



The Seventy Sixth issue of a sort-of letter substitute, kinda thing. Maybe weekly, maybe not. Available from:

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Available via the World Wide Web, or as an email attachment. I recommend the Portable Document Format (pdf) or, if you insist, a word or Rich Text Format (rtf) can also be emailed or posted. Get in touch and we'll sort something out. Another burst of fannish energy from Tommy. Blame Chunga! Dated, already, 10/10/04.

When Irish eyes Are Smiling by James Bacon

It was a huge honour for me last July when I was asked by the family Circle of James White to accept the Retro Hugo award at the Worldcon should James win. James White was nominated in two categories in the retro Hugo's for 1953. What are the retro Hugo's you may ask, well, here is the official bit From the WSFS Constitution:

Section 3.13: Retrospective Hugos. (<http://worldcon.org/bm/const-2002.html>) A Worldcon held 50, 75, or 100 years after a Worldcon at which no Hugos were presented may conduct nominations and elections for Hugos which would have been presented at that previous Worldcon. Procedures shall be as for the current Hugos. Categories receiving insufficient numbers of nominations may be dropped. Once retrospective Hugos have been awarded for a Worldcon, no other Worldcon shall present retrospective Hugos for that Worldcon. "World Science Fiction Convention" "Worldcon" and "Hugo Award" are service marks of the World Science Fiction Society, an unincorporated literary society.

Here were the nominations and categories that James was in contention for: **Best Fanzine of 1953:** Hyphen ed Chuck Harris and Walt Willis; Quandry ed, Lee Hoffman; Science Fiction Newsletter ed. Bob Tucker; Sky Hook ed. Redd Bloggs; Slant ed. Walt Willis Art Ed. James White. **Best Fan writer of 1953:** Redd Boggs; Lee Hoffman; Bob Tucker; James White; Walt Willis.

Fellow Belfast man Walt Willis was in for fan writer. Willis had a good chance of picking a Hugo up, as his other fanzine Hyphen was also nominated for best Fanzine. The field was tough. I thought it best and proper to be relaxed and stoic about the situation, treating it somewhat academically, lest I get over excited.

James White and Walter Willis met in August 1947, after James had sent a letter to a British SF prozine. James and Walt with their common interest became firm friends and in 1948 they started Slant, the first Irish fanzine.

James White was art editor on Slant, and it ran for 7 issues from 1948 until 1953. Walt Willis was the editor. James was very good at Lino artwork and the covers and interior artwork were stunning for the time. This took tremendous practice and patience. James also type set the zine.

James began his writing career by adding a comment to a piece by Clive Jackson, in Slant issue 4: [These views on the great Smith are not those of the typesetter, J. White.].

In 1952 James had a Con Report published in Vince Clarke's SFN and was also writing articles for Hyphen. By 1953 he had his first piece of paid fiction published in New Worlds 19. Nevertheless, Slant marked the beginning of a Golden age of Fanzine Fandom, and the beginning of what would always be known as Irish Fandom.

Nothing is ever easy, and the preparation that goes into a Hugo presentation is huge. I contacted the organisers informing them of my good luck, that I would be the TAFF delegate at a convention where James White was also nominated for an award.

Unfortunately, what with the Retro-Hugo organisers receiving about 500 mails a day, somehow my mail got a bit lost. I sent a few more follow ups adding that I had been asked to accept, should the academic question arise, but having been involved in conventions myself and knowing how crappy my own email is, let alone anyone else's, I was not at all surprised when I found out that they had not made their destination.

I have always said that The James White Award is easy to run, because everyone is so prepared to help to honour the memory of someone so nice and wonderful, as James White. Many share my personal admiration for James, and one such person, Geri Sullivan, was well known to me.

Geri is James Whites biggest fan. She corresponded with James frequently. She collected his Lensman award on his behalf, and hosted him when he was a GOH at the convention she ran. Geri also came to Ireland to meet Walt Willis and Chuck Harris and other Irish fans and of course James White. I had corresponded with her, quite a bit, as she is an immeasurable source of information that predates my fecking birth, let along my coming to this subject.

Geri was there for me too. When I arrived at Worldcon, the last thing I wanted to do was to be a pain in the arse. I wanted to get involved, help out, and be part of the solutions, not one of the problems. In saying that, the family had written an acceptance piece, and I was tasked with a duty, honoured and pleasurable as it was, all the same, I had to make sure all was set. I met Geri, and we immediately got on in person as in words, birds of a feather and all that. I explained that I had a lack of confirmation, but she was all grins and confidence.

Geri was responsible for the amazing Convention book and programme read me, and was on the convention committee of this Worldcon, Noreascon four, in Boston. Apparently, when I won TAFF, Geri had suggested that I would be a suitable person to receive the award on James' behalf, if the committee had problems contacting the family. This is not unusual.

Worldcon committees who decide to present retro Hugos have an unenviable task of tracking down people and families of potential winners. Sometimes they fail to do so, between the nomination and presentation, and then individuals spend considerable time and money getting the Hugo to the winner, this is of course only on an odd occasion.

I explained that James' family had asked me, and she nodded approvingly, my connection with the James White award and the information pages and, of course my regular contact apparently made me the obvious choice. I dunno, I was so honoured to be asked and surprised at that. She had things all set up for me. She had my special invite, and introduced me to Joe Sicilari who was accepting on behalf of Walt Willis. He was really friendly, and another host of James White at a convention he ran.

Geri then introduced me to Jill Eastlake who was running the Retro-Hugos, a mammoth task. Jill was so pleased to see me, and obviously remembered Geri's correspondence as she knew what I was about. Apparently she had problems with mail, and was very apologetic about the lack of a reply; I was nonchalant about this, as like everything else, all was set for me. No, I should say all was set for James White.

