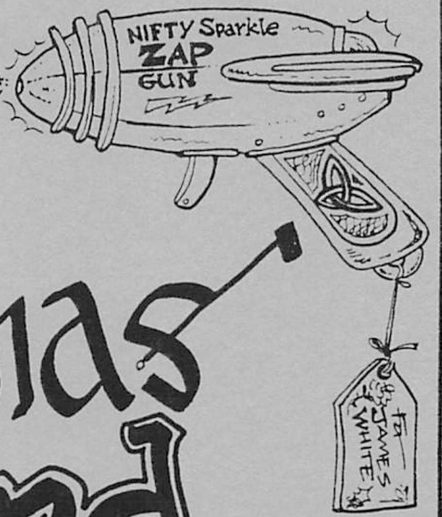
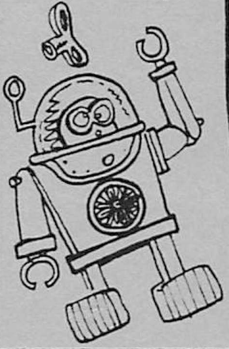
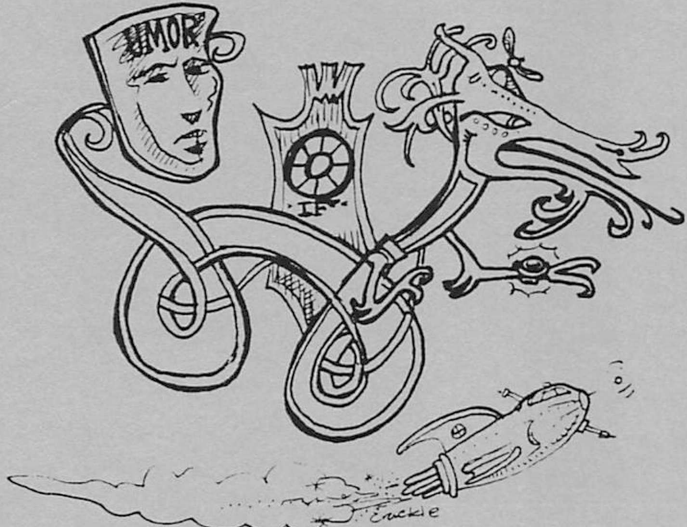


a Fans' Christmas in Ireland



by Walt Willis



Introduction by - Nancy Atherton

Illustrations by Stu Shiffman



SHIFFMAN '80

Laughter of Other Days

An Introduction by Nancy Atherton

Close your eyes and listen.

Somewhere, the sound of a raggedy shuttlecock hitting cardboard. Somewhere, the sound of greeps crottlng and a twenty-cup titan of a teapot pouring. Somewhere, the sound of laughter and fireworks and the steady thrumming of the magic mimeo. And, somewhere, woven behind and around and through it all, the sparkle and flash and gleam of brilliant conversation: the sound of the Wheels of IF turning.

The Wheels of Irish Fandom included Madeleine and Walt Willis, Peggy and James White, Sadie and Bob Shaw, George Charters, and the first John Berry, as well as Honorary Members Arthur Thomson, Vincent Clarke, Chuck Harris and others who came and went as the years rolled by. A glance at those names will tell you that Irish Fandom contained an astonishingly high percentage of good writers. If you look through almost any fanzine in the 1950s, you're likely to find something by a member of IF, and if you do, the chances are overwhelming that it will be as fresh and vibrant today as it was the day it was written.

Much of the inspiration for that writing can be traced back to those legendary evenings when Irish fandom met, not to discuss constitutions (ptui!) or parliamentary procedure (Roscoe forbid!), but to enjoy each other's company and, above all, each other's conversation. The tantalizing sound of good friends enjoying good talk fills the background of IF fanzine pieces. It echoes softly in allusions to what Walt or Bob or James said the other night; it's excerpted in Hyphen's "Eavesdroppings"; it's reworked and polished for columns and articles and features -- and it's enough to make a grown fan cry.

We wish we could have been there to hear the talk, to witness the spontaneous combustion of painfully perfect puns ignited by a fanatticful of word addicts. We wish we could have watched the game of wordplay by wordmasters, in which the point, if one existed, was to keep the conversational ball in the air as long as possible. We can imagine the action: Walter tosses off a phrase and James bats it to Bob, who passes it to Madeleine to throw to George, who sends it to John with a punishing spin, a shining ball reflecting the humor, wit and warmth of the players, lighting the night and keeping at bay the December chill of Romantic Ireland's soft mantle of slush.

We wish we could have been there, sitting quietly in a corner or working up the courage to enter the game. Since we weren't, we have the charming and witty Tom Whitmore to thank for providing us with this collection of the next best thing. The Oblique House Christmas Cards were written by the Spokesman for the Wheels of IF, Walter A. Willis (with the inky-handed help of the rest of IF). In them, he recreated those evenings of nonstop laughter and talk, "with puns tactfully made even more outrageous than usual so you won't feel bad about not actually being here." The cards were originally sent to a small circle of fannish

friends who were invited to join the Wheels as they spun through the night.

