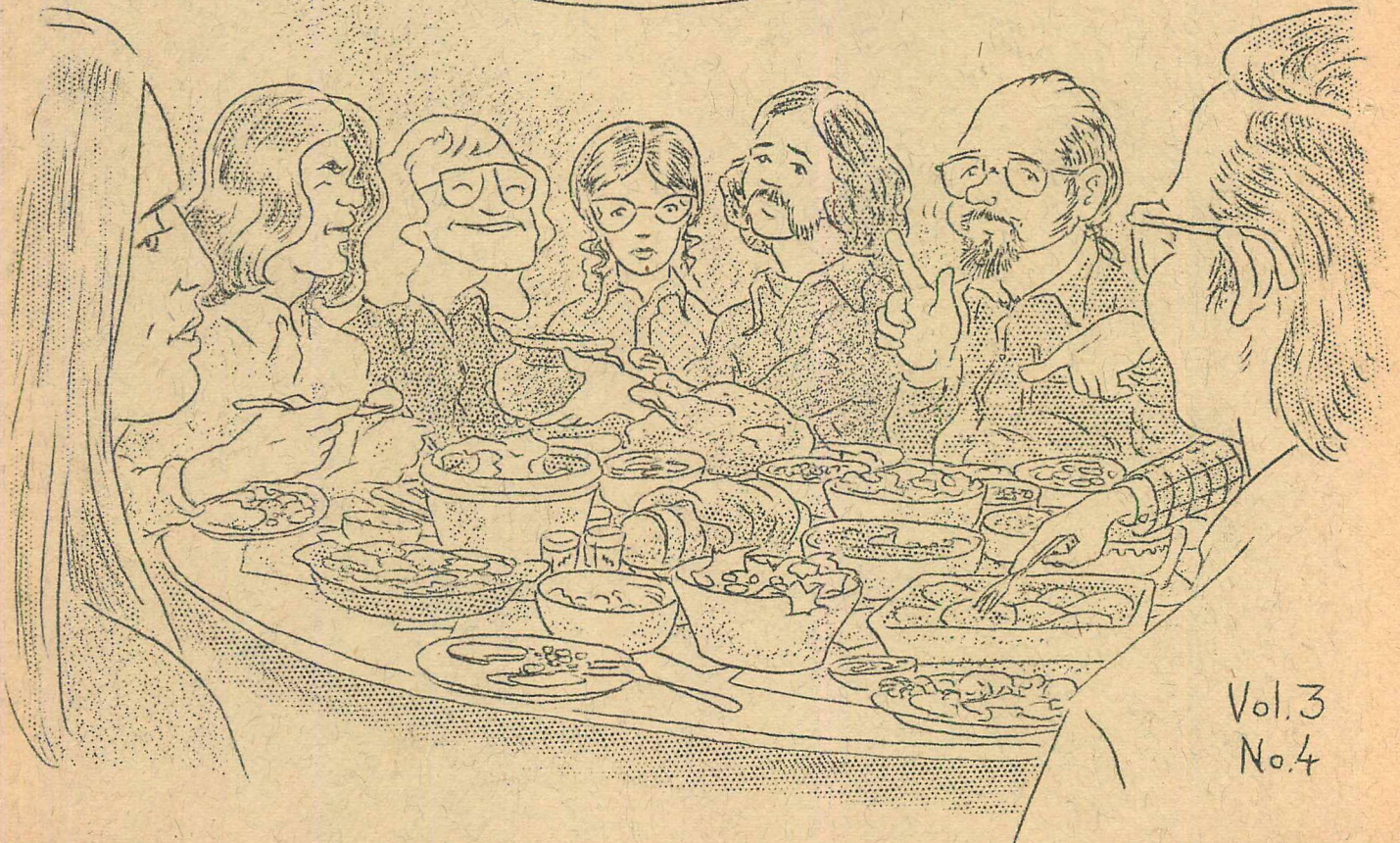


Honey - have you seen the stencils
for

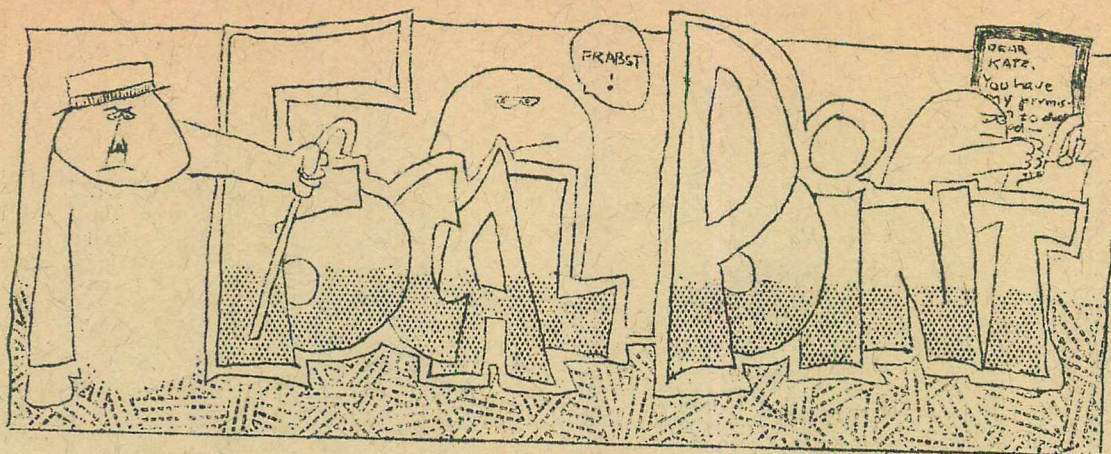
FOCAL POINT ?

I think Bill just
ate them, dear...

Have some
more beans ?



Vol. 3
No. 4



Katzenjammer ::: editorial ::: Arnie Katz ::: 4
 All Our Yesterdays ::: column ::: Harry Warner ::: 10
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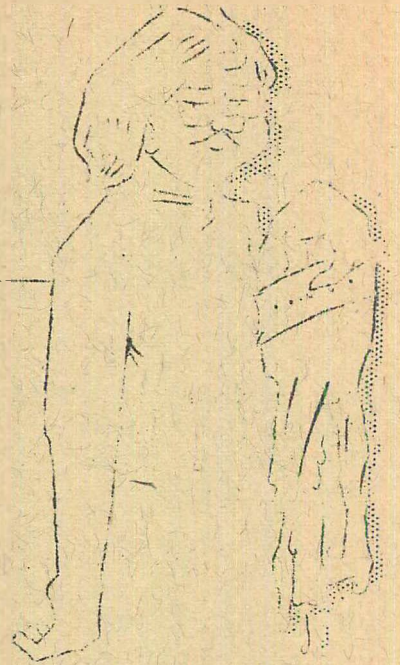
FOCAL POINT Volume 3 Number 4 (whole number in the second series 34) is edited and published (or, John Berry, as we used to say "oublished") by Arnie Katz, 59 Livingston St., Apt 6-B, Brooklyn, NY 11201 Monthly. It is available for letters of comment, all-for-all trade, contribution of art or material, or \$1 for three. Invaluable Helpers: Joyce Katz, Chris Couch, Ross Chamberlain, Charlene Komar, and Bill Kunkel. Brian Burley is thanked, as always, for his labels. Editors emeritus: Mike McInerney and Rich Brown.

Contributions for FOCAL POINT are always appreciated. Humorous and/or entertaining articles, faan fiction (that's fiction about fans and fandom, save the rocketship stories for someone else), or anything else that seems to fit. I'm also always glad to get batches of cartoons of a fannish bent. Cartoons are electrostencilled when necessary, and art will be returned if the artist so desires.

This is the gala October issue of FP, a little late because all Brooklyn Fandom has been Plunged Into Illness for about the last two weeks.

Published and mailed November 6, 1971.

KATZEN



One of the reasons so many fans have become heads may be that they are less daunted than the average person when it comes to the sometimes difficult and lengthy process of procuring a supply of marijuana. I mean, why would anyone quail at the prospect of spending a couple of nights on a cold subway platform waiting for some hippie-freako who doesn't even own a watch, after he has tangled with such corporate titans as Rex and Gestetner.

After Joyce and I got the Rex, we naturally started buying stencils and ink from the Rex Rotary Company. I say naturally, because stencils with seven-hole heads and ink in piston cans isn't readily available at the neighborhood stationery store.

