leave at his laboratory. (He said they were a week's work, but Madeleine commented scornfully that she could collect more dust in her own house in ten minutes.) I had visualized having to explain them to the Customs Inspector while Ian was away checking his car documents.... "Yes, officer, I know about the prohibition on the import of tobacco, but that's not tobacco in those tins.... Well, as matter of fact, it's, er, dust.... Yes, just dust, look for yourself.... No, honestly, that's not cocaine, it's just ordinary dust.... It belongs to my friend Dr. McAulay, he collects it.... No, it's not a hobby, it's his job.... No, he's not a *real* doctor, just an atomic physicist.... No, no, come back, it's not radioactive, it's just ordinary dust. He goes around flax mills all day collecting it and taking it away in tins.... Well yes, I suppose a vacuum cleaner *would* be cheaper but you know the Irish Linen Industry, everything done by hand.... I don't know what he does with it, I think he just counts it.... Yes, maybe it does sound silly, but it's not against the law is it?.... No, I didn't know about the Importation of Dust (Control) Order, 1959. In triplicate, you say?"

Next morning Ian and his SLVD car took us on a tour of the local golf clubs. The first one, Bray, was quite nice but the green fees, 7/6 each, seemed a little high so we shopped around. Killiney was 10/-, Corrickminas 15/-, Foxroch 30/- and Woodbrook didn't allow visitors at all. Lest the next golf club should greet us with flame throwers and hand grenades we settled for Bray, and the following few days were passed in the rich full life of golf in the morning, outdoor Scrabble on the lawn in the afternoon à la Dornford Yates, and in the evening the Gate Theatre and intellectual conversation in Georgian houses. For gracious living, Dublin is hard to whack. For instance on Sunday morning on the way to golf we called on Johnny Hautz, whose acquaintance you made briefly a few *Hyphen*s ago, and Ian spent the morning with him and his pretty new wife Helga lying in the sun eating ice cream, drinking Benedictine and playing

Scrabble. In my dour Northern way I deplored the hedonism of this Sabbath programme when it was mooted, but Johnny promised they would use only words to be found in the Bible.

All too soon the end of the holiday drew near and to shock us back to sordid reality we resolved to wash Ian's SLVD Car. After some hard scrubbing we found two doors Ian had forgotten about and that the car had originally been fawn, except for some rusty fragments of old iron which we surmised might once have been chromium plated: though not of course the front bumper, which was obviously a legacy of some collision with an iron bedstead. All our efforts with chrome cleaner and metal polish merely converted the rough brown finish into a smooth brown finish, until Mrs McAulay sallied forth from the kitchen with a Brillo steel wool soap pad and attacked the car with it. I commented sotto voce to Ian that he would at least be driving the most expensive saucepan in Ireland and Ian, fearing that she would work her way down to the bare upholstery, diverted his mother's attention to the front bumper, so that the deluded lady might the sooner be discouraged. An inexplicable phenomenon then occurred, which even Ian's brilliant scientific brain was unable to categorize. The rust-eaten surface was replaced by one of gleaming scratch-free chromium! The only explanation we have been able to think of is that by some masterly machination at the Ford head office where he works, our old friend Chuck Harris had caused the front bumper of Ian's car to be made of solid chromium plate with a thin layer of steel. In any case, *Hyphen* endorses Brillo Soap Pads.

But now, bronzed and fit, we're back at work (among the pale white slugs in the office I stand out like a pale brown slug) and ready to face the problems of fandom. First, I have been asked by Dr. Ian Ross McAulay, PhD and bar, formerly of Ballycorus Grange, Co. Dublin, to say that he is not and never has been Ian T. McAuley, ASFO, formerly of Atlanta, Georgia. People keep so steadfastly writing in to say how nice it is to see Ian back again and when is the next *Cosmag* coming out, that I tell Ian he had better just accept the situation by taking over this ready-made fannish past and actually publishing the next issue of *Cosmag*. So if any of you old friends of the old Ian are at the next Convention, just introduce yourselves to the new one. You'll recognize him by the reincarnation in his buttonhole.

May 1961

The Warier Bard

This column appeared in Axe *and ran to four instalments. [Ed.]*

May 1962

Recently, as the result of a development which may not have escaped the attention of the readers of *Axe*, I have been studying a type of literature the like of which has never been seen before. I mean American tourist propaganda. As you know, until last year it was as hard for tourists to visit America as it was to visit Russia, and there was less official interest in them when they got there. America was a place tourists went from, not came to. But last year all this was changed. The new administration decided that tourists should be welcomed, and literature dutifully made its appearance. I thought you might be interested to know what some of it is like.

Well for instance here's a pamphlet published by the National Association of Travel Organizations called *Visit USA This Year*, which leads off with a friendly letter to me from somebody called John F. Kennedy headed with his photograph and his address... The White House, Washington. Just in case we come banging on the door there in the middle of the night demanding a double room, and two portions of ham and eggs, a footnote explains that this is "A message to you from the President of the United States". I must say this seems to me disarmingly modest, as if the British were to put a footnote on their stamps explaining "This is the Queen of England." Damnitall for all the famed British modesty they don't even put the name of their country.

Inside, the pamphlet may lack the poetic enthusiasm which Sean O'Faolain infuses into the latest Irish Tourist Board publication (after reading it I was nearly crying with frustration at not being able to go to Ireland, being already there) but I've no fault to find with it. The photographs are well chosen (Hollywood Bowl, Blue Ridge Parkway, skyscrapers, etc.) and the text helpfully informative about such quaint native customs and artifacts as hot dogs, dude ranches, motels (twice) and drug stores. The only thing that disturbed me even slightly was the statement that enough water flows over Niagara Falls to hand a glassful to every other person in the world, once every minute. I can't help thinking

of all those poor people dying of thirst while their neighbours on either side are being crowded out of house and home by thousands of glasses of water, and the unworthy thought crossed my mind that if the Niagara Falls had been in Russia they would have handed a glass of water to every person in the world every other minute. But don't mind me, I know this is just a mental quirk like the one I have about the Isle of Wight. I am always slightly shocked when I hear of anyone going there for their holidays because when I was a child I read in a geography book that if the entire population of the world stood on the Isle of Wight they would have just one square foot each: ever since I've had this feeling that the place is terribly *crowded*.

But as I was saying, this *Visit USA* booklet reads exactly as if it had been put together by some intelligent and conscientious official who had taken the trouble to read a lot of tourist propaganda from other countries and had determined to avoid their mistakes. I wish I could say the same about this next pamphlet, which is published by those old unreliable friends of mine, the Greyhound Bus Company. (Curious, I thought they must have gone out of business years ago.) They make the basic error of assuming that what is remarkable to a native must be remarkable to a visitor It is as if I were to take a visiting New Yorker to see our new ten-storey skyscraper or our great 7-mile dual lane motor road. For instance they use seven illustrations to astonish us with their historic buildings, some of them as much as 300 years old. (I know an English fan who *lives* in a house part of which dates from the 15th century.) This annoyed Bob Shaw so much that he exclaimed wrathfully, "Why can't these Americans realize that they just haven't *got* any history?", but at least they are more interesting than the pictures of slag heaps in Cleveland and warehouses in Winston-Salem. We have warehouses and slag heaps too, some of them older than Williamsburg.

I was going on to be sarcastic about the piece on the Chicago River, which apparently has changed its direction of flow (we even have geography in Europe) when I noticed something about the illustration captions which touched my compassionate heart. I realized I had been cruel, unfeeling. Someone in the vast Greyhound undertaking had torn himself away from the ceaseless work of repairing buses to devote himself to this altruistic task, and he had given his all. It was probably an old man who had spent his life repairing buses but having been self-educated in his youth and possessing no less than four books, he ranked in the Greyhound organization as an intellectual and had been entrusted with the job of translating the captions into foreign languages. The four books were of

course pocket dictionaries of French, German, Dutch and Swedish, so these are the languages into which the captions are always translated. Well... nearly always, and through the flaws we can see this pathetic old man fumbling through the dictionaries with his stubby bus-repairer's hands, trying, trying, while the mountain of broken down buses piles up on his workbench....

He starts off briskly and confidently with:

Independence Hall, Philadelphia, Pa.
Palais de l'Independance, Philadelphia, Pa.
Unabhangigkeits-Halle in Philadelphia, Pa.
Independence Hall, Philadelphia, Pa.
Independence Hall, Philadelphia, Pa.

...but you can see from those last two entries that he is already struggling with agonies of self-doubt. Is he really worthy for this great task? The test comes with the Delaware Water Gap, and his nerve breaks. He translates it into French – "Breche Delaware" – but then, timorously, apprehensively, adds in brackets – "(Delaware Water Gap)". Presumably for the benefit of those of his French readers who understand English.

He pulls himself together with a firm terse "Delaware-Wasserschlucht" but the effort has been too much for him, and he hears the plaintive rumble of more broken big-ends calling to him, begging for his healing hands. He abandons the unfortunate Dutch and Swedes to their ignorance, merely repeating "Delaware Water Gap" again twice, presumably on the well-established principle that foreigners can understand English quite well provided you say what you want to say clearly and often enough.

The deterioration continues into Kentucky, where we are apparently to understand that German is the only language with words for "Mammoth" and "Cave", and it must have been a relief for our bus-repairer to get to Texas where in the clear desert air everything appears so simple. His entry for this state must be a classic in the field of multi-lingual captions. It reads:

Alamo, San Antonio, Texas
Alamo, San Antonio, Texas
Alamo, San Antonio, Texas
Alamo, San Antonio, Texas
Alamo, San Antonio, Texas

Even this translator must have felt there was something vaguely

unsatisfactory about this, because in Yellowstone park he makes a last desperate stand, one which deserves to rank with Custer's in the annals of lost causes. Admittedly he doesn't actually *translate* the words "Old Faithful Geyser", but he does do something to convey an inarticulate message to the world that, while merely an ignorant bus repairer, he does have deep inside him a feeling for the delicate cadences of the most elegant of all languages. While the crass Germans, Dutch and Swedes are each tossed a perfunctory "Old Faithful Geyser, Yellowstone Park", the French entry is subtly, thoughtfully different. It reads:

"Geyser Old Faithful, Yellowstone Park."

July 1962

Dance of the Seven Veiled Innuendoes

These recent launchings of orbital-missile type articles, fearlessly attacking nobody in particular, must please those who know the targets for which they, are programmed, but all they induce in the rest of us is a sense of menace as we watch them droning about up there. This recent fashion in generalized gossip, a sort of schematic scandal-mongering, must be meaningful to those who live in a fannish metropolis, but it's frustrating to those of us who get only faint clues to go on, we who live in what you might call the hinter-land.

I know that anyone who criticizes anyone in fandom these days is liable to get hit on the head by a toy elephant, called Sam, but surely there is some way in which fandom can be freed from this creeping film of suspicion, this Nouvelle Vague, this Menace of the Faceless Monster. I have a suggestion to make. At the Chicon business session let us put Joe Gibson, Dirce Archer and Earl Kemp up on the podium and have them point out everyone who is *not* a moocher, a no-goodnik, a whore, an anonymous correspondent, a Sticky Gentleman, a Hugo-stuffer, a blackmailer or a Cleveland Postmark. Those of us cleared of odium by the podium can then quietly withdraw and continue the business session elsewhere. I can only hope there will be enough of us to form a quorum.

Overheard at Oblique House

"But the universe can appear infinite to you and still be finite. Imagine you

are a goldfish in a Klein Bottle."

"Just call me Mobius Dick."

Pope Elopes!

The New Statesman recently ran a competition for the most sensational headline its readers could imagine. (Example, from a similar German competition in 1926: ARCHDUKE FERDINAND ALIVE. WORLD WAR ALL A MISTAKE.) One of the prizewinners this time was CAPSULE RECOVERED SAFELY. ASTRONAUT GONE.

Synthetic Feud

I thought the finest thing in the *Axe* Annish was that superb satire by Lupoff and White on fan feuding, the finest essay in the genre since Bob Farnham's parody of Southern-race prejudice. I especially admired the subtle way in which, with Larry's co-operation, the real basis of the "feud" was subliminally concealed in Ted's article about duplicators. I mean of course where Ted said, twice, that Dick had been duped by a duper firm... obviously a far more wounding accusation than the absurd one of illiteracy. Ted's hurt incomprehension at the reaction to one disguised as a reaction to the other was beautifully simulated. Altogether a piece of jewel-like ingenuity, on which Ted, Dick and Larry are all to be congratulated.

White Hope

James White's novel *Second Ending* has been nominated for a Hugo, and the Chicon Committee have asked him to nominate a proxy to collect the award for him if he should win it. Guess whom he has nominated. This is a thing I would dearly love to do, but I wouldn't presume to suggest you vote for *Second Ending*. Just read it. It appeared in *Fantastic.*

What a Lot

I notice from the Chicon Progress Report that Ray Beam has donated to the auction the very pen used by Hal Shapiro. Well well. I knew there were some pretty imposing auction items at American conventions, but this is ridiculous. A whole prison! This I must see.

Incidentally I've been making a little list of the things I want to see in America besides fans. They include a drive-in cinema, mountains, a baseball or college football game, a University campus, strip tease, colour television and a golf club. It looks as if the last may be the most difficult. Are there no fellow-golfers in fandom?

– WAW (H'cap 14)

August 1962

New Vagary

In accordance with the fine old traditions of fanzine film columns I bring you the first (and the last) news you will hear of a sensational new movie. It is a venture by the film-makers of West Coast fandom, now incorporated as Twentieth Century Squirrel. This fannish avant-garde masterpiece is titled *Last Year at Marionbradley*, and will use all the latest cinematic techniques ranging from the ridiculous to the subliminal. The film is shot in a vast baroque Convention Hotel and deals with the efforts of a male faned to get a female fan writer to contribute a column to his subzine. He claims she wrote the first installment at last year's Convention, but she denies this, inhibited by the subconscious memory of an unfavourable review. This is made clear, inasmuch as anything is clear about this film except the price of admission, by flashes of dead white on the screen, interspersed with brutal shots of a prominent New York fan, bitching. The draft scenario has been sent to Virginia Blish so that none of the subtleties she will find in it will be inadvertently left out during the actual production.

Piper on the Beam

Everyone here has been reading *Little Fuzzy*, and how we all loved it. Hard-boiled hack, cynical scientist, blasé bureaucrat, we all thought it was wonderful. Which just shows that all us sophisticated fans are just children at heart, because it wasn't really that scientific stuff we liked, but the little cuddly creatures showing those horrid villains where they got off. And what's that but "The Ugly Duckling", a fan's fairy story if there ever was one.

History never repeats itself exactly, but the past is full of interesting

echoes. You remember that the climax of *Little Fuzzy* was a court case about whether killing one of these creatures counted as murder or not. As a matter of fact a court case very reminiscent of this actually took place in New York in the 19th Century. It concerned a little girl called Mary Ellen, who was being cruelly ill-treated by her parents. As the law stood at the time nobody could help her, until a charitable New York woman with a fannish type of mind thought of reporting the circumstances to the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. When she had got them interested, she told them it was a child. The Society gamely took a prosecution nevertheless, and actually fought and won the case in the courts, on the contention that a child *was* an animal.

It was in fact this particular case that led to the formation of the National Societies for the protection of children both in the States and here, the latter being actually founded at a meeting originally called to set up a Dogs' Home.

Goggle Box

Saturday, 14th July, must have been a traumatic day for British television viewers. At 6:59 p.m. the BBC six-week science fiction serial, *The Big Pull* came to an abrupt end with the entire cast, including the hero, lying dead on the ground. Their gallant eleventh hour attempt to save the world had failed and behind the credits the alien invaders were competently continuing to take over. Shocked viewers who switched to Independent Television in search of reassurance were shortly confronted with a beautiful 16-year old girl stowaway on a spaceship being ejected through the airlock by the hero. I must say these developments have given my interest in television a new dimension. I am now watching eagerly for Lassie to get rabies and have to be shot, and even for Perry Mason and Cheyenne respectively to lose their case and retain their shirt.

The girl stowaway was of course from Godwin's "The Cold Equations", the third in a new series of one-hour adaptations of sf stories. This and the first one, Rog Phillips's "The Yellow Pill" (you know, the one where the patient thought he was a spaceship pilot and that his psychiatrist was mad, and he was right) were uncompromisingly faithful to the original, and so well done as to be, I honestly believe, better than the stories themselves. The series sagged a bit with "Little Lost Robot" – a pin-up Susan Calvin and 21 aluminized chorus girls with arthritis – but then it wasn't much of a story in the first place, and robots are notoriously difficult to cast. The nearest thing this series has had so far is Kindly Old

Boris Karloff, who makes an avuncular appearance at the beginning and end with a few ill-chosen words. For this presumably he gets paid. Personally I think that if ITV are putting him on to attract the monster-lovers they should insist he wear his Frankenstein set, bolt through the neck and all. He might at least *gibber*.

May-August 1962

A final instalment dated January 1963 is about the aftermath of both Willises' Tenth Anniversary Willis Fund trip to the USA, and is included in the relevant ebook TAWF Times Two *rather than here. [Ed.]*

My Life with Robert Bloch

Into each life some fall-out must rain, and so it was that in 1952 I met Robert Bloch. It was in September of that year as I remember, at the convention known as Chicon II. I am not blaming anyone, even the Convention Committee: I knew the risk and I took it. Even at the New York docks I could have turned back. I had shown the Immigration Officer my certificate of inoculation against smallpox and watched a guilty look steal over his face. “You know of course there are worse things than smallpox,” he said haltingly. “America is not perfect... there is yellow fever, leprosy, a man called Robert Bloch....”

“I know,” I said quietly. “I am going to a science fiction convention.”

He took off his peaked cap and looked up at me in awe. “May I have your autograph?” he pleaded. I signed my name on a piece of paper headed “Release” and continued along the quayside, the Immigration Officer falling in behind me. I ignored the splash – I had my own troubles. At the exit of the docks I was presented with some sort of purple decoration and escorted to the bus station by massed bands playing slow music. Thousands of people stood weeping as the bus moved off. The driver was deeply moved and the bus itself broke down several times.

On arrival at Chicago I found the Convention Committee broken-hearted. Even the chairs in the Convention Hall were in tiers. It seemed that despite all the Committee’s precautions Bloch had found out where the Convention was being held. As I said, I did not blame the Committee. The false Convention literature they had sent him was beautifully printed and looked completely authentic. It gave the venue for the Convention as Tuktoyuktuk, Northwest Territory, and went into quite startling detail about Eskimo hospitality. They had even sent him a free railroad ticket to the nearest trading post and a voucher for a double igloo with running iced water.

This brilliant plan foundered on one fact: that Bloch cannot read. This may come as a surprise to some of you, too, but a moment’s reflection will show that if Bloch could read he would have had to read all his own stories. Actually he dictates them to relays of robot stenographers, himself wearing earplugs.

Arriving at the railroad station, then, Bloch looked around for someone to read his ticket for him and tell him where it was for. Naturally he was ashamed of his ignorance and looked cowed and sheepish. So

cowed and sheepish, in fact, that before he could open his mouth he was loaded onto a cattle truck and consigned to the Chicago stockyards. Fortunately for the canned meat industry, Bloch was helped to escape at the entrance to the slaughterhouse by a pen friend and, attracted by the smell of liquor, found his way to the Morrison Hotel. The Convention Committee realized it was too late to move the Convention to another hotel and decided to make the best of a bad job. Bob Tucker introduced him to me in the hopes that my refined and cultured personality would have an ennobling effect on the man.

"This," said Bob, in an attempt to avoid prejudicing me beforehand, "is one of the collaborators on 'The Lighthouse' in the current *Fantastic*."

"Ah," I said keenly, "the great Edgar Allan Poe!" I knew that Poe had been dead for some time but in view of Bloch's appearance the error was understandable. It was tactfully explained to me that Poe was still whirring around quietly in his grave and that the figure before me was the result of the kind of life lived by the man who had finished his uncompleted story.

I'm sorry to have to say that my influence had little effect and I soon saw what a menace this man Bloch was to a sober-minded convention. His first infamous act was to usurp the place of toastmaster at the banquet. The solemn function was, of course, completely ruined. Bloch seized his opportunity to profane the ceremony with facetious remarks and make it an occasion for unseemly hilarity instead of serious reflection on the cosmic importance of pulp science fiction. It was for all the world as if he regarded a convention as an event to which people came to enjoy themselves.

But worse was to follow. The following afternoon he again forced his way onto the stage and made an even more disgraceful exhibition of himself – tossing a box of tacks onto the floor, throwing a saucer at our distinguished guest, Mr Willy Ley, and insults at everyone else, and presenting the Chairwoman Miss Julian May with a toilet seat. The fact that the tacks were largely responsible for the spirited performance of the dancers in the ballet which followed was no credit to Bloch. Nor was it any excuse that the seat he presented to Miss May was the only one in his room.

Some people have tried to excuse this unseemly performance on the grounds that it was very amusing. That may be so, but I am bound to say that it is not the sort of thing that we serious constructive fans expect from the professional authors to whom we look up with such veneration. In any case I happen to know that this speech of Bloch's was stolen from *another speaker*, along with all the props including the toilet seat, the saucer and

the brass tacks. As a result his unfortunate victim, a Mr John W. Campbell, had to fall back on a few hastily scribbled remarks on “The Place of Science Fiction in the Cultural Pattern”.

I have not been to an American Convention since, but I understand that Bloch continues to act in this undignified way; and I know from my own reading of fanzines that he continues during the rest of the year to flout the sacred barrier that should divide the aristocracy of professional writers from the common fans. Not only does he ignore the dignity of his profession, he fails to make the proper discrimination between fans of varying importance and treats even the naivest neo with what one could almost call kindness and courtesy. But though he behaves like a fan he does not assume a fan’s responsibilities. When the tocsin sounds for war where is Bloch to be found? Not joining impassionedly in the crusades sometimes known as “feuds” but dispensing the treacherous anti-tocsin of the milk of human kindness through his letters and articles. Which of us would not have been proud to be able to dispense with him?

September 1961

Originally written as a direct response to similar calumnies from Robert Bloch about the alleged behaviour of Walt Willis at the 1952 Chicon, and here revised as a standalone piece for the Bloch tribute issue of Oopsla!. *The original attack and response, published in the same 1953 issue of* Hyphen, *can be found in the Appendix to the TAFF ebook of* The Harp Stateside. *[Ed.]*

Instant Fandom

"Oifig an Phuist" said the green sign over the shop door, an inscription that always makes me feel I am expected to whistle for service. But I knew what it meant all right. It had been impressed on my memory by Chuck Harris, who on his first visit to Southern Ireland confided gravely in me: "If Oifig an Phuist doesn't mean Gentlemen, I did a very silly thing in the Post Office this morning." As for the rest of the sign, it said with a sort of rush of vowels to the blood, "Caisiean Griaire". But that was simple: the green and blue peaks of Beenoskee and Cummeen were evidence enough that I was in Castlegregory, County Kerry.

You are cheating, said my subconscious quietly. It was remembering one of the games I used to play on long dull bus journeys through familiar surroundings to and from school. The idea of this particular game was to imagine I was an amnesiac victim who had suddenly wakened to find himself on the bus: the aim was then to fix my position in space and time solely on the evidence observed through the bus window. It could be surprisingly difficult and I was always being faced with ethical problems as to how much knowledge I should allow myself. As here for instance: for all I knew there could be mountains exactly like Beenoskee and Cummeen in Paraguay, even down to that soft shadowy blue. But I wasn't on a long bus journey this summer holiday, so I brushed my subconscious aside and walked into the shop.

"Anything for Willis, Poste Restante?" I asked at the counter opposite the groceries. The little old lady produced a picture post card and, pausing only to read both sides, handed it over. One side showed the United Nations building photographed from an unflattering angle and labelled The House That Hiss Built. The reverse was completely filled with airmail stamps, printed Goldwater propaganda, and a handwritten message from Joe Pilati. Goldwater I remembered, having seen him last night on Telefis Eireann. He was the man with one foot in the nineteenth century and the other in his mouth. But this Joe Pilati, who wanted some article I had promised him – in a previous existence? Fandom was as unreal to me as work; I didn't miss either of them. As Bob Shaw put it once, work is the only thing you can do for years without getting the habit. Sometimes I think I have a vocation for retirement. It's a pity it comes when you're too old to enjoy it; and of course, as another Shaw pointed out, youth is far too good to be wasted on children.

Of course, I speculated, the economy is wrongly organized too, all back to front. Obviously one should start off one's life with several years on pension, with nothing to do but travel around and chase girls. Then when one is ready to settle down one should be given a big gratuity and a huge salary to set up house and rear children, the salary diminishing as one's needs grew less. Long holidays at first too, of course, while one could enjoy them, diminishing as one got more interested in work.

Well, at least I had the long holidays, I thought. As I came out of the post office somebody got into a black Volkswagen saying to the driver, "Can you give me a lift as far as Glockamorra?" I could go there myself, I thought, and report to America on how things are. I couldn't think of anything else to write about, though during the next few days while rowing on Lough Gill watching the trout leaping out of the water or lying on the sands wishing the sun would stay out longer than the trout, I tried feebly to concentrate on the problem. Certainly there was nothing resembling science fiction nearer than Tralee, sixteen miles away, except perhaps the book *Angling in Ireland* published by the Irish Tourist Board. From this volume one can learn that humanity is in imminent danger of extinction by being pulled into lakes and rivers and trampled to death by hordes of voracious Irish fish. Maybe I could do a screen treatment of that for Hitchcock, but it would hardly do for Pilati. Something about fandom was indicated, but all I had was my pocket diary.

Could fandom be reconstituted from these clues, I wondered. If I were a victim of total amnesia, could I learn from my diary what fandom is?

It must be some kind of international organization. There was a note of the address in Germany of a man called Scithers, and a memo to send a copy of the *Angling in Ireland* book to one Toskey in Seattle. Also I had apparently made two air trips during the year to visit people, one to London and one to Newcastle-on-Tyne. On the first trip Madeleine and I traveled separately, so that she landed at 4 and I at 6. When I told this to somebody called Weber, he apparently said, "My, that was a long aeroplane." There was also a note that I had had stuffed olives during the flight for the first time. I didn't like the taste of them, but they looked so pretty I nearly took one home as a pimento.

Okay, what about fandom's aims and methods? There was a note that according to calculations made by Archbishop Ussher in 1650, the world was created on the 23rd October, 4004 BC. (I seem to remember that some other ecclesiastical mathematician fixed the actual time of creation at about three in the afternoon.) Could it then be assumed I was a member of

some fundamentalist sect? Hardly, because on another page there was a blasphemous slogan: “Jesus Christ for TAFF; he’ll walk it.” There was also a quotation from Freud (“The most effective adaptation to environment is to die”), a cryptic reference to V-bombers, and a note that according to one A. Young the Red Spot in Jupiter was caused by the presence of free radicals. Finally there was a page headed “The Worst Typo in the World”, referring to the foundation stone of Antrim Courthouse, on which the mason had chiselled “Bult 1726” and then, discovering his mistake and reluctant to suggest that the entire edifice be demolished, had added a caret mark and a tiny “i”.

Would it, I wondered, be legitimate to deduce from all this that fandom was a loosely organized and broadly based social grouping, interested in epistemology and generally in questions affecting the future of humanity? That it had no narrow or fanatical aims, but was just a group of like-minded people talking to one another through correspondence and amateur publishing, more of a party than a Party? It seemed pretty worthwhile to belong to if that was the case.

But alas, it wasn’t. Or so it seemed when the amnesiac looked in his notecase for further evidence and found a letter from Phil Harbottle giving instructions on how to get to his address in Newcastle-on-Tyne and including a quotation from a letter from “a well-known U.S. fan”:

> Anything that can be done to bring fandom back to the straight and narrow way of “science fiction” would be wonderful. It is very sad to read of the present mess here in America on the morality or lack of same in some fans. This is a reason I think why we lose so many potentially valuable fans and also for the wide difference between fan and professional fields. It is a shame but the blame must be attached to the sercon fans who have abandoned fandom to these BNFs who just spout off on everything but science fiction. I feel as does Sam Moskowitz that these people are not “real” fans. They are fake fans who are here not to contribute, or to learn, but to impress with words the younger and often less knowledgable fans. The more I read the old fan magazines, the more I am impressed with the fanatical zeal to push science fiction.

((If I may have my memory back for a moment, I don’t have permission to give the name of this “well known U.S. fan”, but I guessed who it was and so will you. I’m sure you’ll also speculate as to what sort of person thinks science fiction has to be pushed as if it were some sort of inferior dope,

and what would happen in the pro or sercon field if one of their members were unjustly treated. If the answer is that they would have just kept on talking about science fiction, then I say shame on them.))

Obviously the amnesiac would have a different impression of fandom if he had found himself with someone else's notebook, so to that extent my game had ended in failure. Fandom is different things to different people, as we have all been finding out. To me it is rather like some offices I have been in, where the work is not too demanding and the morale is good. Everyone is there for the same reason, and the work is competently done, but the conversation is not exclusively devoted to it, but instead ranges over the widest area from art to politics to private office jokes. And if the work is anything requiring imagination or initiative it is done all the better on that account. In that "well known U.S. fan" I think we have a specimen of the typical office bore, the small minded bureaucrat. Let him stay in his little back room with his old files.

Summer 1964

Epilogue and After

Willis in the 1970s and the Disintegration of IF

Under this heading in Warhoon *#28, Richard Bergeron prefaced "The 10 Year Hitch" (below) with excerpts from one "Harp" column (the final one in* Warhoon*), three Walt Willis letters and four paragraphs of his article on the Irish Troubles, "Dark and True and Tinder Is the North" (also below, now in full). The last appeared under the pseudonym Walter Ryan and is entirely different from the chapter with the same title in Walt's* The Improbable Irish *(1969) as by Walter Bryan.*

The first letter to Bergeron below is in response to a suggestion that an additional Harp column would be welcome for Warhoon *#28; the Geneva phone call in the final letter was from Sidney Coleman.*

Warhoon, February 1969

In Northern Ireland at this very moment the past and the future of Ireland, and perhaps in miniature of the whole world, are locked together in struggle in an arena so small that every ideological concept is personified. The conflict involves religion and politics, racial prejudice and patriotism, love and hatred, and I hope in the next Warhoon to indicate how the fundamental philosophy I've outlined stands up to such a test, if it does.

Letter to Richard Bergeron, 7 December 1969

I would have liked to do a new Harp to go with all these old ones, but as things have been here these past few months I tend to be mentally exhausted when I get home, and pre-occupied privately as well as officially about the state of the nation. In fact the last piece of really creative writing I did was a political manifesto. If it ever gets published I must write a piece about my experiences with the more esoteric literary artforms, from cake inscriptions upwards... if manifestos lie in that direction.

But as things are at the moment I find it impossible to resume the

fannish frame of reference, or even to relate myself to my corpus of fan writing. I feel I would tend to be critical of my past output, since I have always tried to improve: but it might also be that I would be by now sufficiently dissociated from it to regard it with indulgence.

Letter to Friends, December 1973

After five years of civil war I find myself a sort of refugee of the mind, fleeing with only a pramful of thoughts from the destruction of my premises.

One of these forlorn fragments is a remark by a British civil servant whom nobody has ever heard of: “Any reform must be accounted a success which does not have an effect exactly the opposite of that intended.”

I can no longer class myself as a socialist, a liberal or a conservative: a progressive or a reactionary: an atheist, an agnostic or a deist: an idealist or a materialist: not even... and here even deepest bedrock dissolves... an Ulster Unionist or an Irish Republican.

After five years of worry about the problems of Northern Ireland, a country so tiny and a community so close-knit that great historical processes are personified as people you know, the sort of conclusion I have come to is that there is no answer... or rather that everybody has part of the answer and it’s all very complicated... or maybe it’s very simple because... and here I’m apt to find myself enunciating some proposition which with sudden mortification I realize was better stated at the Mount of Olives.

