

"I shall keep my mind out of free fall by being mentally alert"

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CHAPTER - P L A Y

* the fapa serial *

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All star cast * February 1954 * Episode 3

"Redd Boggs is the last publisher I have left in fandom"

CHAPTER 16: (Winding up many miscellany before plunging perilously into the main body of business.)

With bowed head and tears of shame dripping from both tendrils, I apologize for being forced to postmail my November issue. Activity requirements weren't needed; I just didn't want to wait until February. I failed to get the stencils to Lee in proper time, and also I knew nothing of the "official postmailing" until about the day it left Burbee's soil ed hands; so I asked Lee to wait until the Christmas rush was over, and do her worst.

Around my house somebody eats a breakfast cereal called "Puffed Wheat," and currently my fannish heart is enthralled with a series of pictures on the backsides of each box, depicting space flight to the moon. They are "Exciting New 3-Dimension Pictures" no less because small cut-out panels are provided to fit into the slots on the larger picture. Right now we are eating our way thru number 4, "Passing Space Liner!" The series began with a spaceport scene, moves along to the take-off, a stopover at the space island, and eventually winds up exploring the moon. Numbers 4, 5, and 8 in the series are worthy of your close attention.

Number 4 pictures a one-man scout ship passing near a huge liner in flight. By way of greeting, or recognition signal, the sleek liner flashes its giant searchlight -- you can see the broad beam cutting up thru darkest space. It fairly took my breath away. Number 5, which I am going to the grocery to search for, depicts "wing repair in outer space." The advance description of this thrilling scene is as follows: "One of the hazards of interplanetary travel is the danger of being hit by meteors. Unfortunately a small one has struck and damaged the Rocket Ship's wing, which is repaired by crewmen in special space suits. Note how welding equipment floats in space." The next paragraph states that "some time later, after resuming flight," the ship continues on. Finally, I can hardly wait until the Quaker people rush box number 8 to the grocery shelves. "Number 8, Exploring the Moon. Armed with Ray Guns for any possible enemy or danger, you disembark from the Rocket Ship in special Space Suits to explore the valley...." Golly, but science fiction is wonderful! And to think that I, by merely being an early fan promoting the stuff, helped bring about the world-wide literary revolution. Wohlhelm and I are proud, proud!

Fapa members I have met??? Sometimes I curse my rotten memory! In those instances when I am knocking around the country and stop at someone's house, the memory lingers on; but at conventions where great

hordes of names and faces rush at me, I frequently can't remember the second day who I met the first. But let's have a try at it.

Alger, Beale, Bergeron, Boggs, Browne, Burbee, Calkins, Cantin, GM Carr, Coslet, Croutch, Day, Dunkleberger, Elsberry, Eney, Grennell, Hammond, Hoffman, Ish, Keasler, Macauley, Moskowitz, Pavlat, Perdue, Shapiro, Silverberg, Speer, Van Splawn, Venable, Vick, Warner, Wells, Wesson and Willis. I'm unsure about Stan Woolston; 1946 was a long time ago in an old man's memory. Among the waiting-listers, I've met Jacobs, Economou, Gerding, and Olsen. It might be reported here that I just barely missed adding two more names to the list: Shrewsbury and Hampton. Vee Hampton was visiting relatives in Illinois some months back but we didn't quite meet up; Maril Shrewsbury stopped off in Bloomington enroute to Chicago, but I was away on my honeymoon. Of those illustrious names dropped in November for failure to meet this or that, I had met Stanley and Laney, making forty in all.

It might also be remarked that I've met a few of these people numerous times; I've known Moskowitz and Speer (face to face) since 1939 and have lost count of the number of our meetings. Nor can I now remember when and where Alger and I first met, but we've crossed paths surely a dozen times; I've seen Hoffman four or five times in as many places in three years, met Warner twice in a thirteen-year span, and am probably the only living Fap who has met Dunkleberger and Phyllis Economou. Eureka! (Nan Gerding was the greatest surprise.)

This really isn't fair because the deck was stacked in my favor, but the Sage of Savannah may bow three times in my direction. Howard and Theodore Lydecker are the special-effects boys with Consolidated Laboratories and Republic Pictures. And now, right back at you, Lee: Can you identify William Lava?