We placed a couple of orders for stencils and ink and everything seemed fine. When we needed something, we had only to call the company, tell them what we wanted, and a package would be waiting at our apartment door by the next evening.

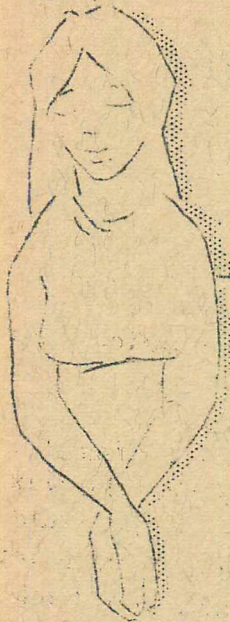
They were fine stencils. A pleasing shade of green which made for nice contrast, they were equally good for typed copy or etching with a stylus. True, they didn't have plio-film, which meant frequent typer key cleaning, but you can't have evrything.

With three monthlies and a bimonthly coming from our little group, we use up mimeo supplies pretty fast. So it wasn't surprising that I found myself calling up Rex and making a really large order, aten quires of stencils and 24 cans of ink.

When I got the stencils, I was aghast. Despite the fact that they had the same order number as the old Rex stencils, they were completely different in appearance. When we tried them, we found to our dismay that they were also vastly inferior to the old ones. They didn't produce very good typed copy, and stenciling art on them was simply out of the question.

When we tried to run one of the new stencils off, we discovered that it had the habit of fraying at the sides, allowing globs of ink to seep out.

JAMMER



Fortunately, there were some of the good old stencils left. We doled them out to the locals for use on pages that had hand-stencilled art.

Even ten quires of stencils don't last too long around here, so recently, my thoughts turned toward making another order. I'd tried to get some satisfaction on the first order that had gone awry, but to no avail. This time I called the salesman who had sold us the machine and asked him to check into what had happened to the quality of Rex's stencils. I didn't want ten more quires of the same lousy stencils we'd be wrestling with for the last few months.

Eventually, I ended up bringing a sample of the old and the new Rex stencils down to the office for Mr. Luisi to see. He and I performed various tests on them and decided that the new stencils were in every way inferior to the old.

Then he broke the news to me. "Arnie, I took it up with the bosses, and they're convinced that these new stencils are better than the old ones." We exchanged a few words on the subject of bosses. "Why don't you call up Gestetner and see if they can help you?" he said as I left.

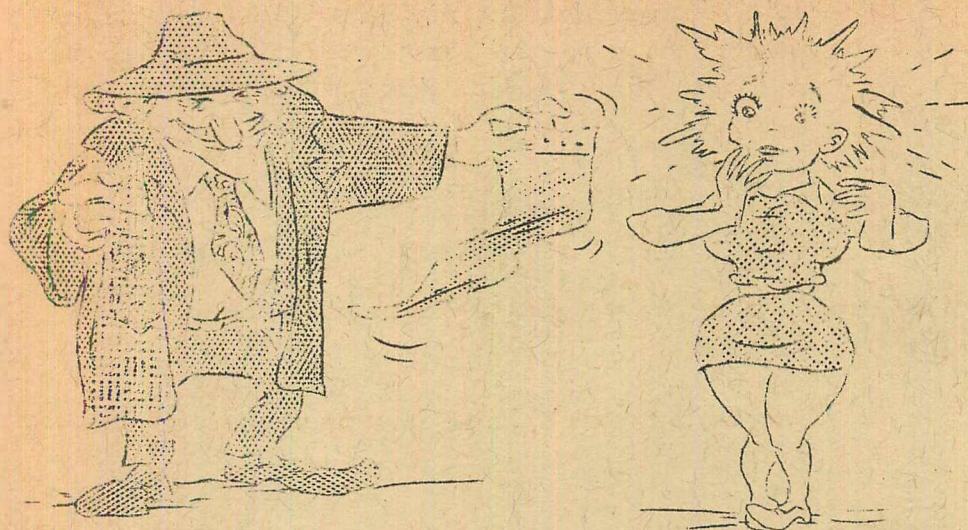
I did call Gestetner, but they didn't make a seven-hole stencil except for electrostencils. I was damned if I was going to pay Rex \$4 a quire for those stencils, so I started to think of possible alternatives.

I remembered that I used to buy stencils, paper, and ink from a place called Gold Seal Duplicator when I used the gestetner. The service had been excellent and the quality of the products high.

I called Mr. Annenberg, Gold Seal's proprietor, reminded him of who I was, and told him my problem. "What are you going to use the stencils for?" he asked.

"Typing, and some stylus work. Long runs," I said.

"You'll need the good ones." He paused, checking his mental pricelist. "\$2.75 a quire,



film topped." I told him I'd try six quires, and he sent them over to my office the next afternoon.

When the package arrived at QUICK FROZEN FOODS, I couldn't resist opening it up. I slipped a stencil from one of the boxes and scrutinized it carefully, testing the wax and other arcane things. I gave a second stencil to Ross Chamberlain so he could test it for art stenciling. Satisfied that the stencils were at least as good as what I would have gotten from Rex at \$1.25 a quire more, I put the package aside and went back to composing a feature destined to be of consuming interest to processors of frozen fish.

Joyce and I were sitting at our kitchen table (our very fannish, very oval table, despite what you may have read in other fanzines) waiting for our dinner to finish cooking.

"What to see the new stencils?" I asked.

"Sure." I pulled one of the boxes from the package.

"Get a load of this box," I said as I placed a box of Trojan pliofilm stencils before her. The box was a washed out green in color, with trim of eqally faded red. A little head of a trojan warrior appeared under the brand logo.

"Why, that's the biggest box of prophylactics I've ever seen!" Joyce exclaimed.

"No, Joyce, it's stencils," I explained. Actually, it looked more like a box of prophylactics than a box of prophylactics does. It just had that look, if you know what I mean.

"Let's see one, Arnie." I took one out. "Gee, it sure smells funny."

"Smell? Oh yeah, I guess so," I said as I sniffed reflectively. "Wintergreen, maybe."

"It smells like a rubber!" my wife shouted. "It smells like a rubber!" She then advanced her theory that the stencils were made by the same company that makes Trojan condoms.

"Don't be ridiculous," I said, "the stencils are made by the General Stencil Manufacturing Company of Denver Colorado. If those rubbers were made by the General Stencil Manufacturing Company, don't you think some fans would have noticed some-time?"

"At a time like that, who notices," said Joyce Katz, self-proclaimed rubber expert. "Besides, most fans use other means, you know."

"But how would a company that makes stencils get into the rubber business?" I challenged her.

"Silly, prophylactics aren't made of rubber; they're made of something like--like--" she grabbed at the stencil, "like pliofilm!"

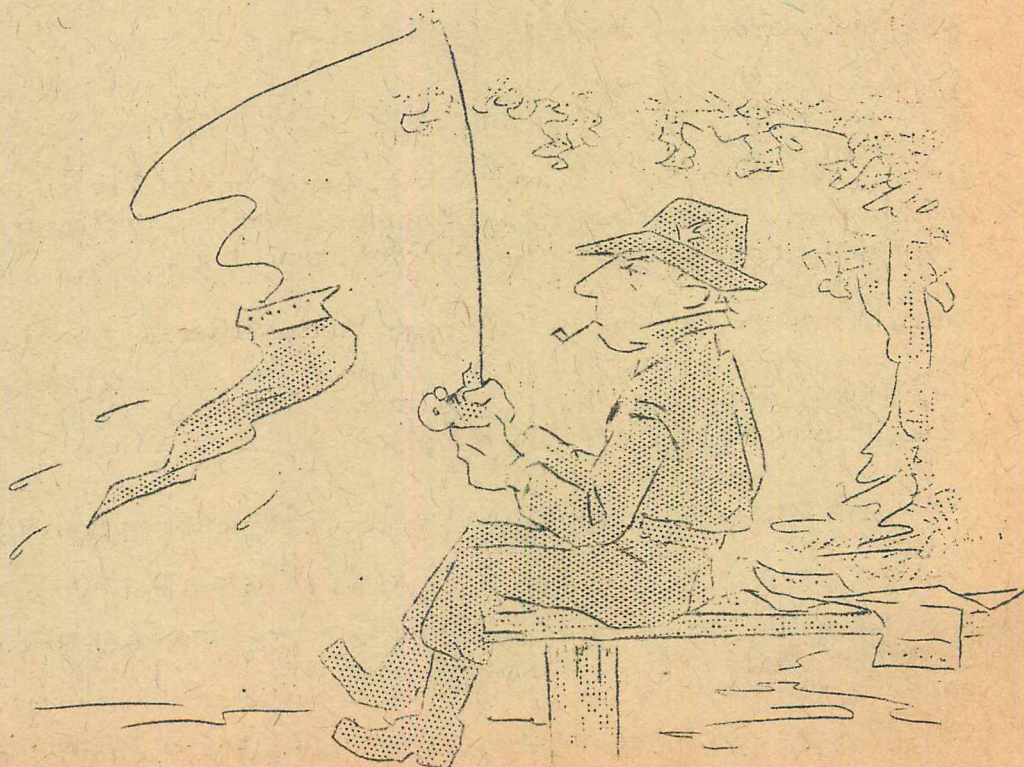
"Hey, you know what it says on the back of this box of stencils?" I said trying to divert her from her obsession.