Sometimes I wonder if maybe there was not really something profound in that revelation I had in a dream once and got up to jot down: the obvious is not necessarily untrue. For instance don’t you think it maybe occurs to Nixon nowadays that maybe unsophisticated old Honesty may have been the Best Policy?

But to come back to something I know about, I keep thinking the trouble is the scorpions. You know that fable people are always quoting about the Israelis and the Arabs. How the scorpion asks the alligator to carry him on his back across the river, and the alligator says no you’d only sting me, and the scorpion says of course I wouldn’t because if I stung you we’d both drown, so the alligator agrees and halfway across the river the scorpion stings him and they both drown, because that’s the way scorpions are.

Well, politics is scorpion country. It doesn’t even matter if there

aren’t any actually around, because as long as people suspect there are they’ll suspect their presence in the most innocent of guises. It follows there can never be a genuinely generous gesture between one group of human beings and another, either in the making of the gesture or in the receipt of it. And, worse, that generous gestures are counter-productive because both those who spurned it and those who offered it feel worse towards each other afterwards.

So the years of my working life spent in inspiring generous gestures were wasted, and ended with Direct Rule. Now I suppose the situation is one in which a bigger and more thick-skinned alligator is trying to ferry two scorpions across the river, in the hope that they’ll stop fighting each other when they get across. I’m part of this alligator too, and believe me us alligators get pretty fed up with scorpions.

Letter to Richard Bergeron (?), July 1974

A midnight phone call from Geneva made me realize how pedestrian my existence had become. How far a cry from the days when Harlan Ellison was hardly ever off the phone, and I ventured regularly each decade into perilous places like Chicago.

Nowadays nobody seems to visit me for some reason. No one even telephones me except James White, and he doesn’t visit very often because he languishes in a ghetto dominated by the IRA, whereas I of course bask in the benevolent protection of the UDA. Bob Shaw has gone to England and I haven’t met another fan for ages.

Dark and True and Tinder Is the North

by Walter Ryan

One day a group of fellow-travellers marched against the ancient walls of a forbidden city, guarded by fierce giants. If this sounds like the beginning of a fairy story, well, that is how it should be, for in a country which has had so much history as Ireland, and where that history is so long remembered, every place is a symbol and every action takes on the quality of myth.

To most modern reporters, however, the confrontation between the travellers and the giants, and the violence that followed, were the spontaneous revolt of an oppressed people against unjust government. To some others they were a conspiracy of terrorists against democratic institutions.

To some extent both these assessments are correct, and indeed almost every statement made about the recent troubles in Northern Ireland contains some element of truth. Unfortunately, many people assume that the problems of such a small country must be very simple: whereas a small country is subject to the same historical and economic forces as a large one, and the operation of those forces is further complicated by personality conflicts. The struggle between Terence O'Neill and Brian Faulkner for leadership of the Government may, as the New Left ingeniously explain, be essentially a class struggle between the declining aristocracy and the rising bourgeoisie; but when in fact those socio-historical trends are personified in two fallible human beings, one wonders at which level true reality lies.

Some reporters merely drag into the open one strand of the truth from the tangled skein of Irish politics and exhibit it proudly to the world as the core of the problem. Each time they pull tighter the knot in Northern Ireland, as those who feel their point of view has been overlooked conclude with some justification that the only way to secure the attention of modern communications media is to do something violent.

The more simple and obvious the explanation, the less likely it is to be correct. For example, the troubles have little to do with religion, the Protestant and Catholic churches being on the best of terms with each

other. (The notorious Paisley is neither a Presbyterian nor an Orangeman.) They have even less to do with civil rights for Catholics, who have and have always had in Northern Ireland exactly the same rights as Protestants. If one had to give a one-sentence explanation for all the bother it is this: an age-old vendetta between two ethnic groups, fomented by unscrupulous and shortsighted politicians and exacerbated by economic problems, has once again flared into violence.

The two ethnic groups are the descendants of the rebellious Irish of the 17th century, and the descendants of the Protestant Scottish and English settlers who displaced them from their lands. The rebellious Irish were themselves the descendants of successive waves of similar invasions, all of whom were contentedly absorbed in the mainstream of Irish culture, and most of the settlers were of similar racial origins. They would soon have intermingled if it had not been for the fact that the Catholic church had decreed that the children of any marriage between Protestant and Catholic must be brought up as Catholics. This decree, which is still in force, has perpetuated a virtually complete apartheid between the two communities in Northern Ireland, so that it is possible for a Protestant to grow up, live a rich full life and die, without ever meeting a Catholic socially. The two communities live in separate districts, go to separate schools where they learn different versions of history, play different games, join different clubs and dance different dances, read different newspapers, and generally know less about one another than they do about the Red Indians. The Catholics, who are in the minority in Northern Ireland, look for aid and comfort to the Republic of Ireland, which has never recognized the right of the Protestant North to an independent existence. The Protestants, who are in the minority in Ireland as a whole, look with less confidence to England, which doesn't want to be bothered. The situation is one of ghettoes within a ghetto, and Northern Ireland is probably the only country in the world where everyone is a member of a persecuted minority.

In rural and working-class Northern Ireland, the ethnic boundaries are well defined and generally well-respected, the traditional parades of the Orange Order and the Ancient Order of Hibernians avoiding the territory of their traditional opponents. These parades are a form of folk art, full of music and colour, but they serve the basic purpose of re-asserting claim to a particular territory, and when one side attempts to assort a right to "walk" in the territory of another it is regarded as aggressive or provocative, or in a mixed area as an indication that the offending side now believes they have supremacy in that area.

We are now in a position to translate into contemporary terms the fairy story with which we began. It falls naturally into three chapters.

1. The Battle of Duke Street

One day a group of civil rights marchers attempted to march into the traditionally Protestant area of Derry, the old walled city centre, and were barred by the police. The civil rights movement at that time comprised all the enemies the Unionist (Protestant) Government had accumulated during its existence, and no government which has been in power for 48 years is likely to run short of them. Their leaders were liberals genuinely in search of an integrated society, communists, socialists (revolutionary or otherwise) and Catholic nationalists including members of the terrorist IRA, which had now turned its energies into street demonstrations. Their stated aims were such reasonable ones as the abolition of the property qualification for voting in elections for municipal authorities and similar bodies in rural districts. This property qualification was based on the fact that the revenue of those authorities was raised from taxes on property, but it had been abolished in England some twenty years ago because of the wartime destruction of property and movement of population. The importance of it in the Northern Ireland context was that because of the 17th century settlement Catholics were less likely to own property than Protestants, and some Protestants feared that the introduction of universal franchise would tip the balance in mixed areas. The practical importance of this was that the winning party could use the local authority's powers to build and allocate housing to consolidate its position.

A number of militant Protestants accordingly regarded the civil rights march as an attempt by their traditional opponents to assert their supremacy in Derry, and it was clear there might be trouble. The police advised the Government accordingly and it was decided to divert the march along a less contentious route. A barrier was set up to enforce the diversion. The civil rights marchers however unexpectedly turned along another street leading in the same forbidden direction: another body of police was hastily posted there, without a barrier: the marchers attempted to push their way through: there was some throwing of stones and banner poles: the police made a baton charge: simultaneously the outflanked police arrived behind the marchers, who thought their retreat was being cut off, and the melee was retained in full view of the tv and newsreel cameras which the leaders of the marchers had thoughtfully arranged to be present.

It was at this point that Northern Ireland politics entered the McLuhan

era, in which politics is a branch of the entertainment industry. The dramatic pictures of armed policemen clubbing defenceless demonstrators raised a simple question to which the Government had no simple answer. Namely, why should a peaceful procession asking for such an obvious right as “one man, one vote” not be allowed to walk along the street?

The question exposed the basic weakness of the Northern Ireland Government’s position, which is that it is trying to operate the machinery of two party government in a one party state. In England the two political parties try to do each other down at every opportunity, but since power swings from one to the other quite frequently no lasting damage results. But in Northern Ireland they play for keeps, since the Opposition party is dedicated to the destruction of the state itself by its absorption in the Republic of Ireland: there is no alternative Government nor any prospect of one. This is a state of affairs which has induced arrogance and complacency in the ruling party, since they have little to fear in elections: and irresponsibility among the Opposition, who can blame everything on the Government and promise Utopia without any likelihood of being asked to deliver it.

2. The Prisoner in the Castle

It will be obvious to you that the only hope of Northern Ireland evolving into an integrated democracy is for the Catholics to reconcile themselves to the existence of the state, and for the Protestants to trust them not to sabotage it. Catholic co-operation in running the country might not materially improve the economic situation (Northern Ireland is a semi-industrialized region with no raw materials and separated from its markets by the sea) but it might stop the Catholic unemployed from blaming the Protestant Government for their plight.

This was Terence O’Neill’s policy, and for some years it looked like being successful. The Catholic Nationalist Party accepted the role of Official Opposition in the Northern Ireland Parliament and the Prime Minister of the Republic of Ireland visited O’Neill at his official residence, Stormont Castle. O’Neill became popular with many Catholics and was even voted Irishman of the Year by the readers of a Southern Irish newspaper. But unfortunately in political terms this popularity was a liability to O’Neill rather than an asset. His power base was the Unionist Party, which existed to preserve the union with Great Britain, and which had the solid support of the Protestant two-thirds of the population. It was obvious to many Unionist voters that the only danger to Northern Ireland’s

existence was that the Unionist Party would split: if two Unionist candidates ran in the same constituency a Nationalist might be elected, and if there were enough of them they could vote Northern Ireland into the Republic. This was where Paisley became important. His following in the country was negligible, but he commanded the support of some fanatical activists, all vehemently anti-Catholic and therefore anti-O'Neill. Moreover, O'Neill had become personally unpopular in some quarters, and there was an increasing body of opinion within the Party that it would be safer to have another leader.

This then was the situation at the time of the Battle of Duke Street. The press and tv coverage of the incident was so extensive that the British Government intervened, and with their aid O'Neill was able to get the Unionist Party to accept most of the reforms advocated by the Civil Rights Movement. But this did little to reconcile the Catholics, who regarded them as having been forced on the Government, and it further alienated the anti-O'Neill element in the Unionist Party and increased its strength. The Cabinet Minister responsible for law and order during the Duke Street affair resigned, and a Party Meeting was called to consider deposing O'Neill.

Politically speaking, O'Neill's position was impossible, because he was asking his party to destroy itself. The basic aim of the Unionist Party was the maintenance of the union with Great Britain, but every movement eventually becomes institutionalized, and the preservation of the Party as an entity was the first consideration with many: just as the preservation of churches as institutions seems to become more important than the teachings of their founders. O'Neill had the great majority of the country behind him a public opinion poll showed that nearly 80% of the people preferred him to any other leader... but as long as he had any sizable proportion of the Unionist Party against him his position was untenable. In desperation he appealed directly to the people over the heads of his party bosses. Going on television he appealed to them to put love before fear, trust before suspicion and to indicate their support to him personally.

The response was the most moving and hopeful event in Ireland since Parnell, and the only reason it did not attract world-wide attention was because Northern Ireland is such a small country. About 150,000 people wrote to O'Neill, which is equivalent to 20 million Americans writing to the President. Factories, schools, whole villages organized petitions. Groups of people took full page advertisements in the local papers. Bumper stickers reading "Keep O'Neill at the wheel" were-produced overnight. Several organized groups sprang up dedicated to the principles

of O'Neillism and were inundated with subscriptions.

This remarkable upsurge of public opinion silenced the traditional politicians, and the Unionist Party voted O'Neill unanimous support. An amnesty was declared for all those involved in the Duke Street battle and the subsequent riots, and Northern Ireland spent the Christmas of 1968 in a spirit of goodwill which seemed to promise a brighter future for everyone.

3. The Burntollet Ambush

That would have been a fine ending for a fairy story, but in politics nobody ever lives happily ever after. The revolutionary socialists, including one Bernadette Devlin, were disappointed with the apparent success of O'Neill's reformist solution and announced their intention of holding a civil rights march right across Northern Ireland, and the IRA provided them with an escort. The march was described by the judicial commission which investigated the events later as "an act of calculated martyrdom" and, sure enough, it was attacked by extreme Protestant toughs at Burntollet Bridge in the moorlands of County Derry, and some students were beaten with clubs. The Government and police were blamed for affording inadequate protection, and the country immediately split along traditional lines. Catholics saw Bernadette Devlin and the other student marchers as young idealists, brutally attacked by Government supporters. The graphic newspaper accounts of young girls being beaten with nailed clubs had sexual undertones. Protestants despised their own extremists, but regarded the march as a publicity stunt, callously calculated to destroy O'Neillism.

Certainly it had this effect. In an attempt to clear the air O'Neill appointed the judicial commission I mentioned, and was disowned by two members of his own cabinet. He declared a general election, and supported pro-O'Neill candidates against official candidates of his own party. He won the election and was returned to power, but not by a convincing enough majority, though 500 more votes scattered over a few vital constituencies would have made all the difference. The Catholics had been alienated by Burntollet, and many voted for candidates from among the marchers. The Protestants were alienated by the Catholic rioting which had taken place in Derry City after the Battle of Duke Street and the Burntollet Ambush. O'Neill struggled on for a few months, and then gave place to a traditional type of Protestant Government which had little hope of reconciling the Catholics. The Catholic rioting in Derry continued at intervals, until 800 policemen had been seriously injured, more than a

quarter of all the police in the country. At the height of the last and worst riot the Republic of Ireland moved its troops to the Border, and the now extremist-dominated civil rights movement organized demonstrations in other towns to weaken the police further. Catholic extremists in Belfast used the opportunity to attack police stations and Protestant working class areas with rifles and machine-guns. Protestant extremists counter-attacked with firearms and petrol bombs, burning many Catholic families out of their homes. British troops were brought in and enforced the uneasy peace which now exists.

It seems to me that there are several lessons of universal application which can be drawn from the events in Northern Ireland.

1. That democracy as we know it can operate only when there is general agreement on fundamentals. The solution which is being tried now in Northern Ireland is to transfer most of the controversial aspects of government to the civil service or to nominated public bodies.

2. That hate is more powerful in politics than love, if only because its effects are more newsworthy and televisual. The influence of the modern news media on the events in Northern Ireland has been consistently pernicious.

3. That the technique of obstructive or violent demonstration as practised by the New Left can destroy a community by creating the opportunities for the violent expression of hatred, and can produce nothing else. After a year of such demonstrations the extreme Catholics in Northern Ireland have destroyed all hope of a peaceful unification of Ireland as a whole, the extreme Protestants have destroyed the basis of the ascendancy they were trying to protect, and the New Left have alienated a whole generation from socialism.

It would not be fair to Northern Ireland to conclude without making it clear that the total number of extremists of all sorts involved in the disturbances number only a few thousand in all, and that more than 90% of the people live in goodwill, without ever having seen an act of violence except on television. This is the fourth and most important lesson Northern Ireland has for the world. That a modern highly organized community is terrifyingly vulnerable.

January 1970

The 10 Year Hitch

In the great days of the romantic thriller, authors used to add a few pages at the end in which they would set out briefly the humdrum later life of all the main characters, after the hero had clasped the heroine to his manly bosom and restored the blood-red ruby to the eyesocket of the statue of John Wesley in the Methodist Mission Hall at Stoke Newington. I always felt this practice showed a proper consideration for the legitimate curiosity of readers, and now, prompted discreetly by Mike, I feel I should add a similar postscript to the *Hyphen* story.

Well, as you've probably guessed from the news of the mundane world, Irish Fandom hasn't been living happily ever after. What no fannish feud could ever do has been accomplished by the IRA and Irish Fandom has disintegrated as a group. It was nothing to do with the political polarization of the Ulster community, though both sides are represented in Irish Fandom: it was simply that travelling outside one's own district became too chancy.

At one time James White's suburb was completely dominated by the Provisionals, and his windows broken because he wouldn't pay their levies. This phase went on so long that the more respectable citizens sought an estimate from a contractor for a neat post-and-rail road obstruction to replace the untidy and insanitary barricade of burned-out cars erected by the IRA. I remember James and I discussing on the telephone the possible market for a new magazine to be called *Better Homes and Barricades*. Later my own area was dominated for a while by one of the Protestant para-military organizations which arose to counter the IRA, though since this is a high-rent district the barricade near our house was in a different class. There is nothing like a burned-out Jaguar for giving tone to a barricade.

More recently there have been the random murders and the Provisional bomb attacks on the homes of civil servants, of which I am one. Since my son's best friend is a Catholic we are possible targets for both lots of freedom fighters, and my son has started sleeping with a sword by his side and we don't encourage visitors.

So what with all these paramilitary organizations – inside every nut case is a colonel – there hasn't been a full meeting of Irish Fandom for years. However we do keep in touch and worry about one another. Madeleine and I saw the venerable George Charters as recently as

Christmas Eve, when he called to leave in his Xmas present. George is retiring soon from his job and hopes to devote his time to arranging his collection and completing his Mammoth Index to all the science fiction magazines, despite my warning that there is not much public interest in stories about mammoths. He has a brother in Virginia and has been visiting him every other year. We used to complain bitterly that George, a shy sort of person, never called on any fans while he was in the States: so last September he went to the Discon, where he was Member No. 4582, saw no one he recognized, bought a few prozines and went away again.

Well, that's the really poignant bit over. James and Peggy White are well and the Andersonstown situation has improved since some local authorities were interned, but they are still thinking of moving to the Republic of Ireland where authors don't have to pay income tax. It's just that he can't get an ordinary job down there and doesn't write quickly enough to go full-time.

Bob and Sadie Shaw have already moved to England. Bob looked round for a medium-sized industrial area where he could live in the country and travel to work by train in about half an hour, figuring he could do enough writing in that time to buy his own train... which isn't a locomotive. Chuck Harris is living in the North of England now, saying in his Xmas card he is happy except for getting older, and Atom seems the same as ever. The last time I saw John Berry he told me that he was earning with overtime as much as the captain of a car and was going to buy a nuclear submarine, but I think he was suffering from overwork.

As for me, well when the trouble began here I diverted to my work all the energy and enthusiasm that used to go into fandom and rose so far that I was chief advisor to one of the Ministers in the mixed Protestant/Catholic Government last year. When it fell, through no fault of ours, I was left marooned with only a plush office, a devoted staff, a Selectric typer, and a Xerox 3000 photo-copier.

Yes, I know what you're thinking, but....

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As I was saying, the currents of history had marooned me in a well-equipped office, and the thought crossed my mind that at last I was in the fabulous situation of oldtime fan Charles Koenig: who, it was reputed among us awestruck neofans, only had to summon his favourite stenographer when the spirit moved him. Then, putting his feet on the desk and his hands behind his head, he would intone the wondrous words, "Take a fanzine."

This story had made a deep impression on me. Like most fans of that era I had been brought up in hard times and was still at odds with the mundane world. To our generation, even a second-hand hecto was a major item of capital investment. The tiny printing press on which we started *Slant* was salvaged from the loft of a shop where a friend of mine worked: the big press on which we published the major issues was a surprise gift from Manly Bannister: and the *Hyphen* duplicator was one of two old Gestetners bought in a job lot at an auction for the equivalent of $10. I passed the other one on at cost to John Berry, who published all his fanzines on it.

So I used to think quite a lot about Charles Koenig in those early days, but the more I thought the more snags I could see in this fannish nirvana.

It was necessary for me to believe that after Koenig had taken his feet off the desk he had nothing more to do until the letters of comment began to arrive in his In-tray. Any suggestion of further intervention by Koenig in the production of his fanzine would destroy the majesty of the concept of the resources of the soul-less mundane world being exploited by a fannish mastermind.

Really, what began to worry me was this: what would this Koenig fanzine look like? What, for instance, would happen when the typist finished stencilling an article and there was a bit of space left at the bottom of the page? How would she know to get out her lettering guide and put in South Gate In 58? Then again, what about art work? Could one assume that Koenig's firm, whatever it was, had some sort of advertising department which could be directed to produce a supply of spaceships and monsters, if not of esoteric fannish cartoons? No, I concluded, that would be too much.

Well all right, I thought, let's assume Koenig has a fannish art editor who keeps him supplied with drawings of assorted sizes, all easily traced onto stencil. And let's assume that Koenig, after dictating the main contents of his fanzine, goes on to dictate a number of fannish advertisements, slogans, interlineations and other miscellaneous fillers of varying lengths. Then the typist only has to take at random an illo or filler out of the box, the same size as the particular space left on her stencil. Wouldn't it be a proper fanzine then?

It was at that point that I began to doubt the artistic liberalism which had been one of my cherished beliefs since I was 14. The spontaneous creator of my ideal, free from the artificial bonds of artistic convention, began to look sick when I put him behind Koenig's desk trying to dictate

miscellaneous fillers. I just knew I could never do that. Whereas I knew that confronted by a space of a certain size that had to be filled, I could occasionally come up with something that made not only the space but the context look as if it had been designed for that and nothing else; and which I would never have thought of otherwise.

However it was Arthur Thomson who really completed this phase of my education. Since I am completely devoid of any artistic ability whatsoever, and am indeed subconsciously inclined to regard it as some kind of sneaky conjuring trick, I tend to ignore artwork when stencilling a fanzine. So every time I typed up stencils for *Hyphen* I would find myself carried away by the words and wake up suddenly to the realization that I had typed another wedge of solid print. I would hastily indent and then, since my margin stops were defective, find I had closed the space up again so that it was little bigger than a postage stamp. I'd indent again, and very likely the same thing would happen again.

So every time I sent the stencils away to Arthur Thomson I felt very guilty about them. And every time they would come back inside the week with a note of mild expostulation from Arthur, and I would look through them with renewed apprehension. And every time I would be overwhelmed with astonishment at the exquisitely felicitous combination of text and artwork which had been contrived. How pointedly and yet subtly that little caricature exposed the pretensions of the text. Anything larger would have been overbearing (anything smaller, invisible). Then again how neatly those vignettes at the beginning and end of that reader's letter revealed the contradictions of his argument. Confronted with these miracles I sometimes in desperation considered the possibility that I had some clairvoyant talent for leaving the right space in the right place.

But of course it was nothing more than the concentration of Art within discipline, much as water confined to a narrow channel will create power, while left free it is merely wet.

And indeed, as the confines of an analogy like that one will show up flaws in the writer's thinking. For I have been trying to make two separate points, and am now forced to distinguish between them to avoid leaving the impression that I thought that without me Arthur Thomson would be wet. My immediate thesis was that *Hyphen* was the way it was because of our limitations. And behind that, in a sort of subliminal way, I was attacking the current concept of artistic freedom; which seems to me to be a sort of welfare scheme for the talentless. In the old days I would have torn up this page and started again.

The main limitation was space, for all of us. We soon found out that a

large issue attracted no more response than a small one, often in fact less; a phenomenon of numbness among the readership which I called annishthesia. So one day I took a sheaf of over-runs down to the Post Office and found on their scales how many I could send for the minimum rate. It came to 13, including ink, so from then the size of *Hyphen* as far as I was concerned was 26 pages. But there were 4 or 5 more or less regular contributors, and every issue was a struggle against temptation. I always resisted with the argument that it was better to have something to look forward to publishing, than risk burning ourselves out. *Hyphen* might have been a better fanzine without this limit, but I doubt if it would have lasted so long.

Anyway we never had many outside contributions, and I rejected a lot of them. And to be honest, even the ones I did print I sometimes didn't care for all that much. I had started by publishing a letterpress fanzine, and there is nothing like setting type by hand and distributing it all again to put you off unnecessary wordage. Besides I always felt, though I didn't say so at the time, that I wanted *Hyphen* to be a fanzine that would keep. I always had this clear mental picture of some fan 20 years hence feeding old fmz into an incinerator: I wanted him to stop as a matter of course when he came to a *Hyphen* because he knew there would be something in it worth re-reading. People like Ed Wood used to dismiss fmz like ours as ephemeral tittle-tattle: I wanted to show it was fmz full of reviews, and speculations about the differences between sf and fantasy, that would be in the incinerator, while ours was still on the shelves.

So it wasn't enough for us that book reviews should be well written and perceptive: they had to be worth reading in their own right. And it wasn't enough for faanfiction to be funny, it had to say something true and worth saying about the people and incidents involved.

The big strain on this editorial policy came with John Berry, who hadn't had the constraining background that had shaped us. Moreover his was a massive talent, which emerged full grown. We just couldn't accommodate it.

As John began to write for other fanzines and publish his own, he stopped coming to the regular meetings of Irish Fandom. He never said why and I often wondered, and I wonder now, whether he had felt I was jealous of a talent that was so much more prolific than mine and of a gift for comic invention I could never surpass. But if it was, and there was some way I had betrayed it, I couldn't find out about it. We were left to wonder if it was something we'd said: or if his wife disapproved of us; or if it was simply that he wanted to make his own way in the fannish world

but didn't choose to discuss it. Certainly it wasn't because he'd been bored. For years he still turned up every time we had a fannish visitor, behaved as if he had never been away and obviously enjoyed every minute. And he still used us as characters in his stories, not at all inconvenienced by the complete absence of facts on which to base his plots.

There was something else about the situation which I have only now come to realize was peculiar. Obviously there were personal tensions in Irish Fandom over the years: there had to be in any group of people with differing backgrounds working closely together, especially in a place like Northern Ireland. But in the whole 20 years there was never an open quarrel: we simply did not bring annoyances to the surface of conversation, any more than we ever discussed politics or religion. It was as if we were always afraid of an explosion. What annoyances we had with each other, and they were not many, we sublimated in faanfiction. That way we could get off our chests what was bugging us, without the danger of direct confrontation: rather like the way Hamlet got at the King by putting on a play depicting his father's murder. ("The play's the thing, wherein we'll touch the conscience of the King.") Thus we could also avoid the danger of emotional overstatement, and convey what was in our case the essential truth that the accusation was made in a context of affection and respect. So faanfiction as we understood it was in a sense more real than reality. If you wanted to write a history of the personal relationships among the members of Irish Fandom you couldn't do it with a videotape of every meeting: but it's all there in the fanzines.

The John Berry situation from my point of view was in a faanfiction story in *Hyphen* called "The Only Way", a desperate attempt to communicate with John at that level. But it evoked no response: we were just not writing the same kind of faanfiction.

The idea of the re-readable *Hyphen* extended to the back cover, where I believed that the secret history of fandom could be read by anyone with enough patience to ascribe all the names to all the quotes. But in fact, many of the early ones came from the correspondence of Eric Frank Russell, and had little relevance to fandom. EFR never subscribed to *Hyphen*, that being against his principles he said, but every time he returned his copy for resale and enclosed a ribald letter of comment and half a page of quotes, most of which were eventually used. He also sent an occasional article, even after a rejected one. He was a real pro, and a Great and Reasonably Good Man. He was of course the original of Profan in *The Enchanted Duplicator*, the second character from there to make his

appearance in this article.

The ideal baquote was rare. It had to be interesting in itself, and yet obviously full of mischievous implications, so that while everyone would read it with suspicious glee it would detonate like a grenade in one particular quarter. There were quite a few like that, but to give an example would require detailing the story of some obscure feud. A more obvious type was the self-declaratory statement, like Chuck Harris's "I ain't half bloody suave myself," which was a one-sentence piece of faanfiction, or one of Bob Shaw's aphorisms, like "When you read a book and then forget it, you're left with a different kind of ignorance," which contains an entire theory of education.

And then of course there was the topical, like "This is the communications satellite. Your three minutes are up: Kindly deposit eight billion forty two million nine hundred thousand dollars and twenty cents." The fact that this was from *Hyphen* #35 appals me with the mental picture it conveys of a greybeard quavering about the past: next thing I'll be remembering Lindbergh. So enough of reminiscences. I am not an old man, and next time I write anything for a fanzine it'll be about the present.

February and June 1975

The APA and the Survival of Civilization

The first motor vehicle I ever had was a two-stroke third-hand Vespa scooter. The man in the shop demonstrated that it was in working order with a virtuoso display of motorized agility which so over-awed me that I just wheeled the bike home. I was so proud and nervous of this god-like machine with its 125 c.c. of uncontrollable power that I resolved to clean it up and master its complexities before attempting to ride it myself.

So I spent a week or so taking bits off, cleaning them and putting them back. I bought a new windscreen and various other replacements and embellishments. I even repainted the frame, with a Flit fly-spray, which left me with blistered fingers, a bike which looked almost second-hand, and – because of an unfortunate domestic misunderstanding – a metallic green kitchen window and several angry enamelled flies.

Finally, there seemed no further scope for propitiating the monster, so one evening I wheeled it out into the alley behind the Upper Newtownards Read and pushed down on the kick starter. To my astonishment the engine came to life. I weaved nervously along the alley in first gear, chugged with increasing confidence along Clonbe Drive in second, and in a few minutes was hurtling along Belmont Road at 30 mph in top, my spirit set on far horizons.

At which juncture the machine died and would not be revived. I wheeled it ignominiously back home and checked it over. There was fuel reaching the carburettor and a spark at the plug. I cleaned the jets and to my relief she started again. Obviously I had left a piece of fluff in some narrow fuel passage.

At almost exactly the same place on the Belmont Road she stopped again. I now diagnosed water in the fuel, trudged to the nearest filling station for a gallon of petrol and a pint of oil and wheeled the bike home again.

With guaranteed clean fuel she started perfectly again, and this time I leaned her against the alley wall and watched her tick over until the engine would in my judgment have taken her to the utmost reaches of the Belmont Road. Then, confident that calm human intelligence could master any problem, I set off again. Marooned for the third time on the Belmont Road, which now began to have for me something of the significance the

Sun had for Icarus, it became clear to me that I was the victim of a particularly obscure intermittent fault in the electrical system.

I needn't bore you with the time I wasted before I found how wrong I was. Except to say that in a sense it included the period it took Robert Pirsig to grow up and write his book *Zen and the Art of Motor Cycle Maintenance*.

Until I read Pirsig, the lesson I had taken from this episode was "if it's working, leave it alone". This was against all my natural inclinations, but it seemed to me undeniable that I had bought a motor cycle which was working, and by a combination of arrogance and ignorance converted it into a motor cycle that was not working. And, seeing the destruction produced in Northern Ireland by a similar approach to society, I was being tempted to draw the obvious analogy: that attempts at social reform being likely to be equally counter-productive, there was no moral distinction to be drawn between those who try to improve society and those who want to leave it alone.

There are several levels to Pirsig's book, each of which interests me. Much of the journey it describes, from Minnesota to California, I have made myself. The philosophical quest it parallels has something of the science-fictional quality of Josephine Tey's *Daughter of Time*, a detective story which impressed me greatly, though I have forgotten much of the details of the plot, and may not even have the title right. The heroine was a historian engaged to a Scotland Yard detective who was laid up in hospital, free only to read and think. She lends him some history books and he exposes the real murderer of the Princes in the Tower from clues hitherto unnoticed. In the same way Pirsig's hero tracks down the villain among the Greek philosophers responsible for the fatal contradictions in our civilization. (Aristotle dun it.)

The real story line however is: Philosopher finds Answer, Philosopher loses Answer, Philosopher gets Answer. Can the philosopher hero find his way again to the answer he lost in the nervous break-down the first discovery caused? He does so by approaching the problem from below instead of from above, on the mundane and practical level instead of that of abstract reason. This is, when you come to think of it, the Cinderella plot. Cinderella discovers her answer at the ball, but loses it because her approach is not based on reality. The Fairy Godmother is Inspiration, the Pumpkin Coach and the ball gown are Untested Assumptions. Only when the problem is restated and answered in practical terms, by the field experiments with the slipper – the only concrete fact emerging from the situation – does the answer become real and stable. Cinderella is a parable

of the intellectual process.

Pirsig's hero has forgotten his equivalent of the ball because of the trauma of his departure from the scene, but the slipper is there in the form of his motor cycle. It is his only remaining connection between philosophy and reality, and on it he gradually rebuilds from the ground up the same theory he developed in his previous personality.

