

North American in Words and Pictures

BY CHARLIE WILLIAMS

PUBBED BY NICKI LYNCH

We all have our first con. Not unlike one's initiation to sex, a convention has its starry-eyed expectations, the quickening of the pulse, its surprises. Throughout, a sense of euphoria is balanced by a sense of the clandestine. Rusty and I are neo-fans. He's a social worker and I'm a commercial artist. Not long ago we opened a unique window onto fandom with our East Tennessee Comics Company, and since have been to a number of conventions as hucksters. I've been in print often and regularly in the meantime as cartoonist and storyteller. We conformed the necessity of attending NAC as regular participants, and as artists.

Yes, sheer greed was as important as the prospect of good times, but if I've any real role to SF in any generic sense, it's as an illustrator whose craft is slowly coming of age. I loaded up 48 pieces, half of which were previously published, and drove with my pal Rusty Burke to Louisville over the 5-day Labor Day holiday. Russell took a score of his own drawings and was committed to providing logos (with me) for Dick'n'Nicki Lynch's North American *Nebula* newsletter.

The drive was uneventful. I regretted leaving my beautiful wife behind, but she works for a living and speaks less fannish than I do; right now she'll read LeGuin and Niven and "Master of Kung Fu" comics, but only when she's not reading *Gide*. Anyway, we checked into the Louisville Hyatt Regency Thursday afternoon at three. Blithely we walked down a nifty mall to the riverside Galt House.

I was pooped after driving all morning, but that adrenal expectation was still keeping me high. We arrived at the nucleus of a swarm of people and there met my pal Nickilyn Lynch, who helped us check in.

I felt very clean-cut, as I looked around. Folks who in real life might've been and done *anything* were already sporting maniacal costumes, not all of them designed for any masquerade. In fact, the largest collection of physical and emotional aberrants I'd ever seen ebbed and eddied around me. The weekend would certainly be interesting.

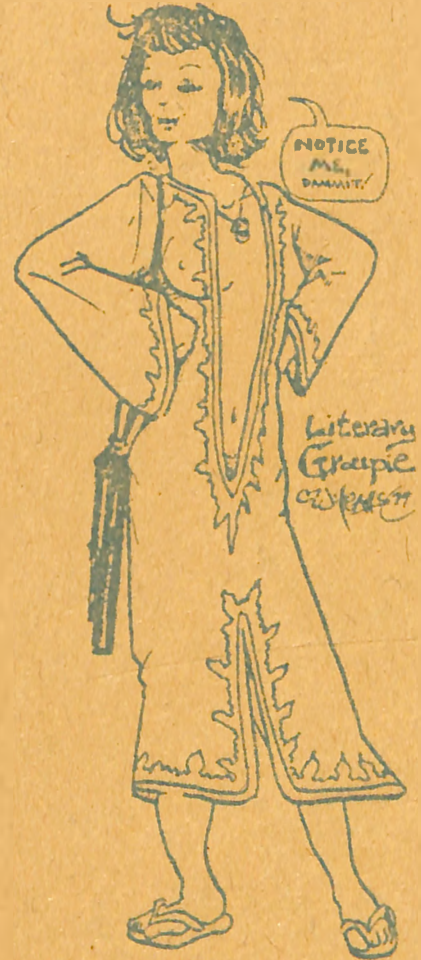
My old friends were hard to find (i.e. more than an hour to find). Like Deb and Roger Johnson, Ken Scott, and Dick Lynch (more later), but Rus and I soon were palsy-walsy with other artists and fell of like mind, such as Wade Gilbreath and Cliff Biggers and their lovely wives, George Laskowski, Cliff Amos,



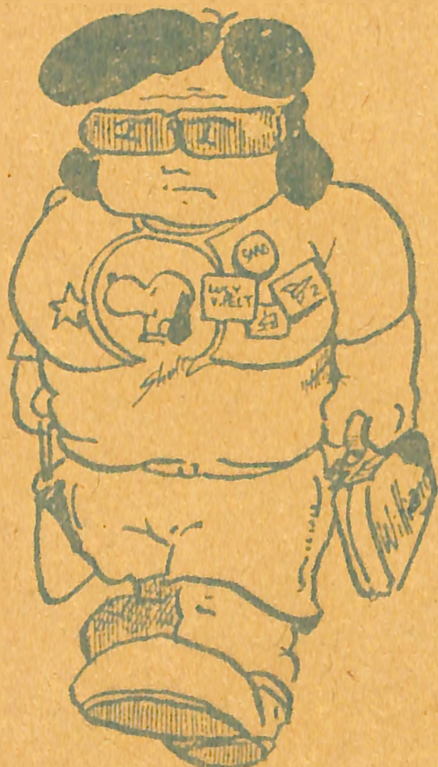
In the Huxley Room...