"I'll bet it says, 'For Use Only For Prevention Of Disease'."

"No, it says that the company is the inventor of the film topped stencil and has been in business since 1906."

"And after they had created the ultimate fannish stencil, the film top, in 1906, they created the prophylactic so that Burbee could safely invent sex in 1927!"

I finally had to go out to a drug store and buy a package of Trojans to show Joyce that they were made by a company in Piscataway, New Jersey. That finally convinced her.





The stencils themselves worked superbly once I got them unrolled.

I showed the preceding article to Joyce. She did the wifely thing and laughed in all the right places.

"The only thing is, I don't know where to use this," I lamented. "I've run articles about the mimeograph in the last two FOCAL POINTs, and following it with an article which begins with talk about stencils...that might be a little much."

"But it isn't about stencils," she said. "It's about prophylactics! Why, it's in the very mainstream of fannish interest. I always did consider the mimeograph to be a penal object."

"Penal? Well, it's true I've seen some pretty criminal mimeography, but 'penal', that's going too far." I thought about the ramifications of her comment. "Don't let me catch you loitering around the handle."

"Just think," Joyce said, "it'll be even more penal when it has a Trojan wrapped around it."

Now that you're all sure that my wife is some kind of sexfiend, it might be opportune to tell you a story of her wonderful naivete.

Joyce, though she has been here since July 1970, is still easily identifiable as a non-New Yorker. One of the ways she can be spotted is that she occasionally refers to

"42nd St." as "42nd Ave."

"I wonder why you do that?" I asked her recently.

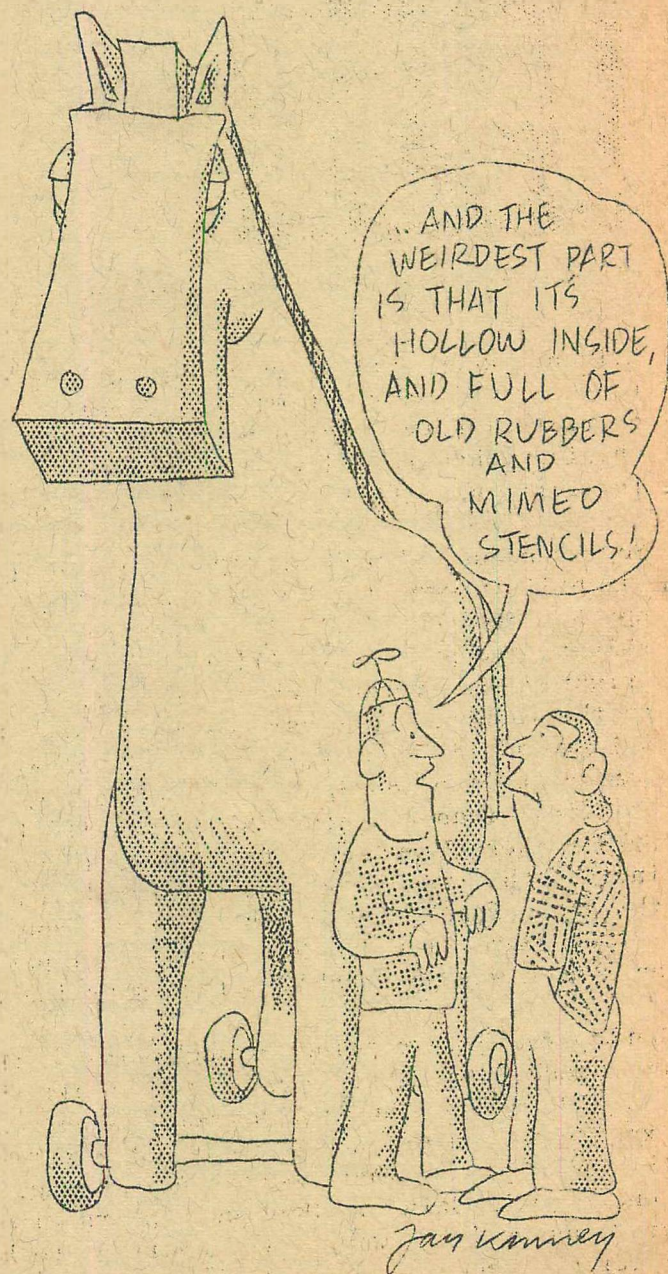
"I think I heard it on a record," she replied.

"Oh, you mean on Happy and Artie Traum's record," I said, mentioning an album which is played frequently around 59 Livingston and contains the phrase "down on 42nd Avenue" in one of the songs.

"No. Well, yes, I guess that reinforces it, but I know there's a song by Simon and Garfunkel I heard before I came here that calls it '42nd Avenue'."

"No, what it says in 'The Boxer' is 'a come on from the whores on Second Avenue'," I shook my head sadly.

(continued on back cover)



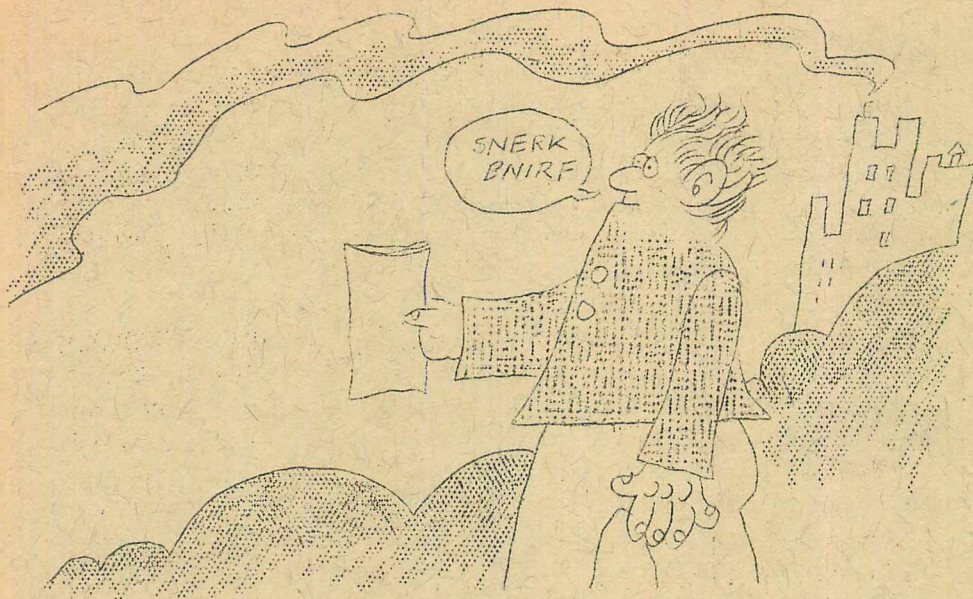
SAPS IN 1957



Evidence keeps piling up about the way time is passing. The last time I had opportunity to see a calendar, it was 1971, only a year away from the completion of SAPS' first quarter-century. This apa has fallen into an era of smaller participation and less enthusiasm than it enjoyed when young, because it has fallen victim to whatever debilitating influence afflicts most of the general-interest, non-local apas these days.