The process starts from his bewilderment as to why his travelling companion does not maintain his motor cycle, although he is completely dependent on it. Pressing him, he finds a fear and hatred of the machine and the technology it represents, which seem increasingly significant as he analyses them. The dichotomy they represent is he perceives, the fatal flaw in our civilization and is related to the splits between classicism and romanticism, the arts and science, idealism and materialism, humanism and religion, and western and eastern philosophy.

"The real cycle you're working on is a cycle called yourself" postulates Pirsig. In the case of my Vespa, I am sure you have already appreciated the significance of the fact that the engine performed perfectly as long as I was not riding it, more like an untrained horse than a properly domesticated motor cycle. What was wrong was this. The fuel tank was attached to the sprung seat, so that when I sat on the saddle it sank closer to the carburettor, just enough to kink the rubber fuel pipe and cut off the supply. Of course when I got off to see what was wrong there was nothing wrong, a classic example of the observer influencing the experiment.

The symbolism seemed quite striking after I had read Pirsig. There was nothing wrong with my motor cycle: the fault was in my relationship with it. In Pirsig's view the relationship between men and his artifacts is the crux of our problems.

Given he's right, the problem that interests me is, what are we going to do about it? Pirsig's answer seems to be simply, maintain your motor cycle, as Voltaire's was, cultivate your garden. The main difference seems to be that a motor cycle is a garden you can drive hither and thither through the world, setting an example.

I'd prefer to consider the sort of practical changes that need to be made in the way we run things and see how they could most rapidly be brought about. If you say this is treating the effect rather than the cause, I would argue that we are treating a cyclic process which can be broken at any point. Consider the main example Pirsig adduces of technological alienation, the English Professor baffled by the rotisserie assembly instructions. This is because the instructions are a series of disjunctive commands, without any sense of underlying purpose: whereas, Pirsig

suggests, rotisserie assembly should be regarded more like a long-lost branch of sculpture. As an example of another type of assembly instruction, he cites an Oriental example which begins: “Assembly of Japanese bicycle require great peace of mind.”

Two things interest me about this example. The first is that while the rotisserie assembly instructions were no doubt the result of the philosophic error behind technological alienation, they were also the cause of alienation among people who wouldn’t know a philosophic dogma if one came up and bit them on the legma.

The other thing that interests me is Pirsig’s account of how these types of assembly instructions come to be written. He says that what usually happens is that when the product is ready for marketing some junior executive is sent along to the factory to ask the foreman how it is put together, and sets down more or less what he’s told.

What seems significant to me is that this is a middle management decision, and increasingly typical of the sort of decision which determines the nature of our daily life, at the interface between technology and humanity. The more complex society becomes, the more data is necessary for decision making. The more the data, the lower the organizational level at which it is assembled, and the more likely it is that the decision will be effectively taken at that level by selection of the data assumed to be relevant.

In the case of the rotisserie, for example, there are no doubt dozens of different methods by which it could be put together, and an infinite number of ways in which each could be described. But the foreman reduces the methods to one, and the junior executive normally forecloses most of the options of alternative descriptions.

What is supposed to happen, of course, is that the Marketing Manager throws the assembly instructions back at the junior executive, without being able to suggest an alternative himself. I would suggest however that it is inherent in the nature of large organizations that he will not do this, the fundamental reason being that there is inadequate incentive for him to do so. This is because the larger and more complex the organization, the weaker is the communication of feed-back from the consumer. In the old days, if a blacksmith made you a roasting spit you couldn’t put together, you could go along and dump it on his anvil. Nowadays major design faults, whether in manufactured goods or public services, may persist until the consequences are serious enough for consumer feed-back to manifest itself politically. A notable example is the effect of high-rise flats in working class areas in Britain.

Ideally, all organizations should be broken down to units small enough for personal consumer contact to restore a sense of personal job responsibility, and there are some interesting developments in that direction in the automobile industry in Europe. However, the same aim might be achieved to some extent if the people in middle management realized their power. The first requirement for the responsible and efficient use of power is to realize that you have it, and the main cause of all administrative inefficiency is uncertainty as to the areas of personal power and responsibility; when those areas are not only undefined but incongruent, disaster cannot be far away.

There is an unconscious conspiracy to hide the facts about power. Politicians claim they are in charge because it makes them seem important, and people believe them because it makes them feel secure. Every century or so someone comes to suspect “with how little wisdom the world is governed”, but by common consent the veil is hastily drawn back over the alarming prospect of a world in which there is no one in charge at all. In which we are all, as artist-philosopher Ray Nelson put it once, “floating down a river of piss in a blue-enamelled bed-pan”.

Usually the information media are part of the conspiracy, partly because they are large organizations themselves and partly because it is easy for them to have well-known personalities to praise or blame for everything. But recently the veil has been drawn aside and glimpses of reality have appeared.

One example was Haldeman’s disclosure that his suspicions of Coulson were based on the latter’s regrettable tendency to do what the President told him, contrary to established administrative practice. Another was the TV documentary on the Cuban Missiles Crisis, from which it was clear that Kennedy had more trouble with his own staff than with Krushchev. A third was Crossman’s disclosure that in his view Cabinet decisions were “rigged” by civil servants.

It is my suggestion that these decisions which the nominal rulers found it so difficult to overthrow were effectively taken at, or just above, the administrative levels at which the relevant data were amassed, selected and presented: and that a similar state of affairs exists in large-scale commerce and industry.

The situation reminds me of the old story of the man who explained that there was no doubt as to who was the boss in his house. His wife made the minor decisions, like where they should live and how the children should be brought up. He made the major decisions, like what to do about Vietnam.

To sum up, our nominal leaders may have the power to destroy the world, but it is doubtful if they have the power to save it. That knowledge is power is a statement even truer nowadays than when Engels made it, because more knowledge is required for the operation of modern civilization. The more knowledge required, the lower the administrative level at which it resides, and that is where power lies. It is not being used effectively or responsibly because people do not know they have it. The conventional information media cannot bring them this message because they are themselves part of the problem, not of the solution. They are vertical channels belonging to the system, whereas what is needed are horizontal channels, like the photo-copied manuscripts which circulate among the dissident Russian intellectuals.

Or like this.

November 1975

The Wilderness Years

Well now, what did happen to Fandom?

I'm not quite sure myself. I was still in touch up to the mid-sixties paying off the debt of the second trip to Chicago in 1962... the moral obligation I mean, not the money. Then three things happened. Terry Carr invited me to write a book about Ireland, I totalled my car (ending up upside down in a field but unharmed thanks to a safety belt) and it was uninsured and I needed the money, so I did it. It involved reading or at least skimming dozens of books and altogether took up about a year, during which fandom had to be set aside. Then this country began to run into serious trouble and for the next eight years I devoted to my work all the energy that used to go into fandom. It didn't do the country much good in the end as it turned out, but one by-product is that I ended up as a fairly important official. In fact in 1974 I was the administrative head of one of the departments in the power-sharing executive. As you know that was brought down, and work began to lose its value and interest for me.

I took up with fandom in a small way again, even going to a convention in Manchester in 1976. I found that generations of fans had flourished and died in the interim, but that fans were still there who remembered us and there were others to whom we were revered mythological figures.

I retired from the NI Government service with a stroke brought on by stress, part of which was a mental overload which left me unable for a while to read fiction. My subconscious seemed to have resolved it was a waste of time, like reading for mere pleasure before a vital examination. Even now I read remarkably little compared to what I was like before. (I remember the sense of grievance I felt for years against the Belfast Library system because they wouldn't let you change your books the same day you took them out.) I have recovered to some extent, but the only science fiction I am so far able to read is firmly based on rational ideas and the real world. Adventures in imaginary universes seem pointless to me: even the blurbs make me feel tired. The acceptable spectrum now seems to run between Sagan's *Contact* and Koontz's *Watchers*, both of which I loved, but I can't define its parameters. Fantasies set in an imaginary world seem to be right out, so far.

I was in love with my job, but that was before Direct Rule. When that happened all us native civil servants were inevitably downgraded in

practice, however tactful the English imports tried to be – and they did try, many of them very hard. (One notable example was Trevelyan* who later became head of the prisons in the HO* and is now making a name for himself in the Civil Service Commission. Watch out for him, he's going places. Not only had... has... he intelligence and charm, he could almost be a fan. Look out for his name: I fancy him for Head of the Civil Service.)

** Dennis Trevelyan; Home Office. [Ed.]*

Well, as I was saying, not only were we downgraded by the movement of power to Westminster and Whitehall leaving us with responsibility without power, the obverse of the harlot and much worse for the morale. Another thing was that they did things very differently from us. The most comprehensible example I can offer of the sort of thing I mean can be found in Harold Wilson's autobiography, his account of his trip to Rhodesia as it then was to sort out the UDI thing. On this day there had been a long session with the Rhodesian cabinet and their Lord Chief Justice, which had got nowhere. Wilson went back to his hotel and the Rhodesians stayed on talking among themselves. New ideas surfaced and they thought they had the answer, and the Lord Chief Justice hurried over to Wilson's hotel room with it written down on a piece of paper. Wilson wouldn't even read it. It should be properly typed out, he said, and they shouldn't use a Lord Chief Justice as a messenger boy. This has nothing to do with politics or racial problems or left and right: it is simply an illustration of the different ways things are done in large countries as opposed to small countries. Another example was when my assistant at the time, an agreeable character called Eric McIlwrath, myself and two English civil servants were sitting in the officials' gallery in the House of Commons when Gerry Fitt came over to thank my Eric for some information he had given him. (Relations between Stormont civil servants and Nationalist MPs were cordial because we felt we had to compensate for the fact that the opposition was unlikely to have the opportunity to participate in government and thereby learn the ropes.) The conversation concluded like this:

> Fitt. "You remember I promised that when I took over as Minister of Home Affairs I would make you an Assistant Secretary?"
>
> Eric. "Oh yes."
>
> Fitt. "Well, I've changed my mind. I'm going to make you Permanent Secretary."
>
> Eric. "Well thanks, Gerry. See you in the bar?"

The English civil servants were indescribably appalled by this exchange. You just didn't talk to MPs like that, or joke about bribery.

Another factor was the nature of the job itself. Technically it was unknown as Unallocated Legislation, by which was meant legislation on subjects which weren't the administrative responsibility of any other branch in the government, either because there was no administration at all involved in them or because they were entirely new functions. This included such things as liquor licensing, gaming, criminal law, race relations, family law, race and sex discrimination, civil remedies, shop hours, public holidays, obscene publications, land law and leasehold reform, criminal injuries and ghod knows what else. Which was great, all very interesting and varied. But after you'd been doing it for a few years it was increasingly borne in upon you that you were always struggling uphill. What I mean is that you were always being faced with the problem of mastering some new subject to the point where you could hold your own with people who had been immersed in it for years or actually earned their living at it. This eventually got to be quite a strain, to the point where I began to feel a real revulsion against having to absorb fresh packages of information, and to be fascinated by the problem of excessive information storage as experienced by people with eidetic memories. Cf. the professor of ichthyology who every time he remembered the name of a student, forgot the name of a fish.

So maybe you can see how though I liked my job, it was a great relief to get away from it.

I came out of my mild stroke in November 1978 practically unscathed, but my doctor was prepared to certify me as disabled for my work, on the reasoning that I shouldn't be exposed to too much stress and the nature of my job in the Northern Ireland Office *was* stress, so I was eligible for the Job Release Scheme. So I came out at the age of 60 and a bit. That was in March 1980 and I haven't regretted it for a second. I find I have a real vocation for retirement.

The only thing is that I don't seem to have enough time for all that I want to do, and I have this block I mentioned against typing. I think it's partly a reaction against all those years I wrote because I had to without wanting to, and now I don't have to do anything I just damn well don't. I'm coming out of it gradually but I think sometimes I'm like an old watch you come across in a drawer. You shake it and the hands move fitfully and it goes tic tic and you think maybe this ol' watch is still working... but in fact all you've done is briefly stimulate the hairspring to tremulous life.

The mainspring is gone.

1981

A Kind of Immortality

I never had much time for relatives. I remembered them from my childhood as peculiar strangers wearing black clothes and smelling of camphor, who appeared from nowhere at irregular intervals to exclaim foolishly about how one had grown, as if one had been confidently expected to dwindle and eventually disappear.

The only two who were at all real to me were my great-aunt Martha and her husband Matt, who lived behind a tiny shoe repair shop in the working class district of Ballymacarrett, about half a mile down the road from us. I used to visit them occasionally with messages from my mother and they were always very kind to me. Aunt Martha fed me seed cake and engaged me in tripartite discussions with her canary ("He knows you strange," they would always begin) and my great-uncle would let me watch him repairing shoes with little brass nails he produced mysteriously from his mouth. He never said very much, no doubt on account of the brass nails, hut his meticulous craftsmanship spoke for him, as did the fact that when he had finished soleing and heeling a pair of shoes he would invariably polish the uppers. For the rest of my life his seemed fo me to be the only way to do a job right.

But apart from those two I thought very little of my relatives until a few years ago when my mother died. Then I found among her papers the flyleaf from the family Bible. Well to be strictly accurate it wasn't the flyleaf, it was the title page; and it wasn't even a Bible, it was "A Guide to Family Devotions for the Morning and Evening of Every Day in the Year", apparently a Wesleyan Methodist publication. However on the blank side of this title page were duly recorded the births and deaths of all the children of Robert Davidson and Margaret Alexander of Ballymacree, Killinchy, Co. Down, from 1856 to 1873. Deciphering with mild interest the terse entries in faded handwriting I was brought up short by the following:

> Mathew Hall Davidson. Born 1st of February 1870, year of our Lord. Baptised by the Rev. Mr. Gowdy, Wesleyan Minister.
> Mathew Hall Davidson. Departed this life Wednesday morning May 3rd 1871 at about 8 o'clock a sweet child and affectionate with Dimples.

That last unexpected phrase impressed me deeply. Here were no dead dull

relatives, but a woman whose love had transcended propriety and a child of such exceptional charm as to evoke this unique entry in the family records, I began a search for my ancestors among the little green hills and winding roads of mid-Down, a countryside of deep tranquillity which has to my knowledge not changed an iota in 50 years. Eventually in an overgrown graveyard I found a comprehensive headstone indicating that the entire Davidson family had migrated to Belfast, and I even found my grandfather's original house there, on the eve of obliteration by a motorway. But by that time I had begun to realize I had fallen victim to one of the perils that tend to beset science fiction fans.

Why did I feel so let down, I asked myself. What had I really been looking for? The answer was that I had been subconsciously hoping for some sort of time travel experience, an actual encounter of some sort with Margaret Davidson; who with no good reason I believed to be the one who had written the words which so affected me; who I imagined to look a little like Greer Garson, and whom I was already a little in love with.

It was, I realized, exactly the sort of mental quirk which was responsible for the fact that I had no less than 11 radios on my premises, all working. That, I had come recently to realize, was because I was subconsciously convinced, that one day I would come across a radio on which I could get Aldebaran, or at least the Jack Benny Show. I had to accept that this was unlikely to be the case, and that I was equally unlikely ever to meet Margaret Alexander Davidson and sympathize with her on the loss of Mathew Hall.

So I folded the old page and put it away carefully. But not before I had read it again and noticed something I had forgotten. This was that another Mathew Hall Davidson had been born, on July 25th 1871. In those days of high infant mortality you didn't waste a perfectly good name: and also I like to think that Margaret was secretly hoping that the sweet child and affectionate with dimples would somehow reappear. Alas he died three days later. But there was yet another attempt, apparently successful. Mathew Hall Davidson Mark III was born on July 13th, 1873, and his was the last entry.

Thinking it all over I made what was to me an important connection. The third Mathew Hall Davidson was of course my great-uncle Matt, the craftsman. Suddenly I felt much happier about the short life of the original Mathew Hall. To have been born three times; to have inspired a love that could leap a century from a line on a page; and to have shown a little boy how to do a job right... that's enough for any Mathew Hall Davidson.

April 1983

On Bob Shaw

Rivercon XII (Louisville, Kentucky, July-August 1987) had Bob Shaw as professional guest of honour and asked Walt Willis for a few words of appreciation.... [Ed.]

"A watched petal never coils," said Bob Shaw.

Irish Fandom was lying on the grass outside Dunluce Castle, near the Giant's Causeway. At that time it included Dr Ian McAulay, a nuclear physicist of international renown (as Assistant Editor of *Hyphen*). He had just been speculating as to why the daisy petals did not curl up when a cloud passed over the sun, as they do at night.

Bob Shaw's offered explanation was typically subtle and profound, raising as it did a question now at the heart of subatomic physics, the role of the observer in physical phenomena. But that sort of thing was normal with Bob. What worried me was this: was it conceivable that an atomic physicist from Dublin had joined a fan group in Belfast just to speculate about the behaviour of *bellis perennis*?

I remembered this question the night Bob turned up at an Irish Fandom meeting in his new two-tone Triumph. This was the latest result of his professional career, which had started in the days he used to dazzle every meeting of Irish Fandom with the plot of his latest book and left promising to start writing it immediately. But next week it was always a completely new book. I remember suggesting he was waiting for a new prozine to be called *Seventeen Unfinished Science Adventure Books*. (Or does no one but me remember a short-lived prozine called *Two Complete Science Adventure Books*?) It wasn't until Terry Carr and Ted White gave him an advance of $500 for a book that he actually finished one.

Anyway at this meeting he was late, and someone asked if his car had broken down. (His new Triumph was of course secondhand: we didn't even *know* anyone with a new car.) "No," said Bob, "those cars were built to last; like the Pyramids." "I didn't know the Pyramids were enamelled in two colours," mused George Charters. "They must have been a wonderful sight, cruising up and down the desert." "What did they use for fuel?" I enquired, foolishly. "They must have used water," said Bob, "judging from something I found in the toolkit." I saw a pit yawning before me, but fell in anyway. "What was that?" I asked. "A Nile phial," said Bob.

At that I cowered like a shadowed daisy, knowing that the world was

shortly going to come to an end. For what were the odds against that opportunity? The word was astronomical. Classic cosmology has it that the world was created for the glorification of God, ie for egoboo. But this is a slight on the Almighty, implying as it does selfishness and conceit of a positively neofannish nature. How much more likely it is that it was created for a joke? And those of us who know Bob Shaw can think of no more suitable agent to deliver the ultimate punchline. When the inconceivably improbable combination of events occurs for which the world was created, he will utter the crack of doom and thereupon, to cosmic applause, we will all vanish. I'm afraid I must warn you that the circumstance of our diffident, shy old friend from the Cregagh Road, Belfast, being invited to address a Convention in far-off romantic Kentucky* seems to me just such a combination.

Panic-stricken, you may protest that Bob invented the item in his toolkit. If so, you don't know Bob Shaw. He will lie in wait for an opportunity, but in his twisted mind a weird sense of ethics will not allow him to create one. There really was a nail file in his toolkit. The question that confronts humanity is this: who put it there, the previous owner... or God?

July 1987

The Chuck Wagon

An appreciation written on the occasion of Chuck and Sue Harris being special guests of Corflu 6, held in Minneapolis in April 1989. This was published in the convention Souvenir Book.

"I HITCHED MY WAGON TO A STAR
ONLY TO FIND THAT STARS ARE USELESS FOR DRAWING WAGONS"

During his wartime service with the Royal Navy, HRH the Duke of Edinburgh met Chuck Harris, a privilege you are now to share. It is, I often think, a tribute to the great man that he has never forgotten his old shipmate, although he has attained a status in fandom so far above that of Prince Philip.

Another thing Chuck encountered in his war service was the meningitis virus, which made off with his hearing, leaving him marooned in the pop music world of Duke Ellington and Hoagy Carmichael and tragically depriving him of all the great wealth of modern music, from Barry Manilow to The Beastie Boys.

Fortunately he already had a job in the accounting department of the Ford Motor Company at Dagenham, a result of the fact that all his family were great readers and his father had encouraged him to pass the examination for High School, a rare accomplishment for a working class boy in those days. (University education for helots like us was unheard of.) More important was the fact that his father was able to introduce him to English fan and collector Fred Brown, who was a workmate of his. Fred gave Chuck the freedom of his vast collection of science fiction and of fanzines, so that Chuck became familiar with names like Russell Chauvenet (curiously, another deaf fan) before knowing any fans in Britain.

The Royal Navy had done its best for Chuck, paying for him to attend lipreading classes for example, but fandom did more. Through it he developed a new social life, though at first in a vicarious way....

He wrote once: *I was trying to adapt to a deaf world. I was searching for things in which I could compete equally with mundane people. As a letterhack, I was on equal terms with most everybody and I got a lot of joy from correspondence.... I found Walt's trip reports fascinating and kept questioning him about the country I'd never see.*

While we are all contemplating with pleasurable awe this spectacularly inaccurate prophecy, it might be helpful to invoke another of his past selves in aid of the present one.... Here is the advice he gave to Skel when the latter was thinking of standing for TAFF: *...shyness is hardly a valid reason for not standing for TAFF. All of fmz fandom is shy and inarticulate. You won't be expected to sing, tap-dance, or take your clothes off seductively on the stage. It's rather like sex – just get there, act naturally, and enjoy yourself.*

Anyone interested in the early days of Chuck Harris and Sixth Fandom can find more stuff like the above in *Warhoon* #28 and in the latest and greatest instalment of Rob Hansen's Fan History, *THEN*, being distributed to you fortunate few at Corflu. I think it would be more constructive to direct the fine minds assembled here to a problem which has perplexed other great Thinkers down through the ages – namely, how to edit a Harris letter. This problem involves complex considerations of artistic integrity, structural coherence, esoteric comprehensibility, and the laws governing libel, obscenity, and blasphemy.

Take for instance the remark: *She had I GO POGO tattooed across her stomach, just over a portrait of Bert Campbell.* Coming as it does at the end of a comparatively rational description of a lady member of Sixth Fandom, this pinpoints with deadly accuracy her position in the fannish spacetime continuum; but it also raises a number of awkward questions in the editor's mind. For instance, will the lady in question be offended by the implication that Chuck at least has seen her naked abdomen? Will the full glory of the mental picture invoked be appreciated by those who have not actually seen Bert Campbell's beard? After brooding over these matters the editor is likely to do as I did and consign the sentence to the back cover quotes: *Hyphen* bacovers are rife with such unexploded bombs.

For this distinguished postgraduate editorial seminar I have from an old correspondence file taken at random constructed a typical Harris letter. It is important to keep in mind that all those dots are not just quotations from Bill Bowers, but a vast semantic jungle from which quotable remarks spring out at you without warning, doing immense damage to your peace of mind.

> So there I was, sitting there all alone and depressed, wondering whether to read Sic Biscuit or the Harpic tin. I got my new dental plate today, and it hurts like hell. Lately I seem to have every bloody affliction except the seven plagues of Egypt and... Good Christ! Look! It's raining frogs....
>
> I have got this new book on large scale catering skills... take

three loaves and five fishes....

...I went off half-cocked as usual, a problem I have discussed with several eminent medical advisors. That latter is DNQ: there are at least two Trekkies in Patagonia who haven't seen it yet.

"Lapwing" comes from the throbbing sound its wings make in flight. If you think beaks are difficult to lipread you should try wings....

Also my wife is in love with Arthur. "I have always liked Arthur. He is a real gentleman (God save us all!) He is interested in other things apart from bloody science fiction." (Like apple pie.) "He listens when you talk to him." (You're one up on me there, sport.) "He doesn't look any older." (Ol keeps him in the fridge during the week to save him from going off.) "He talks properly too." (She means he's got the same South London twang she is blessed with.)

...We older fans are elegant and courtly – but older than the hills and not really pulling the same class of birds. About my language difficulty, I think I am quite good on "Fuck" now. I use a sort of languid drawl coupled with a little toss of the head just like the Rats. As soon as I master the wrist flick I shall be able to hold my own with the Radical Fairies and Earth Mothers.

...I see on the box that dear Brigitte is 50 this week, and I feel and look twice her age. I thought she looked marvellous: mature, content – and lovely fitting teeth.

I am returning the photographs to Vince. Altho I am told they are artistically superb, the identification system has been found wanting. I STILL DON'T KNOW WHICH IS AVEDON AND WHICH IS PAM WELLS. I have made a photocopy and sent it to Avedon. I trust she will tell me which is which. After she has straightened me out (that's a disgusting thing to say, Thomson. I am old enough to be the child's father and am merely showing a paternal interest. Are you insinuating I have a touch of the Ken Bulmers?) I will inform the rest of you. It would hardly do if you lot started making *Rude Bitch* comments to the queen of the Soft Toy APA.

We've had Japanese golfers at Staverton, but we try to discourage any sort of visitor at weekends.... Some people are not above shouting "Banzai" when they drive off and coming out with the "Ah so" in the bar.... "And what about poor old Joss and

Blind Bea, answer me that. You killed Sister Urticula, you filthy yellow swine."

The attractive thing about chastity as one of the two RC birth control methods – apart from its strong appeal to the innumerate – is that it really works. Even the earliest data consistently shows a 99.98% success rate. I myself followed this method for more than a decade, until I abandoned it at the age of thirteen due to burgeoning lust and failing eyesight....

Trusting your ding-dong is merrily on high.

PS

From Buckingham Palace. Dear Subject, My husband and I thank you for the subscription renewal reminder. Our *Privy* Purse is *Engaged* for the weekend, but we will pop round to the Mint on Monday as soon as they open. It seems ages since the last issue, but wasn't Chuck superb... almost Blochlike. We have no jurisdiction over Hugos, but (in confidence) he will be ennobled in the next Honours List as a Queen's Beast.

Honi Soit etc.,

E2R.

PS God save me.

A nice idea, Ma'am, but Phil will tell you he'd rather be a Special Guest of Corflu.

April 1989

Home Moanership

July 1989

A cordless phone is a great convenience. You can take it with you anywhere when expecting a call, in the garden for instance. You don't realize how easy it is to leave it somewhere, in the garden for instance, until someone tries to phone you. This happened to us the other morning. The extension bell rang and rang but the phone itself could not be found. Eventually the caller gave up, but tried again half an hour later by which time we had still not found our phone and were losing our reason. I promised myself never to poke fun at Shelby again for losing his typer in his den: but who would have thought there was a Kent Corey file for telephones? Eventually I disconnected the extension bell, asked the neighbours to call our number, and Madeleine and I roamed our vast estate, hearing aids turned to maximum gain. It was however our daughter Carol who found it, in the boot of my car.

"Why did you put the phone in the boot of the car?" asked Madeleine.

"I must have been expecting a trunk call," I told her.

All that remained was to identify the mysterious caller. I phoned James White. It wasn't him, but I explained what had happened, as above, ending "...so I told her..."

I didn't have to finish.

"Oh no!" said James.

Enough of this persiflage, you must be thinking – let's get onto something of real importance.

Things have taken a turn for the better here. I wrote a letter of comment a while back in which I compared our plight to that of the Romanovs in the Winter Palace, besieged by revolting workmen. Every now and then, I said, we open a window and throw a Fabergé egg at them. Vince's £1,000 for the plumber reminded me of that. Yesterday the plasterer, a charming fellow called Brendan Murray, came back to complete the first stage in our domestic rehabilitation. It will still be many months before we can begin redecoration, but at least we will be able to get the furniture back in those two rooms. We have been waiting for this fellow for months. We can't get anyone else because he is the Official Plasterer of the Insurance Company. Anyway, they're all the same: they all take ages to come. (They must have great sex lives.)

The 12th July holidays start this weekend and the whole country closes down for the rest of the month. I have an uneasy idea that the work here will be unfinished until then, or even later. I mentioned this dire possibility to Brendan and he suggested he might bring his caravan down here (he has a better car than I have, and for all I know a yacht too) so he could nip in now and then and cobble the odd cornice or two. Did I know of any suitable sites in the neighbourhood. I suspect he had in mind parking his caravan in my garden but I'm having none of that, so I referred him to the local tourist office. We're not going to have that unsightly erection in our garden for a fortnight, swaying and creaking all night.

We've told the builder we want a slate roof on the conservatory, which will now be more a double-glazed extension. Besides, Madeleine says the books all warn about glare. Apparently these places are nothing but glares and leaks all the time, just like a Thatcher cabinet room. (Maybe that's why they're called Conservatories.)

I had to spend £4,000 on replacing the outside rendering of the house, and that was only for the front and side. The back and return were left because we couldn't make up our mind what structural changes to make. Eventually we were recommended a good local builder and he gave us a reasonable estimate for providing a conservatory and rendering the rest of the house, so we're going ahead with that after the Twelfth holidays. Sure it'll all be very nice when it's finished: I only hope we are around to see it.

January 1990

> "Late 19th century: seductively ostentatious, two and a half storey; stucco, Edwardian semi-villa with projecting front and side wings, canted bays and arc-headed windows. The stucco moulded architraves, string courses and splendid Dutch gables are reminiscent of 31 High Street."

It was this description of our house in an architectural survey which made it a "listed building", one of historical or architectural interest. The owners of a Listed Building are not allowed to have any work done to it which changes its appearance: conversely, if they cannot afford to have repairs carried out properly, the government will help.

When fellow house owner Geri Sullivan was visiting us in November, we told her about this bureaucratic interference with private property rights, thinking she would be shocked. Instead she told us that in Minnesota gangs of government inspectors periodically invade people's

homes and require repairs (inside and out) to be carried out under threat of fines for non-compliance. We were astonished. And even more to learn from Gina that the same thing happens in Canada, where one might expect more vestige of the tradition that an Englishman's home is his castle.

As it happened, we had been struck off the List on account of our arc-headed windows being downgraded as not quite authentic by more expert experts, so we were on our own. This meant we had to choose between doing away with the moulded architraves altogether (prohibitively expensive to replace) or chipping away the flat stucco from round them. We chose the latter and are now identifying the places, fortunately few, where the rain is finding its way in between the old cement and the new. A 100 mph gale in December which propelled the top half of the Irish Sea in our direction was a great help in this respect. With a clash of symbols, the ceiling fell on the Christmas tree.

What with this and other distractions Christmas seemed busier than I had hoped. James White complained once that "People shouldn't have to visit people at Christmas: people should visit them", but either way is time consuming.

May 1990

I reached an amicable settlement with the builder who finished our cement rendering and built our conservatory, whereupon he gave up his business and took up a regular job in an ice cream factory in Newtownards. (Am I succeeding in altering your image of Northern Ireland?) So I engaged his righthand man at £3.50 an hour to paint the outside of the house, which now again looks seductively ostentatious, emerging like a concrete Venus from her foam of rubble. (I am entering this in a contest for Ineptest Simile of the Year.)

By contrast, 170 Upper Newtownards Road has now been converted into a Guest House called "Dunroamin". How low can a house sink?

Postscript, 1996

We sold 32 Warren Road for £110,000, and bought a modern bungalow 100 yards away for only £84,000, a clear profit of £26,000 not counting legal fees, etc. It was traumatic selling 32 WR. We had been having a lot of trouble with rain penetration, which we suspect originated in a defective rendering job done a few years ago and which had already led to a bill for

over £3,000 for dry rot. (We have an insurance policy with Rentokil for dry rot but it doesn't cover dry rot in the roof which is where Rentokil claim the current outbreak originated. We had already done pretty well out of our Rentokil insurance, so we accepted their decision.) Not knowing what to do about the defective rendering we decided to put the house up as it stood, evidence of damp and everything. Fortunately a local builder had his eye on the property with a view to building another house in the garden and offered us £110,000, plus another £10,000 if he got the planning permission he wanted. (There is still no word from the planning people on that.)

So now here we are in a modern bungalow, so near that there is a difference of only one digit in the postal code. It has been hell moving all our stuff. Here I am in the smallest of the four bedrooms with a desk and a table and a sofa and some hundreds of books and fanzines, the rest of the fanzines and the old correspondence files being relegated to the garage, which is still so full that the car stood outside. The latest disaster is that the car was stolen on Monday / Tuesday night and recovered by the police the following morning smashed up. It doesn't make all that difference to our daily lives because Madeleine won't let me drive anyway and we might go over to taxis, as James has done.