Thanking Geri, I went back to work and agreed to meet Joe at a given time before the ceremony. I have to admit, I so wanted James to win. The Hugo was the one award that eluded James, and I knew that he would have loved to win it.

At the same time, I did not set my hopes too high. The competition was fierce and a loss would be depressing enough for me personally, so I remained stoic about it, and decided that it was all academic.

I had received a very nice and complimentary speech from Pat Larkin, and he had given me permission to adjust it as I felt needed. I did so, just a little bit, essentially taking bits out about 'me' and adding more in way of mentioning his fanac and links to fans. I reckoned James would have been tremendously grateful, were he to win. I received assistance from Claire Brialey and Mark Plummer, along with some last minute suggestions from Tom Becker.

I was truly shitting myself. As the night approached, I left children's services to go to get ready. I had bought a Linen suit especially for this, something I thought was quintessentially 50's and well, Irish of course. I made sure I looked well, it's important, representing friends, I reckoned and worth the effort, even if academic.

I met Mark and Claire one more time, for the once over and then met Joe at the large auditorium where the presentations were taking place. It could house about 3,500 people and the committee reckoned on a good 2,500 present. A special area, with huge legroom, was available for presenters and receivers. Bob Eglinton was the MC and Peter Weston interviewed the Guest of Honours as we went back to 1953 thanks to the sound of fermins, (not dead animals, music things.)

As the time for the awards approached, I was really nervous, but that was academic.

Best fan writer and Fanzine were the first two to be presented. My heart sank when I heard Lee Hoffman win best fan writer, but then this is what I had convinced myself to expect so I was not too visibly down.

Then came best fan artist. As I heard acceptance speeches, I adjusted my own, well I mean James' families acceptance speech a little more.

Then when the best fanzine was read out, my heart and stomach leapt as 'SLANT' was called out, to tumultuous applause. I paused for a moment, and Joe turned and said, 'This is us' and I stood with him and walked up to the stage and up the steps.

I was studying the floor, keen not to make a miss footing. We got there and Joe was handed the Hugo. There was only one, you see. Joe passed the Hugo to me and stepped up to the podium and said his speech, quoting Walt Willis and thanking everyone. I then stepped forward and read out the speech, occasionally looking up out at the vast darkness that held the audience. There were some words and phrases, especially of thanks that I emphasised.

There was quite a bit of applause afterwards and we stepped to the side of the stage and down to the back stage area. We should have walked back out and around, but in the silence and privacy of the rear area, I asked Joe for a moment to catch my breath, I was a bit uneasy on my feet.

The rest of the Retro Hugos flew by, and afterwards Joe and I made our way to the fanzine lounge, an appropriate place to gather, since this was a Fanzine huge.

There many UK fans met us and many photos were taken, everyone revered the Hugo with great respect. We spoke to Deb Geisler the Chairman, and she was very apologetic about not having a second HUGO ready, we were of course nonchalant about this, as another was promised and most importantly, selfishly

I must admit, from my point of view was that it had been agreed, that I would take the one we had back with me so that I could present it to Peggy White, Pat and Patricia Larkin, upon my return.

At this stage Geri Sullivan caught up with us, and she was moved with joy, such emotion triggered considerable upset, as we all remembered one who is now longer with us, to be expected, no doubt under the circumstances. From here, Joe and Geri went for Dinner, but I knew I should go to the Interaction party, which I did, to catch up with many UK fans who were preparing that party.

On my way, I met fellow Irish Fans James Peart and Rod O'Hanlon, as soon as Pearto saw the Hugo, he pointed, and called out 'James White', he could see from my broad grin, that it was so. Pearto roared out 'HUGO HUGO' and was soon joined by the booming voices of Rod and others in their company, as the corridor filled with their cheers.

Vince Doherty, Worldcon chair and no stranger to Ireland's shores, looked tremendously pleased, and somewhat proud, as he held the Hugo in the Interaction party. He too knew James White well, having visited him in Belfast on occasion. All present were well impressed with the deserved win. At this stage, I was worried that something would untoward might occur to the award, so I went back to my hotel room, and gently stored the Hugo, secretly in a drawer with shirts.

I then went back to the parties, which had an added fervour about them. It was at this stage that I met a bunch of new fans, and we hung out quite a bit, I had intended to meet up with Joe and Geri, but missed them. The night continued well, with much celebration.

I walked; sober enough back to my hotel room, and it was about 4am, Boston time. I phoned Pat and Patricia to tell them the good news, I had tried earlier, when I had secured the award, but it was 5am in Belfast and they slept through the ringing.

I went through the whole evening with Patricia, and she was so pleased, as any daughter would be. Later I phoned Peggy White. We spoke at length, and it is true to say that she was very happy, although understandably moved by the award.

Of course, somewhere beyond this mortal coil, I imagine a gentle, softly spoken man is smiling, I hope he is smiling at this well deserved recognition from his fans and fandom, but more than likely his warm eyes are a glow at the thoughts of so much happiness over something he would no doubt make little off.

It appears that authors don't just bring joy through their words.

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Tommy >> Blame James and Chunga, that's all I'm saying.

It really is a pleasure to be able to publish this from James. I was delighted when he won TAFF, and knew he'd made a good candidate. I'm equally delighted in James White's Hugo win – an honour truly deserved. So to put all of these together in the first part of his TAFF report if just fantastic.

Add to this the recent dropping of Chunga 6 through my letter box (alas not Banana wings this time) and my fannish energies have been given another lease of Life. I'll be writing more on the Chunga effect in the next issue. Also some personal stuff, as always, lots of stuff on recent trips to Paris and London and even some SF stuff.

A quick burst of a few issues and then I'm off back to work, studies and real life. So it goes. See you soon.