So I dug out a batch of SAPS publications from a wilder and friendlier era of fandom, my slightly incomplete copy of the 40th mailing, published in the summer of 1957 when the apa had just completed its first full decade of existence. My bundle lacks, among other things, a copy of the official organ, and its absence caused me to feel sympathy for some bright young library school graduate who is going to have a terrible experience some day in the future. Universities and public libraries are taking an increasing interest in science fiction and fandom, fanzines are going into their collections, and inevitably, someone will be assigned to catalog some apa mailings without being instructed on how the official organ contains the only reliable clues to exactly what's in the same envelope. SAPS members knew each other so well at this time that many publishers didn't bother to include their own name and address in their fanzines, and also had the habit of omitting the date of publication or the issue and number data. The library employee who first of all empties all those big brown envelopes of their contents and stacks all the magazines any which way on a table before starting to catalog is going to hate fandom.

Moreover, while reading through some of the pages in the 1957 SAPS publications, I had an even madder thought. I wondered if all the New Wave stories have been written by those old SAPS members under pennames. When you read a 1957 SAPS publication, you feel almost exactly as you do when you encounter a New Wave story which leaves you uncertain about the time, place, characters, and meaning. Mailing comments took up most of the ink that went onto SAPSzines. Most commenters either assumed that other members had memorized the previous mailing or expected everyone to keep that previous mailing handy for instant reference, because most of these mailing comments seem to possess the same semi-logic as the conversation in Alice in Wonderland or the plot of a W.C.Fields movie. A mild example:



ALL OUR YES TER DAYS

Harry Warner, Jr.

"Actually you've about hit it...the difference between not-poems and am-so poems are mostly that Rapp writes not-poems, Nance does am-so poems and GM Carr...well, I dunno, I think she's on Nance's side in an undercover way. Between them they've even got me mixed up and I'm supposed to be an expert on not-poetry and Bull."

SAPS possessed at this time quite a few very active publishers who never gained extreme prominence in general fandom. It was particularly strong in Seattle-area fans, a few old-timers who had lost interest in other aspects of fandom like Art Rapp, and some people who were almost unknown outside of SAPS, like Nan Gerding. It also had its share of odd-balls, like Norman G. Wansborough, a Britisher who was simply incapable of expressing himself coherently in written words, and Ray C. Higgs, a potentially ideal Rotarian or Kiwanian who wandered into fandom by mistake. The membership in general was older than it had been when SAPS was founded; there was no longer the determination to be silly at all costs, and if the SAPS publications lacked the polish of the era's best general circulation fanzines, they shared some of their camaraderie and unbounding energy.

But one item in this mailing is quite hard to read, the first issue of Beaver-Bored. The difficulty consists of the fact that it was published by Kent Moomaw, who was soon to kill himself, apparently over his draft prospects. I was never among those who decided after Kent's death that he was a superfan of untold abilities. But he was a good young fellow who was bubbling over with enthusiasm when he wrote the contents of this issue. The very fact that he sounds in it so much like a hundred other fans of the same era who have since gone on to quite happy adulthoods makes his death all the more lamentable; if he's been the Hamlet-like individual who was growing up disillusioned with life that some people found in him, I could have imagined that his end was fated all along. Here are a couple of paragraphs near the end of the issue:

"Just a few minutes ago, I was rummaging around through recent letters and fanzines for something to talk about here, and suddenly decided to hell with it. So I did as I often do in such cases: I pushed the piles of paper out of the way, extinguished all the lights, and hauled a chair up to the open window, after removing the screen so that I could look

out without the wire mesh standing between my eyes and their objectives, whatever they might happen to be.

"The window overlooks a long row of neighboring houses facing the adjacent street, and sitting here on the second story, the sky dark except for a half moon, I soon found myself engaged in refreshing meditations on why that window is lighted at this late hour, who the man is who just crept down along the sidewalk, where the little dog in the next backyard has been today and where he'll be tomorrow, the movement of the winds... all sorts of inconsequential little things. It's really a lot of fun. If it weren't for the parents, I'd probably take a midnight walk a couple of times a week."

Dick Eney had one of the few items in the mailing written mostly by other people, KEEBIRD. Ted White was represented in it with a report on the 1957 Midwescon: "The party in the Cleveland suite Saturday night had been ordered out, and I accompanied the three Canadians and Bob Tucker Jr. (a seventeen-year-old who I would never have taken for Tucker's son if he hadn't told me) across the street to the Howard Johnson's for coffee. We had just seated ourselves when we were joined (at the counter) by Riva Smiley, known to most more accurately as The Bat. After inquiring if the eggs were the usual kind or the good kind, she turned to us and said 'Someday I hope Bob Tucker will be my father-in-law.' Bob Jr.'s jaw dropped, and the rest of us were struck speechless by this incredible desire. But in the next breath she revealed that she thought three-year-old Davey Tucker was just 'too-too', etc. Bob Jr. let out a long sigh of pure relief." I don't know if it's just coincidence that almost the first thing Davey did as he gained wisdom and intelligence was to join the FAPA waiting list, where he stood sixth from the top this summer, not far from the complete obscurity and hiddenness that FAPA membership conveys nowadays.

Dick Geis had a Leather Couch instalment in this issue, too, containing an alleged conversation between himself and Lars Rourne. Geis quoted himself: "'Fandom needs some organization. It needs a focal point like the old monthlies that carried on the feuds, carried on the news, carried on the arguments..until the editors were carried off the field. Fandom needs...ME!'

"'A-a-a-r-r-g-h-h.'"

"'So in response to this widespread demand from the poor downtrodden common fan in the street, I have decided to sacrifice myself once again on the altar of the Enchanted Duplicator. I shall revive P*S*Y*C*H*O*T*I*C!'

"..... 'Give it up, Dick, give it up. Retire to FAPA like a good old BNF.'"

Dave Rike had one outside contribution to the issue of Orgy that was in this mailing. It was billed as a two-unit credit in the Official Fanacademy Course, on the association between poker and science fiction. Jenrette didn't mince words as he introduced his lecture with a memory of a recent Westercon: "Rusty, the red-headed wife, was playing too and we played the classic penny-ante game: one cent minimum, nickel maximum. The game was five card draw, jacks or better to open, and no wild cards. Yet, in spite of the low stakes, we made \$3 profit in about one hour's play! I'm not trying to say we're phenomenal poker players: we're not.



We weren't particularly lucky, either. The sad truth of the matter was that those fans were terrible poker players. Somehow I have the feeling that this is not restricted to players in that particular game." Dave devoted about equal amounts of space to playing the cards, betting skill, and cheating. Yes, I know which subject you'd prefer to read about:

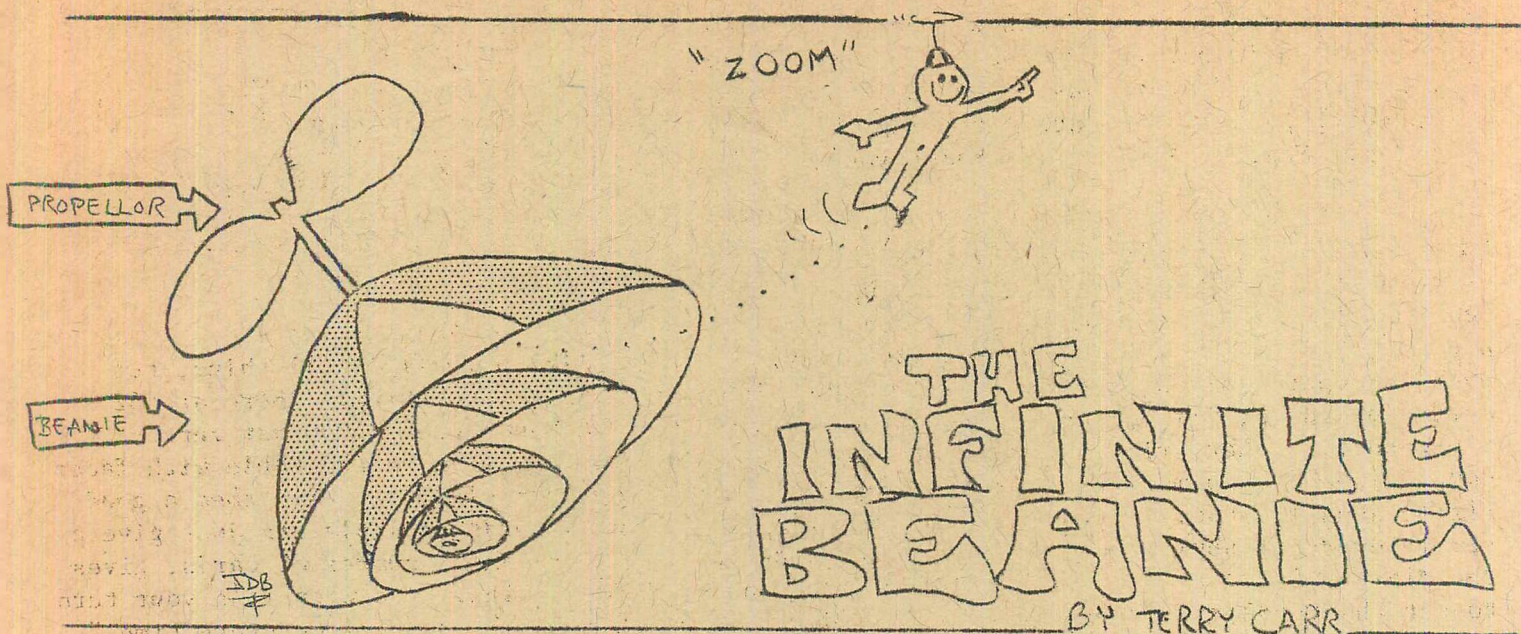


"Just as bad is the player who watches the cards being shuffled. Maybe he notices a couple of aces or kings going down near the bottom and notices that a cut will bring them into play. It seems like a really small thing, but over the course of an evening or a few games it gets to be a sure thing. There are 52 cards in a deck; if you know where four of them are, you know about seven per cent of the cards.... That brings us to card shuffling. Shuffle them flat on the table with faces down. You have no more right to see the faces than the other players. Give them a good riffle shuffle, too, not once but several times. I have seen several players just give a simple overhand shuffle, this changes the sequence of a very small number of cards, gives the player with a good memory an idea of how the cards are going. And when it's your turn to cut the cards make sure you do so. And don't cut them in the same place every time."

I'm sure that Art Rapp had a big publication in this mailing, but all I got was a ten-page issue of Gripes of Rapp which doesn't provide ammunition for a single lengthy extract. Art must be the most neglected of all the fine fan writers in reprint sections, so I feel that I must copy off several samples of how well he could handle a topic in a few lines: "I'm afraid you're falling into the logical pitfall of assuming that the whole world is identical to the small samplings of it that happen to comprise your personal observation of it to date. As to whether an ocelot can lie down, I believe that a stuffed one makes a serviceable chair. The middle ages had a saint for everything. My favorite, and one which I am sure every trufan and Fapate will be enchanted with, is St. Fiacre. Besides having a type of carriage named for him, or perhaps because of it (springs being somewhat inefficient and roads rough in those days), St. Fiacre is also the patron saint of people with diseases of the rectum."

Burnett R. Toskey was well known by members of Seattle's local fan club and by SAPS, but showed little fanac elsewhere. Nevertheless, he must rank among the most active fanzine publishers of this era, because of the enormous issues of Flabbergasting he created for SAPS, where he also once circulated a complete textbook on mathematics that he'd just published. The July, 1957, issue contains an amusing article celebrating the fact that Tosk had just acquired his 50th rejection slip. He was quite cheerful about this event, and seemed disturbed only by the fact that he would have achieved this milestone a bit sooner if Saturn's editor hadn't cheated by returning a manuscript without a rejection slip. People are collecting everything nowadays and I don't doubt that someday this article will serve as a guide to pricing rejection slips for huckster rooms. "Many magazines go to considerable trouble to prepare an attractive rejection slip. Take the now defunct Weird Tales for example. In addition to an elaborately designed title, they have a little picture of a witch and sorcerer accompanied by evil spirits upon it. Below this they describe in great detail the kind of stories they want. At the beginning of the printed part is found the assertion that 'It's return does not necessarily imply lack of merit but means that it does not fit in with our current needs.' Note the subtle use of the word 'necessarily'." Toskey also called attention to a remarkable line from the Other Worlds rejection slip which should go into an anthology somewhere: "You may study our magazine if you wish, but it is not necessary."

Continued on page 23.



Not too long ago Gerry Conway and Piglet came over for dinner, and since that meant there were four writers in the house at once, naturally what we talked about was writing. Sf writing in particular, of course. (Gerry writes as Gerard F. Conway; Piglet writes as George Alec Effinger, and if you want to know where he got the nickname, go read UNIVERSE 1.) We sat around and smoked and joked about the nutty stories we were going to write someday. "Hey, how about..." was the beginning of most of our sentences. We vied to suggest the most ridiculous story-idea.

When we weren't talking about writing, we talked about the usual melange of things that any group of people talk about: rock music, Mexican food, rule changes in baseball, and intimate details of our personal lives. Plus, of course, a little idle chatter: Carol mentioned, for instance, a proposal that Dick Ellington once made for the handling of everybody's kids at parties. "I think if they're young enough you could just put them all in an empty swimming pool and let them do whatever they want for the afternoon. When the party's over, just hose the kids clean and take 'em home."

"Hey," said Gerry, "how about..." and he began to outline this sf story called THE BABY PIT, in which everybody under twelve or some such age lives in the Baby Pit till he's old enough to graduate to life outside. I added some ideas; Piglet got interested and contributed more silliness; Carol joined in with a bunch of bizarre suggestions. We started getting seriously interested in this damned story as it got stranger and stranger, sillier and sillier. Finally Gerry burst forth with the inevitable: "Hey, why don't we all collaborate on writing the story...right now! We can take turns writing it, and when we're finished we can send it to Ted White."

God help us, the idea sounded like fun. So Gerry sat down forthwith to write the opening of the story, while the rest of us kibbitzed and generally continued the breezy tone of most of the evening's talk. We took turns in the writing, and the story quickly broke every rule of writing we could think of. "Boy, is this non-linear," I said. "We're breaking new paths!" cried Piglet. "Yes, it's a trailblazing story," Gerry said. "Maybe we

shouldn't send it to Amazing after all; maybe we should send it to New American Review." And the typewriter rattled on, each of us took three turns writing, and I had a feeling I'd done something just like this many times before. What was I thinking of, anyway? I'd never collaborated with three other people on a story before.

Then I realized: this was an sf writers' oneshot session.

It was all there, the frantic pace, the party going on while each person typed, the asides in the narrative about what was being said in the room, the playfulness that characterize the most enjoyable (to produce) oneshots. "To hell with New American Review!" said Gerry; "let's send this to Stanley Kubrick!" "Boy what a weird story," said Piglet. And I thought: They don't even know there is such a thing as a oneshot session. They've invented the form independently. And I reflected: Art, like science, has no secrets; what can be discovered will be discovered.

When the story was finished and we settled back in our chairs exhausted by so much creativity, Gerry decided that maybe we ought to limit our sights to Amazing after all. "It's such a strange story!" He told me to read it over the next morning and "smooth it out a little" and send it to Ted. I promised that I'd read it over the next morning.

And I did. It's just what I thought it was; it's a pro writers' oneshot. It's full of writers' jokes written for other writers, just like fan jokes written for other fans. Some of the gags were corny, some were subtle -- again, like in fan oneshots. I decided that we should forget sending it to Amazing and try FOCAL POINT instead. So here's what we wrote that night:

THE BABY PIT

by

Gerard F. Conway
Carol Carr
Terry Carr
George Alec Effinger

Based on an offhand remark by Dick Ellington.

GERRY:

Nick stood by the window, watching the movement of the olders outside; they were shadows, dim and distant, slashes of blue and gold against the green sky. They never looked at him now. When he was younger, some of the female olders would drift close to the glass and make faces at him, muttering things to themselves he could never understand. Then he was older, not quite old enough, and they wouldn't come to him anymore. Some of the younger olders would look at him, at his boyish features, and giggle to themselves. Even they stopped.

Nick couldn't understand why, but after today, they'd sure pay attention to him, they would. They'd have to. After today, he'd be Grown Up.

He remembered how it started. (Sure he does.)

CAROL:

Sure he did. Gerry is obviously trying to get something going here by capitalizing Grown Up. That's because he's very young.