Walter A. Willis, 9 Alexandra Road, Donaghadee, N. Ireland, BT21 0QD

July 1989 to 1996

A Faraway Shore

Everyone seems to want to know how I am, and I find this simple question curiously difficult to answer. Physically, I am about a stone (14 lbs.) lighter than I was, part of which is no doubt associated with the fact that my body gives the appearance of having been assaulted by a demented can opener, the same no doubt as the one I wrote about in Nebula many years ago, which coped with anything until it came up against a cardboard milk carton.

Actually, this analogy isn't so far out of place, because my recollection of recent events is quite different from everyone else's. Not for me is there a memory of the dramatic journey from Newtownards Hospital to the City Hospital, with RUC escort, nor of the operating room, nor of the long sojourn in intensive care. Instead I have quite a clear memory of finding myself among a group of fellow computer enthusiasts and sf fans. I had been here before, it seemed to me, at the invitation of a fan from New Zealand, looking for traces of Americo-European fandom in the Southern Seas. I had found evidence that Jackie, the missing twin of our cat Nickie, born 1953, had emigrated to New Zealand with the family he had adopted. I wrote an elegiac sort of piece about the possible influence of this lone Sixth Fandom Cat under the Southern Cross. I added some pictures and music I found on the file and thought that the result would make a nice little program.

I had heard nothing further, but it was obvious what the new problem was on which my assistance was, required. An input from another computer was indicating the presence of another lifeform in the region. I created the conditions necessary for its appearance, and there it was, a rather spectral fishy lifeform. As with most computer generated lifeforms, it did not have the energy surplus necessary for independent survival, being nothing more than an echo of some previous program.

Soon after I reported this, I found myself removed from the computer room and installed in a small ward at the very top of the city hospital. I had never seen the building in question, but it seemed to rise and narrow like the prow of a ship. The most important inhabitant of this ward seemed to be a captain of industry type, whose empire of business machines, tv sets, video records etc. occupied far more space than could be justified by normal hospital rules.

However I wasn't able to find out more because I had almost

completely lost my voice. James later advanced the theory it was something to do with the administration of oxygen during my 12 days in intensive care, but when Madeleine came to visit me that evening, it seemed to have affected my writing, too, everything I tried to write becoming smaller. However Madeleine and the doctors were able to explain to me that I had been undergoing an operation for an aneurism which involved the replacement of a length of artery. It was a very serious affair, and I wouldn't have stood much chance if it hadn't been for my remarkably strong constitution.

This was more flattering than reassuring, but seemed insignificant when compared with the importance of the fact that I had just composed a masterpiece among musical comedies. I had awakened that morning with the last magnificent bars ringing in my ears. The work was strongly Influenced by the recent assassination of Rajiv Gandhi and described the events surrounding the annual opening of another part of the Amazon basin to exploitation. The story was told by the crew of a British ship, a Cunarder from Belfast, all parts played by the businessmen and sailors from my ward. So brilliantly that the only thing which prevented my congratulating them on their performance was one awkward question: how could I have written a musical without knowing how to write a note of music? This question gave me food for thoughts for the entire morning.

As time went on, however, reality as other people understood it began to take over. I was still plagued by the feeling that parts of my body did not belong to me... In the middle of the night I would find myself pouring out two drinks, and I attributed the muscular weakness which made me feel so tired all the time to a similar conflict. The doctor of course said that muscular weakness was a usual concomitant of severe surgery and would last for months afterwards.

After a while it became clear that I could no longer reasonably claim the full attention offered by an immediate post-surgical ward, and I was packed off to Newtownards Hospital for convalescence. This put Madeleine into direct contact with the administration, with the inevitable result that everyone concerned soon realized that convalescence would most rapidly succeed if put in the hands of the organization which had been specializing in looking after me for fifty years.

After two weeks the occupational therapy people, two handsome women in a smart dark green uniform of sweater and slacks, were asked to report on my ability to dress myself and on the suitability of my home and reported so favourably they were allowed to take me home the following day in their own car. At 32 Warren Road. they examined the bath and

provided me with a temporary seat for it, which was replaced within two days by a custom-made equivalent. I was impressed by the Occupational Therapy people, and wonder what their equivalent would be in the United States. I have given up speculating how much the other treatment I got from the NHS would have cost me there. Whereas I understand both seats.

Now I'm home again, with every home comfort, including my favourite food (today gazpacho, poached salmon and new potatoes, strawberries and whipped cream), and fanzines to read. What worries me, apart from another bust artery, is the possibility I lost some brain cells during those 12 days I was in intensive care, or just before, the sort that takes care of fanac. This little piece has taken me five days. However my memory seems OK, except that I forgot how to work the new video.

February 1992

The Prying Fan in *Pulp*

The Prying Fan
Sixty Religions and Only One Sauce

“My God, they’ve stopped signing their names!” said Alan Seaton. He and I and another young pseudo-intellectual were sitting in the Café de la Victoire, on the Left Bank. The left bank of the Connswater, that is, an unsavoury stream which meanders through the working class area of Ballymacarret from the Ropeworks (which we were always told was the biggest in the world) to the Shipyard (where the *Titanic* was built). The café itself was actually a fish and chip shop, the Victory Supper Saloon. Belfast is a fine city in many ways, but one of them is not its profusion of pavement cafés. However, we were doing our best and had not entirely given up hope that one day Alan Seaton’s post-impressionist landscapes would replace the calendars advertising brake linings that presently adorned the walls. Then, we hoped, the Victory Supper Saloon would become known to the intelligentsia throughout the world, like the Café des Deux Magots in Montmartre. In this of course we were quite right; because here you are reading about it now, a mere forty years later.

The other decor of the Café de la Victoire comprised four tables covered with what used to be called oilcloth and each furnished with a salt shaker, a bottle of vinegar with a pierced top and a bottle of either tomato ketchup or HP sauce. The turnover of sauce bottles here was faster than in our homes, so this was where we first learned of the startling development to which Seaton had referred.

In *The Times* earlier this year columnist Miles Kington reported a similar crisis. The message in French on the side of the HP Sauce bottle had suddenly disappeared, the one which was set to music by Denis King in the 1960s and performed by Marty Feldman. In his perturbation Kington had consulted the book about HP Sauce recently published by actor Dinsdale Landen and his wife Jennifer. He learned that the message had been put there in the first place, not to aid infiltration of the French gourmet market, but to give the homely HP Sauce a more sophisticated image in British eyes.

We habitues of the Café de la Victoire would never have been satisfied by this lamely prosaic explanation, which really explained

nothing. We had years ago decided that the text in question was really a lesser-known prose poem by Mallarmé:

> Cette sauce de premier choix
> Possède les plus hauts qualités
> Digestives

What explanation we would have arrived at for its sudden disappearance I cannot now imagine but it would certainly have been one to convulse the French literary establishment, judging by the one we devised for the development on the other side of the bottle.

The other side of the bottle was at that time occupied by a certificate from two public analysts that they had regularly taken samples of the sauce from stock and had found it to be in every way pure and wholesome. Until now the label had reproduced their signatures, A. Bostock Hill and William T. Rigby: but now their names were printed. What could it mean? It must mean, we concluded, that A. Bostock Hill was seriously ill. The strain of regularly taking samples from stock all those years had finally told and his signature was no longer firm enough to carry the necessary conviction: it might even be that he was not taking samples from stock at all, or at least not regularly, and William T. Rigby was covering for him though not to the extent of forging his name. This fitted our past analysis of the character of the two men, formed from close study of their signatures: it was clear to us that A. Bostock Hill was a stocky unimaginative man, but scrupulously honest, whereas there was something a little raffish about Rigby. He affected impatience with the slower-witted Hill, but secretly admired him and would do anything for him. He would have readily forged Hill's name to the certificates, but Hill would not allow it: hence the compromise of the printed signatures.

All this meant that at last the long saga of A. Bostock Hill and William T. Rigby was nearing its end, and I decided it was time to write some of it down. The first chapter described the tragic Hill household; ruined by the addiction of Old Squire Hill to Unrectified Spirits of Wine (i.e. impure vinegar. The HP Sauce labels laid great stress on the purity of their vinegar, and the quest for absolutely pure vinegar was to be the Holy Grail of our account). It was all far too harrowing for your sensitive dispositions so I'll go on to where young Hill is sent off to school....

Chapter 2.
In Which Hill makes an Enemy and finds

a Friend.

In the long raftered refectory of Westminster College young Hill toyed abstractedly with his food. Would he prove worthy of the traditions of this great seat of learning? The events of the previous day crowded into his mind: his interview with the Headmaster, the famous Dr. Dalton, and the impression which that great man had made on him; his first lesson in chemistry, a subject where if anywhere his dream of transforming his father's curse into a blessing for humanity might find realization....

His reverie was rudely interrupted. "Pass the tomato ketchup," growled a loutish overgrown youth opposite. "I wouldn't touch that stuff if I were you," said Hill, complying. "And why not, pray?" "Everyone knows their vinegar is not pure," said Hill rashly. A flush mottled the other's features. "Gosh," said Hill's neighbour, "you've done it now. That's Herbert Fletcher. His father makes the stuff."

At the door of the dining hall Fletcher waited with his two cronies, Cyril Urney and Sidney Needler. "What's your name?" scowled Fletcher. "Arbuthnot Bostock Hill," came the proud reply. "Well, Hill," simpered Urney, "We want a little talk with you," and they hustled him to a corner of the quadrangle. Fletcher produced a familiar red bottle from his pocket. "Here," he said, "Drink this." "Shan't," said Hill, "It's poison." "It's the best sauce in the world," roared Fletcher, and flung himself on the youngster, who was borne down by the superior weight of his antagonist. Again and again he struggled to his feet, only to sink back again under a fresh onslaught of blows.

"That's enough," said a firm young voice. A slim figure stepped into the ring, "what about taking me on, my dear Herbert?" Fletcher cringed away but was pushed forward by impatient onlookers; desperately he rushed at his intrepid adversary, kicking and scratching in a most unsportsmanlike manner.

A quick twist of the wrist and Fletcher landed with a crash a dozen yards away. "My goodness," said Hill, "How did you do that?" "Just Ju-jitsu," laughed his new friend. "By the way, my name is Rigby. You've a lot of spunk in you for a young 'un."

In fairness to American readers perhaps I should explain that Urney and

Needler were manufacturers of chocolate we regarded as much inferior to Cadbury's. Cadbury himself appears later, as do Gustav Tobler, kindly old Professor Heinz of Heidelberg and many others.

This was the first thing I ever wrote for pleasure, as opposed to school essays and stuff. I know it's not much, but it's interesting to try and classify it. Obviously it's part of the Anglo-American tradition of cult fantasy, the earliest example which I know of being the world of Gondal invented by the Brontë sisters and Branwell, the entire corpus of which was destroyed by Charlotte on the death of Emily. But that genre is entirely fantasy, whereas the Hill & Rigby myth is rooted in reality. It's more like the Baker Street Irregulars cult, of which Anthony Boucher was a leading light. But that as far as I know is severely practical, based on the notion that all the Sherlock Holmes stories are completely factual, the game being to account for the discrepancies between one story and another... in much the same way as theologians account for discrepancies in the gospels. So where else does one find fantasies based on real people? Is it possible that, in the cooking fat and vinegar air of the Victory Supper Saloon, there hovered the Spirit of Fandom?

June 1986

The Prying Fan
Dress Sense and Live Aid

One of the things Judith Hanna has in common with Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy Onassis is that they both taught me something important about clothes. So did a girl who used to be my assistant when I worked for the government; I shall call her Brenda, because that was her real name. Before these three women entered my life I had never really thought about clothes. I belonged to the Penguin generation, when the in gear consisted of shapeless grey flannels and a tweed sports jacket bulging with pocket books, and since then I am afraid I have not become any more of a natty dresser. Despite having been the recipient of several generous public subscriptions to make me look respectable I still find my pullover labels being tucked in by strange women in shops. My thoughts about clothes went no deeper than the British Army court-martial in Egypt which found an officer not guilty of an offence against Kings Regulations for chasing, naked, a girl along the corridor of a Cairo hotel. They found, or so legend had it, that he was "correctly attired for the sport in which he was engaged".

This girl, Brenda, I was telling you about was a pretty little blonde, not unlike Eve Harvey, and had a mind like a steel trap. She had recently qualified as a lawyer from Trinity College Dublin and she helped me look after an area of the Government's programme of legislation. It was part of our job to attend Parliament, where we sat in an inconspicuous ghetto called The Officials' Gallery on the Government side of the house, ready to supply our Minister with answers to any unexpected questions that came up in the debate. Theoretically our presence should not have been necessary at all, because we supplied the Minister beforehand with a folder containing the answers to all the questions we could think of; but, as I used to tell Ministers when the unforeseen happened, a fool can always ask more questions than a wise man can answer. The job was a bit like air travel – long periods of boredom interspersed with episodes of terror.

We had started doing this in the old Stormont Parliament, where it was much more congenial. We were on the best of terms with the old Nationalist Opposition and often they would tell us what questions they were going to ask and we would warn them if they were foolish. Sometimes when the subject was particularly abstruse they would ask us

for sensible questions to ask. Then we would pass a little note to our Minister telling him what question was going to be asked and supplying a tailor-made reply. Sometimes we would put a little joke in the question and an appropriate comeback in the answer. Everyone had a fine time and it looked great in *Hansard*, not to mention the provincial newspapers. It was a bit like being a Secret Master of Fandom.

But came the Troubles, the Stormont Parliament was abolished and we had to do the same job at Westminster, where everything was more pompous and more formal and took ages. It usually took two days to get anything through the Commons, and then we had to come back for the Lords. But one day we had to go to both in the same day and after the Commons I asked Brenda if she'd like to come for a drink while we were waiting. No thanks, she said, she had to change for the Lords. It was then that I realized that, heavens yes, she did dress differently for each House. For both it was the same deep blue tweed costume, with conservative miniskirt, but in the Commons she wore a plain white blouse with a sort of tie thing, and her hair tied back in a pony tail. But in the Lords it was a cream, frilly blouse with a bow, and her long blonde hair hung loose round her shoulders. I was impressed. The difference was exactly right. The Lords *was* more old-fashioned, courtly, less formal and they would like a pretty girl to look like one. Whereas the Commons were a rougher, more cynical crew. But fancy my little Brenda working all that out and translating it into the placement of bows.

After thinking about it a while I was reminded of the Kennedy assassination. Among people who were around at that time, hardly a day goes by but they think of that. It was like the murder of John Lennon;, and sometimes I feel that my generation was particularly ill-fated to have both those in the one lifetime. I think though that possibly the visual images of the Kennedy assassination were more potent if only because everything was on television. One of the most powerful of those images was of Jackie Kennedy's bloodstained skirt, which she wore for the whole of the rest of that terrible day. It seems she was given the opportunity to change, but declined. Not, I believe, out of emotional paralysis on the one hand or any instinct for self-dramatization on the other, but simply because of a deep feminine instinct for the right dress for the occasion. And she was right I felt. The right dress for the widow of a just-murdered president was incontestably a bloodstained skirt. And I also think that once she had done it, everybody felt that; it symbolized in a cathartic way the horror and pain and shock we all felt. I admired her deeply for it. She had integrity, and style; I thought they might be the same thing.

But it took Judith Hanna to put it all in words of one syllable for me, in her fanzine.* Dress, she said, is self as a work of art. Yes, I can see that. That to me at last explains why we were all so disappointed in Jackie when she married Aristotle Onassis. It was not because he was a bad man; it was simply that he was not the right style of accessory for Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy. For the first time in her life, the integrity of her style had been breached. She was not correctly dressed.

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* Copulate with the Conservatives**

** *I regret that no doubt because of my petit-bourgeois inhibitions I rendered incorrectly the name of the ideologically correct (but readable) fanzine edited by Judith with Joseph Nicholas, Valma Brown, Leigh Edmonds, Terry Hughes and T. Cobley. It should of course have been* Sod the Social Democrats.

The Live Aid Concert

Bob Geldof's 16-hour Live Aid Programme was a marvellous thing for me. Of course it was marvellous for most people, but I had extra reasons. One was that it filled in so many gaps. I used to feel pretty much in touch with the popular music scene, but in recent years for some reason I kept finding that people were becoming world famous before I had even heard of them; it was rather like the current diversification of fandom. I first noticed this in the case of Barry Manilow, whom I first heard of when I saw his tv spectacular, but that was a deprivation which I thought I could continue to face with courageous equanimity. Then I began to read reviews in fanzines of albums I'd never heard. So Live Aid supplied me with a sort of anthology which was just what I needed.

But there were other angles too. There was the appearance of the Beach Boys for instance. That was nostalgic of course: I used to love their records and every note was familiar. It was sad too, though, to hear them doing their thing so exactly as they used to, now faded and dated. I was reminded of the recent re-emergence of the Fifties fans. But it was nice that they were so well received: whether it was genuine pleasure, or politeness or kindness, I wasn't sure: there was so much kindness about that day it hardly seemed to matter. I was just more than ever convinced that young people today are more understanding and sensitive than previous generations.

I think also of Elinor Busby's Guest of Honour speech at the 1963 Westercon...

What's fandom for? Most people will tell you friendship, and they will tell you communication, and sometimes they will equate the two – and perhaps call it love. I'll say the same, and go one step further. What's friendship for?

Why love? Fannish friendship (communication, love) perform a function which no mundane friendship or communication that I know of does.

I think that fandom may prove to be a vehicle to carry individual fans safely into the future, with minds and spirits intact,

You know what happens to old people? They get homesick, a homesickness for which there is absolutely no cure. People who live long enough, live in a world completely different from the world they were born into, and grew up in. Everything changes – food and drink, houses, transportation, clothes, entertainments, manners and customs and even mores, change and change utterly.

And people cannot go back again, ever. They may try. Last year, my neighbour went back to the island on which he was born, which he hadn't seen for fifty years or more. He remembered it as a place where people laughed in the sun, where he knew everyone and everyone knew him, where any excuse was good enough for a party, with singing and dancing and wine. He tried to go back there, but he didn't succeed. There weren't any parties. He'd walk down the street, and he wouldn't know anybody, and nobody'd know him. He was just like a dummy, he said. You can't go back again.

But we fans may hope to go forward. The mind is like a muscle, in that the more it's used, the better it works. Science fiction at its best is stimulating to the mind and destructive to all the prejudices, preconceptions and general hideboundness which curb and vitiate the mind. Science fiction fandom, at its best, is equally stimulating, and has the added advantage of mingling fans of all ages in such a manner that there is no danger of any fan outliving all his friends.

If fandom can prevent homesickness for the past, can fandom keep us young forever? I guess we'll have to wait and see.

The other thing that struck me about the Live Aid show was the appearance of Paul McCartney. Obviously he had become a legendary

figure since the days so vividly evoked recently by Chris Priest in that wonderful article in *Chuch*. And obviously his status was now such that one felt it was great of him to come, not that he should have been flattered to be asked. But then there was that dreadful moment when he began to sing at the piano and the microphone wasn't working and people began to shout in frustration. You could see from McCartney's face that he didn't know what was happening; and that for one horrible moment he was facing the possibility that he had completely misread the situation in coming, that he was getting the bird. Not for the first time I considered the difference between him and John Lennon. I didn't think that momentary glitch would have affected John in the same way as it did Paul, Paul was, it seemed to me, more vulnerable to hurt, more dependent on the good opinion of other people.

Damon Knight once told me that in his opinion mankind was divided into boosters and knockers. I don't think that's true, but on the other hand you occasionally come across pairs of people who seem to personify the attributes Damon I think had in mind, and Paul and John seemed to me to be such a couple.

The archetypes might be Gabriel and Lucifer, but it is not a matter of morality but of temperament. It's a bit like looking for an old sundial for your garden. You have two classic mottos to choose from. Maybe you would like I COUNT ONLY THE SUNNY HOURS. Or perhaps you would prefer IT IS LATER THAN YOU THINK. In people some sort of mythic quality seems to be involved. For instance in fandom the row in Los Angeles which led to the expulsion of the Insurgents from LASFS has always seemed to me to have some of the qualities of the legendary expulsion of Lucifer from Heaven. There you had Gabriel Ackerman – generous, idealistic, innocent, optimistic – as the archetypal booster, and Francis Towner Lucifer as the classic knocker – cynical, pessimistic, suspicious and saturnine.

Shelley and Byron seem to me examples in English literature, and in British fandom there was the long, intimate and ambiguous relationship between Arthur Clarke and Bill Temple. I don't see an equivalent yet in modern British fandom, but I am keeping an eye on Simon Ounsley and D. West, They seem to be shaping up well. It is a characteristic of the booster that he tends to be the victim of unfair attacks, and this qualification was duly supplied in the last issue of *Pulp*.

August 1986

The Prying Fan
It’s Only Fanwriting But I Like It

My nominee for Hero of the Year, and I hope such a category will be included in the Brighton Hugos, is Owen Whiteoak, who retired to his room during an Awards Ceremony and did not emerge until the danger of being called to the dais had blown over. He replaces on the pinnacle of my esteem my previous Hero. Danny Blanchflower, the first man to walk away from Eamonn Andrews and his Red Book. I can see that it would be unusual to have an Awards Ceremony where it was known the recipient would never turn.up, but I can only regard it as a step in the right direction. After all, *This Is Your Life* had another programme on tape, prerecorded for such an eventuality, so that those who actually enjoy this sort of thing would not be deprived. There could be a whole panel of understudy Hugo winners standing by clutching their acceptance speeches. It could be a whole new form of fanac.

I have always wished I had the courage of Owen and Danny, but instead all my life I have cravenly suffered agonies of fear and shame from sheer lack of the moral courage to say “Get stuffed” to any request for a speech. I have often wished it could be made a criminal offence to shout “Speech” in a public place, like crying “Fire” in a theatre. Unfortunately it’s unlikely it could be made a capital offence: it’s only necessary to turn on the tv at any time of the night or day to see how many people love to see others humiliated and embarrassed. But perhaps we could bring back the stocks; it would provide the same kind of audience participation in the administration of justice as is available at executions for adultery in Iran.*

** The Moral Majority make only smallish stones available, to ensure that the event is satisfactorily prolonged.*

Knowing of these feelings of mine, you may be as surprised as I was to find that at office presentations I could make quite successful speeches. Probably this was partly due to practice in fandom... three brief Worldcon appearances in 30 years, each slightly less disastrous than the last... but I think there was more to it than that. The difference I think was that for the first time in my life. I knew everyone in the audience. It was a fandom situation.

People talk glibly about the “timing” of comedians, as if it were just a matter of using some sophisticated kind of stopwatch. But what it really is, is understanding, knowing, the audience. Max Miller, for example, used to make instant contact with the gigglers – the reaction leaders, his judas rams – and establish a dialogue with them that soon had the entire theatre in a state of hysteria. Frankie Howerd does this too. Tommy Cooper could manage identifiable sections of the audience separately and simultaneously, like a good teacher juggling with the elements of a mixed ability class. Clive James had a marvellous review of the gag in which Cooper comes on with an oil painting and a violin. James identified no less than four Cooper audience components and examined how their reactions are combined. I wish I’d kept the review, but these were the components:

1. “I’ve just been to an antique dealer with these. He tells me I’ve got a Stradivarius and a Rembrandt.” Pause 1, while those in the audience who are particularly bright or who have heard the joke before hold their breath and the theatre goes unnaturally quiet. *Ignition.*

2. “Unfortunately...” Pause 2, during which the brighter segment begin to giggle and the tension of the rest increases. *We have lift-off.*

3. “...he said Stradivarius couldn’t paint for toffee...” Pause 3, just long enough for all but the slowest to get the joke. The eruption is held back only for the end of the sentence. *Second ignition.*

4. “...and Rembrandt made lousy violins.” *The theatre goes into orbit.*

But the master of them all, for the purposes of my argument anyway, was Jack Benny, who could have an audience rolling in the aisles by saying nothing at all. He did this by having devoted his entire career to creating an imaginary personality for himself and an imaginary world for it to inhabit. The audience knew this world, so he knew the audience. All he had to do was to contrive a situation and leave the audience to amuse itself: he just helped it along by varying his facial expressions to correspond with their imagination. The resemblance of this technique to that of faan fiction was increased by the spread of his imaginary world to incorporate the Fred Allen Show, and for a time in that Golden Age of Radio an almost perfect Fandom was created in the mundane world.

You must understand that by fandom here I have in mind the kind of fandom I myself like; it consists of people whom I know (though I may never have met them) and regard with amused affection, who know each other in the same way, with whom you know you can be honest and unguarded without having your motives maligned. I know there are other fandoms, and I have not a word of criticism of any of them. They all have their merits, and there is room for us all. All I am trying to argue is that the

type of fandom I am talking about, which I'll call for convenience Gestalt Fandom, offers a form of creativity which does not exist elsewhere in literature, and has much in common with the techniques of the stand-up comic.

Most obviously, it offers a unique kind of audience participation. Classic authors used to try to simulate the feeling of audience participation by using the "Dear Reader" technique. The most remarkable example is probably Tolstoy, who started off *War and Peace* with that title remark about the difference between happy and unhappy families, and followed it by similar homely observations throughout the book. One really couldn't say that *War and Peace* was greatly improved thereby, and nowadays, when that sort of thing has gone out of fashion, it gives the work a rather fusty air.

Modern authors try to establish a personal relationship with the reader by what might be described as the self-revelatory, or strip-tease technique. The author, either directly or through his characters, describes thoughts or behaviour patterns of an intimate character. His hope is that the reader will exclaim to himself something like, *My God I thought I was the only one who did that / felt that way*. Ideally, he should feel that some kind of universal truth has been revealed, or at the very least that the author is being completely honest with him. He feels uniquely privileged, and accordingly now trusts the author to tell him the truth. This is a very powerful technique, especially perhaps in poetry, but is full of danger for the author. For if what he has revealed is not universal, but peculiar to himself, he risks being written off as some kind of a weirdo and held up to cruel ridicule in the reviews. His entire life's work may be discredited.

One can, I think, in the auctorial dilemma this presents, discern the elements that distinguish the Gestalt Fanzine from what I'll call for convenience the Profanzine. The Profanzine is based on the assumption that fanzines are inferior prozines: fan writers are just disappointed pros, in the same sense that Joyce defined a pier as a disappointed bridge. They can however be improved by criticism.

Fanzine reviews can indeed be interesting and helpful, but there is a tendency inherent in all critics to fall victim to what I think of as The Sibelius Syndrome. When Sibelius pointed out that nobody had ever erected a statue to a critic, they all took it to heart and concentrated on getting into the anthologies of quotations. But if you look at their monuments there you will find they consist entirely of malicious gibes. And I am firmly convinced that Dorothy Parker thought up "runs the whole gamut of emotion from A to B" in the shower one morning and

could hardly wait for an innocent victim to happen by on whom she could use it. I know that's what I would have done. No doubt she persuaded herself she was raising the standards of the New York stage, but the sad fact is that malicious reviews are far easier to write than the kind D. West stigmatizes as "supportive".

Profanzines tend to resemble the kind of budding-writers circle in which everyone in turn reads their piece while the others wait with barely concealed impatience for their own turn: as Thurber described the conversation of the intelligentsia, not so much listening as waiting for an opening. Their evaluation of each other's writing varies between sycophantic praise and envious spite, the common factor being an arrogant belief that they are conferring a favour by giving their opinion. Usually they are not. One is reminded only of the old saying: those who can, do; those who can't, teach; those who can't teach, teach teachers.

All this of course can be quite interesting to watch, like observing the bodies come floating down the rivers of blood in the gutters of the *Times Literary Supplement*: but I do not think the atmosphere can be described as a creative one. Writers are sensitive creatures – otherwise they wouldn't be writers – and good writing cannot flourish in a climate of hostility. It is a bit like finding the secret police are at your Party meeting. One may have nothing against the police, secret or otherwise – fine stalwart fellows all – but there is no doubt you don't speak quite the same way in their presence. In self-protection, the writer will stop being honest, first with others and then with himself. He starts acting a part. If he has a great enough natural talent he may end up like the later Hemingway. If not, he is finished before he starts.

There are elements of the profanzine to be found in all fanzines, even this one. To free ourselves, we should hold fast to the truth that fans are in no way inferior to pros; to suggest otherwise, because they get paid for their writing and we don't, is as silly as to suggest that lovers are inferior to prostitutes. We are, simply, amateurs: we do it for love. That's what "amateur" means. All sorts of conclusions follow from that. One is that commenting on a fmz is neither conferring a favour nor performing a painful duty, but a little labour of love. If you don't feel that way, don't bother. Another is that goodwill is everything. Not only do writers write better in a congenial atmosphere, the reader enjoys the fanzine more. For instance, every reader has a choice when first confronted with the sort of esoteric allusion which is the hallmark of fan writing. He can take it as a sort of Private Property notice and keep out; or as an invitation, a.ticket to ride, and come in. It is always, *always* the second. It is our own version of

the self-revelatory communication of the good writers and poets, our own secret handshake. It is what has taken the place of science fiction itself as our recognition symbol, now that our old symbols have been taken over by the mass media.

A Last Letter to Terry Carr

One tries to ease the sense of loss when a friend dies by reflecting that it is partly selfish, to the extent that it is one's own deprivation one is concerned about, not his. But this is very difficult when you cannot stop thinking of your own sins of omission, which can never now be put right. It is some tiny comfort to me that while Terry was alive I let him know how I thought of him. It was earlier this year, after he had sent me a copy of *Between Two Worlds*, an anthology of his work published by the NESFA Press, Box 6, MIT Branch PO, Cambridge, Mass.

18 February 1987

Dear Terry,

Your letter and enclosures arrived just hours too late to be the Most Interesting Item of Mail of 1986; however I'm sure it'll have no difficulty in winning the 1987 Title, unless there is a particularly long and appreciative letter of comment on *Warhoon* #28 from Raisa Gorbachev.

I was much taken by *Between Two Worlds*. Apart altogether from the Fannish Oldpharts, an all-time gem of fannish fiction, I was much impressed by the breadth of your output and its overall quality; one has a feeling that you have never written anything – even a laundry note – that wasn't of utter excellence, For some strange reason, possibly to do with the fact that I have recently typed out again William F. Temple's despatch to *VOM* from the Italian Front, I was reminded of those little volumes of Omar Khayyam or Herrick that young officers used to carry in WWI and which invariably deflected enemy bullets, I hope this will reinforce your protection from fannish feuds.... I've noticed how people respect your refusal to become involved in the recent fracas... your reputation elevates you from the melee.

Summer 1987

The Prying Fan
The Travelling Circus and More

There was the letter from Avedon about the travelling circus in her back garden. The owners had turned out to be a couple called Economou who used to be in fandom: did I know anything about them? It seemed they were having trouble with their elephants.

I was shocked at the idea of Plashet Grove's sylvan serenity being so profaned... caravans on the grassy slopes where the local peasantry used to disport themselves, Fragonardlike, by the waterfall... washing hanging from the immemorial oaks... steam calliopes frightening the nightingales... it didn't hear thinking about. I was eager to help. But I didn't really know much about the Economoux. They had been in FAPA in my time, they lived in Wisconsin, and I had met them at the Chicon in 1962, but I remembered nothing at all about Arthur except that he always seemed to be somewhere else, doing things. Come to think of it, I remembered Phyllis quite well, though. She was a dark, pretty woman who projected a powerful aura of calm efficiency. She told me once she could fix any piece of machinery, whether she knew anything about it or not, if only she could get it onto the kitchen table. She fixed it by simply taking it apart piece by piece, making clear and detailed notes of each operation, until she found something that looked wrong. I was tremendously impressed, because for some reason that sort of thing never worked for me. My notes would always degenerate into something like:

1. Remove flat screw on top of black box.
2. Remove top of black box.
3. Search for unknown number of little black springs heard pattering off the ceiling, walls and fireplace.
4. Go and make a cup of tea.
5. Return to find pup has eaten notes, and all springs and screws have disappeared.
6. Decide to buy new streamlined sealed non-user-serviceable tin opener.