Irvin Koch, Meade Frierson, Andy Andruschak, Howard DeVore and Frank Love. With these and dozens more, Rusty and I became involved in more craziness than one can normally fit into a five-day weekend.

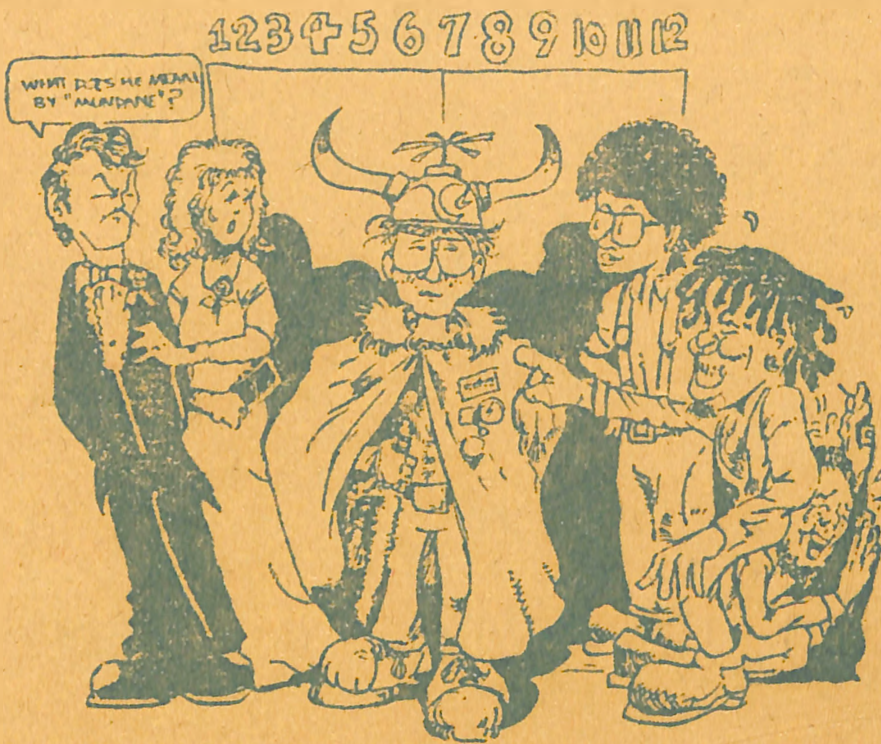


Literary Grapple



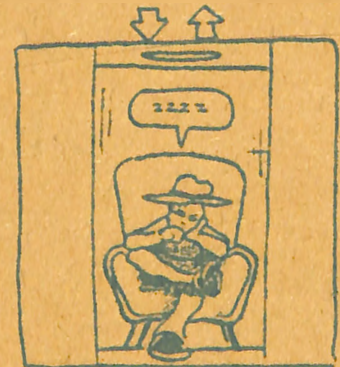
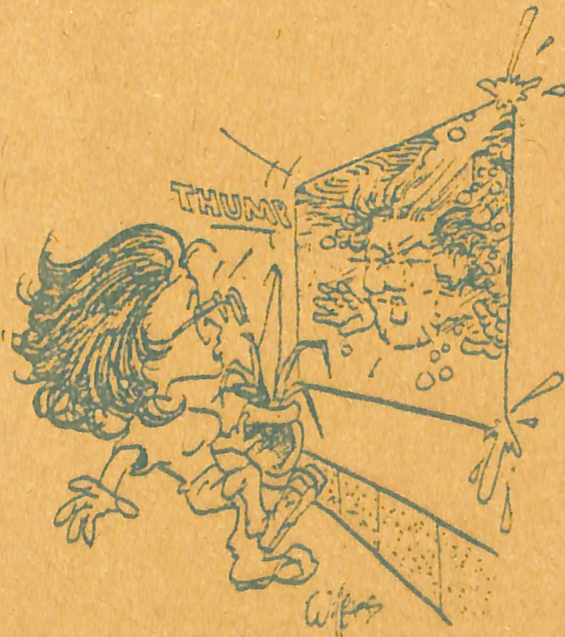
HOPES NO ONE RECOGNIZES HER.

NAC was like being in *The Twilight Zone* for a week—the best example of its other-worldiness occurred while between the parking garage sub-level and the lobby.....



.....Saturday night on the elevator, "mundanes" of two wildly different ethnic backgrounds sharred car number two with Rusty and I, and with two "bizarres". The hybrid mutate caught between three thugs and a couple in formal dress was too abashed to explain that a convention was in progress in the hotel. I pointed out their convention badges, although by doing that I identified myself as "one of them"!!

I can tell it better in pictures-----



Remember the swimming pool window? Nothing swam by higher than a "7".