Nick stood by the window trying to remember how it started and came to the conclusion that it never had. The pit was his past and as that past came washing over him it brought with it the smell of potato chips, talcum powder and urine.

TERRY:

Piglet (who's one of the authors of this story, though you haven't met him yet, but you will) just said (he's sitting across the room in a chair) that we (the cat just knocked a magazine off the table, that's newsbreaks) could subtitle this THE STAIRS MY DESTINATION. You'll meet Piglet later. Now he wants to subtitle it THE LIGHTS IN THE SKY ARE LIGHTS. Lots of authors get hung up on titles. I may never get beyond it.

Behind Nick, they were singing in the drain (this phrase provided by Piglet), dancing in the muck, laughing in the endless morning of the baby pit. They were poetic as all hell. Children are very poetic, you know, and symbolic and basic; their pabulum covered psyches predict those of the olders. Perhaps this is why the olders liked to come to the glass and look inside. Some of them, like the female olders, would watch the pit for long periods at a time.

Not that the kids paid much attention, though they'd once had a kid, Harold Pungent, who used to start fights with the three-year-olds hoping to attract crowds. He'd beat hell out of them. Well, somebody had to beat hell out of the three-year-olds, and the seven-year-olds were already busy beating hell out of Harold Pungent. But he really showed off too much, and one night when things lasted late and they were there in the dark, when everybody else woke up Harold Pungent didn't. See what I mean about kids?

PIGLET:

They'd all be pretty pungent, wouldn't they? So now I have to move the story along, right? It's all up to me. The responsibility is awesome. I'm the only one who's straight around here. All right.

There, in the dark, in the pit, the Baby Pit, they had no concept of time beyond the periodic hosings and the imperceptible progress of Harold's disappearance. Bit by bit he shuffled his mortal coil, and the others in the pit were made aware of their own mortality. Nick (the protagonist) thought about these things a lot, as he was expected to do before becoming Grown Up. (Gerry's caps. No comment.)

Early in his developing awareness he was attracted to the glass where the olders stood, alien and inviolable and somehow threatening. The others in the pit spent most of their time sitting in the many corners and drooling, but Nick rolled over to the glass whenever a face appeared. He would press his hands against the window and slowly slide his thumbs down over the older's face and torso, leaving black trails of mud and excrement. The older would shake her head and laugh, and then Nick would shrug and move away from the glass. As the years passed he tried to establish a more satisfying communication, but each attempt was frustrated by the olders' lack of interest. Somehow, he knew, somehow soon they'd listen.

GERRY:

Primarily because my paragraph initiated this monstrosity, and also because of a sense of Destiny, I'd like to take this opportunity to congratu-

late the others on our first section Anniversary. Piglet is reminding me that we've yet to establish conflict. Okay. (And I'm getting pretty tired of all those comments about my age, goddamned geriatrics.)

As Nick stood staring by the window, a massive sense of weight seemed to descend upon him from above; a sense of depression already bringing him lower and lower -- No, not from above, Nick thought to himself, since it seemed appropriate at that point, goddamn it, but from below.

Nick turned, saw Harold, and realized that the situation was beginning to become desperate.

§

Some hours later, as the penultimate afternoon was beginning to settle over the bouncing baby home called Pit, Nick stood beside the window, watching, waiting. The stench was tremendous. So was the author's gall.

CAROL:

Everybody talks about establishing the conflict but nobody does anything about it. When last we saw Nick he was standing by the window watching the movements of the olders outside, or trying to remember how it started, or having a massive sense of weight descending upon him. I would like to change all this. I would like to have Nick standing at the window picking his nose.

Nick stood by the window picking his nose.

Charlie Conflict came over to him.

"I think you stink," said Charlie Conflict.

"Go stick your face against the window, pig," Nick answered quietly.

"You're not even toilet trained; you belong back in the Pit."

Charlie Conflict had been in the Pit with Nick for the last 14 years, and that was more than enough time to learn to despise him. He hoped Charlie would trip back down the chute. After today, he intended to do something about Charlie Conflict.

(All around me they are talking about Edna Ferber and Pearl S. Buck. I think they must be insane.)

Nick decided he'd have to do something spectacular to gain the Olders' attention.

TERRY:

Terrific. So far as I can see, Charlie Conflict has been introduced but not established: he's got a walk-on part. Let's see what he does in this pulse-pounding confrontation with Nick Protagonist. He could be a contender yet.

Since Nick had decided to do a grand feat to impress the olders, he put off doing anything about Charlie Conflict until the next day. The olders outside were obviously impressed at his restraint. He saw one girl climb laboriously up the incline from the Pit bottom to reach him and tug at Charlie Conflict's arm. "Better let him alone," she said ponderously; "he's really got the oldfarts impressed with his cool. You can't score outside points today."

Nick smiled benignly, tolerantly as Charlie was led away, but he didn't miss the glance of blazing hatred that Charlie threw at him just before he slid down the incline into the crap, piss, puke and snot in which most of the kids (we've just decided that we'll go around once more to finish this story, so you're about halfway through it now, have patience) gamboled.

Next day, Nick Protagonist decided to deal with Charlie Conflict for good. If he did, he reflected, and id it in a sufficiently clever and

urbane manner, he might get out a few weeks early. (Note how I'm pushing the plot along kicking and screaming.)

So he called Charlie Conflict (Piglet just said, "It's such a burden to be creative"; they must be talking about something else) up to him at the window the very next morning, and he said to him "Charlie, I think you stink." That was what he'd said the day before, but armed with his experience he said it this time with such incredible suaveness (suavetee) that a passing older gasped, and Nick saw him hurry away toward a public telephone to tell his friends that something remarkable was happening in the pit.

PIGLET:

Hi, there. I've gotten a little stoned since the last time, fans, so what say we try to move this forward together? Carol sends word that 'Something remarkable was happening in the pit' ought to be an alternate title. What do you think? Let us hear from you.

Time passed.

Nick chewed his lip, gauging the distance between himself and the traces of Harold Pungent, between himself and anything else that caught his eye. He had little else to do; sometimes he hummed, and other times he kicked clods, but that was about all. Now, though, he saw an other at the window. He started toward the window eagerly, but stopped when he saw the clipboard in the other's hand. The clipboard usually meant a hosing was due, and Nick felt the fear in the pit of his stomach turn to nausea. But the other was joined by another and then another other and another. This was no usual event or transpiration. Perhaps, Nick thought, perhaps....

A loud, deep voice called through the heavy plastoid door (a plastoid is a small rodent): "Nonentity, Shirley N."

There was a small gasp of surprise. "Yeah," answered Shirley.

"Nonentity, Shirley N., you may join us."

Nick felt his throat tighten. He was right: today was the Day of the Choosing. Wow.

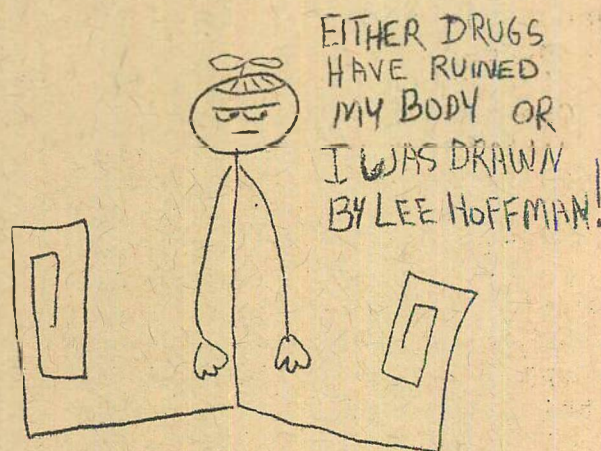
"Faceless, Larry J."

"Say what?"

"Never mind, Faceless, Larry J."

The others studied their clipboards for a while in silence, then turned away, leading Shirley N. Nonentity out of the pit. Nick was once again afraid, feeling that somehow he had been rejected.

Before I surrender this machine to Conway, I want to thank you for your indulgence so far, and realize that, being last, I'm going to be stuck for the ending. Now, the creative process is a strange thing. This is very much like trying to build a true and lovely edifice of lasting importance with the cooperation of three tone-deaf ax-murderers. You can see how I've tried to keep this straight, can't you? You can see how I've been the only one who's seriously trying to get the message across, right? All I want is a chance.