However, fortunately, I now remembered enough to be able to give Avedon authoritative advice about her back garden. At this very moment, I assured her, Phyllis is in her caravan fixing the portable typewriter which Arthur had thrown at the lions. When she had finished she would type a

letter thanking Avedon for her hospitality and enclosing a handsome check for back rent. Then she would sally forth from the caravan, subdue the lions with one level glance, just like Linda Pickersgill at Metropole Reception, and help Arthur down off the netting wire. Then she would set everyone to start packing and they would all be on their way back to Wisconsin by mid-afternoon, hoping to arrive there before the WELCOME BACK JEANNE festivities turned into Thanksgiving. Meanwhile in Plashet Grove the villagers would venture back with their parasols and prams, bowing gratefully to the gracious American lady who had restored their rustic idyll. It's not often one is able to help a friend so effectively, I thought with quiet pride; and me ill in bed at the time, too. But by the time I had taken my temperature again, I was beginning to have niggling doubts. All that about the circus was on the second sheet of Avedon's letter, but I now remembered it as a one-page letter; and hadn't she said something about Plashet Grove having traffic jams? No, I refused to accept that. Who ever heard of a grove with traffic jams? And what was so unlikely about a travelling circus owned by Wisconsin ex-fans appearing in one's back garden, lions and all? Why, I remember I had had a ridiculous nightmare about a reputable English hotel not acknowledging bookings and losing all their records, and it all turned out to be true. Satisfied about Plashet Grove, I went back to sleep.

I was wakened by the telephone. It was Vince Clarke enquiring after my health – it seemed everyone was down with a horrible chest cold. But not to worry. Greg Pickersgill had identified it as the chest cold that everyone gets at Worldcons.

Good old Greg, I thought, still sorting everything out for us. I wondered, if I rang him would he reassure me about this fever and tiredness, too? It would probably be the classical medical dialogue: "Have you had this before?" "Yes." (And I had, after Chicon 2.) "Well, you've got it again." Maybe he would even have a name for it, like Stigwort's Disease. It's marvellous how much better you feel when your affliction is given a name. "Doctor, I have sore eye." "Ah, yes, a touch of iritis." (Translation: you have sore eye.) "Oh, thank you, Doctor."

Oh, well, I was awake now – I might as well catch up on my reading. Fortunately for my weakened condition, I didn't have to carry any books upstairs. Already at my bedside were the following:

Count Zero by William Gibson
The Helliconia Trilogy by Brian Aldiss
Worlds by Joe Haldeman
Dying of the Light by George R.R. Martin

All these books had two things in common. First, they were recommended by people I respect; and, second, I hadn't been able to read a single one of them.

I knew this was partly my own fault. I have to explain that for 15 years my job had been what was described in the Department's Organization Chart as Policy, Unallocated Legislation. What this really meant was that anything no one else knew what to do about came to me. The Government machine is supposed to know everything, but really, it knows only about subjects for which it has administrative responsibilities. This leaves a whole mess of miscellanea, like abortion, sexual law reform, civil rights, liquor licensing, betting, obscene publications, Sunday observance – everything "unallocated" like this, and indeed anything new at all, would come to me. I would read it up and suggest what to do about it. For instance if I was still at work now I would probably be up to my eyes in surrogate mothers.

As you can see, this was an interesting job. But have you thought what it must be like, year after year, to keep having to become The Expert on one subject after another, sufficiently knowledgeable to argue with people who have dedicated their whole lives to it? And to keep doing it, year after year, with an endless succession of different subjects? In time I began to feel like one of those stage memory acts who suffer from the feeling that their brain is becoming congested. And this dread spread to my private reading, so that at the prospect of learning another imaginary universe with another cosmology, history and customs – before you even started on the plot – a terrible, terrible tiredness would come over me. In frustration, I would get annoyed and impatient, and unfair. So Gibson writes like Raymond Chandler? So what? – I wouldn't read the real Raymond Chandler. And the rest of them seemed just like the SF shelf at our local public library, which seemed to consist entirely of trilogies about galaxy-hopping unicorns.

But it was all SF all right – our library said so, and they were very good at classifying books. In fact, they had discovered categories even the British Museum didn't know about. I realized this one day when a lady came in while I was at the counter and asked for "another nice book". The librarian went straight to a special shelf, unlabelled but undoubtedly full of Nice Books, and got another for the satisfied customer.

Now, added to the familiar tiredness came a sad thought that maybe I wasn't a science fiction fan at all any more. But as I drifted off into a mournful sleep there came more hopeful thoughts. I liked the Heechee trilogy, didn't I? And I was able to help Avedon with those elephants...

Lucas Aid

The following week, and a course of Amoxil antibiotic brought convalescence and a copy of a fascinating book by David Hartwell. I'd met him at Brighton, where we agreed among other things on how under-valued is the work of van Vogt. The book, *Age of Wonders,* was full of interest to me: not only for its unprecedented understanding of science fiction fandom, but for its reassurance that maybe I was a member of it after all. There had been a literary movement I had missed. Its slogan was created by fan Dena Benatan: LET'S GET SCIENCE FICTION BACK IN THE GUTTER WHERE IT BELONGS. And that said it all. Its argument was that the new intellectual respectability of science fiction was destroying it as a literature of ideas. It seemed to me she was right. I had liked Pohl's Heechee trilogy because the ideas were the plot, whereas in those other books the ideas were just a sort of Lucas-type back projection, against which the plot was acted out.

Arise Sir Tony

There must be other golfers in the audience, so I cannot be entirely alone in complaining that the present monarchy lacks the style of the Tudors. HM the Q should have met the victorious Ryder Cup team at Heathrow and knighted Tony Jacklin there and then on the tarmac. She could have used a golf club instead of a sword. A five-iron, I would think.

If I am entirely alone, except for Chuck Harris of course, let me remind SF fans that golf is the most scientifictional of all games, being the first to be played off-planet. In one of the Moon Walks, Alan Shepard produced a five-iron he had smuggled from Earth and played a golf shot, which was flashed round the galaxy on colour television. This shot seen round the Universe passed Sirius eight years ago. So some respect from you lot, please. And if any extra-terrestrials are reading this... FORE!

Tailpiece

On the way back from Brighton I finished the copy of *The Times* (28/8/87) I had brought with me, and came across an article by John Rae which seemed to cover the same sort of ground as my column in the last *Pulp* about the creativity of fan writing. Only he was trying to define the difference between talent and genius. He quotes a definition of genius by

George Steiner which is worth thinking about:

> ...the capacity to modulate an intensely personal, private... angle of incidence... into an intelligible enunciation or form in which numerous other human beings recognize something profoundly their own.

November 1987

Short Takes

Casting a Spell

May I draw your attention to an interesting item in the December *Other Worlds*? The only interesting item in fact. It is that on the contents page the title of one of the stories is given as QUANDRY. No "A" at the end, you notice. Fans will probably have forgotten that in the years BH (Before Hoffman) this word was spelled "quandary". In the world outside fandom – oh yes, there is one – this old form lingers on. Or did until recently, when the compositors of Better Publications changed over to "quandry". Obviously, after having set up the name of Lee Hoffman's mag in the review columns, they have realized that this form is the only possible one. I have no doubt that Shaver could prove it was the original form of the word in Mantong, or Mahjong, or whatever that phoney language of his was called. Now the *Other Worlds* compositors have followed suit. I think we must all take off our hats to Lee Hoffman (as we should in any case in view of her... er... if Rog Phillips will pardon the expression... s-e-x). Plenty of faneds have murdered the English language, but she has *changed* it. Only slightly of course, but I hope it will give fresh hope to Max Keasler in his valiant attempt to alter its spelling entirely.

Confusion #3, February or March 1952
edited by Shelby Vick

Letter to Shelby Vick

Dear ShelVy,

July 31, 1951

Huh!!!!!!????? Me at the Nolacon? My imagination boggles, and I can tell you it takes a lot to make my imagination do that. In fact I just can't get on top of the idea at all. I am incoherent. But calming down for a moment, I can see that in the first place there would hardly be time to organize even such a worthy project and in the second place I would hardly win the Most Popular Foreign Fan Contest. Not this year anyway! (My money would be on Ken Slater at the moment....) So I don't think it's very likely that I'll be strolling along Basin Street this September, at which I am almost relieved. *Almost.* It has been my secret fanlife ambition to attend an American Convention, but I can't help thinking the awful thought that once the delegates get a good look at me they'd be trampling over themselves to get their money back. However Forry told me he was trembling like an aspirin at his first Con where he had to make a speech and look where he is now. Maybe in a year or so I would have the self-confidence for it, though it would be worse thinking that all those people had paid for you and were expecting something for their money. But all this is beside the point, which is that in any case I don't see how I could manage it this year (complications connected with my job) even if by some miracle the idea came off.

In any case, many, *many* thanks, Shelby, for such a wonderful thot. Believe me I'd give ten years of my life to just be in New Orleans and meet you and Lee. It was awfully nice of you to think of me and I really do appreciate it. I swear that some time before I slide into dotage I will come over there and shake that sunburned hand of yours.

Sincerely, Walt

?*Confusion* #1, November 1951
edited by Shelby Vick
Included without source in *Warhoon* #28

The Ancient Ones

Some years ago Rick Sneary sent a questionnaire to various prominent fans. One of his questions was whether it would be a good thing if all fans lived in the same town. With uncommon common sense, most of the fans replied that it wouldn't, because if fans could talk to one another instead of writing, some of the most enjoyable of fan activities would tend to die away, such as fmz publishing and letter writing. In London, this is what has actually happened. It has at once the biggest number of fans and the least activity of any city in the English-speaking world.

But London fandom is far from dead, whatever unkind things we provincial barbarians may say about it from time to time. Old English fans never die, they merely fade away into the saloon bar of the White Horse Tavern, where every fan in the greater London area congregates on Thursday nights. Coming into this place, the astounded neo-fan feels like his American counterpart entering FAPA and encountering the giants of a former era. But the White Horse is no elephant graveyard, full of whited sepulchres fulfilling their minimum activity requirements. It is more like the Elysian fields. There, any Thursday night, can be seen our ancestors, the legendary heroes mentioned in the *Fancyclopedia*, alive and fanning still after their fashion.

"The Immortal Teacup", *SF Digest* #4,
November 1951
edited by Henry Burwell

Inclinations: Introducing *Hyphen*

To beguile subscribers to *Slant* during the fleeting interval between issues I've entered into a symbiotic relationship with Chuck Harris, my best friend and severest critic (alternately) to publish this new international fanmag. Chuck's other qualifications were that he is one of the few English fans not already working fulltime for Ken Slater, and that he has acquired a very striking duplicator. However, the duplicator insisted on staying on strike despite heroic efforts by Vince Clarke – see opposite* – so I've run off the mag myself on a machine I picked up the other day at an auction in an effort to get Bill Temple's last Convention Report out before this year's. Blame all mistakes on me.

** "Aghast Editorial" by Clarke: "Duplicate, duplicate, toil and trouble, / The drum won't turn and the ink won't bubble...". Full text in* A Vince Clarke Treasury. *[Ed.]*

When we get over our labour pains we might bring out this thing quite often. We'd like to make it a sort of link between British and American fandom, which is one of two or three reasons for its name. I've always thought it would be a good thing if world fandom were better integrated, if only to raise the standard of fanmag material and increase its circulation, and we're in a good position to help bring that about since the 300 subscribers to *Slant* are scattered all over the civilized world – not to mention parts of Los Angeles.

Hyphen #1, May 1952
edited by Walt Willis and Chuck Harris

Inclinations: The Poisoned Pen

This is all the editorial natter there'll be from me in this issue, because in less than a week from now I'll be on my way to discover America, just another bounder on the bounding main. As soon as I've finished this letter column I'll be sending the dozen or so stencils I've cut – you'll recognize them by the absence of typoes – over to my associates Chuck Harris and Bob Shaw to turn into a magazine. I hope to get a copy while in America so that I can write them a rude letter of comment.

Hyphen #2, September 1952
edited by Walt Willis

Stop Fanning!

INTRODUCING A NEW PROXYBOO SERVICE

Is your life being wasted on this useless vice? Are your wife and children starving while you squander your hard-earned money on stencils, paper, postage? Is your health being ruined, your sex life interfered with, your job endangered?

BREAK YOURSELF OF THIS TERRIBLE ADDICTION THE SAFE EASY PROXYBOO WAY!

No harmful after-effects! Proxyboo's new patented DOUBLE ACTION treatment is guaranteed to cure you completely and safely. No drugs, no appliances, no harsh purgatives. *You need do nothing!* This is how Proxyboo's DOUBLE ACTION treatment works;

1. Immediately on receipt of your remittance Proxyboo will communicate with the Postmaster General and have your mail diverted to the Proxyboo offices. There, Proxyboo's highly trained experts will write cold hurtful replies to your correspondents, nasty sneering letters of comment on the fanzines, and will also publish issues of your own fanzine so bad that no one will comment on them or renew their subscription. Simultaneously, experienced Proxyboo agents cleverly disguised as you will call on all nearby fans at inconvenient times of the night, drink their liquor, steal their books, and insult their wives. (No charge is made for this part of the Proxyboo service!) So efficient are our operatives that we can guarantee that you will be run out of fandom within three weeks.

2. *Meanwhile*, so that your mental stability is not affected by a too abrupt cessation of fanactivity, Proxyboo will supply you with a *dummy fandom*! Each day the postman will continue to bring you mail indistinguishable in outward appearance from that which you have been accustomed to receive. However, each letter and fanzine will have been carefully designed and constructed in Proxyboo's laboratories to cause you to lose interest in fandom. Adjusted under the supervision of experts from our famous "Seventh Fandom" Department it will be so utterly dull that you will discover it quite impossible to reply to it. In a few weeks you will lose even the desire to do so, and your cure will be complete.

READ THESE UNSOLICITED TESTIMONIALS!

" " – Lee Hoofman*

“ ” – Rich Elsberry*

(* Notice that these fans have been so completely cured that they do not even answer our letters soliciting their testimonials!)

GIFT OFFER

Have you any friends (or others) whom you would like to see leave fandom? Then take advantage of Proxyboo’s SPECIAL GIFT OFFER. At no extra charge the full Proxyboo DOUBLE ACTION treatment will be made available to any fan you name *without his knowledge*. Many well-known exfans are unaware that they owe their release to Proxyboo and their unknown friend (or other).

PROXYBOO SERVICES INCORPORATED, 170 UPPER N’ARDS RD, BELFAST

Hyphen #8, April 1954
edited by Walt Willis and associates

Farewell *Slant*

After much heart-scratching and head-searching, we have decided to announce the formal suspension of *Slant*. There might be a revival some time but we don't feel confident enough about it to continue to hold on to subscribers' money. This page is being sent to all "*Slant*-only" subscribers and in the box here is a statement of how much our electronic brains calculate we owe you. If it's different from what you think it should be please let us know, especially if it's too much. The whole issue is also being sent to a few "*Slant*-only" subscribers whom we hate to part with and who we hope might prefer the balance of their subs in *Hyphen*s instead of mere money. However they can have the filthy stuff by returning their *Hyphen*s undesecrated and preferably without comment. Postage will be refunded too.

The reasons for the suspension of *Slant* are simple: it took anything like ten fan-hours to set, print and distribute each page. The one half-printed half-mimeographed issue we produced seemed to us an unsatisfactory compromise. *Slant* was meant to be a magazine for everyone who was interested in science fiction and had a sense of humour, including not only fans but non-fan aficionados and pros. But to get the active support and participation of the latter two categories – who are not familiar with the limitations of fan publishing – you need a magazine which looks professional and appears regularly enough to create confidence. The obvious thing was to go semi-professional and regular like the US photo-offset jobs, but that would have meant more worry and money than I'd like to put into a hobby. I'm in fandom for fun and friendship, not profit and ulcers, and enough people like *Hyphen* to keep us happy publishing it.

"Inside Coverage", *Hyphen* #10, September 1954
edited by Walt Willis and Chuck Harris

Poctsarcds

Poctsarcds. Well. At one time when Lee Hoffman and I were in really intensive communication we used to send each other postcards as matters came into our heads because it got so difficult remembering everything when we were writing letters. Once the flow of them dried up for a week or so and I put a postscript on a letter to Lee enquiring what was wrong. Hastily typed, it read: “No poctsarcd?” Lee replied sorrowfully to the effect that she had tried every shop in Savannah but had been quite unable to find any poctsarcds. The poctsarcd situation was serious. They had plenty of pitcuer poctsarcds, but no ordinary poctsarcds. Taking her at her word I ran off a few dozen poctsarcds on the press with Lee's name and address on one side and *POCTSARCD* on the other, and started sending them to her. I also sent her a supply of blank ones, i.e. without the address, but still poctsarcds. I also explained to her that the essential difference between a poctsarcd and a postcard was that whereas on a postcard the address is on one side and the place for correspondence on the other, on a poctsarcd it is the other way round. An ordinary person would hardly be able to tell the difference, but once you've used a poctsarcd you would never want to go back to old-fashioned postcards.

This got into the 1952 *Fanspeak*.

Letter, *Psychotic* #17, November/December 1954
edited by Richard E. Geis

Offtrails Magazine Publishers Association

OMPA is a very fine thing, and Ken Bulmer and Vin¢ Clarke deserve an accolade (you know accolade – Arthur C. Clarke's favourite drink) for having started it. I've been in FAPA for some years now and I've seen several SAPS mailings, and I'd say that this first OMPA mailing surpassed both of them in general quality. I think you can all be very proud of yourselves. I wish I could too, but the first mailing came during my estivation period, or tennis season, and the plans I had for a twenty-page mag for this mailing were held up through no fault of mine; so I'm typing this out hastily straight on the stencil the weekend before the deadline just to show that the spirit is willing though the mind be weak.

Also, there's a couple of suggestions I'd like to make. First, I don't think the name of this organization is altogether suitable. What trail are we supposed to be off? With a name like that we're practically begging to be invaded by Shaver Mystery fans, flying saucer suckers, Atlanteans, Forteans, Dianeticists and testimonial writers for Joan the Wad. Especially if "Inquisitor" continues to advertise the organization in *The British Volsted Bedpan Magazine* or whatever alias it's skulking about under now. Surely we don't want anyone in this organization but already active fans? I always understood that its purpose was, as Ken Potter put it in a legible letter I once received from him, to enable us to rise "to hitherto undreamed-off heights of esotericism"? FAPA, having suffered horribly from religious cranks, moronic mundane ayjayers and even movie fans, has long since ceased sending its mailings for review in the prozines.. I suggest that we too confine our publicity to fanzines. If we do that we could leave the name as it is, seeing that it's already established... though we could change the first word to something less attractive to the lunatic fringe and preserve the initials. There are plenty of possible words beginning with "O" once you've accepted the fact that the name of our organization doesn't have to have any more sfish connotation than "Spectator" has in SAPS. Take your pick from OASIS, OBELISK, OBSCURE (!), OBSESSED, OBTUSE, OCCASIONAL, ODD, OPAQUE (that'll keep the dianeticists out), ORACLE, ORB, OUTCAST, OUTHOUSE, OUTLANDISH, OUTPOST, OUTRAGEOUS, OUTSIDER, OUTSPOKEN, OBERON, OWL and OZ. I might even let

you use OBLIQUE.

Woz #1, December 1954
edited by Walt Willis

Marginalia

Poised as I am here between Britain and America, I often find myself having to explain one to the other. Puzzled neofans come to me with their little worries, plaintive questions like “What does PTO mean?”, “How can they have 31 months in the year?”, “What is Harlan Ellison?”, “Why do they print their calendars sideways?” and so on. One of the things that puzzles Americans most are the sheaves of black paper they receive from time to time bearing British stamps. Some recipients merely throw them aside after an idle glance but others, fans being the sensitive finely-wrought creatures that they are, worry themselves into an early FAPA membership by fears that they are being put on the spot – that these sheaves of black paper are a fannish equivalent of the black spot that Captain Kidd used to serve on his friends when they got his goat. I can comfort these unhappy people. These sheaves of black paper are nothing but *British fanzines*! If you examine them closely you will often be able to distinguish individual words, and investigators with high-powered microscopes report definite traces of margins round the edges. (Much the best place for margins.)

“Harpie/Black Mail”, *Le Zombie* #64,
January 1955
edited by Bob Tucker

Caught in a First Draft

I made a bit of a Daphne out of the first issue of this sterling publication by composing on the stencil, but if you'll bare with me (as the Liverpool Poker School say to one another) I'll persevere. I think it is good for me. You see I've always been an inveterate reviser. I don't think I've ever sent out an article that hasn't been re-written at least three times. Apart from the time this takes, I think it's bad for one's writing. You find yourself unconsciously *writing first drafts*. That is, you write with the knowledge in the forefront of your mind that what you are writing will have to be done all over again... that is you are writing for yourself, and you lose the sense of communion with your readers. This mightn't be of much importance in mundane writing, but the essence of fan writing is the personal relationship between the writer and his readers, the realization of friendship and community of interests. One has a mental picture of the people one is writing for and the thought of their reactions, individual reactions, to each sentence suggests and determines what you will say in the next. This is why most fans write better letters than they do articles; they are daunted by the anonymity of their audience, in much the same way I suppose that stage artists are daunted by the impersonality of cameras and microphones.

Woz #2, February 1955
edited by Walt Willis

Bad Times Just Around the Corner

One thing I did mean to mention was the lovely calendar I got from Peter Hamilton. It was a great improvement on last year's, which was in only two colours – black and white – and looked rather like a squashed plum pudding with radio-active raisins. (They may have been The Currants of Spice.) Round about July I decided it was meant to be a nebula. There's no doubt about this year's though; it is a representation in glorious technicolor of the world being destroyed by an atomic chain reaction. The area of seething destruction has already engulfed the cradle of Western civilization as far as Glasgow and great fissures are yawning all over, like readers of a recent *Astounding*. You can almost hear the screams. Underneath this moving scene is the simple message; "SINCERE GOOD WISHES FOR 1955". Obviously Peter thinks we will be lucky to get a 1955 at all and lest we enter the fragment that remains to us in a mood of unthinking optimism he wants us to hang this sobering reminder on the wall next to Marilyn Monroe. This is itself a nice piece of symbolism – Life & Death, The Bust & The Bust-Up, erection & demolition. Thank you, Peter. Before the temperature reaches 451°F the fan will have time for one last look at the calendars on the wall; one last thought of lost hopes and wasted opportunities, as symbolized by Joe di Maggio.

"Inside Coverage", *Hyphen* #13, March 1955
edited by Walt Willis and Chuck Harris

Footnote to a Piece of Chewing Gum

There was a terrible tragedy here about a year ago, so dreadful that I hardly dare tell you about it. But brace yourself, these things must be faced. Carol *ate* the piece of chewing gum you bought me in Fort Mudge! I have almost forgiven her now and I think I might let her out of the cellar one of these days. If you happen to be shopping in Fort Mudge, though, maybe you'd buy me another piece: I think it's about time that place had another customer. See if you can get that same taxi driver – he knows the way. When and if I get the chewing gum I'll put it in the museum of fantiquities here. Do you know Jack Speer sent me the key of FooFoo? Well, he sent me a car key and I'm telling everyone that's what it is. Why else would he send me a car key? Unless of course he sent a car too and it fell out of the envelope.

Letter, *Forty Four Forty or Fight*, August 1955
edited by Lee Hoffman

Oh, the Serendipity of It All

or Roscoe's Name Be Praised

Dear Chuck & Arthur:

I was in the auction rooms the other day and I ESPied this Gestetner blushing unseen. I asked the bod when it would be on sale and he said Friday about half twelve, so I turned up at half eleven and waited while the entire population of Belfast had been supplied with mattresses and wardrobes. I passed the time wandering casually over to the Gestetner whenever anyone seemed to take an interest in it, peering at it with an expert eye, moving a lever and shaking my head scornfully and walking away again. However nobody seemed to be really intent on it. There was one complication, though; there was now another Gestetner under the table, and by its lot number it was going first. I'd had a look at the one on the table and it had seemed OK, but I couldn't get at this one. All I could find about it was that it was a much earlier model; the serial number – 9 thousand and something – was on the label. The other one was 41 thousand odd. I decided I'd offer up to five pounds for the first one and six for the second, and thought through all the possibilities so that I wouldn't be disappointed. Like both going for £20, or the first selling for £5:10 and the second for £20, or getting the first for £5 and the second going for a song.

But of course the unexpected did happen after all. The auctioneer said "Lot 899, two Gestetner Duplicators". For a moment I thought of asking him to split the lot, but it was too late, he was off. I started to bid, was matched in five shillingses up to £6, raised my own bid in over-anxiety, listened to a couple of seconds of the most beautiful silence I have ever heard, and an even more exquisite solo on the gavel. I paid a deposit, rushed out for a taxi, and took the loot home before they discovered they'd sold two lots in one.

So here I am the owner of 2 (two) (count them – 2) Gestetner duplicators, Model 26. They both work too, though the pressure roller on one is finished. The only thing is, I can't make up my mind which to keep. This is a position few fans find themselves in, I expect....

Calloo, also callay, Walt.

undated, 1956

See card for Christmas 1956

APAthy and OMPAthy

I appreciate Ken Slater's kindly interest in my subconscious motivations, but I assure him I don't need anything as complicated as that to make me overlook things, even something as important as my OMPA activity status. I can overlook things just from natural talent.

I have got to admit though that when it comes to those lists in *Off Trails* I do have some assistance from my subconscious. It's not that I'm browned off with fandom or OMPA, it's just that anything in the form of a list or schedule afflicts me instantaneously with a sort of mental blindness.

I think this is a sort of occupational disease. When I was a mere clerk in the Civil Service, instead of the highly influential nonentity I am now, it used to madden me how some of my superiors erected schedules around them to protect them from thought. I suppose you know how the Civil Service works? Generally a question is considered first by the lowliest of clerks, who amasses all the information he can, sets out the facts, says what *he* thinks ought to be done and passes the lot on to his superior. It goes right on up the chain like this, each person adding his quota of knowledge and wisdom and saying what he thinks ought to be done, until finally it arrives with the man who can take a decision. The distance it travels up the scale is of course determined by its importance. The decision having been made, the papers travel all the way down the chain again so that everyone can see where they were wrong. No doubt it's very slow and wasteful of manpower, but the idea of this procedure is to ensure consistency and continuity and train the decision-takers of the future.

Well, as I was saying, I used to come up against the type of civil servant who regarded having to take a decision as the ultimate calamity. Some of them had attained their present dizzy eminence by never having made a mistake in their entire career, simply through never having done anything positive. You would present one of these with all the facts and arguments on some question so that he only had to say yes or no, and you could see a hunted look start to come over his face as the realization dawned on him that he was being asked to make a decision. Cowering away from the dreadful prospect, he would mumble despairing questions designed to ascertain whether there might not be, somewhere, another Government department which should be consulted. As avenue after avenue of escape was closed he would turn pale, twitching nervously at the fateful documents. Then he would notice something, and he would

collapse with relief. There was no schedule. Muttering something about "the whole picture", he would scribble a note requiring the compilation of a schedule setting out all the relevant and irrelevant information about this and every remotely similar case which had been known since 1921. (To the everlasting gratitude of Irish Civil Servants, all Government records prior to that date were burned with the Dublin Law Courts building in the Civil War.) Then, dusting the document with sand, he would throw it in the out-tray and take six weeks' leave.

Woz #4, February 1957
edited by Walt Willis

The Penultimate Mailing Comment

Satan's Child: I thought at first you were parodying something, but it went on and on.... I have spent the best years of my life drafting and interpreting Acts of Parliament and Government regulations, but every other sentence of yours throws me. Most of them can eventually be surmounted with a judicious re-arrangement of the commas, which appear to have been inserted with a shot-gun, but I can't even get a toehold on this one. Where's the subject? Where's the object? My Ghod, where's the verb? HELP!

> "Still befuddled with theory and besotted with formulae the centre of much interest and speculation as to his future prompted by his unheralded arrival at said destination."

Having now read it some 17 times I can see that it is not intended to be a sentence at all, but a phrase in apposition to the missing tutor in the previous sentence. Well OK, we're not stuffy. It would have been a little more pellucid with commas after formulae (to prevent the reader thinking the formulae are the centre) and after "future" (to prevent the reader thinking "prompted" is operating as a verb), and if "his" had been substituted for "said" before "destination" (you haven't mentioned any destination before and anyhow "said" in this sense is a pariah word), but my advice to you is to tear the whole thing down and start afresh. No one will ever know what you mean unless you say so yourself.

Apparently, for instance, the words "still besotted with theory and befuddled with formulae" (or vice versa) have some tenuous and inadequate relationship to "the briefest of instructions" in the preceding paragraph, but this still leaves the controversial question of to whom does the "interest and speculation" belong. The fact that it, or they, relate to "his future" suggests first that they belong to the people in the classroom who saw him go, but this hopeful train of thought is brutally derailed immediately by your statement that they are "prompted by his unheralded arrival". Unheralded is right, by gosh: it was the first we'd heard of it. The very latest news we'd had from you about this character was that he had been teleported "clean out of this dimension" at the end of the preceding paragraph. It is only from the rest of the story that we dimly discern that he

has landed somewhere, apparently back on Earth. Why don't you just say what you mean as simply as you can, instead of trying to "write"? You overestimate the intelligence of your readers and underestimate your own ability to write without affectation.

Woz #4, February 1957
edited by Walt Willis

Mercer's Day

Archie Mercer had announced an OMPA submissions deadline of 31 April....

Off Trail Magazine Publishers' Assn Special Presidential Edict

Oblique House, 24th March 1957

The other day I was browsing through the Constitution, gloating over the extent of my autocratic powers and rising now and then to walk up and down practising swinging my knout, when I observed a remarkable thing. My powers were even greater than I had thought, incredibly greater! In a blinding flash of revelation I saw that the president "has powers to deal with situations not covered, by the constitution"... not just situations in OMPA, you notice, *any* situations! I observed keenly at once that the Constitution, masterfully drafted though it is, does not cover some extremely important situations, so it is obviously up to me to sort them out. I am at the moment at work on edicts to deal with such situations as the Gaza Strip, the Partition of Ireland, the Hydrogen Bomb and the White Problem in South Africa, but I realize – absolute power not yet having had time to corrupt me absolutely – that it is my duty to give these complex matters my very careful consideration, so I do not propose to issue any instructions to the United Nations until I have finished reading the FAPA mailing. Meanwhile however there are a few comparatively simple situations which I can clear up right-away. Calendar reform for instance.

I have noticed that in past years there has been a lot of trouble in various parts of the world on the 1st of May, on account of labour parades and Communist demonstrations etc. So this year I rule that there shall be no 1st of May. Instead the day following the 30th April shall be known as the 31st April, and shall be succeeded, without interruption by the 2nd May, Instead of May Day, the new date shall be known as Mercer's Day, in honour of our infallible Association Editor, who has so intelligently anticipated my wishes.

I have instructed the Poet Laureate to compose a new mnemonic verse to indoctrinate the population accordingly.

Archive Between Meals, March 1957

edited by Archie Mercer

What's Right for God Is Right for America!

Well, it looks as if I goofed again, doesn't it? There was this poor foolish foreigner thinking that *The Reporter* was a fine liberal magazine representing qualities like generosity, honesty, freedom, brotherly love and democracy which we admire in America, and generally having far more in common with the signatories of the Declaration of Independence than with George III or his soulmate in Seattle – and all the time it was unAmerican! I don't know whether all you people have realized the full horror of that damning revelation in *Gemzine**, but boiling them down the facts now disclosed amount to this: no more, no less.