The bored projectionists around these parts play a game with the screen credits: finding and chanting strange-sounding names. Manny Friedlob, S.P. Eagle, George George, Laslo Vadnay, Edward Carfagno, Winton Hoch, Doane Hoag, etc. The one that never fails to evoke a snicker, however, is Gladys Hurlbut.

It was Colin Clive. About fifteen years ago, methinks.

CHAPTER 17: (Inspired by Shrewsbury, Bloch, Coriell and Gresham.)

By coincidence, four actually related items finally joined together and inspired the following longish lecture. (1) with the November mailing, Maril Shrewsbury joined the glorious company of Faps; (2) around Christmas I read a new book by William Lindsay Gresham entitled MONSTER MIDWAY; (3) a long time ago I invented and inserted into Bob Bloch's mouth a wisecrack based on an earlier Gresham book--- only to discover Bloch had already said it, and to Gresham; (4) just previous to New Year's Eve, Phil Farmer and his wife, while visiting Vernell Coriell in Pekin, Illinois, telephoned me from a Pekin saloon and invited me over to get drunk with them.

There, you have it, four dangerously radioactive incidents now brought together by that Fapa catalyst, "the deadline effect." You are now in for a (gay/boring) evening unless you skip along to the next chapter or the next magazine below this one.

Maril is probably the first and only Fap to have sawdust in her shoes, to be "with it." She and her husband travel with (and even may be part owners of) a carnival which each season plays the real mid-

west; Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas, Nebraska, etc. They winter in Aransas Pass, and I assume the show does likewise. She and I corresponded fitfully last year, swapped a few remarks about circus and carnival life (my father was a circus hand), and just missed seeing each other when she passed thru town. However, she is not the only fan to pursue the sawdust life. Vernell Coriell of Pekin is the other, seemingly an all-around hand in the circus; acrobat, high-wire man, elephant boy, and the like. Coriell publishes THE BURROUGHS BULLETIN and is an avid Tarzan collector; he makes a point of meeting actors who've played the part, collects books and magazines, showbills, Allen St. John pictures and so forth. There now, two of the stars in our drama have been properly introduced. Bob Bloch needs no introduction. One day a few years ago (I think I was visiting Hoffman and Oliver in Georgia at the time,) I brightly remarked, "Well, as Bob Bloch said, the geek shall inherit the earth!" This remark was so funny (to me, at the time) that I promptly wrote Bloch and told him what I had put in his mouth.

He just as promptly replied that I could take it out of his mouth, for he had already said it, and to Gresham who had also written NIGHTMARE ALLEY. Thus I lost my chance to become Bloch's ghostwriter. There's money in that field -- look at what he gets away with. If you have read ALLEY you already know that a geek figures prominently in that grisly novel. What is a geek? Ah, unless more Faps mend their sinful ways they may easily wind up as geeks; if they be a boozier or dope addict they've already started down that terrible path, and someday we clean-living fans may visit a carnival and watch one, dressed as the "wild man" geeking for a living. Are you listening, Grenhell?

Geeks are deliberately made, not born, as MONSTER MIDWAY reveals. It also reveals much more, for the book is a veritable encyclopedia of the outdoor show world; I want as many fans as possible to read it and see for themselves how easy some difficult-appearing tricks really are ---and then at the next convention we will be spared the long-winded harangues of speakers, for these fans can instead entertain us with their newly-acquired arts.

I'd much rather watch Ken Beale eat fire than listen to Campbell speak on Whither Science Fiction. Lend an ear, Ken, and I'll tell you how to do it. First you straighten out the kinks of an ordinary wire clothes hanger and wrap a small wad of cotton on each end; next dip the cotton in gasoline or kerosine and light one end. Now comes the good part! As the packed audience of breathless fans watch you in amazement, you thoroughly wet your lips and tongue with saliva, and quickly pass the lighted cotton across your protruding tongue, being sure to squeeze out a little gasoline onto your tongue as you do so. Presto, your tongue is now merrily ablaze and the fans are cheering like mad! Without hesitation, you now swing the other and un-lighted wad of cotton around and pass it thru the flames dancing on the tip of your tongue. That wad will promptly catch fire. Hold the two ends in the air and snuff out the fire on your tongue. You are now a full-fledged fire-eater, and entitled to a union card! I will be there in the front row, beaming with a silent pride as all around me the fans are howling and stomping their feet. Isn't that much better than a gabby Campbell? It occurs to me though, Ken, that perhaps I had best wise you up to a couple of little details before you go into the act. Let us make sure the hall is not drafty and that the sudden opening of a door will not cause a gust of wind in your direction; also, you must take care to breathe gently outward at all times when the fire is on your tongue -- don't inhale, cough or sneeze, else you'd have toasted

lungs. And finally, don't play the ham and delay matters so long that the gasoline vapor burning above your tongue actually burns down to the gasoline ON the tongue --- else we'll need a new fire-eater at the next convention. Bravo, Ken, well done!