This remarkable collection expands that invitation, and allows us to glimpse Irish Fandom at its most gregarious. Paging through it, we can smile at the sly allusions, groan appreciatively at the puns, and read fannish as she is spoke by natives. We can finally hear clearly those conversations that were once a distant hum. And we can better understand why this small group of word-loving fans has stayed together so long and produced so much fine writing. We no longer have to imagine the scene; we are beckoned to come in from the cold and be part of it.

We glee.

For sixteen years, the Oblique House Christmas Cards brought a special message of comfort and joy to fans around the world. I hope that this collection brings the comfort of warm friendship and the joy of sparkling conversation to you, wherever you are and whatever the time of year.

Close your eyes and listen. You can still hear the laughter. And now you can join in.



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 tranquility 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 neighbors 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 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 LENS MAN.
 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 salves, 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 catalog 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!

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 colorless.

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. Richards--n. 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?

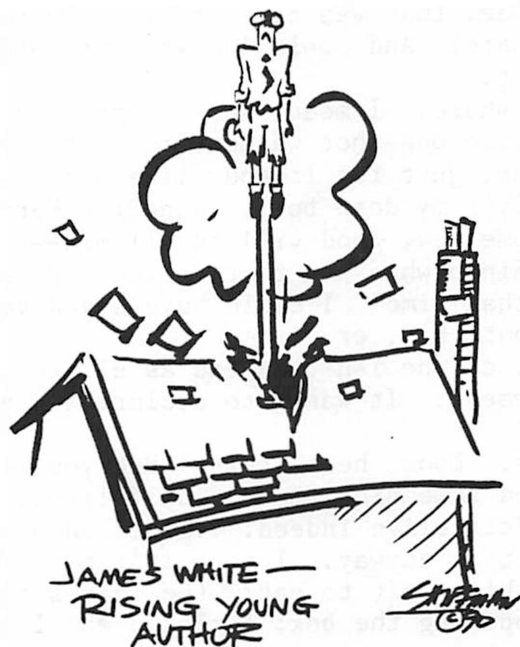
WALT: Er...written anything recently?

BOB: Only a minor masterpiece for '-' about me being thrown out of London and a little gem for Vind. 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 1-1/2 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 send 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: Hmmm.

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.

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 goodminton, 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 and 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 disenchanting?

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



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 - contemplates repeating a pun!

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) as 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

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, bbeer 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 & 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 sleight 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 slipsheet for Dean Grennel that Good Man, inscribed "Souvenir 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 horsehip 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--

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 & Vinç & 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.

* 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)

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 "A Bas". He's a fan!

VENERABLE FIGURE: Cease this ignorant outburst. That is merely a label. "A" 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 Vinç, Bob Chazim's head for Bobbie Wilde, a box of matches for EEEvans, a fantehnicon for Paul Enever---How could you afford so much? Why this ticker-tapemachine for Jan Jansen alone must have cost a fortune. Did you sell your Clayton Astoundings?

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.

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 semi-detached 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 out and temporary way 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 widely 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.

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 Tallahassie. What about the Christmas message?
WALT: I saw another Greyhound bus in a movie..that's what they call films you know..last night. (Nostagically) 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 criffanac, 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

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 ghoddminton 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 organisation 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 cerebation.
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

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, soignee 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 extrabrain alternates between his newest novelette and that diabetic dinner.

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...

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 mashed 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 30000 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.

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!



Bob Shaw -
 ready for CANADA'S
 Summer sports
 (The far-flung out-post of Empire?)

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 Astoundings.

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 Moscovitz 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, 1500 dollars from American fandom.

BOB: 1500 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!

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 druggot 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 Lots 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 home-spun 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!"

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 susurrantion 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 attache 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 out 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!"



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 changee. 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 cuing 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 chans.

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. Mathildas, we called them.

GEORGE: Why, because they were Aussiefied?

WALT: Come George, you're slipping. You must have heard of Wallthing Mathilda?

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: Hmmmh. 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

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 decarbonised 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 publishg 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 Minstel 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.

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. We 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.

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' 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 Technicolour.

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 fortell 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 boomeriques.

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 Noon 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

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 Nile.

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 Millenium 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 & 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 were 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!

Afterword, colophon and final notes from Tom

I would like to thank a lot of people on this: Stu, Nancy and Walt to start with (and thanks for not being too pushy when it got a year late!). If not for Gregg Calkins, this wouldn't exist: the cards used to produce it were his directly, except the 1951 and 1953 cards for which I used the text he reprinted in Oopsla!. Thanks also to everyone who expressed interest, and to the cheap photocopying available in Berkeley.

This fanzine is dedicated to Arthur Thompson.

A Fan's Christmas in Ireland

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