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* *Gertrude M. Carr's contribution to FAPA, the Fantasy Amateur Press Association. [Ed.]*

The Reporter was founded by one Max Ascoli, who is A REFUGEE FROM ITALY!

His wife's maiden name was Rosenwald. (A JEWISH NAME.)

A mere 20 years ago she divorced a man called Alfred Stern. (ANOTHER JEWISH NAME.)

Barely 8 years after she divorced him this fellow Stern led a march on Albany during some housing emergency and occupied the legislative chambers. (I beg your pardon – correction, he didn't actually lead a march, he led a "march", and the occupation had quotes round it too so maybe he didn't really march or occupy the chambers, he just pretended to do so in some sneaky Commie sort of way.)

Mr. & Mrs. Ascoli are LOADED WITH DOUGH and contribute to political FRONTS which are OPERATED by one Arthur Goldsmith (ANOTHER JEWISH NAME!) who actually has the nerve to live in the Waldorf (ANOTHER JEWISH NAME!!). Admittedly he doesn't seem to have a room at the Waldorf, just a LAIR, but I'm not quite sure what the difference is, having led a sheltered life. The next time I check into a hotel I must try asking for a double lair, with bath. Maybe it's cheaper.

I know this sort of high class logic is pretty difficult for some of you to

follow, but if you were a disciple of our great leader the late Senator McCarthy, you would see at once that the above indictment which Mrs. Carr has quoted for our edification from the *Seattle Post Intelligence* is CONCLUSIVE PROOF that *The Reporter* and everyone connected with it directly or indirectly by marriage or former marriage is not only a COMMIE but probably a JEW and a REFUGEE FROM ITALY and lives in a LAIR paid for by MOSCOW GOLD, and is probably a dero as well. Well sir, I think we must all be humbly grateful to Mrs. Carr for this fine example of anti-UnAmerican thought, especially us ignorant foreigners who are sometimes stupid enough to judge magazines by what they say instead of finding out first who the editor's wife might have divorced 20 years ago and what he's been doing since. What a fine representative Mrs. Carr is to us of all that is best in America! How nobly she illustrates the finer aspects of American thought! So grateful are we benighted foreigners for Mrs. Carr's kindly instruction that I'd like to suggest we take back that horrid female in New York harbour, who is associated with RADICALS and REFUGEES, and substitute a gigantic statue of our beloved teacher Mrs. G.M. Carr.

And now I have a confession to make. So inspired was I by the example of the keen minds of the *Seattle Post Intelligence* that I dashed down to the Western Union Office and sent the following cable to Mr. Hoover:

> Suggest you investigate woman currently calling herself Gertrude Carr and OPERATING from a LAIR at 5319 Ballard, Seattle. Relatives were REFUGEES from country bordering on RUSSIA. She is LOADED WITH DOUGH and contributes to amateur journalist FRONT founded by COMMIES and known by code name FAPA. Corresponds with known RADICALS, JEWS, REFUGEES, EGGHEADS, N——R-LOVERS and FOREIGNERS. Distributes secretly printed propaganda sheets containing code messages, communications from FOREIGN RADICALS, indecent material and propaganda for ideology of foreign quasi-religious FRONT OPERATING from a LAIR in Rome, Italy, claiming to be founded by JEWISH RADICAL in Middle East. Seen recently in Ohio gambling and driving in foreign cars. Observed by informer in disguise in Chicago in 1952. Suggest immediate arrest and interrogation of all relatives and suspension of husband from employment. Be firm, Mr. Hoover; beat up as you sweep as you clean.

I was a little worried at first in case my enthusiasm might involve some embarrassment for Mrs. Carr, but then I remembered she assured us that the innocent had nothing to fear from this type of thing. God bless Mrs. Carr! God save America!

Pamphrey #6, January 1958
edited by Walt Willis

Primal Urges

I suppose Julian Parr is right about the motivations of the average faned, but I don't think it's necessarily true in the case of the editor of the long established fanzine. After some years the power of egoboo wears off, along with the novelty of publishing, and what is left to make you carry on is partly the urge to keep fandom going and partly the same impulse that makes you want to lend books to people. Lending books is an unprofitable and unrewarding occupation, like fan publishing, but you always keep on doing it from some deep-seated urge to see good things appreciated. Some obscure sense of justice perhaps. You must have felt it yourself. Suppose you get a good letter or article from someone. You can hardly wait to publish it, but it's not for your own egoboo. You know that you'll get very little more credit for it than the mailman who delivers the fanzine. Really, the reason you want to go to all the trouble of publishing it is that you feel "it's too good to go to waste".

Letter, *Void* #13, 1958
edited by Greg and Jim Benford

Minutes of the Wheels of IF

The 987th meeting of Irish Fandom was held despite the fog on 17th January at Oblique House as usual, a mass protest march by the inhabitants of East Belfast having been diverted into the canal by friends of John Berry in the Traffic Police. Mr. Willis drew attention to the fact that Irish Fandom had been meeting regularly for ten years and not once had proper minutes been kept of the proceedings. He was not forgetting the unfortunate case of the visitor from England who had attempted to take notes – they would be glad to know he was now allowed visitors – but he pointed out that Wally Weber had been doing it for the Nameless Ones and was still sane, comparatively speaking. He proposed that Mr. White be elected Secretary, as the only professional writer in Irish Fandom. Mr. White said that while profoundly conscious of the honour, he just could not afford to accept it. His wife Peggy had wired a cash register up to his typer and he had to account for every word: his London Worldcon Report in *Hyphen* #19 had left him without pocket money for another four years. Mr. Charters drew attention to the fact that John Berry was not yet present and it was resolved that Mr. Willis put a red light outside the door to direct him through the fog. On his return Mr. Willis found that he had been proposed and unanimously elected Hon. Secretary.

Mr. Willis's attempts to find a seconder for an amending resolution were interrupted by the arrival of a strange young lady who said that a copy of *Hyphen* had accidentally come into her possession and she had been very interested in it. Immediately the well oiled machinery went into action. She was whisked upstairs and taken on the Ten Minute Tour of the attic while Mr. Charters read selected excerpts from *The Enchanted Duplicator* and Mr. White assembled the rest of the material for the Basic Indoctrination Course. The young lady had been taken as far as the Museum of Fantiquities (key of Jack Speer's car, to be exact) before she was able to make it clear that she was the vicar's daughter and had no interest in science fiction, or even fandom, but had thought the publishers of *Hyphen* might like to help out with the parish magazine. She produced samples of the sort of printing that would be required, including a large poster advertising the garden fete next weekend, to be opened by Sabrina, and then departed, leaving the meeting stunned. The Hon. Secretary, pausing only to close a window which had been left open, was about to proceed downstairs to explain, when there was a terrible scream from the

hall.

The Hon. Secretary blames himself for his carelessness in allowing the poster to be blown through the window so that the words PERSONAL APPEARANCE OF SABRINA were illuminated as it stuck on the wall beside the lamp, but he still insists that John Berry was foolishly optimistic. Both of them are however united in the hope that fans will accept copies of the St. Simeon Parish Magazine in fulfilment of the unexpired portions of their subscriptions to *Retribution* and *Hyphen*.

Cry of the Nameless #116, June 1958
edited by Wally Weber

Fanning on a Higher Plane

I’m not gafia either but people think I am just because I don’t write to them. Actually I keep writing letters and publishing fanzines here in my head (there’s plenty of room) and all my fanac lacks is the crude physical manifestation of these. How materialistic people are.

Letter, *Psi Phi* #4, September 1959
edited by Robert Lichtman

How Not to Survive Women's Liberation

Your editorial was fascinating with its True Confessions, but on behalf of the male sex I'd like to protest against this projected series of exposures of male fans by their wives. I think its unfair, because you know we'd never dare to retaliate, and besides think of all the marriages you might break up. Of course I admit it might be the other way about because even the most happily married couples have misunderstandings that might never be cleared up until one of them does the sort of article you suggest Elinor Busby should write. For instance in our case there's the affair of the toothpaste. On our wedding night when I went to the bathroom I found Madeleine had not replaced the cap on the tube. I clutched the towel rail and tried to be calm. Walter, I told myself, try and forget all the books you've read about marriages that founder on this rock. Be tolerant, broadminded, forgiving: she is a nice girl and may make a good wife and mother even if she doesn't replace the cap on the toothpaste. Try and see it from her point of view. I did, and began to adjust myself to it rationally. After all, I reasoned, *why* replace the cap? It only has to be taken off again, a double useless expenditure of energy hastening the final extinction of the universe through entropy by probably as much as a couple of seconds. If the tube is used often enough the toothpaste doesn't harden anyway. I argued so well that in a few minutes I had completely convinced myself that Madeleine's attitude was logical and right, so I left off the cap myself. So it went on for fourteen years until one evening I picked up the *Ladies' Home Journal* (I always read the article "Can This Marriage Be Saved?" because it reminds me of the London Circle) and found a questionnaire Madeleine had filled up about marital difficulties. She had answered yes to the question "Do you replace the cap on the toothpaste?" I taxed her with it. "You don't," I pointed out reasonably. "Well I would," she said, "only you always come to the bathroom after me, so I leave it off for you. You should talk anyway, I've never known you to replace it yet, you slob."

Letter, *Femizine* #13, Spring 1960
edited by Ethel Lindsay

Appreciating Atom

It's impossible to imagine fandom without Arthur Thomson: well, perhaps not impossible, but who would want to think of a fandom without Atom cartoons and illoes, and that clean-lined elegance he imparts to any fanzine touched by his magic stylus? It would be a monotonous and messier microcosm.

It was one day in 1954 that I got a letter from a new fan in London, enclosing a subscription and, infinitely more important, a cartoon footnote. In this footnote I recognized, as you might say, the hand of providence, because Bob Shaw was shortly leaving for Canada. I replied with a letter that was intended to be enthusiastic and encouraging, and I suppose it must have been because Arthur told me later he sat down and did 30 cartoons one after another. (And that isn't a tautology, because it so happens that he can write and draw with both hands simultaneously). *Hyphen* had a new Art Editor. In fact, you might say that fandom had a new Art Editor, because the number of faneds who had cause to be grateful to him is a heart-warming thing to think of when you reflect how very few readers bother, to comment on artwork. They just note that it's good, it's by Atom, and that's that. But Atom has given us more than prolificacy without lowering of standards, he's given us humour without cruelty, satire without malice, wisdom without arrogance and good taste without ostentation. We don't know how lucky we are.

In this Atom sampler an attempt has been made to remind us, but no one can appreciate Atom as much as a faned. You send him a heap of stencils, with odd-shaped blanks determined by just when you remembered to adjust the margin stops, and you get back a magazine. Not only does it look better than what you sent, it seems to read better. But what strikes you more than anything else is what he has managed to do with all those odd shapes: it is as if he had had that cartoon in mind for years and had sent you a detailed specification for that space to the nearest millimetre. The susceptible faned is apt to reach the conclusion that he himself has some infallible artistic instinct but I, who cannot even draw a dog that my four-year-old son doesn't sneer at, know better. It's just that this quiet-spoken young London Scot (with I hasten to claim Northern Irish ancestry) happens to be one of the few real geniuses who have appeared in this wild-talented world of fandom. Artistic geniuses that is: I know there are some who impute the prose pieces in this volume to him, but I refuse to believe

it.

untitled in *The Atom Anthology*, 1961
edited by Ella Parker

Eastercon 1964

As I said last time I've never wholly enjoyed a convention since I became a celebrity; and at Easter, among all the new BSFA fans at Peterborough I had the pleasure of being a carefree nonentity again... introducing neofans respectfully to my famous friend James White, no responsibilities, no speeches. I tell you, it's soft at the bottom. Next issue there'll be a Convention Report from Bob Shaw, a task for which he has been saving himself for 14 years, but meanwhile I must mention what a superb TAFF delegate Wally Weber proved himself. Seattle and American fandom in general can be proud of him. And the professionals can be proud of Leigh Brackett and Ed Hamilton who registered an immense personal success and whose programme item (their first) was one of the best I've seen at any Convention.

There was also a refreshing outbreak of sanity. For 25 years some members of convention organizing fandom have suffered from the delusion that sf conventions should have press coverage. Apparently they have this fixed belief that anyone reading in a newspaper any reference to a Convention will dash madly to the nearest newsstand and buy every promag in sight, pausing on the way home to take out postal subscriptions to the others. Whereas the bitter experience of a quarter of a century should have convinced them that the only purchase likely to be made by anyone reading the average newspaper report of a convention would be a bargepole for not touching fans with. Well, at last it has. On the second day of the Convention word went round that there was a Reporter present, but that it was all right, nobody was talking to him. Sure enough, everyone he approached told him politely but firmly that this was a private function. Not only that but at the next Convention session Chairman Tony Walsh, a young fan who seems to have been born with mutant sensibilities, issued a Public Warning. So the reporter sat alone in the bar writing his piece out of his head. No doubt it was just as accurate as any other newspaper report but it did no harm because it didn't get published. Which just proves what I've always claimed, that what Convention Committees need is not a Publicity Officer but a Security Officer. Never, apparently, more so than at present....

"Inside Coverage", *Hyphen* #35, April 1964
edited by Walt and Madeleine Willis

Court Circular

I have read in your excellent, though-not-of-course-to-be-compared-with-*Hyphen*-type fanzine, the piece by Ian McAulay about my driving and my car. I refer of course to the inferior plastic modern Ian McAulay, not the genuine Ian McAulay of Atlanta, Georgia, who graced fandom some ten years ago.

I am sure you will be very relieved to know that I have decided not to sue. This I may tell you is against the advice of my solicitor, my garage proprietor and the shade of Lord Nuffield, who communicated with me by knocking in my engine. The reason for my forbearance is that I hate to discourage eager young neofans like yourself. The fact that McAulay has no money – I hear he is the only nuclear physicist who has to offer Green Shield stamps with his atomic secrets – had nothing to do with it. Though I did naturally make allowances for the understandable jealousy of a man who only has a Ford Anglia for one who has a car like my Morris Minor, commended by no less a person than Boyd Raeburn Himself. Especially when his Ford doesn't even have an engine. (It is propelled by the violent oxidation reaction taking place in the rear bumper.)

Besides McAulay's article the rest of your contents bloom into significance. I understand now that Berry got the way he is as a result of that duck-shooting expedition... so that's what they meant by "duck's decease"... and was interested to notice that a first edition of *Irene Iddesleigh* was once worth £30. What I'd like to know is what it's worth now, because I have one. My grandfather, the one whose type I reverted to to the eternal delight of Rog Phillips, printed it for Mrs Ros.

Letter, *The Scarr* #4, April 1964
edited by George Charters

To Geo. Charters in Hospital

Sick bays indeed, I suppose this has something to do with mal-de-mare. Have you ever thought how horrible it'd be if you were injected with blood from a person who had taken an Apal stop-smoking course? That must be the origin of the old cockney proverb: "Never introduce your donor to Apal." I suggest that you show this letter to the doctor next time he comes round. He'll conclude that if you're strong enough to survive those puns you're strong enough to go home. That is, unless he prescribes a merciful release for you. All depends on his age, I suppose. An old doctor will choose a hard way out, and a euthanasia.... Isn't that *horrible*? Let's see, what else happened tonight? I asked James whether the Latin for "Give us each day our daily bread" was "Ora pro Hovis" and he said, "Why don't you join the Church so you can get excommunicated?".... John said he'd hurt his shoulder at ghoodminton and wouldn't be able to go to the office: I said he could apply for embrocation leave.... Peggy said she'd stick to James through good puns and bad.... We'll put the red carpet out for you on Sunday – or would you think it a bit of playful bandage? Tell you what, we'll get Sadie to order a fatted calf – that'll show you how we veal, i.e., hoping you'll heifer swift recovery.

Letter, *The Scarr* #7, February 1965
edited by George Charters

Willis the Snide

Some while ago I wrote in an American fanzine about meeting the new English fandom in Peterborough, and poked fun at the discomfiture of us old has-BNFs. To my utter incredulity Ron Bennett reported to British fandom that I had been "snide". Naturally I was quite overwhelmed at the revelation of this new and unsuspected facet of my genius – in 17 years of fandom nobody had ever called me snide before – but after searching vainly for those hidden subtleties in what I actually wrote, I was forced to the reluctant conclusion that Ron's judgement revealed more about himself than about me. I remembered that a year or so ago he had said something else peculiar, something about Irish Fandom's "air of wry superiority". At the time we all thought this was one of his more obscure jokes, but it looks as if he actually meant it, and now I wouldn't be surprised to hear that he reads aloud everything I write with a sneering expression and a John Brunner accent. No wonder he gets the wrong impression, because anyone thinking of giving public readings from my works should do so in a rather diffident Belfast brogue, to a rhythmic accompaniment of knees knocking in a cold attic. It would never fill Carnegie Hall.

[...]

To change gear for a moment, I admit to Graham Hall that I may have been unfair to our Press. I acknowledge its fearless crusading zeal in the persecution of Royalty, the bereaved, civil servants, untitled sexual offenders, and others unable to answer back. I recognize its discreet respect for the privacy of other press lords, patent medicine manufacturers, and powerful millionaires. I will even concede that it may have reported an event with fairness and accuracy; all I say is that the event was not a science fiction convention.

That paragraph was dedicated to Ron Bennett.

"Fanorama", *Zenith Speculation* #8, March 1965
edited by Peter Weston

The End of Oblique House

IF Press Release, 7 May 1965

On 6th May 1965, the old red brick house at 170 Upper Newtownards Road, Belfast, which has been the headquarters of Irish Fandom for nearly 20 years, finally reverted to the mundane plane of existence. In the fan attic the last ghoodminton service was solemnly performed by Bob Shaw. Symbolically, it was not returned. Instead the last shuttlecock was picked up by John Berry and reverently removed to its final resting-place, a time capsule donated by Sadie Shaw. Also in the glass cylindrical 2lb capsule were deposited a copy of *The Enchanted Duplicator* (first edition), some hyphens in printing-type used for *Slant*, a dollop of duplicating ink, James White's first bow tie (symbolizing the professional element in Irish Fandom) and signatures of the great fans and good friends who had stayed at Oblique House during the years, including Forry Ackerman, Chuck Harris, Lee Hoffman, Mal Ashworth, Ron Ellik, Larry Shaw, Vince Clarke, Boyd Raeburn, Andy Young, Ken and Irene Potter, Ken and Pamela Bulmer, John Roles, Bea Mahaffey, Rory Faulkner, Evelyn Smith, Sid Birchby, Harry Turner, Sid Coleman, Steve Schultheis, and many others. The time capsule was then buried in the front lawn, underneath the cherry tree, in earth with which had been mingled the sacred soil of South Gate, donated by Rick Sneary. A fannish era had ended. Oblique House was at one with Nineveh, Tyre and 101 Wagner St., Savannah....

Focal Point #9, 19 May 1965
edited by rich brown and Mike McInerney

Full and Frank

I do not ordinarily run about being frank at people, nor do I think there is necessarily anything dishonest about refraining from saying something. I think that what is really at issue here is the technique of fan writing. The thing about fan writing, it seems to me, is that it is more subjective than any other material written for publication. The fan writer is not declaiming to an anonymous multitude like other writers; he is addressing himself to specific individuals he knows personally. To sustain the integrity of this person-to-personal relationship it is essential for the writer to be honest with his readers. This is most true in the case of personal reminiscences, which usually lack intrinsic interest, and I seem to remember promising with this in mind to hide nothing from the readers of my memoirs, but even in an account with some intrinsic interest like *The Harp Stateside* the main interest for the reader lies in the reaction to situations of a person whom he thinks he knows. Just as the value of a critic is ascertained from his reviews of things you have seen. To be simplistic, how without me being critical about Webbert and Gernsback would people really know how much I thought of the Grennells and Busbys? So from my point of view it is not just an unfortunate side effect that should sometimes appear to be indiscreet, it is essential. It is a triumph for an author when he can occasionally make the reader exclaim to himself, “My Ghod I thought I was the only one who ever felt like that.” When this happens the writer has really struck home through all defences and created a new and more intimate relationship with his reader; but to do so he must have first opened all his own defences, and thereby made himself vulnerable. Because it will sometimes, perhaps often, happen that the reader will *not* have ever felt like that, and the reader will then regard the writer as kinky in some way. A case in point is the thing I did recently for Terry Hill *[see A Kind of Immortality]*, in which Madeleine thought I had exposed myself as being excessively sentimental: from that point of view she may very well be right, but from my point of view there was no point in writing it any other way. That was just the way I felt and if other people didn't feel the same way or I couldn't communicate the emotion properly, well you win some you lose some. It also follows from my point of view that ktf* reviewing is counter-productive in raising the standards of fan writing because it tends to inhibit sincerity and produce the kind of defensive or aggressive posturing or performing which seems to be taking over so many

fanzines these days. It also follows I think that it is useless to argue with people whose only stock in trade is abuse and self-justification: all you get is more of the same. It is wrong to assume that people shout and throw bottles out of a desire to improve the standards of football.

Letter, 18 April 1983

** KTF: the contemporary "Kill the Fuckers" school of no-holds-barred fanzine reviewing. [Ed.]*

On D. West

The newest member of our household, the Golden Retriever pup called Max, is far from being house-trained yet but already he has given me a new insight into English fandom. The human being in our household who is up first, usually me, must as first duty let the pup out and observe his behaviour. The next member to come down, usually Madeleine, duly asks, "Has he performed yet?" This morning a small light dawned on me. "Performance?" I said. "Now I understand the writings of D. West. He creeps out of Skipton, craps on our flowers, and creeps back again. The results may be unsightly but one may hope for more fertile soil eventually."

Social Notes

A fireworks display in honour of Bingley's most prominent fan took place yesterday evening at Bingley Recreation Grounds and Civic Amenity Site. The display was somewhat dampened by continuous heavy rain, with the result that there were very few bangs or colourful displays. However, the organizers valiantly persisted, and fizzing and sputtering continued at irregular intervals until a late hour: indeed no one was quite sure when it had ended. The Mayor of Bingley apologized afterwards that things had not gone quite as well as he had hoped, but local literary circles were delighted. "We thought it was just like one of D. West's articles," said one of his admirers.

Chuq #1, June 1987
edited by Walt Willis

D. West was known for (among other things) trenchant fanzine criticism and long complex essays including "Performance" (1982). He collected his best writing as Fanzines in Theory and Practice *and* Deliverance*, both now TAFF ebooks. [Ed.]*

The Wizard of OF

An appreciation of the 1987 Worldcon Fan Guests of Honour.

On the evening of 10th October 1950 a tall thin young man walked pensively from the Castlereagh Road, Belfast, to the next radial road but one, a distance of about a mile, and made his way down the even-numbered houses to number 170. Nervously he pressed the old-fashioned bell push. The door opened almost immediately to reveal another tall thin young man. “Er...” said the visitor, “I’m... are you... I got your name from Operation Fantast. My name is Shaw. Are you...?“ “Come in, Bob,” said his host. “We’ve been expecting you.” He called up the stairs. “HE’S HERE!” A noise like a robot falling down three flights of stairs, and there appeared in the hall another young man, even taller than the others, and a shapely little blonde girl. “Bob Shaw. Madeleine Willis. James White.”

Among the impressions Bob took away from that fateful first evening, there must have been one of Operation Fantast as a vast and powerful organization with worldwide ramifications. The truth was otherwise, but no less remarkable. If it had been possible to construct a radar scope showing science fiction fan activity, a scan of the Eastern hemisphere just after World War II would have revealed Europe in total darkness. Maximum amplification might have disclosed a residual glow from Leeds, where Mike Rosenblum with the help of Forry Ackerman had for so long published Futurian War Digest. But it faded, and darkness was total. But if we keep watching, there seems to be a tiny spark in Cambridgeshire. As we watch, spellbound, it darts to a British Army base in West Germany: and, steadfastly growing in brightness, it illuminates the entire scene from London to Liverpool, Bournemouth to Belfast. Fandom came into existence again. And it was all due to your Fan Guests of Honour, Ken and Joyce Slater. There were of course dozens of meetings brought about by Operation Fantast like that first one of the four Irish fans who came to be known as the Wheels of IF, and some may have been of even greater importance to those involved – though we find that hard to imagine – but Operation Fantast did more than just introduce people to one another. In catalogue mailings there were enclosed leaflets from customers. They were in fact little fanzines. They were not very good, admittedly, but in those days a fanzine did not have to be very good to be significant, which is why I still tend to believe that there is no such thing

as a bad fanzine. At any rate, one day one arrived that was so awful that Madeleine uttered the fateful words: “We could do better than that.”

So we tried, and that is how we came to be here. One may speculate that we would all have become active fans anyway, and James and Bob professional writers. It may be so: but for myself, I had been reading science fiction since 1934 and remembered funny readers’ letters about staples, and even remembered someone called Tucker, but had never thought for a moment of being involved in such fanciful goings-on. I believe it was Ken and Joyce who changed my life, and very much for the better. Their nomination as Fan Guests of Honour indicates how many others of us feel the same way.

Frontier Crossings, August 1987
edited by Rob Jackson

Breakthroughs

Contribution to 1987 Worldcon programme book symposium.

I didn't have a good school teacher until I was 35. He was a man called David Bleakley who used to be leader of the NI Labour Party, and he was teaching at a training centre for unemployed youths while I was escorting an inspection party of the Child Welfare Council. The centre was so organized that people could pass along the back of each classroom without interrupting the lesson, but my problem was that I could not get my people to move out of Mr Bleakley's room. They were enthralled, rooted to the floorboards, by his account of the discovery of America. Even to this day, I can still recall the vivid mental picture he gave of the frail craft, the enterprising civilization they represented, and the vast unexpected continent they were to discover.

It was a breakthrough for me to discover what education should be like, but a teacher doesn't have to be a genius like Bleakley to inspire a child. One did it for me with one letter, to wit the letter "g". I had written an essay, or as we called it in those days, a composition. I knew very little about the subject set for the composition, and in a spirit of mischief and desperation I made a little joke in it. To my utter astonishment (and relief) it came back with a little red ink "g" at that place in the margin, and a higher mark than I'd ever got before. I realized then that for the first time that the purpose of an essay was not to convey information but to entertain: nobody had bothered to tell me that before. It made a lot of difference, sufficient to change my whole life.

I'd forgotten that incident until last year when my son got married and left home. Tidying his room I found some of his old exercise books. They weren't inspiring reading, because his education had been a disaster area, despite the fact that he read every book in the house (which is more than I've done). But I found an essay in which he had made a pun, to which the teacher had reacted only with an impatient "Sp!" Isn't it a terrible thought that there may be breakthroughs that just don't happen?

Frontier Crossings, August 1987
edited by Rob Jackson

Bababadonnerronn!

“Eh? What was that?”

“It was just the Big Bang, Boss.”

“Oh. Well, are we all ready this time?”

“Yes, Boss. Except for an out of the way planet to be called Sol III. I have a new idea I’d like to try out there. It’s pretty far out, but it might be interesting.”

“Let’s hear it.”

“We people it with two entirely different varieties of the same species.”

“I give them six months.”

“No, wait a minute Boss. Here’s the gimmick. We make their co-operation essential for reproduction, and highly pleasurable.”

“I like it, I like it. But hold on. With that kind of set-up who’d want to spend their time praising and glorifying me. What’s the point of creating worlds if you don’t get any egoboo out of it?”

“Well, Boss, I thought we might tie in the reproductive organs with the excretory ones. A little practical joke, sort of. Would be economical too.”

“Oh boy, would that screw them up. OK, go ahead but let me see the prototypes. (Thinks) Gotta watch that Lucifer. I think he’s after my job.”

MagiCon Original Bookmark Anthology #8, 1989

Appendix

Willisography

Originally compiled for *Warhoon* #28 by Richard Bergeron with special assistance by Bruce Pelz, under the title "Notes for a Walt Willis Bibliography". Expanded and rearranged for this ebook.

Asterisked sections and items below were not listed in the *Warhoon* #28 bibliography (*W28bib*).

Annotations indicating the collection or collections where a piece has been reprinted are as below. *W28bib* is cited only on occasions where that bibliography gives a piece a new title.

- *TAWF – TAWF Times Two* (ebook 2022) ed. Rob Hansen and David Langford
- *THE – The Harp in England* (ebook 2023) ed. David Langford
- *THR – The Harp Remembered* (ebook 2023) ed. David Langford
- *THS+ – The Harp Stateside* (expanded as ebook 2023) ed. David Langford
- *TWP – The Willis Papers* (1961; ebook 2019) ed. George W. Field
- *W28 – Warhoon* #28 (dated 1978 but 1980) ed. Richard Bergeron
- *W28bib* – bibliographical listing in *Warhoon* #28 (dated 1978 but 1980) ed. Richard Bergeron
- *WDA+ – Willis Discovers America and other fan fiction* (ebook 2021) ed. David Langford

Bibliography Links

Writing: Articles, Book, Columns, Departments, Drama, Fan Fiction, Fiction, Letters, Mailing Comments, Miscellaneous, UK Convention Reports, US Trip Reports

Publications: Collections, Ebooks, Christmas Cards, One-Shots, Periodicals

Writing

Articles

- "Telekinesis and Buttered Toast" (*Slant* #1, November 1948) – *TWP*, *W28*, *THR*
- "Gulf" (*Science Fiction News* #5, Summer 1950)
- "'Corn' Becomes Callous" (*Rhodomagnetic Digest*, V2 #5, March

1951) – *TWP*
- "The Mind of Samuel Merwin" (*Explorer*, April 1951) – *THR*
- "Fan File" (*Quandry* #10, May 1951) – as "Autobiography" *WDA+*
- "Belfast Postscript" (*Slant* #6, Winter 1951)
- "Message from the Flying Ackerman" (*Slant* #6, Winter 1951)
- Untitled piece (*Mad* #5, August 1952) – as "Notes by a Tributary" *W28bib*
- "In Defense of the Pun" (*Wastebasket* #4, 1952) – *TWP*, *W28*, *THR*
- "Oblique House" (*Wastebasket* #4, 1952)
- "Concerning Calliopes" with Hoffman, Clarke, and Bulmer (*Quandry* #26, October 1952)
- "Love in the Cornfield" (*Spaceship* #17, April 1952) – *TWP*
- "The Judgment of Harris" (*Slant* #7, Winter 1953)
- "Film Notes... Or Something" (*Pendulum* #1, January 1952)
- "Shaw – Ireland's Gift to English Fandom" (*BoSh Appreciation Magazine*, July 1952) – *TWP*
- "Comes The Revelation..." (*Sol* #6, Summer 1952) – *TWP*
- "A Question of Title" (*Wastebasket* #3, 1952) – *TWP*
- "The Subcutaneous Fan" (*Skyhook* #13, Spring 1952) – *TWP*, *W28*
- * "The Harp in Savannah" (*Quandry* #23, October 1952) – *THS+*
- "Introduction to The BeaCon" (*Hyphen* #4, October 1953) – *W28*, *THR*
- "A Word about Fanzines" (*Operation Fantast Handbook*, 1953)
- "The Fan from Tomorrow" (*Oopsla!* #9, January 1953) – *TWP*
- "Fandom at Sixes and Sevens" (*Vega* #12, 1953) – *W28*. *THR*
- * "Aftermaths and Repercussions" (*Peri* #3, April 1954)
- "Wilde Heir" (*WAWCRHBSJWGATWCMWPMSSACW*, July 1954) – *TWP*
- "The Consternation of Orion" (*Orion* #6, October 1954) – *TWP*
- "How to BNF Without Tears" (*Bem* #1, April 1954) – *TWP*, *W28*, *THR*
- "A Plea for Clemency" (*A True Bill*, August 1955)
- "Autobiographical Notes" (*CanFan* #25, June 1955) – *TWP*
- "Harpie/Black Mail" (*Le Zombie* #64, January 1955) – *TWP*; excerpt as "Marginalia" *W28*, *THR*
- "Harping on the Past" (*Fanhistory*, February 1956) – *W28*, *THR*
- "Sporting Supplement" (*Retribution* #6, March 1957) – *THR*
- "The Life of TAFF" (*Yandro* #50, March 1957) – see the TAFF site
- "Off Trail Magazine Publishers' Assn / Special Presidential Edict" (*Archive Between Meals*, March 1957) – as "Mercer's Day" *THR*

- Untitled appreciation of Atom (untitled in *Veritas* #1, 1957) – as "The Discovery of the ATom" *W28bib*
- "Minutes of the Meeting of *WAPPOTEESSC*" with Ken Bulmer (*Woz* #7, June 1958)
- "Sound the Anti-Tocsin!" (*Inside* #53, September 1958) – *THR*
- "Minutes of the Wheels of IF" (*Cry* #116, June 1958) – *THR*
- "The Sterling Fanzine" (*Cry* #125, March 1959) – *THR*
- "Book Review" (*Retribution* #14, September 1959) – as "From Aa to Zombie" *W28, THR*
- "As Others See Us" (*À Bas* #11, February 1959) – *W28, THR*
- "Untreasured Berry" (*Fanfaronade* #3, July 1961)
- "My Life with Robert Bloch" (*Oopsla!* #30, September 1961) (rewrite of the 1953 "Bloch Exposed" in Fan Fiction below) – *THR*
- "The Ten Year Hitch (I)" (*Void* #23, January 1961) – *W28, THR*
- Untitled appreciation of Atom (*The Atom Anthology*, May 1961) – as "Notes on ATomic Art" *W28bib*; as "Appreciating Atom" *THR*
- "The *Slant* Story" (*Xero* #6, September 1961; Xero 7, November 1961; Xero 8, 1962) – *W28, THR*
- "Fandom for the Highbrow" (*Scottishe* #27, March 1962) (part of or postscript to "I Remember Me" column) – *W28, THR*
- "Instant Fandom" (*Enclave* #7, Summer 1964) – *THR*
- "The End of Oblique House" (*Focal Point* #9, May 1965) – *W28, THR*
- "Dark and True and Tinder Is the North" (*The Scarr* #201, January 1970) (as Walter Ryan) – *THR*
- "The Ten Year Hitch (II)" (*Random* #6, February 1975; *Random* #10, June 1975) – *W28, THR*
- "The White Badge of What?" (Lilapa 195, December 1973)
- "Walt ERA Willis" (Lilapa 210, 31 July 1974)
- "The APA and the Survival of Civilization" (Lilapa 237, November 1975) – *W28, THR*
- * "A Kind of Immortality" (*Microwave* #5, April 1983) – *THR*
- * "On Bob Shaw" (*Rivercon XII Souvenir Book*, July 1987) – *THR*
- * "The Wizard of OF" (*Frontier Crossings*, August 1987) – *THR*
- * "Breakthroughs" (*Frontier Crossings*, August 1987) – *THR*
- * "The Chuck Wagon" (Corflu 6 Programme Book, April 1989) – *THR*
- * "A Faraway Shore" (*Glitz* #4, February 1992) – *THR*
- * "Manuscript found in box of manuscripts": untitled speech for 1962 Chicon II debate, not previously published (*Banana Wings* #60,

November 2015) – as "The Harp Speaks" *THS+*

Book

The Improbable Irish as by Walter Bryan

223 pages of anecdotes on Ireland and its people. Published in paperback by Ace, 1969. pb36990. Hardcover by Taplinger in the US and Burns & MacEachern, Ltd., Ontario, Canada. Includes some material from the column "The Harp That Once or Twice"; however, the chapter "Dark and True and Tinder Is the North" is entirely different from the fanzine essay of that name listed under Articles above.