Now, who's for the snake charmer? Ah, a lovely lady always gets them! I'd much rather watch Hoffman charm a king cobra than listen to Les Cole read off a faked financial report. It's really simple Lee, and if you listen to me I'll teach you how to steal the spotlight from Ken Beale and win that mighty thundering applause for yourself. The art depends on covering all the angles, of knowing the "gaff".

For the sake of showmanship we will want to make a complete and colorful production of this number, so we'll add suitable props. You will need an assistant, a tootler on the flute. Burbee will come in handy here. As the breathless fans watch enthralled and as Burbee tootles madly on his genuine East Indian flute, you must slowly remove the basket lid and allow the cobra's head to emerge. Once the head is out and the beady eyes are staring fixedly at Burbee, you commence a weird and sinewy dance around the two of them, like some pagan goddess calling down the gods. This will add color and increase the fans' attention. Pay no attention to Burbee or his flute; the snake is doing that. The viper can't hear worth a damn and so the music means nothing to it, but Burbee's madly wriggling fingers resemble so many little field mice, and so the snake appears "charmed." Now for the climax! Slowly approach the basket, after noting that the snake has raised himself to a certain position and no higher. Gently, ever so gently and slowly, bend over and kiss the snake on the top of the head. The critter will be astounded, and so will the wildly cheering fans! You are a success! Place the lid on quickly. Now, see, you weren't harmed, were you? Of course not. You played the gaff.

The secret is in knowing that a cobra strikes forward and down; you were above it and so it could not strike upward at you. A bit of caution however -- because you are a girl, your face may be above the snake but another and outstanding feature of your anatomy is not, so wear a tight bra. Of course, if you really want to play it safe like the fakirs do, sew the snake's lips together beforehand. Meanwhile I will circulate thru the audience selling spirits of ammonia to those who feel faint, and a little booklet explaining how it is done to those who want to try it when they get home.

But don't leave the stage yet, your act isn't finished and we have more snakes in the bag of tricks. While the fans are still gasping at your daring, whisk out a boa constrictor or a python or two and calmly wrap them about you; you also might add a few weird dance steps here to increase the atmospheric color. While a group of frightened fans in the back of the hall are organizing a "Let's Save Hoffman" team, you face the fans and play with the snakes, knowing they are harmless so long as they do not get a grip on your throat or chest. These snakes kill their dinner by suffocation, not crushing it to death; and you can unwind them from even a serious position if you can find and grasp the head or tail. Your act also uses several other mean-looking vipers but only the fans are scared, fearful that sixth fandom will die with you. Most of the other snakes are harmless domestic kinds, or specially treated rattlers from a Florida snake farm. Snakes are purchased at so much a foot from the snake farms, and are "fixed" before shipment; a scalpel is used to sever the duct leading from the poison gland to the hollow fang. After this operation a snake

"I refused to say how now to the brown cow..."

lives only a few weeks, but what the hell, they're cheap. And now we come to the real climax of your act, Lee, the one which will send the fans (and dirty old pros too) madly scrambling for the bar.

Calling for absolute quiet, you will remove a rattler from the basket and kneel on the floor. Whisking out a large handkerchief to wipe the saliva from your tongue and lips, you force the snake's mouth open, bring it up to your own open mouth, and force it to bite you by thrusting its fangs into your tongue. Drops of blood appear. You shudder dramatically, replace the snake in the basket, bow to the awe-struck assemblage and make your exit. Ushers will make the rounds picking up and reviving those who have collapsed on the floor. Lee, your fame is assured and you will be talked about long after QUANDRY is forgotten! Sixth fandom will be revived by popular acclimation, in your honor! And I, who will be waiting for you backstage, will never let on how it was done. The audience will never know the rattler was fixed, will never know you had a false wax tongue in place over your own (which was slipped into place when you wiped your mouth with that large handkerchief), and will never know the blood was beet juice, which filled the hollow of the false tongue. Convention after convention will demand a repeat of your sterling performance!