GERRY:

Things are getting pretty strange right about now. Whole segments of my memory are gone. For example: used to be, olders were others, until sometimes when other olders were others, and another older was another other, or an other older being called, simply, that other another older. So to speak. This may appear rather strange, on the surface of it all, but I think there's something to be said for clarity of intention, but not now.

Nick realized that the story was building to a climax, but for the life of him, he couldn't tell what it was. He wasn't the only one. (Sure he was.)

It was dark, that night of Nick's. He felt a crawling sensation along his spine, one both familiar and annoying since Nick truly hated cliches.

Something drifted forward from the darkness. The large-looming form of Charlie Conflict appeared in a slice of the endless night of the Pit, a slice of yellow from the wondrous window. "So I stink, eh, punk?" Charlie growled, a feat that surprised even him. "Just cause you were born two minutes later than I was, grandpa...don't think you can't fight better." And so saying, Charlie punched himself in the mouth, thus effectively removing himself as a valid force in this story.

Nick saw Charlie's unconscious form plummet to the Pit below, bouncing on the lake-like surface below, like a ball on elastic, touching back again, sticky, then slipping below the fetid surface with a wet slump!

Some hours later, Nick had managed to gather his minimal sense of dramatic impetus, and swung up to the rim of the Pit and the light blue night light above.

CAROL:

Somewhere far away a child was being born.

Poor Charlie. Poor Nick. Poor Another Others, be they younger or older. With Charlie Conflict injured, or at least dead, Nick felt free to rid himself of the impending shackles of moving the plot along, since without Conflict, plot could only be meaningless.

Soon he would be due for his next hosing. Nick liked being hosed. In fact, in the last year or two he found that his heart would beat faster in anticipation of the twice-daily washdowns.

But he caught himself. (Actually I, Carol, caught myself.) In this new world he was about to enter, there would be no hosings, no doodoos, no peepees, no mud in the eye. There would be sweet music and tables set with linen cloths.

But he caught himself. This was fairy talk. What did Nick care about music? What Nick really wanted was to get laid. Take it away, Terry.

TERRY:

See, Nick Protagonist had been shtupping this very mature four-year-old; he liked her because she seldom puled when they were Doing It. He was



getting tired of her, though, because she had so little imagination when it came to sex and only liked it while sliding down the incline. Nick wanted fresh thrills from older women. Preferably not older olders, just olders. Like that one outside who was coming to the glass and --

What was she doing?

The glass opened, and her voice said, "Graduation, Nick. That is your name, isn't it?"

"Do you like to do it sliding down the incline?" Nick asked. "Boy, I sure hope not."

"Come out," she said. "You're not one of the slopeasses in there any longer."

Nick strained toward the open door, every fibre of his being yearning for the freedom and opportunities outside. But at the same time, he thought poignantly, "I'll never get a hosing again." He turned to look back down the incline to the pool of the pit, where the companions of a lifetime -- his lifetime, anyhow -- wallowed.

"Goodbye, Charlie," he said softly. "Goodbye...." He turned and walked toward the older girl who held the door open for him, clipboard in her hand.

But for one moment, for one last moment, Nick had to turn back to the baby pit. In a voice that was scarcely audible he said, "You too, Harold Pungent, wherever you are."

The new world awaited him. If he'd had any brains, he'd have known the end of the story awaited him too, and he might not have stepped so blithely into the world of olders, others, oldfarts, adults, the free and the bigger. But who can resist cadences like that? Nick stepped into the first moment of his adult life.

GEO. ALE. EFFIN.:

Say, how's the old willing suspension of disbelief holding out? You ready for this?

See, I had this whole thing worked out, dig, and then Terry puts on the end of Beethoven's Ninth, the Ode to Joy, and now all I can think is Schiller. May make my fortune.

"I could really dig you, you know that? I mean, I really could," said Nick, eyeing the older's pendulous alabaster globes straining against the thin material of her raiment.

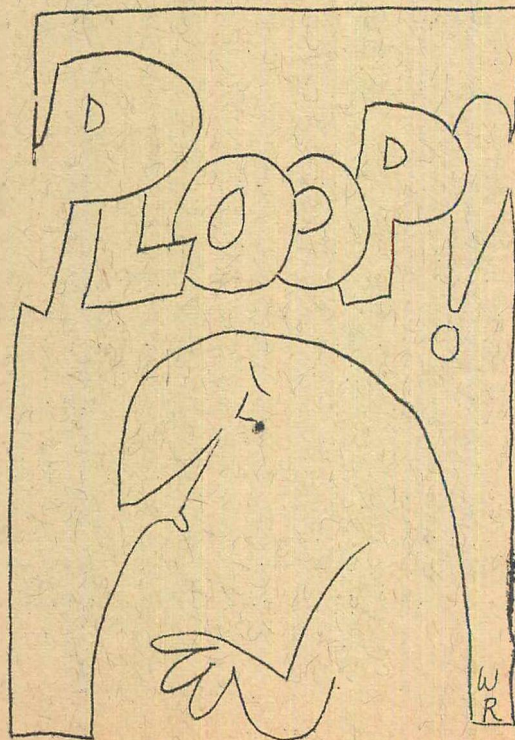
"But soft," she said, "hold yet your youngling tongue, for the ways are old and we are not alone."

"Say what?" said Nick. The older blushed and dropped her gaze to the excremental floor. Nick's heart was warmed, and he felt the traditional stirring in his loins.

"Denouement, Nicholas F." she called. Nick started.

"Yo," he sang out.

"All right," said the older, suddenly businesslike within the constrict-



ing mazes of custom, "take this towel and wipe yourself off." Nick made a few passes, trying to remove the crusted filth of his youth. All the while he exulted inwardly: he had been Chosen, as he knew he would. He could leave them all behind, the pit of accumulated degradations, the lost and solitary younglings, the world of enemies... Now, he, Nick, would belong to the older others. Now he could talk with them, now he could listen to them, now...

"Step this way please."

"Say what?" asked Nick.

"This way. Up the ladder."

"Say what?"

"You got the Puberty Pit now, kid."

Nick looked about himself, alone again. He grabbed the strained lapels of the older. "What does it all mean?" he demanded.

The older pushed him toward the ladder. "Shut up, kid. Get moving."

--oOo--

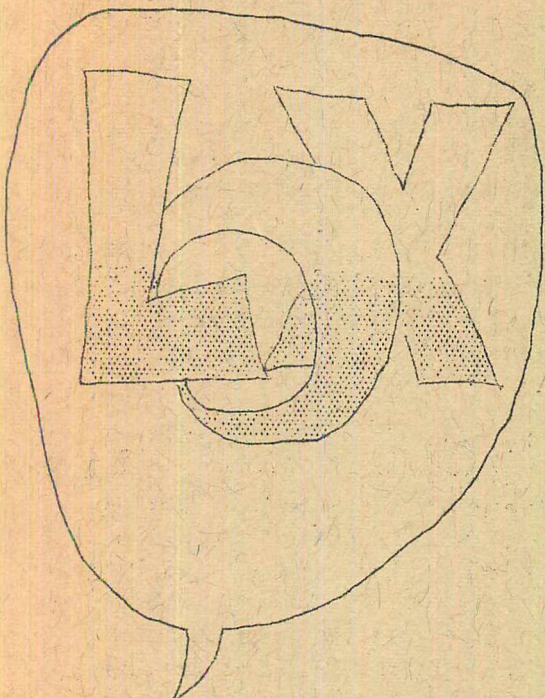
(Terry back again.) Here the narrative abruptly breaks off, probably because the story is finished. If you think this story was somewhat uneven in quality, a bit wandering in theme, sort of unfocused and maybe even a tiny bit inconsistent, not to mention putrid, I ask you to remember the famous Old Fannish Saying about the giraffe: It looks like an animal that was produced at a oneshot session.

Arnie Katz, whenever he reads this column (you'll remember that I mentioned last issue that he often doesn't read my stencils before he runs them off), may be a bit miffed that in successive issues of FOCAL POINT, Fandom's Leading Monthly Except For POTLATCH, I've snuck in a science fiction book review and then an actual science fiction story. What ignominy for a self-confessed Fabulous Fannish Fanzine! But reflect, Arnie Katz, on the long view: by publishing this ridiculous story by four sf writers who are otherwise perfectly good at the craft (Piglet in particular is going to be a hell of a good writer before long, mark me), FOCAL POINT takes one more step in proving that pros are no goddam better than fans. They don't even know how to put out a oneshot.