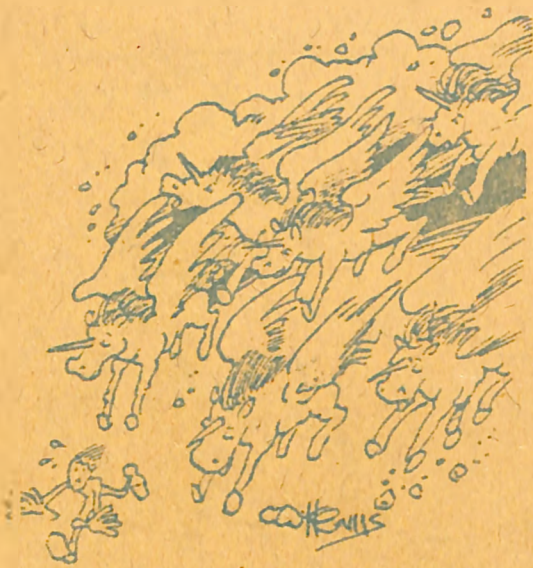
Remember the
Nebula newsroom,
its orderly
chaos?



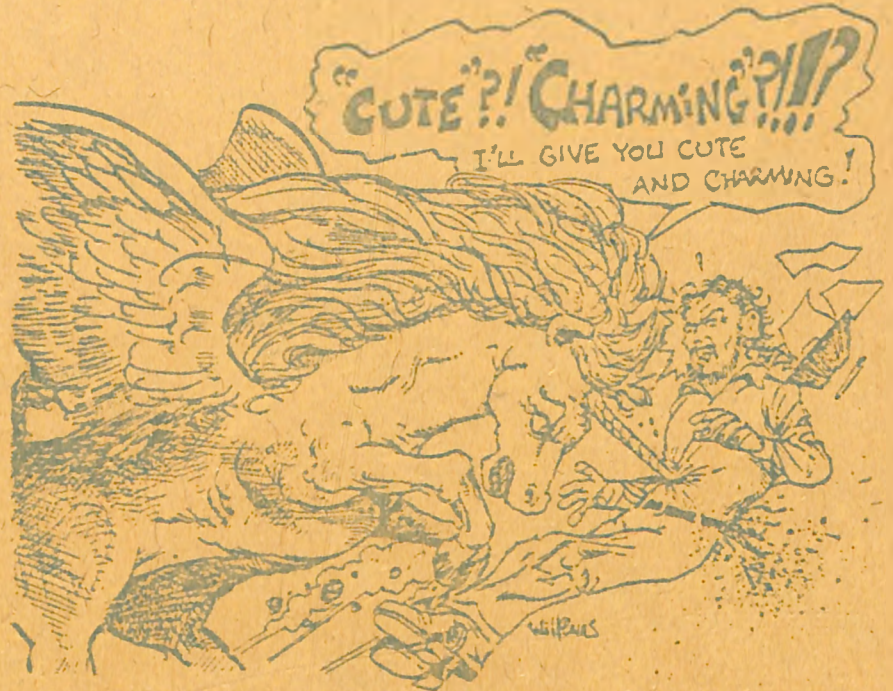
Remember the costumes.....



.....or lack of same?



Remember the convention's animal mascot, the Pegasus, and how the damn thing turned up everywhere?



Remember the PARTIES?

the panels?

the elevators?

those juveniles in the corridors singing 'til 3 ayem?



Remember looking for and at the pros?





Remember con breakfasts?

Remember seeing a cadre of Viper pilots sauntering into Burger Queen in full battle dress in downtown Louisville at noon?

Remember the little girl with seemingly inexhaustible funds who made Steven Johnson and Robin Wood the "hits" of the art show?



Remember the art show?



The slickness of the stuff that won was amazing, and "slick" has a perjorative nature to it, too, you know. I learned a lot of technical things by observation alone, and made more money than I expected, and got more job offers than I've got time for, and I'm flattered. Somehow, though, the auctioneers at NAC had little but sarcasm for the artistic merit of each piece; the artist's NAME and the realism of each piece was somehow more important. I found Jack Chalker very amusing and engaging though, and his enthusiasm made up for a lack of real commentary at the auction; I also found certain themes worked into a redundant lather of Saturns, unicorns, dragons, and sloe-eyed wenches.

The art show had provided me quite an education in terms of what SELLS. I can be self-indulgent in my covers and filler art (editors, they're FREE unless you ask for something really complicated), but conventions call for discipline.

Only on paper-! The festivities themselves are an occasion for escaping the confining effects of life outside our generic club. Expect to see Russ and I at any con in the future I can drive to (blame that on acrophobia), sketchbooks, and Old Charter in our unsteady hands.



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