Now for the next piece of entertainment, which necessarily will have to be performed the following day because everyone who witnessed Lee's closing act will not venture back that day. Ted Sturgeon always plays his guitar at conventions, year after year. Let's do away with that and substitute something lively. A knife-throwing act. Let's make it really interesting and use some lively personalities. We'll start off with Boggs throwing and GM Carr standing against the board-- we can call this "The Battle to the Death for the NFFF." After awhile we'll reverse places. Unlike many other carnival stunts there is no trickery here -- the knives are actually thrown, although they are not sharp ones. Gleaming and wicked-looking, yes, and the points are turned down so that they stick in and pull out easily, but their edges probably wouldn't slice butter. Boggs and Carr would do well to begin practice now --- or better yet, for added thrills, don't bother to practice at all. It should make things keener.

To stand a girl against a board and outline her figure with thrown knives takes many weeks of steady practice, plus the knack of knowing how to throw. One expert quoted in the book claims that 29 feet is the maximum distance for accuracy -- if you hope to hit something with the knife, and hope to make it do its intended job. Killing a man, now, that's something else again. The very next time you see a jungle picture in which a rascally native sneaks out of the woods to hurl a knife at the back of a white man, fifty yards away, laugh like hell whether he sticks the white man or not. If he does manage to hit the man and that worthy topples over dead, laugh all the harder. Those around you might think you queer, but they are fools and don't know they have just witnessed the impossible. The expert quoted above says that if he should have to defend his life against another, having only a knife as a weapon, he will wait until he is about eight feet away from the fellow -- twelve feet at the maximum, but he prefers eight. The tip of the blade is held between thumb and forefinger like a pencil in writing position; wrist and fingers must not move at any time. Raise the knife to your ear, keeping the elbow toward the ground, and then straighten your arm quickly in the direction of the target. Do not move wrist or fingers, let the momentum of the snapped arm hurl the knife forward. It will make a three-quarter turn and bury itself

into the manly chest threatening you--provided your distance is correct, your stance perfect, your delivery good and the other fellow has not already thrown his at you. If Boggs and Carr mess up their first performance we'll substitute Elsberry and Bradley for the next show.

In place of another dry Willy Ley speech, I'd prefer to see the man who blows himself up in a box of dynamite; or to be accurate, the man who blows up a box of dynamite with himself inside it. Mr Wells would be a natural for this. There isn't much to it, Chuck. You rig up a break-away box to resemble a coffin, fill a pipe with loose blasting powder at one end, place a dozen sticks of mild dynamite (don't laugh!) in the center, and when all fannish eyes are riveted upon the coffin, push the plunger and blow everything to smithereens. Fans will go around for days afterward telling each other Wells was an unstable character -- a good guy really, but he just went to pieces. I regret to report, Chuck, that I can't get you out of this one. The gentleman who invented the trick declines to reveal the secret, but HE is still alive. In fact, to keep step with modern times and pay lip service to the revolution science fiction has wrought, his new act is built around a rocketship! He is sealed inside, the damn thing really takes off from its launching rack (when blasting powder is set off in the tubes) and the ship sails across space to land on a trick-bull house, which promptly goes up in a charge of dynamite as he hits it. Yes Chuck, I feel this is for you. Much better than a Ley speech and the noise will help keep the fans awake. And if they should suspect trickery and demand a repeat performance in slow motion, the convention committee can always throw in Dave Ish.

It will be necessary of course to slack off the pace of all this high-tension excitement; the committee simply can't keep fire-eaters, snake charmers, knife throwers and dynamite men going all day long, else the compounded shocks will lose their effect. Too, the snakes might get tired, and by this time somebody will have opened a door and caused Beale to sneeze. So, by sheer genius, the committee will have provided side shows and games to not only entertain the crowd, but to part them from their money. The traditional auction can be dispensed with; with the right men running the games, so much money will be raked in that covers and illustrations may be given away free. At all times the "gaff" will be used to take the fans. Suckers!