Columns

Comebacks from Erin [column]

With James White and Bob Shaw.

- 1. *Straight Up* #2, March 1952: News and *Quandry* poll results.
- 2. *Straight Up* #3, May 1952: News briefs.
- 3. *Straight Up* #4, July 1952: News briefs.

Dusty Answers [column]

Apparently a continuation of "I Remember Me": see that column title and "Warblings" below.

- l. *Quip* #11, January 1969: Ellison and the Fall Of Sixth Fandom.

Fanorama [column]

Observations and fanzine reviews in *Nebula*, the Scottish prozine. The first twelve instalments were titled (by editor Peter Hamilton) "The Electric Fan". The last four appeared in *Zenith*, a fanzine, edited by Peter Weston. One instalment appeared in Robert Lichtman's *Psi-Phi*. All instalments collected by Robert Lichtman as *Fanorama: Walt Willis' Fan Columns from Nebula Science Fiction* (November 1998; TAFF ebook 2017).

- 1. *Nebula* #1, Autumn 1952: Defining fandom by parallel.
- 2. *Nebula* #2, Spring 1953: Chicon II and the ManCon.
- 3. *Nebula* #3, Summer 1953: *Operation Fantast*, Stigwort's Disease, *Space Times*.
- 4. *Nebula* #4, Autumn 1953: The British Convention.
- 5. *Nebula* #5, September 1953: *Astroneer*, *Zenith*.
- 6. *Nebula* #6, December 1953: The Philcon, *Space Times*, and *Orbit*.
- 7. *Nebula* #7, February 1953: TAFF, *Space Diversions*, *Space Times*,

and *Fission*.

- 8. *Nebula* #8, April 1954: *Orbit*, *Orion*, and *The Medway Journal*.
- 9. *Nebula* #9, August 1954: *Bem*, *SF News*.
- 10. *Nebula* #10, October 1954: "i", *Orion*, *The New Futurian*, *The Medway Journal*.
- 11. *Nebula* #11, December 1954: *Operation Fantast*, *The Immortal Storm*, *Alpha*, *Phantasmagoria*, and *Bem*.
- 12. *Nebula* #12, April 1955: *Triode*, *Femizine*, *Satellite*.
- 13. *Nebula* #14, November 1955: Seeing Ken Bulmer off to America, *Hyphen*.
- 14. *Nebula* #15, January 1956: *Quatermass*, TAFF.
- 15. *Nebula* #16, March 1956: Dated technology in sf.
- 16. *Nebula* #17, July 1956: The Simple Life and its complexity, *Alpha*, *Retribution*.
- 17. *Nebula* #18, November 1956: Alien nomenclature.
- 18. *Nebula* #19, December 1956: *Triode* and *Ploy*, trouble with smoke.
- 19. *Nebula* #20, March 1957: The Sense of Wonder and what happened to it, *Eye*.
- 20. *Nebula* #21, May 1957: The truth about the spaceman, *Camber*, and *The New Futurian*.
- 21. *Nebula* #22, July 1957: Contact with extra-terrestrials.
- 22. *Nebula* #23, August 1957: The weather, *Triode*, *The New Futurian*, *Retribution*.
- 23. *Nebula* #24, September 1957: Ted Tubb in action, *Ploy*.
- 24. *Nebula* #25, October 1957: Simplifying science fiction.
- 25. *Nebula* #26, January 1958: Handling the space age.
- 26. *Nebula* #27, February 1958: Making sf fascinating, Ackerman, A.C. Clarke.
- 27. *Nebula* #28, March 1958: William F. Temple.
- 28. *Nebula* #29, April 1958: Who owns space?
- 29. *Nebula* #30, May 1958: Sabotage at the ManCon, *Perihelion*, *Camber*.
- 30. *Nebula* #31, June 1958: SF in reality.
- 31. *Nebula* #32, July 1958: Mail delivery by balloon.
- 32. *Nebula* #33, August 1958: Cinema.
- 33. *Nebula* #34, September 1958: Representatives of the space age and how to handle the problem,
- 34. *Nebula* #35, October 1958: Ken Bulmer, *Satellite*.
- 35. *Nebula* #36, November 1998: Inchmery Fan Diary.

- 36. *Nebula* #37, December 1958: James White in search of fans.
- 37. *Nebula* #38, January 1959: Behind the sf plot.
- 38. *Nebula* #39, February 1959: Word rates.
- 39. *Nebula* #40, May 1959: The Man Who Interrupted *Quatermass*.
- 40. *Nebula* #41, June 1959: The big bang theory of sf.
- 41. *Psi-Phi* #5, March 1960: Do It Yourself psionics.
- 42. *Zenith* #5, June 1964: *Beyond*.
- 43. *Zenith* #6, September 1964: *Alien, The Scarr*.
- 44. *Zenith* #7, December 1964: *Link*, Beryl Henley, and a question of humour.
- 45. *Zenith* #8, March 1965: Beryl Henley, snideness and the UK press. – excerpt as "Willis the Snide" *THR*

The Harp That Once or Twice [column]

All but the last two instalments are collected in *Warhoon* #28 either under the overall heading "The Harp That Once or Twice" or, where appropriate, as segments of *The Harp Stateside*. The 2023 TAFF ebook *The Harp That Once or Twice* likewise omits material collected in *The Harp Stateside* but adds the post-*W28* columns.

- 1. *Quandry* #8, March 1951: The Gold/Campbell war, *Nekromantikon*, *Amazing Stories*, and sf.
- 2. *Quandry* #9, April 1951: The N3F, modern sf.
- 3. *Quandry* #10, May 1951: SF in Gaelic, Redd Boggs, Howard Browne, *Sludge*.
- 4. *Quandry* #11, June 1951: British sf, fanzine fillers, and Russell Watkins.
- 5. *Quandry* #12, July 1951: Eva Firestone, *Wastebasket* and *Amazing Stories*.
- 6. *Quandry* #13, August 1951: Bob Shaw, the fan diary, Chuck Harris, and general doings in Sixth Fandom.
- 7. *Quandry* #16, December 1951: *Fanvariety* and Max Keasler, an imaginary Nolacon report.
- 8. *Quandry* #17, January 1952: Bob Tucker: Home Wrecker, and Proxyboo, Ltd.
- 9. *Quandry* #18, March 1952: Gernsback's Xmas Card and the new British Fandom.
- 10. *Quandry* #19, April 1952: First anniversary of the Harp, H.J. Campbell,
- 11. *Quandry* #20, May 1952: H.L. Gold, George Wetzel, Machiavelli in Maryland, and Proxyboo's Booful! (a fanzine).

- 12. *Quandry* #21, June 1952: *Rhodomagnetic Digest* and literary criticism.
- 13. *Oopsla!* #12, March 1954: Leeh, *Quandry*, Graham, *Slant*, and Annishthesia. – excerpted *TWP* as "Up the Garden Pathology"
- 14. *Oopsla!* #13, May 1954: The Fen Commandments.
- 15. *Oopsla!* #14, September,1954: Preparation for SuperManCon – Operation Armageddon
- 16. *Oopsla!* #15, November 1954: Postscript to the SuperManCon.
- 17. *Oopsla!* #16, February 1955: Vorzimer, Campbell, and old shoes.
- 18. *Oopsla!* #17, May 1955: EasterCon.
- 19. *Oopsla!* #18, August 1955: Harp Stateside.
- 20. *Oopsla!* #19, November 1955: Harp Stateside.
- 21. *Oopsla!* #21, June 1957: Columns, Muzzy, and the pleasures of Feuding.
- 22. *Oopsla!* #23, December 1957: Dawning of the Space Age, and the LonCon.
- 23. *Oopsla!* #24, February 1958: Christmas morning fanac, fannishness and respectability.
- 24. *Oopsla!* #25, November 1958: The end of a fan, Orville W. Mosher III.
- 25. *Oopsla!* #26, May 1959: Prozine titles, garbage and sf, boilerplate and Bob Silverberg, the Bible as a fanzine.
- 26. *Oopsla!* #28/29, October 1959: Perfectionism and Redd Boggs, John W. Campbell, John Berry's return, and Fenaissance.
- 27. Interim [*Oopsla!*] 29/30, February 1959: *Analog* and the burial of Prosser.
- 28. *Warhoon* #10, January 1961: Heinlein, Calkins and the survival of the fittest.
- 29. *Warhoon* #11, April 1961: Life at Oblique House, technological obsolescence.
- 30. *Warhoon* #12, July 1961: Analyzing the creative process.
- 31. *Warhoon* #13, October 1961: Ireland and interlineations, nudity and credibility, analyzing the creative process.
- 32. *Warhoon* #14, January 1962: Improving the species: Eskimo style.
- 33. *Warhoon* #15, April 1962: Ireland and the oldest doodle in the world.
- 34. *Warhoon* #16, July 1962: The Cosmic Pun, love of country, and feedback.
- 35. *Warhoon* #18, January 1963: The American Word, and the Age of

Indestructible Garbage.

- 36. *Warhoon* #19, February 1964: Amateur vs Pro, Robert Bloch, the Decline of the West.
- 37. *Quark* #7, Spring/Summer 1964: Things that crawl in the night, bomber pilots and James Blish.
- 38. *Quark* #8, Fall 1964: The new British fan, and Barry Goldwater.
- 39. *Quark* #9, Spring 1955: An encounter with a Negro, election returns, the London transport system.
- 40. *Quark* #10, Fall 1965: Fandom vs. the Greyhound Bus Lines.
- 41. *Warhoon* #23, May 1968: Memoirs and the trap of Creeping Perfectionism.
- 42. *Warhoon* #24, August 1968: The strange world of Flann O'Brien.
- 43. *Warhoon* #25, November 1968: The Rats That Ate the Railroad.
- 44. *Warhoon* #26, February 1969: Personal philosophy and the Irish dilemma.
- * 45. *Science-Fiction Five-Yearly* #8, November 1986: various.
- * 46. *Science-Fiction Five-Yearly* #9, November 1991: various.

I Remember Me (Autobiographical Notes) [column]

A sequence which began in *Pamphrey* as below, continued in the "Warblings" column for *Scottishe* (see further below) and ended or paused in 1969 with "Dusty Answers" above. All instalments collected in *Warhoon* #28 (except for the first, non-autobiographical "Warblings" column) and *The Harp Remembered* (no exceptions). See next section for the column's 1991 relaunch.

- 1. *Pamphrey* #3, October 1956 and *Woz* #4, February 1957: Beginnings.
- 2. *Pamphrey* #5, July 1957, and *Woz* #5, May 1957: (variant title: I Remember Walt Willis): *Slant*, Vince Clarke, Ken Bulmer, Clive Jackson.
- 3. *Pamphrey* #6, January 1958 and *Woz* #6, November 1957 (variant title: I Chose Fandom or "I Was a Fugghead for the N3F" – The Willis Memoirs – Part III 1949-1950.) *Slant*, Vince Clarke, Chuck Harris.

I Remember Me (New Series) [column in *Mimosa*]

This column was revived with a similar format – a guided tour of the Willis correspondence files – from 1991 in *Mimosa*, edited by Nicki Lynch and Rich Lynch. These later columns are listed below but are not included in *The Harp Remembered* since they have been collected as *I Remember*

Me and Other Narratives, edited by Rich Lynch, who contributes a new introduction and many afterwords to the columns. See https://fanac.org/fanzines/Mimosa/.

- 1. *Mimosa* #11, December 1991: Robert Bloch, IF Christmas Card, Vernon McCain and others.
- 2. *Mimosa* #12, July 1992: Robert Bloch, Bill Temple.
- 3. *Mimosa* #13, January 1993: Vince Clarke, Chuck Harris.
- 4. *Mimosa* #14, August 1993: Chuck Harris, letters to Bloch and Burbee, Harlan Ellison, others.
- "Foot and Drink", *Mimosa* #15, April 1994: reprinted extract from *The Harp Stateside*.
- 5. *Mimosa* #16, December 1994: Damon Knight.
- 6. *Mimosa* #17, October 1995: Philip Larkin, Robert Conquest, Damon Knight.
- 7. *Mimosa* #18, May 1996: Arthur Thomson (Atom), John Brunner.
- "The Harp Meets No. 1 Fan", *Mimosa* #19, November 1996: reprinted extracts condensed from "The Harp in England" (June-August 1951) and "The Harp that Once or Twice" (August-September 1951)
- 8. *Mimosa* #20, May 1997: Chuck Harris, John Berry, Robert Bloch.
- 9. *Mimosa* #21, December 1997: Shelby Vick, Dean Grennell, Chuck Harris.
- 10. *Mimosa* #22, June 1998: Horace Gold, Mal Ashworth, Lee Hoffman.
- "The Harp at Chicon" *Mimosa* #25, April 2000: reprinted extract from *The Harp Stateside*.

The Immortal Teacup [column]

Notes and clippings for a history of British Fandom.

- 1. *Science Fiction Digest* #4, November 1951: Arthur C. Clarke and an article about him by William F. Temple.
- 2. *Science Fiction Digest* #5, January 1952: The Immortal Storm, aims, and Temple's letter from *VOM* on what fandom means to him.
- 3. *Science Fiction Digest* #7, September 1952: Walter Gillings and Novae Terrae. – as "The Immortal Teacup" *THR*
- 4. *ASFO* #1, January 1953: Mainly an article by Francis Arnold on Ted Carnell. – excerpted as "The Ancient Ones" *TWP*, *W28*, *THR*

The Outpost [column]

A compilation of highlights from this column is included in *The Harp*

Remembered (2023).

- 1. *Phantasmagoria* #1, Winter 1951: First visit to the Epicentre and Fandom Radiations.
- 2. *Phantasmagoria* #2, Spring 1951: Twilight over Utopia and Fandom Radiations.
- 3. *Phantasmagoria* #3, Summer 1951: Convention notes.
- 4. *Phantasmagoria* #4, Spring 1952: Authentic SF, Gold and Campbell and the war betwixt. – excerpted as "The Gold War" *W28*

The Perforated Finger [column]

A compilation of highlights from this column, omitting mailing comments, is included in *The Harp Remembered* (2023).

- l. *Wassaw & Ossabaw Backwater Journal*, Spring 1952: Mailing comments, FAPA.
- 2. *Fen Crittur Comical Books*, Autumn 1952: Mailing comments for FAPA.
- 3. *Pamphrey* #1, November 1953: Mailing comments for FAPA.
- 4. *Lighthouse* #5, February 1962: Explaining the title, notes on a wedding. – *THR*
- 5. *Lighthouse* #9, August 1963: Vacation observations. – *THR*
- 6. *Lighthouse* #11, November 1964: Reducing pressures and medical problems. – *THR*
- 7. *Lighthouse* #12, February 1965: Matters of morality. – *THR*
- 8. *Lighthouse* #14, October 1966: Strathclyde and how things are in Glockamorra. – *THR*

Plinth [column]

A compilation of 1960s highlights from this column, omitting segments of *Willis Discovers America* and *The Harp Stateside*, is included in *The Harp Remembered* (2023) as "A Clump of Plinths", with earlier extracts in the "Short Takes" section.

- 1. *Confusion* #2, 1952: Willis taken ill with paragraphs and puns.
- 2. *Confusion* #3, February or March 1952: How to write a column. – excerpt as "Casting a Spell" *THR*
- 3. *Confusion* #4, 1952: Fanticlimax!
- 4. *Confusion* #5, March 1952: A Death Worse than Fate!
- 5. *Confusion* #6, 1952: Willis Visits Chicago! (A Nightmare)
- 6. *Confusion* #7, April 1952: How I Write My Columns. – *TWP*, *THR*
- 7. *Confusion* #8, 1952: Willis Discovers America. (1).
- 8. *Confusion* #9, 1952: Willis Discovers America (3).

- 9. *Confusion* #10, June 1952: Off to a Convention and Willis Discovers America (5). – first section excerpted as "A Fan at Sea" *W28*; in full *THR*
- 10. *Confusion* #11, August 1952: Peter Graham and Willis Discovers America (7). – excerpt as "Hoaxed!" *THR*
- 11. *Confusion*, Special pre-Chicon *Confusion*, 1952: Willis Discovers America (10).
- 12. *Confusion* #13, November 1952: Back in Ireland.
- 13. *Confusion* #15, May 1953: Part of The Harp Stateside.
- 14. *Confusion* #16, February 1954: Part of The Harp Stateside.
- 15. *Fanac* #58, May 1960: Fandom for Mundania and Prosser's artwork.
- 16. *Fanac* #59, May 1960: *Warhoon*, Heinlein and IFen
- 17. *Fanac* #61, June 1960: Who Killed SF?
- 18. *Fanac* #65, September 1960: A visit by Andy Young.
- 19. *Fanac* #67, November 1960: Campbell and IFenotes.
- 20. *Fanac* #70, January 1961: Campbell and some questions by a Mr. Helgesen.
- 21. *Fanac* #72, April 1961: Have Fund, Will Travel and The New Shaw.

The Prying Fan [column]

Although Richard Bergeron listed this only under Departments, its nature in *Slant* was always that of a column of small snippets. It was much later revived for *Pulp*, where more often than not each column was a single essay or piece of fan fiction.

- 1. *Slant* #2, Summer 1949: various.
- 2. *Slant* #3, Spring 1950: various.
- 3. *Slant* #4, Autumn 1950: various.
- 4. *Slant* #5, Spring 1951: various.
- 5. *Slant* #6, Winter 1951: various.
- 6. *Slant* #7, Winter 1952: various.
- * *Pulp* #1, June 1986: "Sixty Religions and Only One Sauce". – *THR*
- * *Pulp* #2, August 1986: "The Prying Fan". – *THR*
- * *Pulp* #3, November 1986: "Superfan!". – *WDA+*
- * *Pulp* #4, June 1987: "The Colossal Enchanted Duplicator Adventure". – *WDA+*
- * *Pulp* #5, Summer 1987: "It's Only Fanwriting But I Like It". – *THR*
- * *Pulp* #6, November 1987: "The Prying Fan". – *THR*
- * *Pulp* #7, February 1988: "The Most Distressful Country", reprinting

the thus-titled segment of “The Harp That Once or Twice” instalment 33 (April 1962) – collected in *The Harp That Once or Twice* (ebook 2023)

The Warier Bard [column]

- 1. *Axe* #25B, May 1962: American Tourist Propaganda. – *THR*
- 2. *Axe* #28, July 1962: Name calling without naming names, Synthetic Feud. – *THR*
- 3. *Axe* #30, August 1962: Piper on the Beam, Last Year At Marionbradley, and Goggle Box. – *THR*
- 4. *Axe* #33, January 1963: Relaxing after The Trip. – *TAWF*

Warblings [column]

All instalments collected in *Warhoon* #28 (except for the first, non-autobiographical column) and *The Harp Remembered* (no exceptions).

- 1. *Scottishe* #20, March 1960: Taking a bath with Queen Victoria. – as “Plumbing the Depths” *THR*
- 2. *Scottishe* #22, December 1960: I Remember Me (4). Chuck Harris, Eric Frank Russell.
- 3. *Scottishe* #23, March 1961: I Remember Me (5). Eric Frank Russell.
- 4. *Scottishe* #24, June 1961: I Remember Me (6). The Epicentre.
- 5. *Scottishe* #25, September 1961: I Remember Me (7). Vince Clarke, Ken Bulmer, Lee Hoffman, and *Quandry*.
- 6. *Scottishe* #26, December 1961: I Remember Me (8). Lee Hoffman, J.T. McIntosh, “Fandom for the Highbrow”.
- 7. *Scottishe* #27, March 1962: I Remember Me (9) The LonCon Report, The Quannish and Lee Hoffman.
- 8. *Scottishe* #29, September 1962: I Remember Me (10). Lee Hoffman, Henry Kuttner, and J.T. McIntosh.
- 9. *Scottishe* #30, December 1962: I Remember Me (11). Chuck Harris.
- 10. *Scottishe* #31, March 1963: I Remember Me (12). Pre-Chicon, Robert Bloch, Richard Elsberry.
- 11. *Scottishe* #32, June 1963: I Remember Me (13). Richard Elsberry.
- 12. *Scottishe* #33, September 1963: I Remember Me (14). Vince Clarke and Chuck Harris.
- 13. *Scottishe* #34, December 1963: I Remember Me (15). Vince Clarke and Chuck Harris.
- 14. *Scottishe* #35, March 1964: I Remember Me (16). James White.

- 15. *Scottishe* #36, June 1964: I Remember Me (17). Arthur C. Clarke, Poul Anderson, Robert Bloch, and more on Chuck Harris.
- 16. *Scottishe* #37, September 1964: I Remember Me (18). Chuck Harris and Forrest J Ackerman.
- 17. *Scottishe* #38, February 1965: I Remember Me (19). William F. Temple, *The Enchanted Duplicator*, The Great Mackenzie War.
- 18. *Scottishe* #39, January 1966: I Remember Me (20). Letter columns, Robert Bloch.

Departments

- Editorial: *Slant* #1, #2, #7. *Hyphen* #3, #16
- On The Level: *Slant* #3, #4
- Off Course: *Slant* #1
- The Prying Fan: *Slant* #2, #3, #4, #5, #6, #7 [excerpts in "The Eofannish Era" *W28*, *THR*]
- Corn Exchange: *Slant* #1, #2
- The Amateur Editor: *Slant* #3, #4, #5
- Lesser Known Fantasy: *Slant* #3, #4
- Competition: *Slant* #3
- The Good Old Days: *Slant* #4
- Fanfile: *Slant* #4, #5, #6
- The Things They Say: *Slant* #4
- Authors!: *Slant* #6
- Inclinations: *Hyphen* #1 [excerpt as "Introducing Hyphen" *THR*], #2 [excerpt as "The Poisoned Pen" *W28*, *THR*], #3
- Final Footnote: *Hyphen* #19
- The Quartz Quintal: *Hyphen* #23
- Random: *Hyphen* #18
- News and Reviews: *Hyphen* #13
- Inside Coverage: *Hyphen* #6, #7, #8, #10 [excerpt as "Farewell *Slant*" *THR*], #11, #12, #13 [excerpts as "Bad Times Just Around the Corner" and "The Lost Planet" *THR*], #20, #22, #24, #25, #26, #27, #28, #30, #31, #32, #33, *#35 [excerpt as "Eastercon 1964" *THR*], *#37
- Readers' Letters: *Hyphen* #5, #6, #7
- Postscripts: *Hyphen* #10, #11, #12, #13, #19, #22, #24, #25, #26, #27, #29, #30, #31, #32, #33, #36
- SF Trends: *Slant* #1
- Advertisement: The Fantyper, with Bob Shaw (*Hyphen* #13, March

1955)
- Advertisement: Nirvana Guild, with Ken Bulmer (*Woz* #7, June 1958)
- Publications Received: *Hyphen* #27

Drama

Scripts for audio productions:

- "Whiskers" (Produced at the Coroncon, London 1953) – *WDA+*
- "The Alien Arrives" (Produced at the ManCon, Manchester 1954. Published in *Triode* #1, October 1954) – *WDA+*

Fan Fiction

- "The Immoral Storm" (*Opus* #2, February 1951) – *TWP, WDA+*
- *Willis Discovers America* (April (?) to August 1952. Originally published as a serial in issues of *Fantasias*, *Quandry*, *Mad*, *Confusion* and *Oopsla!*. Republished as a pamphlet by Willis with annotations in May 1955) – *WDA+*
- "The Immortal Gael" (*Fantastic Worlds* #1, 1952) – *TWP*
- "Thru Fort Mudge with Gun and Typewriter" with Lee Hoffman (*Quandry* #25, October 1952) – *WDA+*
- "Bloch Exposed" (*Hyphen* #3, February 1953) – *THS+*
- "The Only Way" with Madeleine Willis (*Hyphen* #21, October 1953) – *WDA+*
- *The Enchanted Duplicator* with Bob Shaw (February 1954) – many reissues including *W28* and 2015 TAFF ebook
- "Forward with Browne! Or Mike Hammer at the Philcon" (*Space Times*, February 1954. The original version of "Mike Hammer at the Clevention" below.)
- "The Case of the Disappearing Fan" (*Bem* #5, September 1955) – *WDA+*
- "The Bemigration" – Part 2 of "The Future History of Fandom" *Triode* #2, February 1955) – as "The Future History of Fandom: Part Two" *WDA+*
- "Bob Shaw and the Budgerigar" (*Hyphen* #14, June 1955) – *WDA+*
- "The Goon – Ireland's Pekinese Drummond" (*Retribution* #2, April 1956) – *WDA+*
- "Way of Life" (*Hyphen* #17, December 1956) – *TWP, WDA+*
- "A Modest Proposal" (*Century Note*, Winter 1956) – *WDA+*
- "Fendetta" (*Retribution* #6, March 1957) – *WDA+*
- "The Raybin Story" (*Innuendo* #10, December 1958) – *WDA+*

- “Mike Hammer at the Clevention” (*Stellar* #18, 1959) – *WDA+*
- “Interfanna” (*Void* #18, June 1959) – *WDA+*
- * *Beyond the Enchanted Duplicator... To the Enchanted Convention* with James White. Sequel to *The Enchanted Duplicator*, published 1991 by PROmote Communications. 48pp 8½"xll". TAFF ebook reissue 2019.

Fiction

- “Contact with Earth” (*Slant* #1, November 1948) – *THR*
- * “The Others” (*Slant* #2, Summer 1949)
- “Outcast” (*Slant* #2, Summer 1949)
- * “The Solution” (*Slant* #2, Summer 1949) – *THR*
- “The Gatecrashers” with Ken Bulmer (*Slant* #5, Spring 1951)
- “Dissolute Diplomat” with Bob Shaw (*If*, January 1960)
- “The Spanish Main” (*Void* #25, June 1962) – *W28*, *WDA+*
- * “Bababadonnerronn!” (MagiCon Original Bookmark Anthology #8, 1989; from a set of short-shorts issued as bookmarks to promote MagiCon 1992) – *THR*

* Letters

Very many fanzines published letters of comment from Walt Willis. This listing confines itself to those that have been reprinted or excerpted in a Willis collection.

- To Shelby Vick, 31 July 1951 (?*Confusion* #1, November 1951, ed. Shelby Vick) – untitled *W28*; as “Letter to Shelby Vick” *THR*
- To Richard E. Geis (*Psychotic* #17, November/December 1954) – excerpt as “Poctsarcds” *THR*
- To Lee Hoffman (*Forty Four Forty or Fight*, August 1955, ed. Hoffman) – *W28*, *THR*
- To *Void* (issue #13, 1958, ed. Greg and Jim Benford) – *THR*
- To *Psi Phi* (issue #4, September 1959, ed. Robert Lichtman) – as “Fanning on a Higher Plane” *W28*, *THR*
- To *Femizine* (issue #13, Spring 1960, ed. Ethel Lindsay) – as “How Not to Survive Women’s Liberation” *W28*, *THR*
- “Excerpts from a Letter to Greyhound President Ackerman from W. Willis” (*Axe* #33, January 1963, ed. Larry and Noreen Shaw) – as “Letter to Greyhound” *TAWF*
- To Bruce Pelz, January 1964 – first published *TAWF*
- To *The Scarr* (issue #4, April 1964, ed. George Charters) – as “Court

Circular" *THR*
- "To Geo. Charters in Hospital" (*The Scarr* #7, February 1965, ed. George Charters) – *THR*
- To Richard Bergeron, 7 December 1969 – included in "Willis in the 1970s and the Disintegration of IF" *W28*, *THR*
- To Friends, December 1973 – ditto
- To Richard Bergeron (?), July 1974 – ditto
- To Vince Clarke and Mike Glyer 1981-1990 – first published as "The Wilderness Years" *THR*
- To Vince Clarke and Chuck Harris, 18 April 1983 – first published as "Full and Frank" *THR*
- To Vince Clarke 1989-1996 – first published as "Home Moanership" *THR*

Mailing Comments

- *Woz* #1: OMPA 2, December 1954
- *Woz* #2: OMPA 3, February 1955
- *Woz* #3: OMPA 4, May 1955
- *Woz* #4: OMPA 11, February 1957
- *Woz* #5: OMPA 12, May 1957
- *Woz* #6: OMPA 14, November 1957
- *Pamphrey* 0: FAPA 57, November 1951
- *Pamphrey* #1: FAPA 65, November 1953 (The Perforated Finger)
- *Pamphrey* #2: FAPA 67, March 1954
- *Pamphrey* #3: FAPA 77, October 1956
- *Pamphrey* #5: FAPA 80, July 1957 (Half Open Letters)
- *Pamphrey* #6: FAPA 82, January 1958
- *Fen Crittur Comical Books*: FAPA 61, Autumn 1952 (The Perforated Finger)
- *Tangent* #1: FAPA 58, February 1952 (This Column Has No Name)

Miscellaneous

Architecture

- The Tucker Hotel (with Ken Slater, James White, Chuch Harris, Bob Shaw, A. Vincent Clarke) (November 1952)

Unpublished Manuscript

- *America Twice Over Lightly* (unpublished manuscript based on *The Harp Stateside* and *...Twice Upon a Time*)

UK Convention Reports

All collected in *Warhoon* #28 except for the portions of the mosaic "Snug in the Fug" that were not included in "Harp That Once or Twice" columns for *Oopsla!*. All collected without known omissions in the 2023 Ansible Editions ebook *The Harp in England*.