Why, would you believe that when I handed a stencil to Gerry to begin writing the story, he didn't even know what it was, and insisted on having a piece of paper to write on? And Piglet -- would you believe that he didn't think the story was worth publishing? He's never heard that other famous Old Fannish Saying: Anything worth doing is worth doing badly. Or, as F. T. Laney said, if it's worth typing in the first place, it's worth typing on a stencil.

Arnie Katz may not approve of this column, but F. T. Laney would.

COMING NEXT ISSUE: Next issue I'll be back "live." This column and last month's column were written on successive evenings in late August, in order to get enough columns written ahead of time to fill the hiatus while I'll be traveling vacation-fashion to California. Next month, unless I go crazy instantly upon entering California, I'll be back to tell you about the Noreascon and maybe about our trip. Or maybe I'll reprint a thrilling space adventure classic by Alexander Blade. (FOCAL POINT, the Fanzine of Surprises.) 21



GREG BENFORD
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I dreamed I saw Ted White last night.

Yes, I really did. He said to me, "Go thou and rekindle the spark of inventiveness in thy soul, brother, and remember the eternal promise of the Monthly Fanzine."

So I guess that means you. You're the only monthly fanzine around these days -- though I haven't seen an issue in six weeks, he hinted darkly -- and when you get a message from Ted White that way, straight through without benefit of the aether or anything else, so to speak, you do.

It's imposing to see FOCAL POINT appear in the full ceremonial rainments of Fannish Fandom's Salvation. Be warned, though, that time and issues slip quickly through the fingers like hourglass sand and soon pure prose blindness will come upon you of a sudden, like a wet dream in the night, and you will lose your former sensitivity to the nuances of metaphor and invective, of knife twist and typographical trick. In other words, you will become like the rest of us hardened cases.

But until then I look forward to the new era you seemingly promise for fandom. Gone, gone the turgid expositions of the latest Ace Special (gone the Specials entire, it seems). Instead, I expect innovations on every page. Where is the fan who will introduce the writing breakthroughs of Tom Wolfe to fandom? -- perhaps with an insider's view of, say, the vortex of Toronto fandom and the endless status-levels to be sought there. Ah, the wry sarcasm, the loving attention to every detail of expression on the face of Linda Bushyager as she forks her lovely pink tongue in anticipation of a putdown from some unknown Ohio fan. The frantic pace of keeping up with the In Crowd as they go Out... Well, the wait will be worth it, I'm sure.

I believe in heeding the handwriting on the wall, especially when it is legible. If you can keep the old drums spinning ('that's right, isn't it? I haven't seen one for years.) I promise to keep my eyes faithfully tracking left to right, devouring the stuff.

God knows, my doctor tells me I should stop -- the last time ENERGUMEN arrived I didn't eat for 18 hours, trying to piece together the hidden logic and symbolism in a Ted Pauls column.

But I carry on.

So if Ted White appears before you with an injunction, psy



attention, fella. I have a feeling of impending Historical development coming up, something that will get you in a Warner history someday. Something...something... well, I could say more, but my muskrat is boiling.
///// How about this, Greg. Letter column all to yourself. Pretty great, eh? Nothing too good for you hard cases (or relics of a bygone era, as we Now Fans call you has-beens).

I'll bet the rest of you are shaking your heads in wonderment, saying to yourselves, "Is this what he means by a healthy letter column?" Don't worry, LoCs is on the way. It's just that I got so many printable letters, and I had so many left unprinted from last issue, that I decided that I need a special Letters Issue of FOCAL POINT to clear out the backlog without cutting everything to the bone.

Accordingly, you can expect another FP in the mail in about a week, packed with letters. Once I'm somewhat caught up on past unprinted letters, I should be able to keep up with the new ones with a 8-12 page lettercol, which is what I intend to run in FP #34, if letters continue to come in at the present rate.

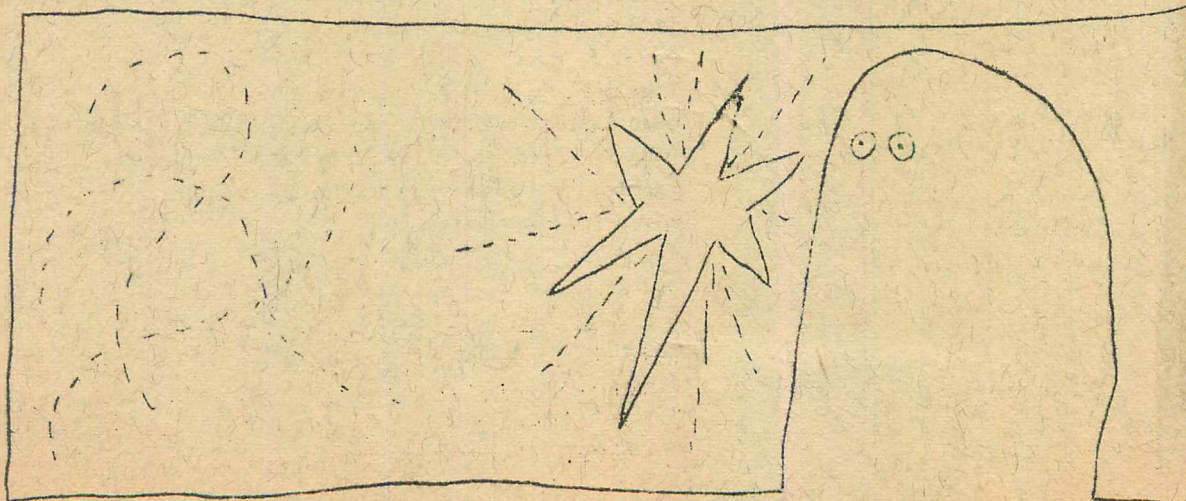
And now, get set, because we're going to switch to bigger type, and rejoin Harry Warner's article, which is already in progress.

So now, from page 13 "All Our Yesterdays, S4PS 1957":

One Surprising thing about this SAPS mailing is the prominence given to comics fandom in several publications. You don't think of the comics fans impinging upon mainstream fandom until more recent years. But Ron Parker publishes a lengthy list of titles and issues he needs to complete his E.C. collection. There's an advertisement for a 19-page pamphlet that provides for a dime "the complete facts behind Superman" as published by Ted White. And George Young, who certainly wasn't an adolescent at the time, writes in TAILGATE about The Spirit's original appearances in Sunday comics sections in 1940, plus some remarks on Lady Luck and Mr. Mystic who also had continuing stories in the little Spirit booklet.

But just in case you think SAPS members had dubious literary tastes, let's finish up with something from Elinor Busby's mailing comment section in FENDENIZEN: "Buz and I read 'The Harp Stateside'. I'm thinking of buying copies for all my firends. I can hardly bear to think of anyone going through life without THS. Feel like starting up a Willis Society to put copies of THS in all hotel bedrooms."

-- Harry Warner



FASCINATION

KATZENJAMMER, continued

"That explains a lot. I was wondering why the guy was getting a come on from 42nd Avenue. I thought it was metaphorical or something."

"You know, Joyce, it certainly is a wonderful thing to have a wife so naive that she doesn't get the sexual references in Simon and Garfunkel." Not understanding the rudimentary references to sex which occasionally pop up in S&G is a little like going to a Doris Day movie and complaining that the sex was too far out.

I said as much to Joyce, and we launched into a discussion of the sexual content of various works of art.

"You know," she said wistfully, "I used to get turned on by Emily Loring books when I was a little girl."

"That's nothing," I said, being randier than thou, "I used to get horny reading Archie comic books."

"Oh, I never read Archie comic books!"

"Why not?"

"They're --- pornographic."

-- Arnie

And here we are again, ready to ring down the curtain on another issue of FP. I don't exactly know why I wrote "we", I must be

reading the wrong fanzines lately, or something. In any case, I'm sure you all remember what the box at the

left is all about. If there's an "x" or something similar in it, you know that this is the last issue of FP you're scheduled to receive. I commend you to the colophon for information about righting this state of affairs. See you all soon with the letters issue.

FOOT POINT

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