Because of the high incidence of drunkards and near-drunkards attending a convention, especially among the moneyed pros, "cake cutting" will be the order of the day. Short-changing the gullible. The quickest and most notorious method of cake-cutting is the "quarter count." All "games of chance" will be in charge of cynical faps who will not hesitate to trim the fans --- Moskowitz for instance. We'll put Sam in charge of the cat rack; throw baseballs and knock down the cats sitting on the rack, win a big (cheap) cigar. People like Max Keasler and Richard Bergeron will flock around him, eager to play. The cost is a quarter for three balls, so they will hand Sam a five dollar bill and hold out their hand for the change. Sam will sniff the likker on their breath and give them the "quarter count." Holding a handful of quarters, he will drop them into their waiting hands one at a time, the meanwhile chanting this sing-song: "One, two, three, four --- ONE dollar. A dollar twenty-five, a dollar fifty, a dollar seventy-five, TWO dollars. One, two, three, four. Four twenty-five, four fifty, four seventy-five, FIVE dollars. Thank you." Keasler or Bergeron will return the change to their pocket and start hurling balls. Smart

Sam will quietly pocket the extra dollar he did not return, and so the expenses are met. If you hesitate to believe this, try it on a friend sometime, making a short pause between the counting of each dollar. I don't know why I go on working for a living.

Elsewhere about the hall will be games of "chance" and shows, each one contributing to the expenses. Because the convention must pay for itself, every game will be gaffed. Suckers by the score will attempt to throw wooden embroidery hoops over the blocks at the back of the booth, and the prizes for settling a hoop fairly and squarely over the block will be tempting: first issues of WEIRD TALES, early WONDERS, and so forth. Every now and then a smiling "stick" (A shill, or secret confederate) will walk off with a prize to prove it can be done. We'll put Jack Speer in charge of this game; he can rook the fans without ever betraying an emotion. Speer will have secretly seen to it that the blocks aren't true; an obstacle is protruding on the rear side and so the hoops can't fall squarely over them. Oh, but this is a slick one! In the booth next to his, Walt Willis is operating a duck pond, a variation of the hoop-la. If the fan manages to toss a hoop over the duck's neck, he wins an autographed copy of the Weinbaum Memorial volume. Somehow though they don't win, and only Willis manages to ring a duck while demonstrating the game. The ducks are tried and true hands at this game and have learned by experience to duck their heads under water when a customer tosses a hoop. Willis plays the gaff, he feints first; the duck ducks and comes back up for air. Willis lets fly as it is raising its head -- there's no time for a second dodge. San Francisco will never be in the red! Or consider the clothespin game: a hundred giant clothespins hanging on a wire at the rear of the booth. Each one has a number painted on the reverse side, and every player wins something, providing he manages to get a loop over a pin. The number on the reverse side reveals just which prize he has won, and the REAL lucky numbers which entitle him to a jackpot are: 9, 16, 18, 61, 66, 89, and 98. Les Croutch can operate this swindle; he's big and beefy and the average fan will think twice before tackling him. Fans will spend money like crazy trying to win a hundred-dollar jackpot or a complete set of (mint) UNKNOWNNS; should they accidentally hit the lucky clothespin, they'll never know the difference. Each of those lucky numbers, when turned upside down, are some other number. The other numbers win only junk -- old fanzines.

The roulette wheels, the tumbling balls, the rabbit race, the cupcake joints -- all gaffed. Merely leaning against a board on which the roulette wheel is resting causes it to slow down; the balls containing winning numbers are not released from the box until the operator shifts his weight on the floorboard on which he is standing; the continuously rotating leather belt which runs the mechanical rabbits over the course (each man's rabbit apparently moving as fast as that man cranks a little handle) is rigged so that belt tension may be increased or decreased as the situation demands; the painted cups are so numerous and the variety of colors so many that the odds are fantastic --- a bouncing ball settling in one cup pays off to everyone who has a dime resting in a cup of similar color. The convention will take in ten dollars for every fifty or sixty cents paid out on this one. Les and Es Cole will be delighted, and will offer to travel about the country putting on conventions professionally for whichever city wins.