- "The Harp in England (I)" – London "Festivention", 1951 (*Quandry* #11, June 1951; *Quandry* #12, July 1951; *Quandry* #13, August 1951)
- "The Harp in England (II)" – London, 1952 (*Quandry* #22, August 1952)
- "The Coroncon" – London, 1953 (*Hyphen* #4, October 1953; *Hyphen* #6, January 1954)
- "The Magnificent Flop" – Manchester "Supermancon", 1954 (*Hyphen* #9, July 1954)
- "The Bloggy Bloggy Do" – Kettering "Cytricon", 1955 (*Hyphen* #14, June 1955)
- * "Snug in the Fug" – First London Worldcon, 1957. "Prologue" in *Oopsla!* #23, December 1957; "The First Evening" and "The Second Day" in *Science Fiction Parade* #6, July 1957; "The Fourth Day and After" in *Science Fiction Parade* #7, October 1957; "Epilogue" in *Oopsla!* #24, February 1958; "Final Footnote" in *Hyphen* #19, January 1958. (Both *Oopsla!* segments are portions of –Harp That Once or Twice" columns, respectively titled "Snug in the Fug" and "Snug in the Fug (continued)".)
- The Revenant – Manchester "Mancon 5", 1976 (*Maya* #11, July 1976)

US Trip Reports

The Harp Stateside

Report on the 1952 trip to Chicon II. Substantial sections appeared as partial or entire "The Harp That Once or Twice" columns in *Quandry*, *Confusion*, and *Oopsla!*. The final expanded version was published by Willis in February 1957. 72pp 8½"xll". TAFF ebook reissue with some extra material – including Robert Bloch's spoof account "Willis in America", Willis's riposte "Bloch Exposed" and Willis's Chicon debate speech – published in 2023.

...Twice Upon a Time

Report on the 1962 trip to Chicon III with Madeleine Willis.

Collected in *Warhoon* #29 and with other related material, including her report, in *TAWF Times Two*.

- 1. *Axe* #34, February 1963 (untitled)
- 2. *Axe* #35, March 1963 (untitled)
- 3. *Axe* #36, April 1963 (untitled)
- 4. *Hyphen* #34, September 1963 (as “Chicago Chicago”)
- 5. *Hyphen* #35, April 1964 (as “Chicago Chicago”)
- 6. *Ankus* #14, February 1965 (as “The Bright Land”)
- 7. *Ankus* #15, May 1965 (as “The Bright Land”)
- 8. *Ankus 16*, August 1965 (as “The Bright Land”)
- 9. *Ankus* #17, November 1965 (as “The Bright Land”)
- 10. *Ankus* #18, February 1966 (as “The Bright Land”)
- 11. *Les Spinge* #13, May 1964 (as “A Day In San Francisco With Ethel”)

* ***The Enchantment***

Report on the 1988 trip to Tropicon VII with Madeleine Willis. Published April 1989 by Fanhistorica Press for the South Florida Science Fiction Society Inc. 36pp 8½"xll".

Publications

* Collections

The Willis Papers

Collection of various early articles and fan-fiction tales edited by George W. Field, published in 1961. A Fornchy Publication. 69pp (including covers and prelims) 8½"xll". Introduction by Vince Clarke. Illustrated by Atom. Items included in *The Willis Papers* are tagged *TWP* in this bibliography.

Fanorama: Walt Willis’ Fan Columns from Nebula Science Fiction

Collection of the 1952-1965 “Electric Fan” and “Fanorama” columns as listed under Columns above, edited by Robert Lichtman and published in November 1998. 8½"xll". Cover art by Alan Hunter. Introduction by Robert Lichtman.

A Fan’s Christmas in Ireland

Collection of the 1951-1966 Irish Fandom mini-fanzine Christmas cards (as listed under that header below), edited by Tom Whitmore and published in September 1991. 8½"xll". Cover and interior art by Stu

Shiffman. Introduction by Nancy Atherton.

* Ebooks

All ebooks prepared by David Langford as free Ansible Editions downloads for the unofficial TAFF website, unless otherwise noted.

- *Beyond the Enchanted Duplicator ... To the Enchanted Convention* with James White (1991; ebook 2019)
- *The Enchanted Duplicator* with Bob Shaw (1954; ebook 2015) – ebook with annotations, mostly by Eve Harvey from the 1979 Seacon (Brighton Worldcon) edition
- *Fanorama: Walt Willis' Fan Columns from Nebula Science Fiction* (1998 ed. Robert Lichtman; ebook 2017)
- *The Harp at Chicon* (December 1952 *Quandry* #27/28; ebook 2017) – original version of Chicon II report, later revised and incorporated into the much longer *The Harp Stateside*
- *The Harp in England* (title piece 1951; expanded ebook 2023)
- *The Harp Remembered* (ebook 2023)
- *The Harp Stateside* (1957; expanded ebook 2023)
- *The Harp That Once or Twice* (columns 1951-1991; ebook 2023)
- *Hyphen* #37 (1987; ebook 2019)
- *I Remember Me and Other Narratives* (*Mimosa* columns 1991-2000; PDF 2021) – edited and with introduction and afterwords by Rich Lynch
- *TAWF Times Two: The 1962 Trip Reports* ("Twice Upon a Time" collected 1980 in *Warhoon* #28; expanded ebook 2022)
- *Willis Discovers America and other fan fiction* (1955 title piece only; expanded ebook 2021)
- *The Willis Papers* (1961 ed. George W. Field; ebook 2019)

Christmas Cards

"Peace On Sol III, Good Will To Mellow Fen"

- 1. December 1950 (inferred from later issues)
- 2. December 1951 4pp 5½"x7½"
- 3. December 1952 12pp 4¼"x4½" (size A)
- 4. December 1953 8pp 4⅛x5⅛" (size B)
- 5. December 1954 8pp (size B)
- 6. December 1955 12pp (size A)
- 7. December 1956 8pp (size B)
- 8. December 1957 8pp (size B)

- 9. December 1958 8pp (size B)
- 10. December 1959 8pp (size B)
- 11. December 1960 8pp (size B)
- 12. December 1961 8pp (size B)
- 13. December 1962 8pp (size B)
- 14. December 1963 8pp (size B)
- 15. December 1964 8pp (size B)
- 16. December 1965 8pp (size B)
- 17. December 1966 8pp (size B)

Note: 10 and 15 are actually numbered; the other numbers are inferred. Data supplied by Bruce Pelz. All but the first (long lost) are collected as *A Fan's Christmas in Ireland* – see Collections above – and included in *The Harp Remembered*.

One-Shots

- *Slander* (with Mike Tealby) (September 1950)
- *Inclinations* (8½"x14" mimeo letter supplement to *Slant* #6, Winter 1951-1952) 8½"x14"
- *Pages from Slant 6* (FAPA, November 1951)
- *Inphantasmagoria*/combined with *Scant* (October 1951)
- *Fen Crittur Comical Books* with Bob Shaw (Autumn 1952. 8¼"x6¾". 16pp) – fannish pastiche of the *Pogo* comic strip.
- *WAWCRHBSJWGATWCMWPMSSACW* (FAPA) (July 1954)
- *Oh, The Serendipity Of It All or Roscoe's Name Be Praised* (1 page. According to Harris only 4 copies were published. Mimeo. No date but presumably 1956 since mentioned in that year's IF Christmas Card.) – *THR*
- *WAPPPOTED* (with Ken Bulmer) (September 1956)
- *Help?* (one sheet in search of luggage) (May 1963)
- * *Chuq* #1 (one sheet distributed through Chuck Harris's correspondence zine *Quinsy* alias *Q* #17) (June 1987)

Periodicals

Gafia Recovery Administration

Mimeo. Letter substitute.

- *GRA* #1 (no information)
- *GRA* #2 (no information)
- *GRA* #3, 1960, 3¾"x10", 2pp

Hyphen

All issues were mimeoed. 1-33 were 8"x10". 34-36 were 8½"x11". 37 was 8¼" x 11¾" (A4).

- *Hyphen* #1, May 1952, 16pp
- *Hyphen* #2, September 1952, 20pp
- *Hyphen* #3, February 1953, 28pp
- *Hyphen* #4, October 1953, 28pp
- *Hyphen* #5, November 1953, 22pp
- *Hyphen* #6, January 1954, 26pp
- *Hyphen* #7, March 1954, 28pp
- *Hyphen* #8, April 1954, 30pp
- *Hyphen* #9, July 1954, 44pp
- *Hyphen* #10, September 1954, 34pp
- *Hyphen* #11, November 1954, 34pp
- *Hyphen* #12, December 1954, 52pp
- *Hyphen* #13, March 1955, 42pp
- *Hyphen* #14, June 1955, 42pp
- *Hyphen* #15, November 1955, 40pp
- *Hyphen* #16, August 1956, 30pp
- *Hyphen* #17, December 1956, 42pp
- *Hyphen* #18, May 1957, 40pp
- *Hyphen* #19, January 1958, 26pp
- *Hyphen* #20, February 1958, 26pp
- *Hyphen* #21, October 1958, 42pp
- *Hyphen* #22, March 1959, 26pp
- *Hyphen* #23, November 1959, 24pp
- *Hyphen* #24, March 1960, 24pp
- *Hyphen* #25, November 1960, 26pp
- *Hyphen* #26, January 1961, 24pp
- *Hyphen* #27, March 1961, 26pp
- *Hyphen* #28, May 1961, 26pp
- *Hyphen* #29, September 1961, 26pp
- *Hyphen* #30, December 1961, 24pp
- *Hyphen* #31, March 1962, 26pp
- *Hyphen* #32, March 1963, 28pp
- *Hyphen* #33, June 1963, 24pp
- *Hyphen* #34, September 1963, 24pp
- *Hyphen* #35, April 1964, 24pp
- *Hyphen* #36, February 1965, 22pp
- * *Hyphen* #37, October 1987, 54pp (revival issue: “Forty Years of

Irish Fandom")

Total: 1,110 pages.

Hyphen had a number of co-editors and associate editors. Chief co-editor was Chuch (also Chuck) Harris and, later, Ian McAulay. Associates included Bob Shaw, James White, Madeleine Willis, George Charters, Vin ¢ Clarke and Arthur Thomson.

Pamphrey

FAPAzine – mimeoed. Number "0": 7"x8¾". All others: 8"x10".

- *Pamphrey* 0, November 1951, 2pp
- *Pamphrey* #1, November 1953, 8pp
- *Pamphrey* #2, March 1954, 2pp
- *Pamphrey* #3, October 1956, 16pp
- *Pamphrey* #4 (No evidence of existence)
- *Pamphrey* #5, July 1957, 12pp
- *Pamphrey* #6, January 1958, 10pp – excerpt as "What's Right for God Is Right for America!" *THR*
- *Pamphrey* #7, October 1958, 2pp – as "Gafia Too Might Be a Way of Life" *THR*

Total: 52 pages.

Slant

- *Slant* #1, November 1948. 6½"x8". 12pp printed.
- *Slant* #2, Summer 1949. 5¾"x7½ (as were all other issues) 24pp. Printed.
- *Slant* #3, Spring 1950. 26pp Printed and final page mimeoed on some copies.
- *Slant* #4, Autumn 1950. 42pp Printed.
- *Slant* #5, Spring 1951. 48pp Printed.
- *Slant* #6, Winter 1951-1952. 60pp Printed.
- *Inclinations* (8½"x14" mimeo letter supplement to *Slant* #6, Winter 1951-1952)
- *Slant* #7, Winter 1952. 68pp Printed and mimeoed.

Total: 280 pages.

Woz

OMPAzine. Mimeo. 8"x10"

- *Woz* #1, December 1954, 6pp – excerpt as "Offtrails Magazine Publishers Association" *THR*

- *Woz* #2, February 1955, 10pp – excerpt as “Caught in a First Draft” *W28*, *THR*
- *Woz* #3, May 1955, 8pp
- *Woz* #4, February 1957, 16pp – excerpts as “APAthy and OMPAthy” *THR* and “The Penultimate Mailing Comment” *W28, THR*
- *Woz* #5, May 1957, 12pp
- *Woz* #6, November 1957, 10pp
- *Woz* #7, June 1958, 8pp

Total: 70 pages.

The Silent Harp
H. Ken Bulmer

One of the most memorable fans it has been my good fortune to meet in fandom was Walter A. Willis, once of Upper Newtownards Road, Belfast; familiarly known as Ghod and now, alas, translated to higher spheres.

One of the most fascinating aspects of Walter's character – Pamela and I never descended into the later and crude cliché of Walt, as James White is always James and never Jim – was that, although I believe he was essentially a shy person, he knew exactly where he was going and what he was doing, and seldom put a foot wrong in fandom. One of the great and hugely enjoyable myths of Belfast Fandom – the Belfast Triangle – was their continuance of the suggestion that they were a bunch of hicks, wild colonial boys, provincials. They would ham this up to the utmost, and often in contexts where it was clear they were far more in tune with the broad current of U.S. and A. fandom than the fannish goings-on in England. They also delighted in playing up what little talents other fans had at the supposed expense of their own, and this at a time when Belfast was producing *Slant* and *Hyphen* and *The Enchanted Duplicator* and the Goon Defective Agency and a whole thundering shower of puns and schemes and zines and goodness knows what else. For a time, Upper Newtownards Road was the centre of world fandom.

Walter was one of the kindest persons in fandom, and probably one of the best fan writers ever. You will notice that I qualify these statements: "one of" and "probably"; and I do this only because I have met many kind people in fandom and there are many fine writers, and I have no wish to tread on corns; the point is that Walter was incredibly thoughtful and considerate and was an infinitely better fan writer than the vast majority.

He sincerely objected to being called Ghod after the initial struggle to reach the eminence he acquired had gone. Although he may fairly be accused of wishing this because he could see it would rebound against his fannish image, I know the reality of reasons went far beyond this merely petty material consideration. Despite his thoroughly well-deserved reputation as No.1 Fan, he was in complete control of any petty ambitions; always on the lookout for ways and means of helping fandom along, willing to encourage neos, shrugging off some superhuman feat of fan pubbing, bewildered that the whole of US fandom clubbed together to

bring him to America so they could personally meet the man who had so vastly entertained them through his fnz and the regular columns he wrote for the top zines of the day.

As a result, the "WAW with the Crew in '52" campaign was so successful that in conjunction with the Big Pond Fund, administered by Don Ford and Ted Carnell – both now, alas, no longer with us – Walter successfully put into operation TAFF. However much TAFF may now be in decline, during its heyday it did an invaluable job, not least being a genuine indication of the way trufans could get things done in the spirit of friendly co-operation outside the mimeoed pages of their zines.

This, in a sense, brings up my own most personal unhappiness with the whole scene of Sixth Fandom. I have said elsewhere that I wasted a lot of time fanning that I could have put to better use; and this is true; but at the same time, there was so much in Sixth Fandom that I would not have wanted to miss, that the statement becomes almost meaningless. It is not so much this aspect of wasted time, as in the generally frivolous attitudes of 6th Fandom that the problem lies. Second Fandom, to which I believe I hew most strongly, contained a wide degree of humour and apparent levity; but it did produce names and fannish origins still important today. Walter wrote a thoughtful review of Heinlein's "Gulf"; but in general, his fannish writing was of the trufan variety, concerned almost solely with fandom itself. I welcome the modern type of fnz, with its serious aspects and fine production – typified best, I suppose, by *Speculation* – and I hear that attempts are being made to resuscitate trufan zines; if the two sides could be joined (and that has usually proved too difficult a task) perhaps we might see the greatest fnz ever. Perhaps, if Walter was writing and working in fandom today, we would see the flowering of the greatest ever. In fact, I'd take a bet on it. But the concerns of fans in the fifties and early sixties were with fandom; sf existed as a kind of generally useful cement to give the idea that we were bound by something outside the fannish activities of the fanzines.

Pamela and I spent a number of extraordinarily happy holidays in Ireland, and Walter and Madeleine treated us as members of the family, as we treated them when they were over here at Tresco. As you know, when it rains in Ireland, they say it's a soft day. When we went to play golf – which tended to cut very seriously into fannish affairs and eventually oust them – Walter and Madeleine would stride healthily over the links wielding their clubs when the heavens were opening and solid water poured down and I was crouched in a little tin shed. Tough, these Celts.

On one occasion, over at Tresco, I was awoken in the middle of the

night by a muffled banging. Wearily, I crawled out of bed, fearing that the house might be falling down. At the time, we had a young fan staying with us as well as Walter. They were in the bathroom and the bathroom washbasin was blocked. I shuffled, with glued-up eyes and aching bones, around the doorway and saw Walter on his knees before the outlet S-bend, giving it enormous bashes with a hammer, in an attempt to free the drain-plug and so release the blockage. After each blow, he and the young fan would whisper to each other, "Quiet, Quiet," and then, very stealthily, they'd take another almighty swipe at the plug. For some reason, this made me helpless with laughter. The seriousness of their attempts at quietness, and then the wallop, struck me then – as it still does – as 'ighly amusing. I have since seen this scene presented as comedy on tv and, believe me, the fiction came nowhere near the hilariousness of the original.

On one occasion, Pamela, Walter and I sat before the fire at Tresco, talking. Then we said we'd better turn in; but we'd have another cup of tea first, then turn in. When that tea had been finished and we'd talked some more, we decided to have another pot. This went on all night and by the time dawn came, we were still talking. I don't recollect that we went to bed at all that night.

Conversation with Walter in normal times consisted chiefly of an unending stream of puns and jokes, the concoction of which he was a master. I have made no attempt to recapture the style here, and many of these puns have been published elsewhere; but, on the occasion referred to above, we talked much more freely and seriously, further proof, at least to me, that in this current sf scene, Walter would still be No.1. It was his fate that with his penchant for jokes, he found himself in a fandom that could be led in that direction, and which he so signally adorned. I feel that this is a deep loss to fandom and yet I wouldn't wish the loss of a single bright memory from 6th Fandom. Walter was not a good public speaker: once he delivered a talk filled with brilliance and humour, which was almost totally unintelligible past the first two rows, and not grasped by the earth-bound clods in those front two rows. From memory, it seems that only the trufen were laughing.

His concern for the well-being of fandom was sincere and all-embracing. For instance, when the London Circle planned to debauch the second Manchester con – the Supermancon – Walter made strenuous efforts to patch things up and to prevent the holocaust; and, despite the breakdown of Bert Campbell's bike which deprived the LC of his bearded dynamism, I'm inclined to believe that Walter did in fact have a great deal to do with the abandonment of the LC's diabolical plans.

The Belfast Triangle consisted of Walter, James White and Bob Shaw (and *there* are two distinguished names in sf), George All the Way Charters, John Berry – the chief Goon – and Ian McAulay, together with valuable wives and children. Also one must mention in close association with the Belfast Triangle, Chuch Harris, Arthur Thomson and Vince Clarke. Having mentioned these names, you have a round up of all that was best and most brilliant in fandom some twenty years ago. With the addition of Mal Ashworth – purveyor of that inferior rubbish, coloured steam – the effect they had on fandom was truly remarkable. During the notorious sale of what was alleged to be part of the BSFA fnz library, one was struck by the frenzied desire to get hand on copies of fnz by, and containing work by, Walter.

Unfortunately, Walter smoked cigarettes. I remember his invariable habit of taking his Woodbine or Weights and carefully breaking it in half and then smoking just the half, saving the other half for later. This was because he had found that a half Wood lasted just the right time. At the Chicago convention to which he had been especially brought by the combined efforts of US fandom, he was sitting high up in a skyscraper near an open window, smoking. An eager young neo offered him an ashtray. “No, thanks,” said Walter, flicking his ash out of the window some twenty or thirty storeys up, “this one isn’t full yet.”

Every year the Belfast Triangle sent around a Christmas card which was a tiny fanzine, filled with incredible wit and humour; some aspiring fan pubber could do a lot worse than reprint these to gain his own status as BNF. Now we have superstars; Walter was a super BNF.

FAFIA claimed him in the end. The current condition of Ireland, apart from anything else more profound, is plain ridiculous, an affront to the ideals of sf, something so deplorable as to be obscene; yet it was this that took Walter away from us.

This little piece has not been witty or humorous and if I have failed because of that, I must add that, having written it, I realize I have been getting sadder and sadder with every remembered thought. This is not just because I have been thinking of the dear dead days beyond recall (gentle harp music off) but of all the associations these memories bring up. We had fun and good times in those fannish days and there was a touch of genius alive in fandom then. I regret only that Walter is not here to write this piece in the way only he could – you’d have enjoyed that out there – but then, if he did that, he couldn’t say, as I do, that Walter A. Willis, Ghod, was one of the nicest best, kindest, chivalrous, brilliant and true fans fandom has ever seen – and further, he was all that and more as a man.

November 1973

Walt Willis & Me
A. Vincent Clarke

Letter to Harry Warner

I had an odd relationship with Walt in the ’50s; unlike his friends in Belfast our ages were only three years apart (he’s the older), and I was the only English fan with his sort of fan background... interest in fandom as a sub-culture and private world with roots stretching back to the ’30s and activity in the early ’50s with a determined idea to have fun in fandom. We were therefore as close as friends could be, given that 300-odd miles and the Irish Sea separated us... at intervals. Yet we quarrelled a lot in private, and it was mostly my fault. I was mad keen to build up British fandom into something resembling the US model and I resented Walt turning his talents Stateswards. I now realize that it was, historically, for the best, as we just couldn’t have afforded to publish him here as they did in the States. All British fan writing in the early ’50s suffered from economic editing.

Looking back, I think that I had a certain amount of jealousy in my relations with Walt. It was sheer artistic jealousy at the skill he displayed; there was nothing silly about competition, as his writing was in areas I didn’t touch. The man was just a genius, dammit. Your analysis of some of his writing talents is OK as far as it goes, but to someone who lived during his most prolific era there’s something to be added.

He was blood-curdling in his honest reporting; he reported on Conventions and people in a warts-and-all fashion which I think was unprecedented, and probably hasn’t been touched since. There have been various individuals who have been singled out by someone who disliked them in fandom, and some very, very straight talking indeed has been done, and there has been this stupid KTF reviewing in the last few years which castigated fanzines, but I don’t know of anyone who calmly laid out facts like Walt. This makes for a helluva lot of excitement when reading his stuff – you don’t know when he’s going to write something which from an ordinary person would seem outrageously personal. If it’s Walt we forgave him, because that was his Style, and he’d just as soon say something strikingly good about a person as strikingly critical.

He and I always retained an identical attitude towards the idea of fandom as a whole, but on a personal level we tended to drift apart in the latter part of the ’50s decade... from being a carefree fan with virtually

nothing else to do in my spare time I found other interests, and semi-gafiated, not doing a lot of original writing. Yet when he heard I was around again, last December, he wrote me an affectionate letter that filled my eyes with tears. A marvellous character.

30 July 1982

Original Appearances

Sections of “The Eofannish Era” are headed with the relevant issue numbers and dates of appearance in Walt Willis’s own *Slant.* The brief squibs and excerpts in “Short Takes” are individually credited.

- “The 10 Year Hitch” – *Random* #6, February 1975, and *Random* #10, June 1975, both edited by Mike Gorra.
- “The APA and the Survival of Civilization” – in Lilapa mailing 237, November 1975.
- “As Others See Us” – *À Bas* #11, February 1959, edited by Boyd Raeburn.
- “Breakthroughs” – *Frontier Crossings* (Conspiracy ’87 Worldcon Programme Book), August 1987, edited by Rob Jackson.
- “The Chuck Wagon” – Corflu 6 Programme Book, April 1989, edited by Geri Sullivan.
- “A Clump of Plinths” – as “Plinth” columns in *Confusion* #3, February or March 1952, edited by Shelby Vick; then *Fanac* #58, #59, #61 and #65, May to September 1960, edited by Terry Carr and Ron Ellik; #67 and #70, November 1960 and January 1961, edited by Terry and Miriam Carr; and #72, April 1961, edited by Walter Breen.
- “Dark and True and Tinder Is the North” – *The Scarr* #201 [19 in ternary], January 1970, edited by George Charters.
- “A Fan at Sea” – as “The 9th Plinth” column in *Confusion* #10, June 1952, edited by Shelby Vick.
- “Fandom at Sixes and Sevens” – *Vega* #12, 1953, edited by Joel Nydahl.
- “A Faraway Shore” – *Glitz* #4, February 1992, edited by Arnie and Joyce Katz.
- “From Aa to Zombie” – as “Book Review” in *Retribution* #14, November 1959, edited by John Berry and Arthur Thomson.
- “Gafia Too Might Be a Way of Life” – untitled as the entire content of *Pamphrey* #7, October 1958, edited by Walt Willis.
- “Harping on the Past” – *Fanhistory* #1, February 1956, edited by Lee Hoffman.
- “Hoaxed!” – from “The Tenth Plinth” column in *Confusion* #11, August 1952, edited by Shelby Vick.
- “How I Write My Columns” – as “The Sixth Plinth” column in

Confusion #7, April 1952, edited by Shelby Vick.

- "Home Moanership" – assembled by Rob Hansen from letters to Vince Clarke dated July 1989, January 1990, May 1990 and 1996; portions also appeared in the Walt Willis APAzine *A Faraway Shore*.
- "How to BNF Without Tears" – *BEM* #1, April 1954, edited by Mal Ashworth and Tom White.
- "I Remember Me" 1 – in *Pamphrey* #3, October 1956, and *Woz* #4, February 1957, both edited by Walt Willis.
- "I Remember Me" 2 – as "I Remember Walt Willis" in *Pamphrey* #5, July 1957, and *Woz* #5, May 1957, both edited by Walt Willis.
- "I Remember Me" 3 – as "I Chose Fandom, or 'I Was a Fugghead for the N3F'" in *Pamphrey* #6, January 1958, and *Woz* #6, November 1957, both edited by Walt Willis.
- "I Remember Me" 4 – "Warblings" column in *Scottishe* #22, December 1960, edited by Ethel Lindsay.
- "I Remember Me" 5 – "Warblings" column in *Scottishe* #23, March 1961, edited by Ethel Lindsay.
- "I Remember Me" 6 – "Warblings" column in *Scottishe* #24, June 1961, edited by Ethel Lindsay.
- "I Remember Me" 7 – "Warblings" column in *Scottishe* #25, September 1961, edited by Ethel Lindsay.
- "I Remember Me" 8 – "Warblings" column in *Scottishe* #26, December 1961, edited by Ethel Lindsay.
- "I Remember Me" 9 – "Warblings" column in *Scottishe* #27, March 1962, edited by Ethel Lindsay.
- "I Remember Me" 10 – "Warblings" column in *Scottishe* #29, September 1962, edited by Ethel Lindsay.
- "I Remember Me" 11 – "Warblings" column in *Scottishe* #30, December 1962, edited by Ethel Lindsay.
- "I Remember Me" 12 – "Warblings" column in *Scottishe* #31, March 1963, edited by Ethel Lindsay.
- "I Remember Me" 13 – "Warblings" column in *Scottishe* #32, June 1963, edited by Ethel Lindsay.
- "I Remember Me" 14 – "Warblings" column in *Scottishe* #33, September 1963, edited by Ethel Lindsay.
- "I Remember Me" 15 – "Warblings" column in *Scottishe* #34, December 1963, edited by Ethel Lindsay.
- "I Remember Me" 16 – "Warblings" column in *Scottishe* #35, March 1964, edited by Ethel Lindsay.
- "I Remember Me" 17 – "Warblings" column in *Scottishe* #36, June

1964, edited by Ethel Lindsay.

- "I Remember Me" 18 – "Warblings" column in *Scottishe* #37, September 1964, edited by Ethel Lindsay.
- "I Remember Me" 19 – "Warblings" column in *Scottishe* #38, February 1965, edited by Ethel Lindsay.
- "I Remember Me" 20 – "Warblings" column in *Scottishe* #39, January 1966, edited by Ethel Lindsay.
- "I Remember Me" 21 – as "Dusty Answers" in *Quip* #11, January 1969, edited by Arnie Katz.
- "The Immortal Teacup" – *SF Digest* #7, September 1952, edited by Henry Burwell.
- "In Defence of the Pun" – *Wastebasket* #4, 1953, edited by Vernon L. McCain.
- "Instant Fandom" – *Enclave* #7, Summer 1964, edited by Joe Pilati.
- "Introduction to The BeaCon" – *Hyphen* #4, October 1953, edited by Walt Willis.
- "A Kind of Immortality" – *Microwave* #5, April 1983, edited by Terry Hill.
- "*The Lost Planet*" – from "Inside Coverage" (editorial) in *Hyphen* #13, March 1955, edited by Walt Willis and Chuck Harris.
- "The Mind of Samuel Merwin" – *The Explorer* [not numbered], April 1951, edited by Ed Noble Jr.
- "My Life with Robert Bloch" – *Oopsla!* #30, September 1961, edited by Gregg Calkins. (Adapted from a more specific response in *Hyphen* #3, February 1953, to a mock attack by Bloch in the same issue.)
- "On Bob Shaw" – *Rivercon XII Souvenir Book*, July 1987, editor not ascertained.
- "The Outpost" – column in *Phantasmagoria* #1, November 1950; 2, Spring 1951; 3, Summer 1951; and 4, Spring 1952. All edited by Derek Pickles, the first three with Mavis Pickles as co-editor.
- "The Perforated Finger" – column in *Lighthouse* #5, February 1962; 9, August 1963; 11, November 1964; 12, February 1965; and 14, October 1966. All edited by Terry Carr and Pete Graham.
- "Plumbing the Depths" – as "Warblings: Son of *Woz*" in *Scottishe* #20, March 1960, edited by Ethel Lindsay.
- "The Silent Harp" by H. Ken Bulmer – *Blunt* #2, November 1973, edited by Mary Smith, Bob Smith and Dave Rowe.
- "Sound the Anti-Tocsin!" – *Inside Science Fiction* #53, September 1958, edited by Ron Smith.
- "Sporting Supplement" – *Retribution* #6, March 1957, edited by John

Berry and Arthur Thomson.

- "The Sterling Fanzine" – *Cry of the Nameless* #125, March 1959, edited by F.M. Busby.
- "The Subcutaneous Fan" – in *Skyhook* #13, Spring 1952, edited by Redd Boggs.
- "The *Slant* Story" – in *Xero* #6, September 1961; 7, November 1961; and 8, April 1962. All edited by Dick and Pat Lupoff.
- "Travels with Ian McAulay" – from "Inside Coverage" (editorial) in *Hyphen* #28, May 1961, edited by Walt Willis and Ian McAulay.
- "Walt Willis & Me" by A. Vincent Clarke – letter to Harry Warner, 30 July 1982 (via Rob Hansen).
- "The Warier Bard" – column in *Axe* #25B, May 1962; 28, July 1962; 30, August 1962; and [not included here] 33, January 1963. All edited by Larry and Noreen Shaw.
- "The Wilderness Years" – assembled by Rob Hansen from letters to (primarily) Vince Clarke in 1981 and 1983, and to Mike Glyer in 1990.

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