



The Forty-Eighth issue of a sortof letter substitute, kinda thing, maybe weekly, maybe not, from:

90 Carnhill, Derry, BT48 8BE, UK (Temporary)

E-mail: tferg@lineone.net

Phone Home: (01504) 358328

Web Site: <http://tommyworld.freeisp.co.uk>

Available only via the net at the moment. See the colophon for the usual disclaimer. Supporting Toronto in '03 for the 2003 WorldCon. This issue dated, already, 29/08/99.

James White: A gentle fan, a gentle man.

James White was always a fan, and then a Science Fiction writer. We all know that the Sector General books were real sensawunda Science Fiction. Most of us know that he wrote some of the best fannish articles to appear in Fandom (The Exorcists of IF, for example, was a tour de force.) We also know him as a dedicated follower of the Science Fiction convention and fannish scene in Ireland, and abroad. We all know this.

What we also know is that he was one of the gentlest human beings we have ever had the pleasure to meet. I don't remember him saying a bad word about anyone, and in over 50 years of fandom and Science Fiction, that is no mean feat. He had an encouraging nod to any new fan that happened to show an interest. An abiding love for new ideas and new technology. A wonderful sense of life.

His slow and easy style of conversation made you pause and listen to him. His easygoing delivery meant that he always had your full attention. It made you think about what he was saying. It may just have been his way, but it was very effective. It was because of this that every atrocious pun he came out with, each awful joke he made and every wry witticism raised its deserved groan of appreciation and chuckle of laughter. The man was a genius at this. We all know that.

He was never a well man. His diabetes kept him from his beloved writing as much as it dared. His new, large format screen meant that he never stopped writing. The 14 point type letters his many fans and friends sent him kept him abreast of developments. The large format zines that a lot of editors produced especially for him meant that the huge magnifying glass he carried with him could be held away from the page under interrogation, rather than on it. His frequent visits to the hospital meant that his visits to conventions and social occasions were limited, though that didn't stop him making (and often succeeding) in the attempts to keep his contacts going. His ill health never stopped him being a SF writer or fan, we all know that.

One of his latest wheezes was TerraCon 3000 an idea where the whole world would be one convention centre. Although he later wrote up some of these wonderful ideas in *Götterdämmerung* the original brainstorming session at one of the Octocon conventions in Dun Laoghaire remain one of my many enduring memories of James. This was because I had had too much to drink the night before and had lost my voice.

I wasn't an overly active participant in the discussion, which revolved around James and about a dozen other fans. All I could do was sit back and be amazed at the invention, wit and gracefulness of the man who came up with an amazingly funny idea and then let everyone around him run with it, adding and contributing some of the more hilarious contributions and developing others.

This was the only time where I felt that the modern day fandom of Ireland, a bunch of guys down the pub basically, had ever successfully competed with the fandom that gave birth to us all. The level of humour, the intelligence and respect for words and ideas that was thrown around that night made me reflect on the Willis' and Shaw's of thirty or forty odd years ago. The invention was similar, the good nature was there for all to see and the openness of the discussion was fun to behold. James White was the epicentre of it; the originator, the contributor, and as the article in *Götterdämmerung* shows, he concluded the discussion as well.

Others who took part in that night made many notes. Had great ideas for articles based on it. Had maps and descriptions all drawn up to illustrate how the con would work. There were lists of puns, and jokes that had been made. A whole slew of material was recorded that night. Only James echoed the fandom of Ireland past and actually produced an article for publication based upon this great night.

He truly epitomised what fandom has meant, at its very best, for all of us, a warm and welcoming place, with happy smiles and open arms. A place to be comfortable and to have friends. That was James White and the merest echo of that in our contribution to fandom and life will be the best tribute that could ever be made to his own life. But then, we all know that.