The convention's hottest money-maker will be the simplest, the most honest-appearing gadget in the hall, a high-striker. You have

seen one at every carnival and fair. It consists of a wooden maul, a striking cushion mounted on a teeter-board, a heavy wire stretching a dozen feet in the air, and a loud gong at the top. Whang down with the maul, send the striker up the wire and ring the bell. Every heavy-muscled townie and farmer in the nation has tried it at one time or another, but it is usually the kids and women who ring the bell. To ensure this being a money-maker, we'll bait it with the most tempting prize, a date with Bea Mahaffey. Fans will line up for hours clutching dimes in their hot little fists, eager to ring the bell and win a date with Bea. Bea needn't worry; she may still go out with whom she chooses, or go to bed early if she wishes, for this too is gaffed. In charge of this simple boobytrap will be Hal Shapiro. Nancy won't let him date Bea, and so in the noble spirit of revenge he'll see to it that no one else does. In principle, the bell is rung by bringing the maul down squarely on the striking cushion; the face of the maul must squarely meet the cushion -- no striking it with the rim. A grown man of course finds this difficult, he must bend his knees and stoop to strike it squarely; small women and children have the best luck without fully realizing why. Shapiro, the cagey devil will take no chances even on the women and children, lest some eighth fandom lad sneak off with Bea. He will have moved the fulcrum of the teeter-board or will have decreased the tension of the wire. The effect is the same: the rubber bird goes singing up, oscillation begins, and it never reaches the top. Sweet dreams, Bea.

But enough of these "games of chance and skill"; Les Cole will realize, if he has read this far, that San Francisco bids fair to be the most memorable convention ever, not only from the viewpoint of the attending fan (fire-eaters, snake-charmers, knife-throwers and dynamite Dans) but also that he and Es will make off with more loot than all previous convention committees lumped together.

Telepaths and Men from Mars.

Every carny has its "mitt camp" in which an exotic gypsy (real or phony, and most likely phony) reads the stars, the fortunes, the lines of the palm or the bumps on the head of the customer. In most states it is illegal to foretell the future (!) and so the mitt camp gypsies steer clear of this; instead they repeat aloud that information which they have gleaned from the customer. This is known as "cold reading", the art of a few well-chosen words and sentences which will cause a distraught woman to signal yes or no with her eyes, her reactions, her facial expressions and so forth. By slowly and carefully feeling their way along, a cold reader can pump a customer without the customer ever realizing it; clothes, hands, face, mannerisms and other signs all help give the background. Every fan is too intelligent to believe in fortune-telling of course, so our mitt camp will be a Telepath booth. For two-bits the quivering fan will have his mind read by a genuine 24-carat telepath, and who is better equipped to operate this camp than Maril Shrewsbury, who by this time has met and studied thousands of people on the midway. Besides, a young fan's mind can be read pretty easily anyway. Ask Bea, or Lee, or Nancy, or Sue.

And the older fans too, eh girls?

We must have a "ten-in-one" show, a sideshow filled with acts of all kinds, and especially freaks, real or home-made. Fandom is filled with freaks and doubtless many of them will consent to serve for a small fee. Some three-legged and three-armed people are real, a mistake of nature; a two-headed baby was born in Indiana only a few weeks

ago, calling sudden attention to the "Joe-Jim" twins Heinlein introduced in ASTOUNDING a decade back. There are cases of vestigial twins which, small and misshapen, grow from the body of an adult normal male or female; there are blue-skinned people, scaly-skinned people, rock-skinned people, pin-headed people. A Pacific war veteran contracted a strange disease in the islands and escaped the boredom of a Vet's hospital to be a "Man from Mars" in a traveling show. In his book, Gresham reveals that the most sought-after freak of all was never found, a one-eyed Negro cyclops; this man was a logger in the Louisiana turpentine forests, but so shy he hid from all strangers. There is a movie due any month now based on the life of Attila the Hun, but here is ten dollars that says he won't be portrayed as he really was -- a dwarf. Midgets, dwarfs and giants seem fairly common, and the first two named are not to be confused with each other. Several years ago, Robert L. Ripley in "Believe it or Not" raised quite a fuss about a boy 7 years of age who was an old man, and dying of senility. These are known as primordial midgets; because of a glandular imbalance they age rapidly and actually die of old age by nine or ten. And so the carny's "Men from Mars" may be anything odd, an albino Negro, macrocephalic idiots or non-idiots -- any human born with an unearthly appearance.

Warner, on one of his rare visits to the theater, recently saw the movie, HOUDINI, a hoked-up version of the great magician's career. He should be doubly-interested in the book being discussed because one or more chapters are devoted to Houdini and other magicians, revealing many of the tricks used by that master. Remember the hole-in-the-ice scene, Harry? Houdini is handcuffed, locked in a mailbag, nailed in a box, and dropped thru a hole chopped in the ice to the river bottom--- for several minutes the movie led one to believe he was dead. Not so. He was already out of the handcuffs while the mailbag was being tied-off over his head; was out of the mailbag while the box was being shut and nailed; was out of the box as soon as water seeped into it. Staying underwater a few seconds for drama's sake, he popped out of the hole in no time. He was the master of a thousands gaffs and used them all -- he and his trusted assistant behind the scenes, the man who was merely "one of the crowd." Finally, there is recounted the spectacular trick of "catching a bullet with the teeth"; several men have died while performing this one, and most of the gaffs they used are revealed. One particular magician though mastered the art so well that even his fellows couldn't detect his methods -- he simply stood off several paces and allowed a policeman to fire one or two shots at him -- fire at his face. Then he would spit out the bullet. He committed suicide without ever revealing how it was done.

One last paragraph about MONSTER MIDWAY.

And now, the geek. FAIR WARNING: If you have a queasy stomach, skip this paragraph. It can make you sick. Geeks are made by finding a booze hound or a dope addict who is practically in the last stages; the guy who will literally do anything for a drink. They are made-up like the typical wild man and placed in a canvas pit; every day for a bottle of cheap liquor or a shot from the needle, they pretend to kill a chicken by biting off the head. Actually, in the beginning, they have a razor blade hidden in the palm of the hand, but after a while the razor is taken away and the bottle (or needle) is withheld, or the threat is made that it will be withheld unless they really geek. One full day and night without a bottle or the needle, and the geek overcomes what few scruples he has left, and geeks. One geek in particular was a hair-raiser and his audience keeled over like flies; he

CHAPTER 18: (Inspired by frustration)

As any fool living on the west coast can plainly see, I did not get to California in November or December, as forecasted in the last issue of this sterling publication. What fools we optimists are. Did get as far as Tucson, Arizona, but there the funds dried up. It's as expensive as hell getting married and running around all over the desert with her, looking at crumbling ruins. When Oille Saari married Ginny, he took along a trunkload of science fiction magazines on the honeymoon. I didn't go that far but I did tote the typewriter and an old copy of SCIENCE FICTION PLUS in the trunk. Wrote a couple of letters on the typewriter and used the magazine as a beer-coaster. It has excellent soaking qualities, Sam.

I'm not going into details of the trip here because a long article about it has already been written for Joel Nydahl's VEGA. If it holds even the slightest interest for you, look it up there. Will only say that the Go-Devil (2) performed beautifully on the way out, delivering a little better than 27 miles to the gallon when I held the speed under sixty, and that it climbs mountains (in second gear and overdrive) better than the old '50 took them. In Tucson however the troubles started; a persistent short circuit developed in the horn and it was not finally located and eliminated until some two months later, in January. At least one guest at the Grand Canyon hotel hates me. He had to get out of bed in the middle of the night (zero weather) and hot-foot it to the parking lot to disconnect the wires, to stop the !! thing from blowing all night. I refused to get out of MY bed. Upon our return the mileage figure stood at 13,600, or about 4000 miles for the round trip. End of the log for this issue.

"That girl, whoever she was, was extremely edible"

AND SO TO BED:

You may cheerfully disregard all statements on page 1 of this issue, having to do with the previous issue being postmailed-- it wasn't. In fact, it SHOULD be included in this bundle, thus giving you two healthy doses of Tucker instead of one. What a tragedy it'll be if your bathroom door happens to be stuck.

Lee done got wrapped up in the penning of a novel (and the riding of a trusty steed) and so that last issue wasn't postmailed. These last few weeks we've been hurling postcards at each other, laying the groundwork for two issues to be in this mailing. Lucky you. And by this time you surely realize that this issue, as usual, has been published on the Quandry Press of Savannah, G.A.

The following non-science fiction books have been read lately, purely in the continuing desire to get out of the rut. A list of your recent reading would be welcomed.

THE RIBALD READER (Dell First Edition) A.M. Krich
MURDER, PLAIN & FANCIFUL (Sheridan House) James Sandoe
MONSTER MIDWAY (Rinehart) William Lindsay Gresham
THE BALLAD OF THE SAD CAFE (Houghton-Mifflin) McCullers
DIGGERS FOR FACTS (Destiny Press) J.O. Kinnaman

"This pro eats, drinks, talks, and sleeps only with other pros"
